

Lucrativeness of the business of architecture: The professional's view

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Abstract. The architectural profession, situated at the intersection of art, science, and business, faces a multifaceted challenge in balancing creativity and financial sustainability. This study aims to assess the financial viability of the architectural profession by investigating the perceptions of practicing architects in Enugu Urban, Nigeria. Employing a quantitative research approach, a structured questionnaire survey was administered to a sample of 135 registered architects in Enugu Urban, the data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify influencing variable and patterns in the responses. The findings reveal a strong consensus among respondents concerning the entrepreneurial nature of architecture and its potential for financial success. However, a notable division in opinion was observed regarding architects' participation in non-lucrative projects, with 62% supporting the idea and 38% opposing it. The results indicate that core architectural services, such as design and project management, are widely perceived as lucrative, while specialized areas like historical preservation and community-oriented projects face challenges in terms of financial viability. The study identifies key challenges faced by architects, including fee negotiation, intense competition, economic fluctuations, and the need to keep pace with technological advancements. Its conclusion highlights potential opportunities for architects to expand their business horizons, such as embracing advanced visualization techniques, offering specialized consultancy services, venturing into real estate development, and engaging in urban planning and research.

1. Introduction

Architects respond to one of the vital needs of the society, which is shelter; and are known to establish profound realities not easily altered if erected in the environment (Okeke et al., 2019). Historically, the profession has long been associated with the art and science of designing buildings and spaces and have undergone significant evolution over time, transitioning from a craft overseen by master builders to a formalized and organized profession. This evolution has been influenced by various factors, including architectural education, formal practice, as well as the changing role of architects over time (Craven, 2020). Within the construction industry, architect suffices as the prime consultant in shaping and influencing the functionality, safety, aesthetics, and sustainability of building structures and urban space in general (Obi et al., 2022); therefore, its professional negligence or extinction would create concerns. However, the practice of architecture extends beyond the realm of design and encompasses a complex business landscape that architects must navigate to ensure the financial sustainability of their endeavors. The business of architecture involves a wide range of activities, from securing clients and projects to managing finances, resources, and personnel (Kathy, 2017). Despite the crucial role that business acumen plays in the success of architectural practices, there is a persistent stereotype that architects primarily focus on the artistic and technical aspects of their work, neglecting the financial and entrepreneurial dimensions of their profession (Bernstein, 2018). According to Mark (2021) the biggest challenge of graduate architects is that they come out of school not understanding that to start a practice is to start a small business. They target to make great influence in the professional landscape and society by concentrating on design prowess and technical abilities.

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Architecture is esteemed as a creatively fulfilling profession, but its financial landscape varies significantly based on factors such as location, specialization, and individual career choices. In recent times, the financial viability of the architectural profession has been a topic of debate and concern within the industry with schools throwing out hundreds of architecture graduates annually. The practice of architecture has been described as risky, questionably profitable, and often underappreciated, with architects facing challenges in converting their value in the marketplace of building (Bernstein, 2018). The prevalence of commoditized fee structures, mounting pressure on salaries, and consistently low profit margins are merely manifestations of a more profound issue plaguing the architectural profession: the inability of architects to fully capture the financial value they generate. Despite the fact that buildings are not only essential for human survival but also serve as the very foundation of civilization and its progress, the monetary rewards for architects often fail to reflect the true significance of their work. This perception has led to a growing interest in understanding the factors that contribute to the lucrateness or non-lucrateness of architectural business. Anecdotal evidence suggests that practicing firms are not willing to hire or train more architects rather they prefer to downsize. For instance, the award-winning Malcolm Fraser Architects, revealed that his firm fell into liquidation in 2015, resulting in the loss of 15 staff members. Fraser admitted that despite the beauty and importance of the work they produced, they were unable to make their architecture practice profitable (Waite, 2015). The architectural profession has been grappling with the perception that fees are unrealistically low, making it increasingly challenging for architects to deliver the level of service that clients and society deserve. This sentiment has been echoed by many in the industry, even when firms are not facing the immediate threat of bankruptcy (Derbyshire, 2018). In the Nigerian sector, it is almost impossible to be paid by the government regulations approved scale of fees.

