

Reflective Practice and Vocational Training at the Nigerian Law School: An Analysis of the Placement Exercise

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of reflection as a qualitative research method within the system of legal education in Nigeria. It analyzes the importance of reflection as a way of encouraging participation in professional roles in the legal workplace. The article is based on a research study conducted among graduate law students who were undergoing professional training at the Nigerian Law School. The study employed a case study research design while the methodology involved the administration of structured questionnaires and the use of reflective journals produced by the students. This article focuses on the findings obtained from the reflective journals and provides an understanding of the value of reflection in information literacy skills development in the legal workplace in Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Reflection involves a mental process of thinking and learning within a given context, the value of which is to produce an expected outcome toward the set objective.¹ Studies on the importance and application of reflection are attributed to Dewey's² earlier work on reflective inquiry in which he defines reflective practice as an:

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¹ Jennifer Moon, *HANDBOOK OF REFLECTIVE AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING* (London: Routledge-Falmer, 2004), 80, 82.

² John Dewey, *HOW WE THINK: A RESTATEMENT OF THE RELATION OF REFLECTIVE THINKING TO THE EDUCATIVE PROCESS* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1933), 6.

‘...active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends...’ (1933: 6).

Dewey’s research encouraged reflective habits by people as a way of developing intelligent rather than routine thought and action.³ Schön’s work in 1983⁴ and 1987⁵ further expanded on Dewey’s theory of inquiry by focusing more on practitioners’ approaches to reflection and the impact of reflective practice particularly in the higher education context. Schön differentiated between reflection-in-action, that is, experimentation and construction of theory in a given situation and reflection-on-action which involves examining one’s action after a process of reflection.⁶ Further development on the concept was also made by Kolb’s (1984) work in his *Experiential Learning Theory*.⁷ Kolb’s learning cycle incorporated reflection as a key process in educational application and practice. Reflective practice today is recognized as one of the major approaches⁸ in promoting independent learning and of linking theory to practice by learning through experience.⁹

³ Mustafa Kurt and Nurdan Atamtürk. “Reflective Practice and its Role in Stimulating Personal and Professional Growth”. <http://www.qou.edu/english/conferences/firstNationalConference/pdfFiles/zaidOdeh.pdf> (accessed June 20th 2013).

⁴ Donald Schön, *THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER, HOW PROFESSIONALS THINK IN ACTION* (Basic Books, 1983).

⁵ Donald Schön, *EDUCATING THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER: TOWARD A NEW DESIGN FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE PROFESSIONS* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987).

⁶ *Ibid*, Schön, p. 10.

⁷ David A. Kolb, *EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: EXPERIENCE AS THE SOURCE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984).

⁸ Karen Hinett, *DEVELOPING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN LEGAL EDUCATION*. (UK Centre for Legal Education, University of Warwick, 2002), 5.

<http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/resources/reflection/index.html> (accessed July 11th 2013).

⁹ Judith McNamara, Tina Cockburn and Catherine Campbell, *GOOD PRACTICE (BACHELOR OF LAWS): REFLECTIVE PRACTICE*. (The Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2013), 3. <http://www.lawteachnetwork.org/resources/gpg-reflection.pdf> (accessed September 14 2013).

2. Background of the Study

In the past few years, the legal education system in Nigeria has witnessed what may be called a major paradigm shift. The Nigerian Law School (NLS), a vocational institution responsible for the education and training of prospective legal practitioners in Nigeria, undertook a number of policy decisions which necessitated a review of its programs of curricula in order to meet with global standards. Policy decisions that have been taken and implemented included an overhaul of its teaching methods to include a critical and analytical attitude in legal research. Specifically, changes to the course modules have been made to accommodate such skills as communication skills, analytical skills, legal writing, legal research, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and other clinical methods. Changes have also been initiated with regard to the mode of application and registration for the program, method of course delivery and assessment and conduct of examination practices which hitherto were not online. These changes are considered transformative in its over fifty years of existence.¹⁰ The reforms were necessitated by the need to renew professionalism in legal practice by inculcating transferable skills to the workplace through the legal education system.

The study upon which this article is based, sought to investigate the extent to which knowledge, skills and competencies obtained through formal legal education are transferred to the workplace.¹¹ The study assessed the attempts aimed at re-shaping professional development programs by the NLS and made contributions as to how the concept of legal information literacy can provide a suitable platform for developing a legal information literacy paradigm for Nigeria. This article presents findings from the reflective journals produced by the graduate law students (“known as aspirant barristers”) in the course of their vocational training at the NLS. It examines the practice of professional legal training by the NLS through the vocational placement exercise and assesses the level of transferability of professional legal training to the legal workplace in Nigeria.

