

CLIENTS PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE SYNERGY BETWEEN ARCHITECTS AND ALLIED PROFESSIONALS IN THE NIGERIAN BUILT ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

The 'Prime Consultant' describes the leader of a team of professionals in the construction industry. Recently, this term has been removed from the architect who traditionally was the de-facto head of the building team, and loosely used to describe any allied building professional assigned by the client to oversee building activity. This paper examines the effect of client perceptions of this increasingly shared role by the architect and the other allied building professionals on building practice satisfaction and the wider implication of relevance of the modern day architect. A mixed-method study of the prescribed duties of the architect and increasing client discontent with architectural practice in Nigeria show architects had a 66.1% approval rating while allied professionals had 67.3% approval rating. Collaborative services of architects and other allied professionals were more highly rated at 90.3%. The study also showed that client discontent with delivery of architectural services centred largely on tardiness and exorbitant architects' professional fees for which most allied professionals took "much less" to do the same job. The study recommends: 1) the integration of technology, finances and ethnography as standard skill sets for the modern architect to successfully execute a project as the Prime Consultant to the satisfaction of the client; 2) Nigerian architects should not sacrifice competence for remuneration and 3) echoes the plea to legislative bodies, stakeholders and clients to protect the constitutional role of the architect as the "Master Builder".

Keywords: *Architect, Allied Professionals, Prime Consultant, Client Perception*

INTRODUCTION

The architect is a trained professional who is responsible for the design and supervised construction of buildings and other related structures. The “architect” is a term used to refer to an architectural firm, organisation or individual commissioned by the client to carry out services under a contractual agreement defined by local and/or international conditions (Architects Registration Council of Nigeria [ARCON], 2011). The role of the architect in society is determined by the amount of perceived benefits the society derives from the services rendered – although the debate lingers on whether the comportment of the architect is actually what influences the perception by society (Oyekola, 2010). Traditionally, the architect is considered to be the “Prime Consultant” in most building projects: a responsibility held by the group leader comprising other allied professionals who work as part of the building team. Due largely to gross misconceptions about the role of the architect, there often exists a struggle between the architect and the allied professionals namely the engineers (whichever discipline), builders, quantity surveyors, estate managers, town planners, surveyors and contractors, over who acts as the prime consultant.

The private and public practice of architecture in Nigeria is regulated by the code of professional conduct of the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA) and the conditions of engagement and remuneration for professional architects’ services of the Architects Registration Council of Nigeria (ARCON) (ARCON, 2011). Failure to comply with the terms and conditions of the regulations attract penalties and sanctions. The scopes of services offered by the architect include the following areas of development:

1. Pre-design work (site feasibility studies, site selection, Environmental Assessment Reporting, land procurement, financing arrangements etc.);
2. Sketch and detailed design development (including preparation of construction specifications);
3. Tendering and contract awarding;
4. Construction supervision (partial or full capacities);
5. Landscaping and/or interior design;

6. Facilities management, maintenance works, remodelling or renovation work;
7. Project management.

It is expected that only duly trained, licensed and registered architects carry out professional services since the concept of “Quackery” is both unconstitutional and harmful. Despite increased yearnings from other members of the building team, the production and submission of all architectural documents including the sketch and detailed drawings, the specifications and the bill of quantities for approval by local, state and national planning authorities remains the constitutionally-protected right of only registered architects (ARCON, 2011). This legally-backed privilege for architects typically remains easier to protect in public-sector rather than private-sector construction.

The architect however has become one of the most misunderstood professionals due largely to misconception of their roles and duties by the very clients that engage them (Souto deMoura, 2016). Without proper understanding of the expectations, preferences and experiences of the client, it becomes difficult to translate this feedback into on-going practice reform (Stern et al, 2003). This paper examines the current trends, dynamics and reasons why the public perception of Nigerian architects is at an all-time low and to understand why the preferred engagement of services of allied construction professionals to those of registered architects for private sector construction in several states of the federation is on the increase. This detrimental practice has been identified as a leading cause of the increase in failed buildings around the country and the stunted growth of the architectural profession as a whole (Umeora, 2013; Uji, 2016). The study aim is achieved by identifying the expectations of the client from the Nigerian architect (and vice versa) and examining the client perceptions and misconceptions of the services rendered by Nigerian architects which are perceived as not being the exclusive duties of the architect in the construction process. The study weighs in on questions about Nigerian architects losing their relevance in the building industry and if so, what mitigating steps can be taken to remedy the situation. It also aims at assessing the need for

mandatory building process and post-occupancy evaluations to improve the quality of architectural service delivery in the country.

DIMINISHING RESPECT FOR THE ARCHITECT: REAL OR CONTRIVED?