Existing research on the business aspects of architecture has primarily focused on the challenges and opportunities faced by architectural firms in developing countries (Oyeyipo et al., 2016; Oluwatayo et al., 2019). However, there is a paucity of research examining the perspectives of architects in developing countries, particularly in the context of Nigeria. The Nigerian architectural industry operates within a unique socio-economic and cultural context, characterized by rapid urbanization, economic fluctuations, and intense competition among firms (Ebong et al., 2019). Understanding the perceptions and experiences of Nigerian architects regarding the financial viability of their profession is crucial for developing strategies to support the growth and sustainability of architectural firms in the country. Consequently, the impact of technological advancements, such as Building Information Modeling (BIM) and advanced visualization techniques, on the business landscape of architecture has not been extensively explored in the Nigerian context. These technologies have the potential to revolutionize the way architects design, collaborate, and communicate with clients, offering new revenue streams and competitive advantages (Mba et al., 2024). Investigating the adoption and perception of these technologies among Nigerian architects can provide valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges they present for the profession. Furthermore, another significant research gap lies in the exploration of architects' participation in non-lucrative projects and its implications for the profession's social responsibility. While some argue that architects have a moral obligation to engage in projects that serve the public good, even if they do not generate significant financial returns (Bell & Wakeford, 2008), others prioritize the financial sustainability of their firms (Fisher, 2024). Examining the perspectives of Nigerian architects on this debate can shed light on the complex balance between financial viability and social responsibility in the profession.

The architectural profession, when examined holistically within the realm of business, faces a multifaceted challenge situated at the crossroads of creativity and business. This challenge prompts a research study that seeks to comprehend, tackle, and improve the financial aspects of the field. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge and address these research gaps by investigating the perceptions of architects in emerging cities. In the light of present environmental, social and economic realities, the study aims to assess the financial viability of the architectural profession, with a focus on understanding the perspectives of professionals regarding the lucrateness or non-lucrateness of architectural business. This study focused on Practicing Architects, in Enugu Urban, Enugu State, Nigeria, examining the opportunities and challenges they face in the business of architecture. The study drew data from surveys of successful architecture businesses discussing the viability and approach used in the practice of Business Architecture. By exploring the challenges, opportunities, and debates surrounding the business of architecture in this context, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence the financial viability and success of architectural firms in Nigeria although the scope did not investigate financial statement of respondents. The findings of this study have significant implications for architectural education, professional development, and business management in Nigeria. By identifying the key factors that contribute to the lucrateness or non-lucrateness of architectural business, the study can inform strategies to support the growth and sustainability of architectural firms in the country. Moreover, the insights gained from this research can guide aspiring and practicing architects in making informed decisions about their career paths and business endeavors, enabling them to navigate the complex business landscape of the profession successfully.

2. The study area

Enugu Urban, the vibrant capital city of Enugu State, southeastern Nigeria, serves as the focal point of this research. Situated within the coordinates of 6°21'N to 6°30'N latitude and 7°26'E to 7°37'E longitude, Enugu Urban encompasses three local government areas: Enugu-South, Enugu-East, and Enugu-North (see Figure 1). This bustling metropolis, once a small coal mining camp, has witnessed a remarkable transformation over the years, emerging as a thriving urban center that now houses over 1.1 million inhabitants (Okeke et al., 2021). Enugu Urban boasts a rich cultural heritage, with the Igbo tribe comprising more than 90 percent of its population (Okosun et al., 2023). The city's strategic location and historical significance as the former regional headquarters of the Old Eastern Nigeria region in the early 1960s have contributed to its growth and development. In recent decades, Enugu Urban has experienced rapid urbanization, characterized by expanding commercial activities and an influx of migrants seeking opportunities in this dynamic city (Okeke et al., 2020).