¹⁰Network of University Legal Aid Institutions (NULAI), “Clinical Legal Education for Nigerian University Law Faculties/Clinics,” 2006. http://www.fupp.org.pl/down/Nigerian_Universities_Law_Faculties_Clinics.doc (accessed June 10 2013).

¹¹ Victoria Lawal, “A Contextual Study of the Information Literacy of Aspirant Barristers in Nigeria” (Ph.D diss. University of Kwazulu-Natal, 2012), 1.

3. Reflective Practice and Information Literacy

Reflective practice is anchored to the constructivist learning theory which emphasizes learning as a process of personal understanding and the construction of meaning rather than the memorization of facts.¹² In the educational context,¹³ the application of reflective practice enables the learner to make informed decisions based on experience and to respond to issues emerging from this reflection.¹⁴ It also provides the learner the opportunity for independent learning and the development of meta-cognitive skills.¹⁵ Reflective practice in the educational sector has been used as an assessment tool by teachers and administrators to explore the impact of critical self-reflection of a learner in any given context.¹⁶ Outcomes of such reflection may be presented in a written form such as a journal or diary, providing evidence of learning or change of behaviour.¹⁷

The relationship between the concepts of reflective practice and information literacy (IL) is centred on the issue of lifelong learning.¹⁸ According to Vezzosi, developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has made information literacy education one of the most effective learning strategies in promoting higher order thinking skills such as critical thinking, evaluative and analytical skills in order to help enhance the

¹² Ghulam M. Kundi and Allah Nawaz, "From Objectivism to Social Constructivism: The Impacts of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on Higher Education," *JOURNAL OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION RESEARCH* 1, no. 2 (2010): 31.

¹³ Moon, p.83.

¹⁴ Ana Gil-Garcia and Zaida Cintron, "The Reflective Journal as a Learning and Professional Development for Teachers and Administrators," Paper presented at a conference on *World Association for Case Method Research and Application*. Germany. July 2nd-5th 2002. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED480130> (accessed September 11th 2013).

¹⁵ Maggie Clarke, "Reflection: Journals and Questions: A Strategy for Professional Learning," Paper presented at the NZARE/AARE Conference, Auckland New Zealand. 29th -31st December 2003. <http://www.aare.edu.au/03pap/cla03134.pdf> (accessed July 12th 2013).

¹⁶ Hinnet, p.6.

¹⁷ Elda Nikolou-Walker and Jonathan Garnett, "Work-based Learning: A New Imperative: Developing Reflective Practice in Professional Life," *REFLECTIVE PRACTICE* 5, no. 3 (2004): 298.

¹⁸ Pamela A. McKinney, and Barbara A. Sen, "Reflection for Learning: Understanding the Value of Reflective Writing for Information literacy Development," *JOURNAL OF INFORMATION LITERACY* 6, no. 2 (2012): 115.

experience of the student in the area of lifelong learning.¹⁹ Within the context of IL instruction, reflective practice encourages deep learning abilities rather than just the mechanics of information search and provides a holistic approach to learning in preparing students towards becoming successful lifelong learners.

In the legal field, the changing legal information environment has had a profound influence on legal research especially with respect to the issue of skills acquisition. Complex tasks in legal research now require formulating new approaches and creating ways of looking at the evidence in a case.²⁰ In view of this, the concept of legal information literacy has become important as the best instructional approach to legal research and writing. Consequently in the context of legal education, it is important that the curriculum design and methods of teaching legal information skills are informed by information literacy models and frameworks in order to help facilitate the development of transferable skills which is vital for lifelong learning. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)²¹ Information Literacy Competency Standards, 2000, SCONUL's (2011)²² Seven Pillars of Information Literacy Model and other models and standards of IL provide useful frameworks that can be used for encouraging reflective practice as an effective method of engaging students in the learning experience of legal research and writing skills.²³

¹⁹ Monica Vezzosi, "Critical Thinking and Reflective Practice: The Role of Information Literacy".

<http://dspace-unipr.cilea.it/bitstream/1889/91/2/BP100%20Vezzosi.pdf> (accessed August 4 2013).

²⁰ Anna W. Shavers, "The Impact of Technology on Legal Education," *JOURNAL OF LEGAL EDUCATION* 21, no. 3 (2001): 411.

²¹ Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy Competency Standards, 2000. <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency> (accessed June 21 2013).