By simple legal definition, the architect is the all-seeing, all-knowing building professional who is responsible for the successes and failures of tangible built environments. Traditionally, the architect was the de facto head of the building team made up of other building professionals but the leadership role in the construction industry became more ambiguous in later years with the emergence of the title “Prime Consultant” (Oyekola, 2010). Claim to this title has been sought by engineers, contractors, builders and real estate developers who argue (correctly or not) that the projects conceived by architects can only be executed successfully with their expertise (Souto deMoura, 2016). The architectural profession has therefore become increasingly complex in recent years as the management and assimilation of issues in technology, business and ethnography have become standard skill sets an architect must possess in order to claim successful execution of a project (Gaddis, 2016; Outram, 2013).

This notion is fuelled largely by the appreciation of the products of architecture rather than the processes which remain unappreciated by most assessors (the clients). Processes are ambiguous – products are tangible. Value or appreciation is easier attributed to what can be defined or perceived and this has become the very undoing of the services rendered by most architects. Architects increasingly find themselves vulnerable to criticism for being unrealistic, disconnected, inflexible to client needs and wants, stubborn and pretentious. It does not help that public opinion also considers the architect to be the professional most likely to charge exorbitant fees and have a propensity to go over-budget (Souto deMoura, 2016; Gaddis, 2016). The architect is somehow expected to overcome these negative perceptions after years of expensive training, lengthy, cumbersome (and also expensive) licensure and registration processes, complex practice skill implementation and more often than not, poor remuneration

to compete for relevance in a sector that is growing increasingly disillusioned about what is in store for the future (Riscica, 2014). The role of the architect has unwittingly been undermined by the increasing use of technology with the advent of computer programs such as Revit, AutoCAD and Sketch-Up which allow mere novices design and publish cookie-cutter proposals for small- and medium-scale projects which could be downloaded off the Internet for free or a nominal fee (Souto deMoura, 2016). Practically every country in the world (Nigeria included) requires the stamp of an architect on anything to do with decking, foundations, structural supports, service engineering, entry points or new construction (Table 1). Yet architects are dependent on the thoroughness and discretion of the designated planning authority who grant building approval to certify only proposals that satisfy the requirements and have received professional endorsement. Loopholes in approval processes still enable the proliferation of illegal construction when clients opt to forgo the services of an architect for small jobs that do not justify the cost of engaging one (Souto deMoura, 2016). In many situations on the domestic front, the government itself has undermined the efforts of its own regulating body for architects by going against ARCON to award commissions to unregistered architects, failing to establish instruments to punish erring architects and cracking down on quackery and supplanting despite a constitutionally-backed scope of professional services (Oyekola, 2010, Enwerekowe & Tsok, 2017).

In a recent study of nearly 200 architects in Nigeria, the increasing lack of respect for the role of the architect accounted for the lack of progression and viability of practices of nearly 46% of the male and 35% of the female architects who participated in the survey – the highest perceived barrier for both genders (Enwerekowe, 2016). A related study also determined that architects with practice ideologies which alleviate harmful practices in the profession are much more viable than those without (Ola-Adisa, 2016). The same study identified diversification of services and overcoming the negative effects of quackery and corruption as mitigating steps needed to improve recognition of the profession in the society. Also, identifiable variables that enhance architectural professional practice

development include (but are not limited to) professionalism, corporate integrity, competence, diligence, punctuality, billing and remuneration and eloquence. This paper examines the roots of the negative perception of Nigerian architects by the clients and suggests practical means of improving architect-client relationships to enhance optimal service delivery in the profession. The study is situated in the capital city of Jos, Plateau state in the north central zone of Nigeria which witnessed exponential building development and reconstruction following ethnic and religious conflict between 2001 and 2008. The zone also holds the second largest concentration of architectural firms in the federation (ARCON, 2012).

Table 1: Scope of architectural services and payment milestones by Delano 2010 and ARCON 2011

Architectural role	Summary of responsibilities to the client	Payment milestone
Design stage (Phase I)	<p>Commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receipt of letter of commission; • Receive and appraise client brief; • Outline potentials and demerits of the proposed scheme; • Receive and interpret the site analysis and report; • Advice on budget planning <p>Concept design:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site situation and planning, outlining space provision; • Preparation of anticipated project timeline, estimated cost and planning relationships; • Preparation of list of allied consultants and specialists 	<p>Milestone 1 - 15% of estimated project cost for new projects</p> <p>Milestone 2 - 20% of estimated project cost</p>
Construction drawings (Stage II)	<p>Coordinated detail design:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production of site design and location of structures on site; • Preparation of all graphical representation of the building; • Coordinate input of allied consultant and statutory planning authorities <p>Construction documentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of contract documents; • Compilation of supporting design documents from the allied professionals; 	<p>Milestone 3 - 25% of estimated project cost</p> <p>Milestone 4 - 40% of adjusted final project cost</p>