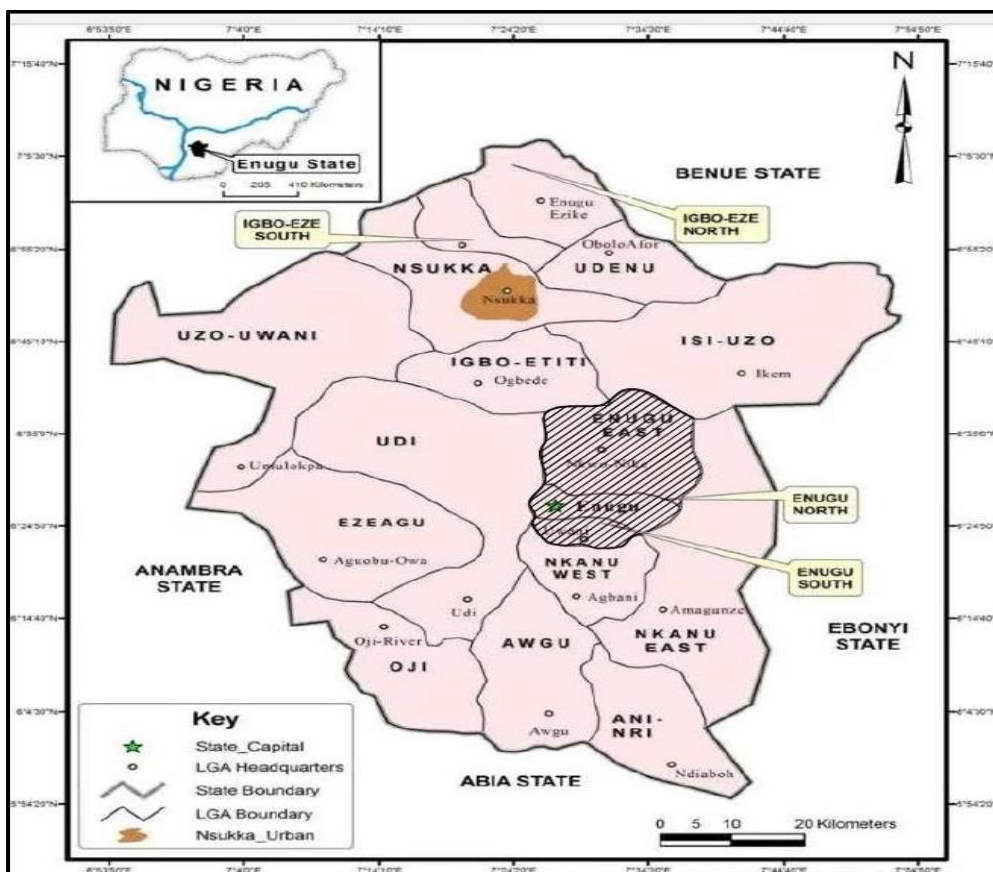


Fig. 1. Showing Enugu the study area.

The selection of Enugu Urban as the study area for this research is based on several compelling factors. Firstly, the city has undergone substantial economic, social, and infrastructural development, making it an ideal setting to investigate the business aspects of the architectural profession. Secondly, Enugu Urban is home to a significant concentration of architects and architectural firms in the southeastern region, ensuring a reliable and representative sample for data collection. The presence of a thriving architectural community in the city provides a solid foundation for examining the perceptions and experiences of professionals regarding the lucrativeness of their field. Moreover, Enugu Urban's diverse architectural landscape, ranging from traditional Igbo architecture to modern urban designs (Nwalusi et al., 2022), offers a rich context for exploring the challenges and opportunities faced by architects in the region. The city's ongoing development projects and increasing demand for architectural services further underscore the relevance and timeliness of this study. By focusing on Enugu Urban, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the business dynamics of the architectural profession within a rapidly evolving Nigerian city. The findings of this study will not only contribute to the understanding of the lucrative aspects of architecture in Enugu Urban but also offer potential lessons and implications for architects and architectural firms operating in similar urban contexts across Nigeria and beyond.