²² SCONUL Seven Pillars of Information Literacy, Core Model for Higher Education. <http://www.sconul.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/coremodel.pdf> (accessed September 25th 2013).

²³ Judith McNamara, Rachael Field and Natalie Cuffe, "Designing Reflective Assessment for Effective Learning of Legal Research Skills in First Year" *FYHE*, (2008), 4. <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/15053/1/15053.pdf> (accessed August 15th 2013).

4. Reflective Practice and Legal Education

The concept of reflective practice in learning has become a well-established practice in professional education in various professions such as Nursing, Law, Medicine and Teaching since the late 1980's. The concern among professional organizations in this regard is the need for encouraging personal and professional development in the workplace in order to meet up with the demands of expertise which are constantly being challenged.²⁴

Reflective practice and workplace learning are closely related and complementary processes.²⁵ In the context of work, reflection provides an opportunity to generate a connection between theory and practice,²⁶ develop a better perspective on work processes and make informed decisions.²⁷ According to Moon, reflective activity in the workplace encourages a deep learning approach.²⁸ It is characterized by emotional components which can create a greater awareness of feelings in the learner especially when handling complex tasks. Reflective practice has thus provided a useful framework for developing important processes in professional learning and has been formalized by various regulatory bodies and professional organizations as a way of developing professionalism²⁹ in students and practitioners through assessment and continuing professional education.³⁰

In legal education, McNamara and Field³¹ noted that reflective practice is used to explore the ability of students to reflect on their own

²⁴ David Boud, "Relocating Reflection in the Context of Practice," in *BEYOND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: NEW APPROACHES TO PROFESSIONAL LIFELONG LEARNING*, eds. Helen Bradbury and others, (London: Routledge, 2010), 22.

²⁵ Hinnet, 7.

²⁶ Nikolou-Walker and Garnett, p. 299

²⁷ Bradley Greiman C. and Holly K. Covington. "Reflective Thinking and Journal Writing: Examining Student Teachers' Perception of Preferred Reflective Modality, Journal Writing Outcomes and Journal Structure". *CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION RESEARCH* 32, no. 2 (2007): 115.

²⁸ Moon, p. 88.

²⁹ Helen Bradbury and Others, *BEYOND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: NEW APPROACHES TO PROFESSIONAL LIFELONG LEARNING*, eds. (London: Routledge, 2010), 1.

³⁰ Boud, p. 22.

³¹ Judith McNamara and Rachael Field, "Designing Reflective Assessment for Workplace Learning in Legal Education," ATN Assessment and Evaluation Conference, QUT, Brisbane, Australia, 29-30 November 2007.

strengths and weaknesses and to practice critical reflection by monitoring their own work performance, interpersonal relations and ability to learn from experience. It also encourages lifelong learning by enhancing the ability of the student to transfer knowledge to other contexts and gain new insights in various tasks. The use of reflective practice techniques in law school teaching is often undertaken in clinical legal education through such programs as in-house clinics, community based clinics and externship or placement programs under established legal practitioners in a court, law firm, or a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). This process is usually supervised by a law teacher from the law school to ensure that the students have a meaningful educational experience.³²

Clinical legal education refers to the practical side of legal training designed to complement theoretical knowledge particularly at the undergraduate level.³³ It is an approach that is borrowed from medical practice and is aimed at imparting certain basic skills and values by integrating the knowledge of skills with the principles of law for problem solving. In practice, it enables the student to master the rubrics of handling legal issues³⁴ to enhance their educational experience in providing affordable legal representation to the community.³⁵ In the legal workplace therefore, reflective practice provides the opportunity for the student to be involved in genuine learning experience. Through reflection, they are invited to examine themselves and the profession they are about to enter as they learn how to be effective lawyers.³⁶

www.eac2007.qut.edu.au/program/McNamara_abstract.pdf (accessed September 24th September 2013).

³² Filippa Marullo Anzalone, "Education for the Law: Reflective Education for the Law", in *HANDBOOK OF REFLECTION AND REFLECTIVE INQUIRY: MAPPING A WAY OF KNOWING*, ed. Nona Lyons (New York: Springer, 2010), 96.

³³ Roger Burrige, Abdul Paliwala, Karen Hinett, *Effective Learning and Teaching in Law* (London: Kogan Page Ltd, 2002), 33.

³⁴ William Sullivan and Others, *EDUCATING LAWYERS: THE CARNEGIE FOUNDATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF TEACHING* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/John Wiley and Sons Inc., 2007), 28.

