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Frontiers of Architectural Research

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Students' motivation for architecture education in Uganda

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Received 9 March 2017; received in revised form 16 June 2017; accepted 23 June 2017

## KEYWORDS

Architecture education;  
Career decision-making;  
Career aspirations;  
Motivation;  
Socialization

## Abstract

Understanding the persistence and success of students has gained increasing attention to unravel the “architectural education black-box.” However, the motivation and pre-socialization of incoming students were largely ignored as these factors fell outside the direct control of architecture schools. Motivational factors can affect the educational process given that the values, expectations, and career-related goals of incoming students influence their attitudes to education. This study seeks to uncover the motivational factors of applicants to an architecture program in East Africa and appreciate those factors that lead students into architecture as a career choice. Through qualitative content analysis, the study revealed the motivational factors of applicants, which were classified into four groups: educational, external, personal, and prestige. These factors were comparable with those found in previous studies conducted in Europe and North America, but nevertheless highlight contextual variances unique to the region. The findings raise questions of the role architecture education in engaging incoming students in discourse that aids their understanding of architecture and architectural education.

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## 1. Introduction

As the process that transforms novices into architects, architectural education is a closed system described rather cynically as “a black box” with rather elusive inner workings (Banham, 1996). Architectural education has attracted

considerable scrutiny to understand its mechanisms (see Boyer and Mitgang, 1996; Stevens, 1998). Beyond the scope of architectural education, but are nonetheless important, is the preparedness and motivation of students seeking to undertake an architecture program. The decision to apply is a major determinant in how students engage with their education (Moore, 1970). Smith and Naylor (2001) and Cubukcu and Cubukcu (2009) revealed that some students enter the program wholly unprepared for the rigors of design-based education. This reality can leave students

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Peer review under responsibility of Southeast University.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.foar.2017.06.002>

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Please cite this article as: Olweny, M.R.O., Students' motivation for architecture education in Uganda. *Frontiers of Architectural Research* (2017), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.foar.2017.06.002>

facing "... a level of cognitive challenge that is unlikely to have been experienced during secondary education" (Roberts, 2007, p. 448). Hence, an appreciation of the degree of preparedness of students for the rigors of architectural education becomes an important area of research. Studies undertaken in this area seek to understand what motivates students to enter the profession but also what they perceive architecture to be.

The decision to enter a particular profession is a confluence of occurrences that precede the actual commitment to invest resources (time, energy, and money). These occurrences, described as "pre-socialization" (Weidman et al., 2001) or "anticipatory socialization" (Bragg, 1976), are influenced by the nuances of particular socio-cultural settings and are important in understanding how students engage with their education. These will be the focus of the current study.

## 2. Rationale of the research

The motivation for this research was derived from two related aspects. The first aspect is the number of students dropping out of architecture programs in Uganda (completion rates average 60%). The second aspect is the concern for the lack of diversity within architecture programs. In terms of diversity, participation from females is low. Data from one school indicates only one female was admitted for the 2017 intake out of 18 successful applicants. Relatively few students are admitted from outside the main urban centers. For example, Liang (2004) examined admissions to public universities in Uganda between 1996 and 2002 and found that 65% of admissions involved students from 20 elite schools. More than a decade later, this issue remains a concern. The admissions list to one of the public universities showed that one school dominated the intake to professional programs, in one case taking more than 20% of available places. Questions arose as to how applicants gained career information, and their subsequent preparation for the architecture program. To uncover factors that influence students' desire to join architectural education, this study investigates the motivational factors of student-applicants to a school of architecture in East Africa. This was the only school out of 11 in the region that does not exclusively rely on secondary school records for accepting students and incorporates intake interviews and motivational essays into its intake assessment process.

## 3. Pre-Socialization and career choice readiness

For many prospective students, the decision to enter architectural school is their first interface with architecture and they hope such process would transform them into architects; many of them possess only a limited appreciation of the profession and even less comprehension of how architectural education prepares them for the profession (Adams et al., 2011). Thus, the applicants' ideas and aspirations could play a significant part in their transition into and through architectural education, which is linked to Hirschi and Läge's (2007, p. 167) "career choice readiness"; this concept is defined as "the readiness and ability of a

person to successfully engage in the career decision-making process and reach a well-founded career decision." Career choice decisions are influential in the confidence and persistence of students as they transit through university education (Sandler, 2000). These career decisions incorporate activities that foreshadow the educational process (namely, career decidedness, career planning, career exploration, and vocational identity), which are "high level" motivational factors that influence the decision to undertake university level education (Hirschi and Läge, 2007). Tinto (1975) presented these activities as "goal commitments" and suggested that students were likely to succeed if they were familiar with their selected careers. Allen and Robbins (2008) indicated that when students' interests matched the program they were enrolled in (a concept which they termed *person-environment fit*), they were more likely to persist with their selected study program (see also Willcoxson and Wynder, 2010). These findings bring to mind the idea of socialization and its role in building expectations in students. A general definition of socialization is as "... that process by which individuals acquire the values, attitudes, norms, knowledge, and skills needed to perform their roles acceptably in the group or groups in which they are, or seek to be, members" (Bragg, 1976, p. 6). Pertinent to this study is anticipatory socialization, which largely incorporates occurrences that transpire prior to entry into a formal socialization situation, in this case, entry into architectural education. These occurrences are the motivational factors that influence the decision to commit to a particular profession

Given the current market-driven educational systems, completion rates and persistence are vital points of discussion; these factors facilitated discussion of architectural education not only on the processes within the program (the proverbial "black box" of architectural education), but also on the transition into architectural education. Smith and Naylor (2001) suggested that transitional difficulties may contribute to drop out rates, influenced by personal attributes of students and their pre-university education. According to Bragg (1976), these difficulties affect academic attainment. For professional programs such as architecture, transitional difficulties can be particularly pronounced, given that activities undertaken within the program are often at odds with the perceptions held by incoming students of what they will be doing; these contradictions manifest as cultural shock in some students (Graham and McKenzie, 1995). This cultural shock and the associated uncertainty are critical in the success (or failure) of individuals as they transition into and through professional education (Riordan and Goodman, 2007).

Closely related to career choice readiness are the values that underlie decisions to enroll in a program. Values form a key element in the transition into university and professional education, wherein students often grapple with multiple extraneous value systems for the first time (Wintre and Yaffe, 2000). These "*value-goal factors*" as perceived by Nelson (1974) relate to students' perceptions of the benefit they could derive from a particular program or career. Duffy and Sedlacek (2007) identified four key values in the context of career choice decisions; *intrinsic values* are related to the importance of autonomy and interest in an area; *extrinsic values* are linked to making

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