3. Research method

This study employed a quantitative research approach, utilizing a structured framework to investigate the business aspects of the architecture profession from both lucrative and non-lucrative perspectives. The research methodology was tailored to the specific research context, resource availability, and additional considerations relevant to the study objectives. A questionnaire survey research design was adopted as the primary data collection method. This approach was deemed most suitable for the study as it provides practitioners views on the business aspects of the architecture profession, enabling the collection of standardized responses from a larger sample of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Secondary data consist of journal paper and published materials available on electronic databases. The target population for this study consisted of architects practicing in Enugu State, Nigeria. Enugu State was selected as the research site due to its significant economic, social, and infrastructural development within the southeastern Nigeria (Okeke et al., 2020), as well as the prominent presence of architects in the area. The sampling frame comprised practicing architects actively contributing to the development of the construction and building sector in Enugu urban. Selection of participants was conducted from a pool of 203 licenced architects registered with the Architects Registration Council of Nigeria (ARCON) as of 2023 within Enugu urban using the Yamane equation $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$ for sample size calculation.

Where n = sample size; N = target population; e = level of significance (0.05); Total Population = 203

$$n = \frac{203}{1 + 203(0.05)^2} = 134.66 \approx 135$$

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation of architects from various sectors and experience levels. The structured questionnaire consists of three sections and was designed to gather data on architects' perceptions and experiences related to entrepreneurship and financial viability and challenges of the architecture endeavour within the study area. Although analysis of annual financial statement and close of business account are not included in the scope of this investigation. The instrument for data collection was validated through expert review and pilot testing to ensure its reliability and validity. Data collection was conducted through a combination of online and in-person survey administration. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were strictly adhered to throughout the research process. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to summarize the responses and identify trends. The adopted research methodology provided a robust framework for investigating the business aspects of the architecture profession, allowing for the collection of quantitative data from a representative sample of architects in Enugu State. The findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of the entrepreneurial landscape, financial viability, and social responsibility within the architecture profession.

4. Results

A set of 135 questionnaires were administered to architects around Enugu Urban. Table 1 gives insights into the distribution and response rates of questionnaires in the survey.

Table 1. Distribution of questionnaire and response rate

Questionnaires	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Number of questionnaires Administered	135	100.00
Number of questionnaires returned	131	97
Number of questionnaires not returned	4	3

The high response rate of 97% as seen in table 1 suggests that the survey achieved significant engagement from the target audience, which enhances the reliability and validity of the data collected. This is generally an indication of effective communication with respondents, and possibly a high level of interest in the survey topic among the target population. Table 2 captures the demographic information of the respondents.

From Table 2, majority of respondents were male, constituting 73%, while female respondents accounted for 27%. This gender distribution highlights a predominance of male gender among architecture professionals in the study area. Among respondents, the age distribution varied significantly. None of the respondents were under 20 years old, while a small percentage (4%) fell within the age bracket of 21-30 years. The largest portion of respondents (60%) belonged to the age group above 40 years, indicating a considerable proportion of experienced professionals. Regarding the institutional affiliation of respondents, the majority (60%) practiced within the private sector, followed by 30% in public institutions and 10% as freelance architects. This distribution reflects the diverse employment settings within the architectural profession, with a significant portion of respondents working in private firms. Furthermore, a small percentage (2%) reported practicing for 5-10 years, while a substantial portion (33%) had 10-15 years of experience.

The majority of respondents (65%) had practiced for 15 years and above, indicating a high level of expertise and professional experience. The demographic profile of respondents showcases a diverse and experienced sample of architects, encompassing a wide range of gender, age, institutional affiliations, and years of practice.

Table 2. Respondents demographic data

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	96	73
Female	35	27
Age		
< 20 years	0	0
21 – 30 years	5	4
31 – 40 years	47	36
> 40 years	79	60
Institution of Practice		
Public	39	30
Private	79	60
Freelance	13	10
Years of Practice		
5-10 years	3	2
10-15 years	43	33
15 years and above	85	65

4.1 Respondent perception on entrepreneurship and lucrativeness of the business of architecture

The table presents the respondents about their opinions based on their various experiences in the architecture profession.