³⁵ David Mcquoid-Mason, Ernest Ojukwu and George. M. Wachira. 2010. "Clinical Legal Education in Africa: Legal Education and Community Service", in *GLOBAL CLINICAL MOVEMENT: EDUCATING LAWYERS FOR JUSTICE*, ed. Frank S. Bloch (London: Oxford University Press, 2010), 31.

³⁶ Anzalone, p. 97.

5. Legal Education in Nigeria³⁷

The framework of legal education in Nigeria consists of a five year program of undergraduate degree in any recognized university in Nigeria and professional legal training at the Nigerian Law School (NLS). The Nigerian Law School is a vocational training institute established in 1963 to provide practical training for law graduates as the second and final stage of formal training for lawyers. As a vocational institution, its objective as reflected in the curriculum is the provision of skills training, court procedures and the ethics guiding the profession³⁷. In line with the recommendations of the Legal Education Act (1962)³⁸, the Nigerian legal education system adopted a two-tier system of legal education and training similar to that of the United Kingdom, which separates academic from vocational training.

This system is in contrast to other countries such as the United States where legal education is undertaken by the university law faculties, that is, the law school is also part of the law faculty.³⁹ Hence the law school as understood in the Nigerian context refers to a non-university institution which undertakes postgraduate professional training for graduate law students who intend to practice. This practice is similar to some African countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Uganda and other countries within the Commonwealth.⁴⁰ Unlike the British system however, the Legal Education Act (1962) provides for the system of legal practice to be fused, in other words, practitioners are entitled to practice as barristers and/or solicitors.⁴¹ Thus, by providing a single point of entry and exit for legal education and practice, the Legal

³⁷ Tahir Mamman, "The Globalization of Legal Practice: the Challenges for Legal Education in Nigeria." Paper delivered at the 2nd Annual Business Luncheon of S. P. A. Ajibade and Co. Legal Practitioners, 19th November 2009. http://www.spaajibade.com/admintoolnew/uploads/2nd_annual_business_luncheon_d.g's_paper.pdf (accessed July 5 2013).

³⁸ Legal Practitioners Act 1962 (Cap 207). *Laws of the Federation of Nigeria*, 1990.

<http://www.nigeria-law.org/Legal%20Practitioners%20Act.htm> (accessed September 20 2013).

³⁹ Ronald H. Graveson, "The Future of the Nigerian Legal Profession," *THE INTERNATIONAL AND COMPARATIVE LAW QUARTERLY* 9, no. 1 (1960): 129.

⁴⁰ Berthan Macaulay, "Students for Law Schools and Faculties in Africa," *JOURNAL OF AFRICAN LAW* 6, no. 2 (1962): 81.

⁴¹ Legal Practitioners Act 1962 (Cap 207).

Education Act established a system that is unique to the context, culture and legal system of Nigeria.⁴²

6. Vocational Training at the NLS

Theoretical and practical knowledge are complementary in legal education, the integration of these two methods are vital to the professional identity of student learning. Through professional education, graduate law students are taught to think, perform, and act like lawyers, the aim of which is to provide them with the capacity and necessary competency skills to engage in complex legal practice.⁴³ Professional legal education is necessarily about practice; the ability to learn from experience is one of the most useful cognitive skills for a lawyer and it is within this framework of learning that the idea of vocational legal education has emerged.⁴⁴

Vocational training is central to the institutional responsibility of the NLS and is undertaken in the form of a placement or apprenticeship program known as the “court and law office attachment”.⁴⁵ This field placement or vocational training is structured in such a way that aspirant barristers assume professional roles in real life settings. The first two weeks of training at the NLS begins with an induction program in which aspirant barristers are divided into groups of teams to act as law “firms” in simulated court cases. This is followed by twenty weeks of intensive study involving the use of case studies, interactive methods including role play and simulation (Grimes, 2009).⁴⁶ The twenty weeks of study is followed by the attachment exercise for eight weeks in which they are sent to various courts across the country for a period ranging from two to five weeks to observe court proceedings. Aspirant barristers are allowed to choose any state of their choice within the country, but not the particular court, for this exercise. They are usually attached to specific judges or magistrates who are responsible for reviewing court proceedings with them daily or periodically. The timing for the court

⁴² Mamman.

⁴³ Sullivan, p.13, 22.

⁴⁴ Ibid, Sullivan p. 27

⁴⁵ Ada Okoye Ordor, “Constructing a Clinical Legal Education Approach for Large Multicultural Classes: Insights from the Nigerian Law School,” *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION* 11, (2007): 67.

⁴⁶ Richard Grimes, “All Change Please: Lessons to Learn from Legal Education Reforms in Nigeria” in *THE LAW TEACHER* 43, no 1 (2009): 82-90. [.http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/section?content=a909208137&fulltext=713240928](http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/section?content=a909208137&fulltext=713240928) (accessed September 12th 2013).

attachment is structured to fit the period when courts are in active session, usually in the middle of the legal year (April-June), in order to ensure that students learn from the proceedings.⁴⁷

This exercise is followed by the law office attachment in which the aspirant barristers are assigned by the NLS to various law offices across the country for a period of about two months.⁴⁸ The law office attachment is carried out in various law firms across the country. The list of the selected law firms comprise three thousand three hundred (3, 300) law firms which are organized in a central database of the NLS.⁴⁹ These law firms are accredited and recognized by the Council of Legal Education for the purpose of the placement program. The law firms are also responsible for ensuring that the aspirant barristers are exposed to the context of legal practice and other clinical training as well as helping to create a definite program of involvement for experiential learning during this period.⁵⁰

The entire placement exercise is routinely supervised by lecturers of the Nigerian Law School and aspirant barristers are expected to document their experiences in the form of a reflective journal for which they will be assessed. At the expiration of the placement, participants then return to the Law School to discuss their experiences of the attachment program and engage in further case study. This is followed by the final bar examinations and the award of a Barrister at Law (B. L) degree.⁵¹ It should be noted that even though the B.L and LLB are two separate qualifications, they are perceived as fused by employers and both are required for legal practice in Nigeria. The bachelor of law degree (LLB) is considered incomplete without the additional vocational qualification of a Barrister at Law (B.L) which is obtained on successful completion of the Bar examinations.⁵²

Vocational training or apprenticeship programs such as that undertaken by the NLS are focused on the development of professional identity and help expose graduate lawyers to the full dimensions of professional life. Through apprenticeship, legal education is able to blend the analytical and practical nature of professional practice in preparing future

⁴⁷ Okoye Ordor, p.67.

⁴⁸ Grimes, "The reforms".

⁴⁹ Okoye Ordor, p.49.

⁵⁰ Grimes, "The reforms".

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Okoye Ordor, p. 65.

legal practitioners with the needed competency skills.⁵³ Such placement programs have also been used in various universities in the United States and the United Kingdom as part of the curriculum and as a form of work experience for law students which may be undertaken in a law firm, judge's chambers or courts. They help provide law students with experiences to understand the expectations of law firms in legal practice and how they can respond to various challenges in the workplace.⁵⁴

Various studies⁵⁵ have also shown that vocational training and legal apprenticeship programs are highly contextualized and enable experts in the field to model performance in a way that the novice can imitate based on the guidance of the expert.⁵⁶ Transferability of skills is often ensured within such a Community of Practice (CoP) and the novice is challenged to determine the most effective approach in tackling legal problems.⁵⁷ Through this process also, experts who have acquired a great deal of knowledge⁵⁸ and skill on various legal issues are able to influence the nature of professional skills training in legal education⁵⁹ by providing the needed support, guidance and feedback to graduate lawyers thereby encouraging a collaborative relationship⁶⁰ between the legal profession and the legal education system.⁶¹

The practice of reflection at the NLS is used to support the vocational training program as a way of encouraging learning experiences in the work place. Aspirant barristers are encouraged to think about their learning processes during the placement exercise and to reflect on their actions in such a way that they can monitor their own progress and improve their

⁵³ Sullivan, p. 28, 97.

⁵⁴ Burrige, p. 36.

⁵⁵ Brook K. Baker, "Learning to Fish, Fishing to Learn: Guided Participation in the Interpersonal Ecology of Practice," *CLINICAL LAW REVIEW* 6, no. 1 (1999): 26-33.

⁵⁶ Sullivan, p. 27.

⁵⁷ Barbara J. Daley, "Novice to Expert: An Exploration of How Professionals Learn," *ADULT EDUCATION QUARTERLY* 49, no. 4 (1999): 133.

⁵⁸ John D. Bransford and Others, eds. *HOW PEOPLE LEARN: BRAIN, MIND, EXPERIENCE AND SCHOOL*. (Washington D. C.: National Academy Press, 2000), 266.

⁵⁹ Kelly S. Terry, "Externships: A Signature Pedagogy for the Apprenticeship of Professional Identity and Purpose," *JOURNAL OF LEGAL EDUCATION* 59, no. 2 (2009): 266.