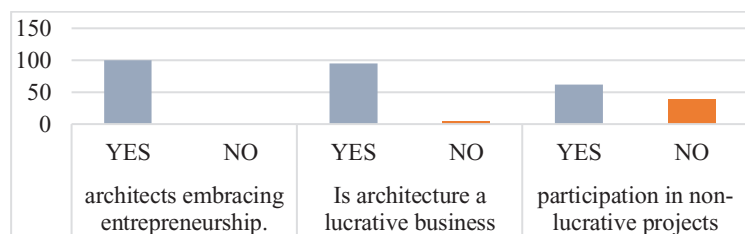


Fig. 2. Perception on entrepreneurship, lucrativeness, and participation in non-lucrative projects.

The graph in figure 2 suggests that the respondents have a generally positive view of the architecture profession, with a strong belief in the entrepreneurial nature of the field and its potential for financial success. However, there is a notable division in opinion regarding whether architects should participate in non-lucrative projects, with a majority supporting the idea and a significant minority (38%) opposing it. The chart in figure 3 show respondents perspectives on lucrativeness of various aspects of architectural practice.

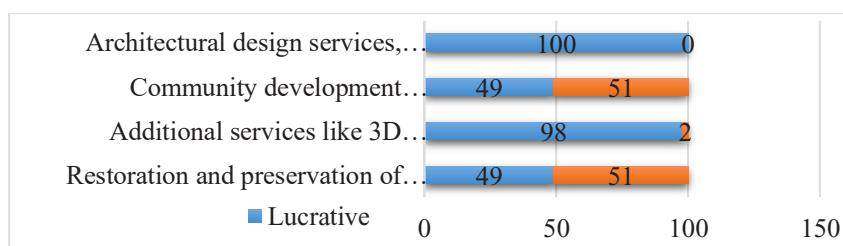


Fig. 3. Perception on lucrativeness of aspect of architecture practice.

From the chart above, restoration and preservation of historical buildings are deemed non-lucrative, with 51% of respondents in agreement. The provision of 3D renders and visualization services for clients emerges as a lucrative endeavor, as perceived by 98% of respondents. Although engagement in projects involving the design of shelters for disaster-stricken communities was regarded as non-lucrative by 51% of respondents and 100% agreed that architectural design services, project management, and construction management services are lucrative.

Table 3. Challenges faced by architects in the business of architecture.

S/N	Perception on the challenges faced by architects in the business of architecture	Rating					Mean	OMS	Rank
		SA	A	N	SD	D			
1	Fee negotiation with clients and project budgeting	39	32	30	30	0	3.61	3.44	1 st
2	Keeping up with technological advancements such as BIM and advance AI tools.	34	34	33	0	30	3.32		4 th
3	High competition among architectural firms in developing cities.	33	38	31	29	0	3.57		2 nd
4	Economic fluctuations and government policies leading to decrease in construction activities.	37	35	29	0	30	3.38		3 rd
5	Maintaining positive client relationships to secure and retain clients and referrals	32	37	32	0	30	3.32		5 th

Source: Researcher's filed survey, 2024

The findings gleaned from Table 3 underscore a central challenge confronting architects within the business landscape of Enugu Urban, wherein negotiating fees with clients and establishing effective budgetary frameworks emerge as the foremost concern, occupying the top rank. Also, regions characterized by a dense concentration of architectural firms exacerbate competition for projects, was perceived as the second among other challenges faced respondents. Economic volatility, manifesting in fluctuations impacting the construction sector, assumes the third position as a significant challenge. Furthermore, architects contend with the imperative of staying abreast of rapid technological advancements and sustaining positive client relationships to procure and retain clients, alongside garnering referrals, presents itself as the fourth and fifth challenge respectively in Enugu Urban.

Table 4. Potential opportunities for architects in business.

S/N	Potential opportunities for architects in business	Rating					Mean	OMS	Rank
		SA	A	N	SD	D			
1	Urban planning and design in collaboration with government bodies.	35	32	29	10	25	3.32	3.40	5 th
2	Venturing into real estate development, property, and housing mortgage.	38	34	30	12	17	3.49		3 rd
3	Additional consultancy services, such as design optimization, LCA and sustainability retrofits	40	35	25	18	13	3.51		2 nd
4	Building Information Modeling (BIM), allied collaboration, partnership and advisory.	37	35	29	14	16	3.48		4 th
5	Architectural visualization, Advance modeling, and simulation.	45	37	32	5	12	3.74		1 st
6	Writing architectural articles and editorial pieces	28	27	12	29	35	2.87		6 th

Source: Researcher's filed survey, 2024

Table 4 reveals that architectural visualization, 3D modeling, and rendering services emerge as the foremost potential avenues for architects to bolster the financial viability of their architectural endeavors. Following closely, consultancy services encompassing design optimization, and sustainability represent a significant opportunity for architects. Additionally, engaging in real estate development, spanning the planning, design, and construction of residential or commercial properties, holds promise as a viable opportunity. Lastly, crafting architectural articles and editorial pieces is identified as a potential avenue for architects, ranking sixth in the list of opportunities according to respondents.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study offer insights into the perceptions and opinions of individuals regarding various aspects of the architecture profession and align with several themes and trends identified in the existing literature on the architecture profession. One notable trend is the increasing emphasis on entrepreneurship and innovation within the field. A study by Figueiredo and Guillen (2021) explored the concept of "architectural entrepreneurship" and highlighted the growing importance of entrepreneurial skills and mindsets for architects in the 21st century. They argue that architects who embrace entrepreneurship are better equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern business landscape and create value for their clients and society as a whole. Since the survey data reveals a strong consensus among the respondents concerning the entrepreneurial nature of architects, it indicates a significant shift in the professional landscape of the study area. This suggests that architects are increasingly adopting an entrepreneurial mindset and engaging in entrepreneurial activities, possibly to expand their opportunities and adapt to the changing demands of the industry. The entrepreneurial concept of architects agrees with Motylinska and Verlaan (2023) who opined that a significant portion of the contemporary built environment have been created by private enterprises and this is reflective of Enugu urban and other Nigerian cities.

Furthermore, the figure 2 highlights the perceived financial viability of the architecture profession. An overwhelming majority of the respondents, 95%, agreed that architecture is a lucrative business. This finding implies that most individuals believe that pursuing a career in architecture can lead to financial success and stability, although disagree with AIA (2020) that firm profitability as a share of net billings decreased 1.3% from 2017. Moreover, it is worth noting that a small minority, comprising 5% of the respondents, disagreed with this notion, suggesting that there may be some skepticism or differing experiences regarding the financial rewards of the profession. This finding aligns with the opinion of Boyle (2023) who submitted that every financial year, several practicing architects face personal bankruptcy or oversee companies that undergo liquidation or administration, frequently resulting in substantial debts owed to creditors. He further emphasized that architect's salaries even in advanced settings, have stagnated and failed to keep pace with inflation. Subsequently, the study results reveal a notable division in opinion regarding architects' participation in non-lucrative projects. While 62% of the respondents agreed that architects should engage in projects that may not be financially profitable, a significant 38% disagreed with this idea. This split suggests that there is an ongoing debate within the architectural community about the role and responsibilities of architects beyond the pursuit of financial gain. The debate is rooted in the historical and theoretical foundations of the profession, which emphasize the social and ethical responsibilities of architects (NIA, 2009). It can be inferred that those who supports participation in non-lucrative projects argues that architects have a social responsibility to contribute to community development, engage in pro bono work, or pursue projects that align with their personal values and passions. On the other hand, the opposing respondents may have prioritized the financial sustainability of their practice and believe that architects should focus primarily on projects that generate revenue (Fisher, 2024). The ongoing debate about the role and responsibilities of architects in society is further complicated by the changing nature of the profession itself. The increasing complexity of building projects, the rapid advancement of technology, and the growing demand for sustainable and resilient design solutions have all contributed to a shift in the skills and competencies required of architects (Duffy and Rabeneck, 2013). As the profession evolves, it will be important for architects to find a balance between their entrepreneurial ambitions, their financial viability, and their social and ethical responsibilities.