⁶⁰ Daniel Givelber and others, "Learning through Work: An Empirical Study of Legal Internship," *JOURNAL OF LEGAL EDUCATION* 45, no. 10 (1995): 9.

⁶¹ David A. Binder, Albert J. Moore and Paul. Bergman. "A Depositions Course: Tackling the Challenge of Teaching for Professional Skills Transfer," *CLINICAL LAW REVIEW* 13, no. 871 (2003): 872.

performance. This system enables the NLS to assess the learning outcomes of the program with respect to skills transferability, professional development and improvement in job productivity of the aspirant barristers.⁶² The use of the journal also contributes to reflective thinking and shows their ability to develop critical and evaluative thinking skills, especially in analyzing and handling legal problems thereby enhancing their IL skills.⁶³

7. Methodology and Methods

In investigating the research questions and objectives of the study, a case study method was employed; the contextual nature of the study required that an in-depth examination of the issues involved be undertaken. The case study method was therefore considered appropriate as it provided more flexible ways by which the complex issues related to the use and application of legal information in the workplace in Nigeria could be investigated. The study used both qualitative and quantitative mixed method design, comprising the administration of structured questionnaires and the use of the reflective journals. The application of mixed methods for the study was informed by the consideration that research questions in case studies are often qualitative in nature and may ignore other quantitative questions that are relevant to the study. Consequently, the use of mixed research methods for the study enabled the researcher to compile rich empirical data in order to achieve meaningful results from the findings of the study. Among the qualitative methods used were the reflective journals produced by the aspirant barristers, this enabled the researcher to provide a rich description and explanation of the processes of the local context being explored.

Reflective journals provide access to concrete documented information; their use can elicit valuable information for transforming educational experiences into best practices. They can also be used to explore the impact of critical self-reflection on a research design. As part of the requirements for the attachment program to the law courts and law firms, aspirant barristers are expected to produce and submit to the Law School a two-page reflective journal on “the most significant thing I learnt during the attachment”. Based on the guidelines for the reflective journal, the purpose of the journal is to demonstrate the level of involvement of aspirant barristers in the specified program of activities for the attachment program and to ascertain

⁶² Terry Hutchinson and Natalie Cuffe, “Legal Research Project Management: Skills Extension for Upper Level Law Students,” *LEGAL EDUCATION DIGEST* 13, no. 2 (2004): 159.

⁶³ Greiman and Covington, p. 133.

their level of professional development and learning from the experience. The journal includes an analysis of what was learnt from the attachment and activities engaged in or observed and a reflection on that achievement or any information or challenges confronted during the period. According to Bates , reflective journals provide an understanding of learning processes particularly within established educational programs. For the conduct of this study therefore, the reflective journals produced by the aspirant barristers were useful for obtaining valuable data which enabled the researcher to ascertain their levels of professional learning and highlight specific areas where there are gaps in IL skills development.

In accessing the reflective journal for the study, express permission was obtained from the authorities of the Nigerian Law School for this purpose; consent was also obtained from the aspirant barristers whose journals were selected for examination. From the selected journals, a purposive sample was drawn by which the analysis was conducted. A purposive sampling technique is designed to pick a small number of cases that will provide the needed information about a particular phenomenon. It involves selecting a sample on the basis of the researcher's knowledge of the study population in terms of its various elements and how it fits into the nature and aims of the research. In purposive sampling, respondents may be selected for their representativeness of a larger population but are likely to be chosen for the kind of information they may provide. The choice of a purposive sample may be done if it is considered that a random sample may not yield the desired result. The reason for the choice of this sampling method for the study was informed by the decision to use the reflective journals produced by the aspirant barristers as a method of data collection. It was considered that since it may not be possible for the researcher to analyse all the journals produced by the aspirant barristers, a purposive sample could be used to select a sample that will be relevant to the findings of the study.

8. Analysis of Findings from the Reflective Journals

According to Hegarty, reflective journals can be categorized into five levels and types, they include – descriptive reflection, explanatory reflection, supported reflection, contextual reflection and critical reflection, each of which are often exhibited by the writer of the journal. These categories were used to examine the level of reflection of the writers using a constant comparative method. The method of analysis was qualitative; a thematic analysis was then used to explain the themes and patterns that emerged from the findings.

In analyzing the data, a descriptive approach was employed to capture the experiences of the aspirant barristers. The journal entries by the aspirant barristers were analysed using a model designed by Boud, Cohen and Walker (1993) and adapted by Merrelyn Bates (2003). Bates' study sought to investigate student's reflection on learning experiences based on work placements in the criminology and criminal justice areas in Australia. The study outlined five criteria by which students' experiential learning in the workplace could be evaluated. Findings from her study revealed how student learning experiences can be enhanced through reflective practice in a work placement program. Bates' model was considered applicable to the study as it provided the opportunity to examine evidence of reflection and other learning experiences of the aspirant barristers from the attachment program. The model has also been used in a similar study on students' experiences through workplace integrated learning by Schembri (2007).

A total of twenty three journals produced by the aspirant barristers were analyzed for the study. The reflective journals were first organized by seeking data that tallied with the categories outlined from the Bates' framework. From the twenty three journals, five journals representing typical examples of the categories determined by Bates, were selected and then coded and classified according to each of the campuses of the NLS from which they were obtained. A table was then created showing the most significant thing learnt as indicated by each respondent as well as the skills, knowledge and values acquired by the respondents. A provision was also made in the table by which the five categories outlined by Bates could be used to examine evidences of reflection, learning and recognized development by the aspirant barristers. In the analysis of the journals shown in the table below, specific aspects of some of the journal entries were selected to illustrate their application to the outlined categories as well as evidences of reflection and learning from the experience. The discussion of the findings presented below follows the format by which the table of responses were organized.

Table 1: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL ANALYSIS USING BATES' (2003) MODEL

	Category	Cases cited	Evidence of reflection	Comments
1.	The work placement experience has been the foundation of and stimulus for learning.	Witnessing a criminal case	<p>“It was instructive for me to learn that witnesses are to be sworn while standing as a matter of rules, practices and procedures of the courts – no matter the person and his status....”</p> <p>“It was rather disappointing to learn that important records of the police such as the statements of accused and complainant are not authenticated by stamping especially when they are not on the prescribed form. This could help the court in averting the rather unending problems encountered”.</p>	Evidence of learning is identified in the journal entry and highlights the ability of the aspirant to link what was learnt in the task to the experience. Evidence of the acquisition of a new skill is also indicated and the ability to construct new meaning from the learning task.
2.	The learner has actively constructed the work placement experience as it has evolved.	Court case over chieftaincy title.	<p>“I was surprised to see the presiding judge struck out the case for want of evidence instead of transferring the case to the state High Court. I believe the judge did not avert his mind to the provision of section 22 [2] of the Federal High Court Act. We went to the judge after the whole proceeding and asked him why he struck out the case instead of transferring and he told us that the application should have been made by the plaintiff counsel. The question I asked myself was is the judge no longer presumed to know the law?”</p>	The aspirant barrister is able to modify the learning task as it evolves. The alternative course of action suggested by the aspirant shows his ability to change the focus and direction of learning as dictated by the circumstances. New knowledge is also seen to be constructed as a result of the learning experience in the workplace.

3.	The work placement learning has been a holistic experience.	Conduct of judges in court and adjournment of court cases.	“...I have learnt that there are long term benefits because I have come to appreciate that experience counts in practice”. “...I am conscious of who I am and I have discovered in a very short time the wise decision I made to study law. I have remained disciplined in speech, appearance and determined to succeed. The knowledge I gathered from the beginning of the exercise to the end of it cannot be robbed off me. It remains my innate treasure and I am convinced that I benefitted beyond my expectations”.	This journal entry indicates a relationship between the learner and the experience. A deeper understanding of the whole experience is achieved particularly through the senses and emotion which enables the learner to confront feelings of anxiety and adapt to the requirements of the workplace.
4.	The work placement learning has been socially and culturally constructed during the course of the experience.	Witnessing a client interview in Yoruba language.	“...I learnt immensely from the client interview. Firstly I observed that although the client interview was conducted in Yoruba language, the message was duly passed to the lawyer. Thus a client interview can be conducted in a language other than English language...”	Evidence of reflection is shown in the ability of the aspirant to recognize the influence of culture to the context of the learning experience. The experience also provides new insight that could influence the application of practical skills to the work place.

5.	The work placement learning has been influenced by the socio-emotional in which it has occurred.	Witnessed a court proceeding in a prison.	“It was a great opportunity for me to experience the prison visit....I learnt a lot from the experience as it taught me that as a lawyer especially a state counsel I have to be diligent in handling proceedings in court because negligence of duty as a lawyer is detrimental to the society”.	The learning experience serves as a key influence to a new sense of awareness as to the expectations of the profession on the aspirant and aroused feelings of a need for commitment (“diligence”) as to the role he/she can play towards positively impacting the legal system.
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From the table above, analysis of the skills, knowledge and values acquired in the course of the attachment demonstrated the development of practical skills particularly advocacy skills, analytical skills and communication skills. Other skills include critical thinking and evaluative skills. According to Greiman and Covington, research has shown that journal writing can assist in the development of critical thinking skills, self-evaluative skills and observational skills. It also contributes to increasing self-esteem and has a tendency to reduce stress and release tension in the writer as indicated in entry number three of the table.