Restoration and preservation of historical buildings are considered non-lucrative by a slight majority (51%) of respondents and this perception aligns with the challenges often associated with historic preservation projects. As noted by Frey (2007), the costs of restoring and preserving historical buildings can be substantial, often exceeding the financial returns. Additionally, the complex regulations, specialized skills, and limited funding opportunities associated with such projects may contribute to the perception of non-lucrative nature (Avrami et al., 2019). In stark contrast, the provision of additional services like 3D renders, visualization, simulation, and research is perceived as highly lucrative by an overwhelming 98% of respondents. This finding reflects the growing demand for digital visualization and advanced technological services in the architecture industry. As highlighted by Bolpagni et al. (2021), the integration of Building Information Modeling (BIM) and virtual reality technologies has become increasingly valuable in architectural practice, offering new revenue streams and competitive advantages of which very few architects possess the skill.

Interestingly, community development projects, disaster response and public services are regarded as non-lucrative by 51% of respondents. This perception may stem from the often pro-bono or low-fee nature of such projects and endeavour, which prioritize social impact over financial gain. As discussed by Sellick (2021), architects involved in community development and disaster response often face challenges in securing adequate funding and balancing social responsibility with financial sustainability. But on the other hand, architectural design services, construction, and project management are unanimously perceived as lucrative by all respondents (100%). This finding reinforces the core value proposition of architectural practice, emphasizing the financial viability of the profession's fundamental services. As noted by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in their "Business Benchmarking" report (2021),

architectural design services and project management consistently generate significant revenue streams for firms. Conclusively, while core design and management services are widely recognized as lucrative, specialized areas like historical preservation and community-oriented projects face challenges in terms of financial viability. This underscores the need for architects to strategically navigate the balance between financial sustainability and social responsibility in their professional endeavours.

5.1 Challenges and prospects

The challenges identified in this current study reflect the multifaceted nature of architectural practice, encompassing financial, competitive, economic, technological, and relational aspects. Fee negotiation with clients and project budgeting emerge as the top-ranked challenge, with a mean score of 3.61. This finding aligns with the observations of Oyeyipo et al. (2016), who noted that fee negotiation and budgeting are critical aspects of architectural practice that significantly impact project success and profitability. Architects often face pressure to strike a balance between providing competitive fees and ensuring the financial viability of their project. High competition among architectural firms in developing cities was perceived as the second most significant challenge. This finding resonates with the research of Oluwatayo et al. (2019), who highlighted the intense competition in the architectural industry, particularly in rapidly urbanizing areas. Small scale and thriving practise are suffocated and relegated behind in the industry, therefore architects must differentiate themselves and demonstrate their value proposition to secure projects in a highly competitive market (Ebong et al., 2019). The observation that Economic fluctuations and government policies leading to a decrease in construction activities supports the works of Saka and Adegbenbo (2022) who emphasized the significant impact of economic instability and policy changes on the construction industry. Furthermore, Okoye et al (2016) reveals that economic fluctuations stalls the growth and performance of Nigeria construction sector invariable making some industry's professionals perceive the field as not lucrative. Hence architects should adapt to these external factors and develop strategies to mitigate their effects on their business operations.

Technological advancements are reshaping the building and construction industry, offering opportunities and obstacles for allied professional. Respondents perceived that keeping up with technological advancements, such as Building Information Modeling (BIM) and advanced AI tools, is a challenge, with a mean score of 3.32. This finding aligns with the growing recognition of the importance of technological adoption in architectural practice (Mtya and Windapo, 2019; Ibem et al 2018) According to Bernstein (2018) the architecture profession today is far leaner and meaner than its pre-crisis state in 2009, likely due to new technology. Although in contrast the study of Mba et al (2024) demonstrates that architects are championing the technological adoption in the construction sectors. This underscores the continuously update of skills and knowledge to leverage emerging technologies and remain competitive in the digital era. Also, maintaining positive client relationships to secure and retain clients and referrals is ranked as the fifth challenge. This finding underscores the importance of effective communication, trust-building, and client satisfaction in architectural practice (Joseph et al, 2020). As noted by Adepeju (2022), strong client relationships are crucial for generating repeat business and positive word-of-mouth referrals, which contribute to the long-term success of architectural firms. Architects must proactively address these challenges by developing robust business strategies, enhancing their skills and knowledge, and fostering strong client relationships to thrive in the dynamic and competitive landscape of Enugu Urban and beyond.