The role of emotion is also demonstrated as an important aspect of learning in the journal entries; some of the emotions expressed include feelings of “disappointment” and “surprise” (entries numbers 1 & 2). Based on the work of Dewey (1933), Boud, Keogh and Walker have suggested a cyclical model with three broader categories of reflective thought, that is, experience, reflection, and outcome which emphasise emotion as an element of reflective practice. Similarly, Boud, Cohen and Walker observed that feelings and emotion can both act as an opportunity or a barrier to learning as they help determine the next course of action in a given situation. Schembri suggests the need, in such situations, to provide a supportive approach in helping the learner overcome the challenges experienced. This support can be in the form of collaborative learning enhanced through interaction between novice and experts as a means of developing professional skills and encouraging work place learning.

Procedural learning through the attachment program forms an important component of legal education; it provided an opportunity for the aspirant barristers to integrate theory and practice and develop knowledge and skills that are transferable to other contexts. Evidence of the development of practical skills is seen from the analyses of experiences from the journal entries, which indicated a better understanding of how legal rules are applied in the practice of law. This component increases the potential by which skills can be transferred to other contexts through such deep learning processes.

Another component of experiential learning identified in the reflective journal is collaborative learning which suggests that individual reflection is enhanced through interaction and participation particularly between the novice and the expert. Givelbar and others noted that the practice setting in this context provides an opportunity for the novice to learn through a process of enculturation thereby providing an opportunity for developing lawyering skills and an understanding of the roles and relationships of the profession within a given Community of Practice (CoP).

Analysis of the five journal entries on “the most significant thing I learnt” shows that these journals generally indicated evidence of reflection and learning based on descriptions given by the respondents of the context in which it was experienced. It was noted from the analysis that respondents were able to critically reflect and evaluate the situation and in some instances make suggestions as to how changes could be made for greater positive impact (entries number 1 & 2). Findings from the analysis of the reflective journals therefore, provide an understanding of the potential of practice-based learning in facilitating the development of practical skills. It also provides insight into the educational value of work as an important aspect of skills training in the context of the legal workplace in Nigeria.

9. Implications of Findings

Analyses of the reflective journals have provided evidence of procedural and experiential learning through the attachment program which is necessary in increasing the potential for the transference of legal skills to the workplace. The imperatives of these findings are that they provide useful insights that can be used to inform policy decisions with respect to the ongoing reforms in the legal education system in Nigeria particularly with respect to vocational training at the NLS. Findings are equally relevant in influencing future policy interventions regarding measures that could be taken in revitalising undergraduate legal education at the university level and other

programs of continuing legal education at the post graduate level for effective legal practice in the workplace.

Similarly with respect to IL skills development, reflective practice provides a way of ensuring that law students obtain the resourcefulness they need in order to become lifelong learners and effective lawyers in the future. Analysis of the contextual factors that influenced the information seeking behaviour and use of the aspirant barristers in the course of the vocational training also served to emphasise the significance of information literacy to the context of legal practice in Nigeria. Findings from the study have shown that the curriculum of the NLS is central to the efforts made towards closing the gap between legal education and practice in Nigeria. The development of professional competence among aspirant barristers can only be achieved if the curriculum and teaching methods of law are designed to promote growth and expertise through employing a skills-based approach in legal education. Adopting an information literacy approach in the curriculum of the NLS, can provide a holistic program of legal training and vocational training that would strengthen the efforts towards the preparation of future lawyers for the legal profession in Nigeria.

10. Conclusion

Recommendations from the findings point to the need for greater collaboration between the NLS and the law courts and firms towards restructuring the attachment program so as to effectively utilize it as a means of providing meaningful learning experiences for the aspirant barristers particularly through reflective practice. Included in the policy initiating the on-going reforms is a provision that allows for the introduction of an evaluative process by which further recommendations and modifications can be made to the implementation of the reforms. Consequently, the timing of the study has provided the opportunity to evaluate the implementation of the reforms against the stated outcomes. It is therefore anticipated that the findings will go a long way towards influencing policy and practice regarding the establishment of information literacy as a key aspect of legal education in Nigeria.

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