On the prospects of the profession, respondents reflect the diverse avenues available for architects to expand their business horizons. Architectural visualization, advanced modelling, and simulation emerge as the top-ranked opportunity, with a mean score of 3.74. This finding corroborates with the growing demand for digital visualization and immersive technologies in the architecture, engineering, and construction (AEC) industry. As highlighted by Becerik-Gerber et al. (2020), the adoption of advanced visualization techniques, such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), can enhance design communication, client engagement, and decision-making processes. Architects who specialize in these areas can differentiate themselves and offer value-added services to their clients (Alsafouri & Ayer, 2019). Additional consultancy services, such as design optimization, Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), and sustainability retrofits, rank as the second potential opportunity, and reflects the increasing emphasis on sustainable design practices and the need for architects to provide holistic solutions that address environmental concerns (Jalaei et al., 2021; Okeke et al., 2023). By offering specialized consultancy services, architects can help clients optimize their projects for energy efficiency, reduce environmental impact, and achieve sustainability goals.

Venturing into real estate development, property, and housing mortgage suggests that architects can diversify their services and engage in downstream activities in the real estate value chain (Ofori et al., 2022). By leveraging their design expertise and understanding of the built environment, to participate in property development, investment, and financing, thereby expanding their business opportunities. Urban planning and research present significant untapped opportunities for architects to expand their business and make a positive impact on society. As highlighted by Opoko et al. (2020), architects possess the skills and knowledge to shape the built environment and address pressing societal challenges. Urbanization, climate change, and social equity are among the most critical issues facing cities and

communities worldwide. In addition to urban planning, Alagbe et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of architects establishing themselves as thought leaders through academic and professional publications. By contributing to the intellectual discourse within the architectural community, architects can enhance their visibility, credibility, and influence within the industry. Publishing research papers, case studies, and opinion pieces in respected journals and magazines allows architects to share their expertise, showcase their projects, and engage in critical discussions about the future of the profession. This engagement not only strengthens the architect's personal brand but also contributes to the overall advancement of architectural knowledge and practice.

6. Conclusion

The architectural profession, situated at the intersection of art, science, and business, plays a crucial role in shaping the built environment and addressing societal needs. This study aimed to investigate the financial viability of the architectural profession by examining the perspectives of practicing architects in Enugu Urban, Enugu State, Nigeria, regarding the lucrative and non-lucrative aspects of their business. The findings of this study reveal a complex landscape characterized by both opportunities and challenges. The majority of respondents perceived architecture as a lucrative business, indicating a belief in the potential for financial success within the profession. However, the study also highlighted a notable division in opinion regarding architects' participation in non-lucrative projects, reflecting an ongoing debate about the balance between financial sustainability and social responsibility. The results suggest that core architectural services, such as design and project management, are widely recognized as lucrative, while specialized areas like historical preservation and community-oriented projects face challenges in terms of financial viability. Architects must navigate a range of challenges, including fee negotiation, intense competition, economic fluctuations, and the need to keep pace with technological advancements, to ensure the success and sustainability of their firms.

Despite these challenges, the study also identified promising opportunities for architects to expand their business horizons. Embracing advanced visualization techniques, offering specialized consultancy services, venturing into real estate development, and engaging in urban planning and research emerged as potential avenues for growth and diversification. The insights gained from this study have significant implications for architectural education, professional development, and business management in Nigeria. The findings underscore the importance of equipping architects with entrepreneurial skills and business acumen alongside their design expertise. Architectural curricula and professional training programs should incorporate modules on financial management, marketing, and business strategy to better prepare architects for the realities of practice. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for architects to actively engage in professional networks, collaborate with allied disciplines, and contribute to the intellectual discourse within the industry. By establishing themselves as thought leaders and leveraging their expertise, architects can enhance their visibility, credibility, and influence, thereby opening up new opportunities for growth and success.

Future research could explore the experiences of architects in other regions of Nigeria and beyond, as well as investigate the impact of specific business strategies and interventions on the financial performance of architectural firms. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of the architectural profession in response to changing market demands and technological advancements would provide valuable insights into the long-term sustainability and resilience of the field.

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