Tendering and Construction services (Stage III)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full preparation and reconciliation of Specifications and Bill of Quantities 	
	<p>Tendering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice client on prequalification of contractors, sub- contractors and tender awards by qualified firms <p>Construction services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation of site meetings and visitations; Overseeing construction and providing clarification about the design and any additions; • Sign off on various works, certifying completion for • contractors' progress billing; • Review of shop drawings and fabricated materials • /samples from vendors; • Prepare building and project appraisals; • Prepare and manage all intermediate and final progress reports and certificates for the architect and allied consultants; • Prepare project for handover and manage the defects liability period 	<p>Milestone 5 – Time charges or Man-hour rates (or lump sum)</p> <p>Milestone 6 – Time charges or Man-hour rates (or lump sum)</p>

Source: Enwerekowe & Tsok, 2017

METHODOLOGY

This study is a fusion of literary research, field studies and data analysis. Literary research covered the review of existing knowledge and trending debates on the roles and duties of the architect, the place of the architect in the society, the challenges to architectural service delivery and practice development, and mitigating efforts so far. The field studies gathered the responses from clients and building users around the Jos metropolis on their perceived benefits or discontent with architectural service delivery as a bottom-up approach to a quantitative analytical process. The sample was randomly drawn from demographics of clients and building users around Jos based on the statistics of the Office of Development Control at the Jos Metropolis Development Board (JMDB). The sample size was obtained using the Moser-Kalton (1974 In Uji, 2009) derivative method. From the Jos-based statistics, less than 18% of the approximately 480 building

construction documents and drawings submitted for planning authorisation each year meet the stringent approval requirements. Primary investigation revealed that up to 70% of private sector construction spans a duration of 2 (two) to 5 (five) years from conception to final completion. As a consequence, the assessment for the study was based largely on the opinions of clients and users of legal buildings which met minimum requirements for approval from the Board within the last 5 (five) years. By derivation, a minimum of 52 questionnaires are required to give a credible sample size. The means of simple statistical analysis such as pictographs, index ranking and means of statistical dispersion presented the basis for analysis into the perceptions of the role of the architect in the Nigerian society. The study analysis also took into consideration a cross-referenced review of related findings from recent studies on sustainable practices of Prime Consultants in response to the key issues raised from the survey. A total of 64 questionnaires were properly filled and returned out of 80 distributed. This satisfies the 60-80% benchmark response rate deemed acceptable for analysis (Fincham, 2008).

DATA PRESENTATION: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The results present the data on the seeming awareness of the sampled population about the role of the architect and evaluate the encounters having engaged the services of one (if at all) as well as the general perception about the profession and by extension the allied professionals. Those aged between 50-59 years of age (31.3%) represented the most knowledgeable group about the services of architects and allied building professionals while those aged below 30 years of age (3.1%) represented the least favourable towards the services of building professionals. This data may support the assumption that most mature building users and owners are more conversant with the procedure and participation of the built environment professionals. Respondents older than 70 years of age (at 18.8%) also had limited knowledge about the services offered by building professionals largely due to lower levels of formal education. 65.6% of the respondents have employed professional services for residential buildings which may either be owned or leased, 12.4% for institutional buildings

while commercial and industrial buildings each make up 9.4% of the sample. Only 3.1% of the respondents indicated engaging the services of a professional for a religious building.

The findings showed that less than half of the respondents (44%) engaged the services of an architect as the Prime Consultant in the course of executing the various building projects. 41% of the respondents preferred to employ the services of an allied building professional to serve as the Prime Consultant (of which engineers were most favoured at 18.8%) and 3% indicated not having engaged a paid professional at all (see Figure 1). Additional findings from the study reveal that collaborations between architects and engineers were preferred by 12% of the clients who undertook predominantly multi-level construction, more than a quarter (28.1%) of the total sample buildings examined. Such collaborations were widely believed to produce a “synergy of technical and artistic expertise”. A further breakdown of the findings from the study showed that architects were perceived to play a more significant role in pre-construction activities (Table 2) statistically determined from recent studies that suggest public perception considers allied professional services just as efficient as those of the architect in the capacity of the Prime Consultant (Hughes & Hughes, 2013; Enwerekowe & Tsok, 2017). Consequentially, the findings from the study in Table 3 show that clients showed a moderate average level of satisfaction with the service delivery of architects (66.1% level of satisfaction), slightly lower than the satisfaction levels for allied professionals (67.3%) and collaborative efforts (90.6%). This finding seems to suggest the clients who used collaborative services of architects and allied building professionals experienced higher levels of satisfaction with professional service delivery.

Table 2: Stages in the construction process involving a Prime Consultant engaged by the respondents

Work stage	Consultants involved	Number of respondents	%
Stage I	Architects	20	83.3
	Others	4	16.7
Stages I and II	Architect	11	45.8
	Others	13	54.2
Stages I, II and III	Architects	8	33.3
	Others	18	67.7
Stage III only	Architects	6	25.0
	Others	18	75.0

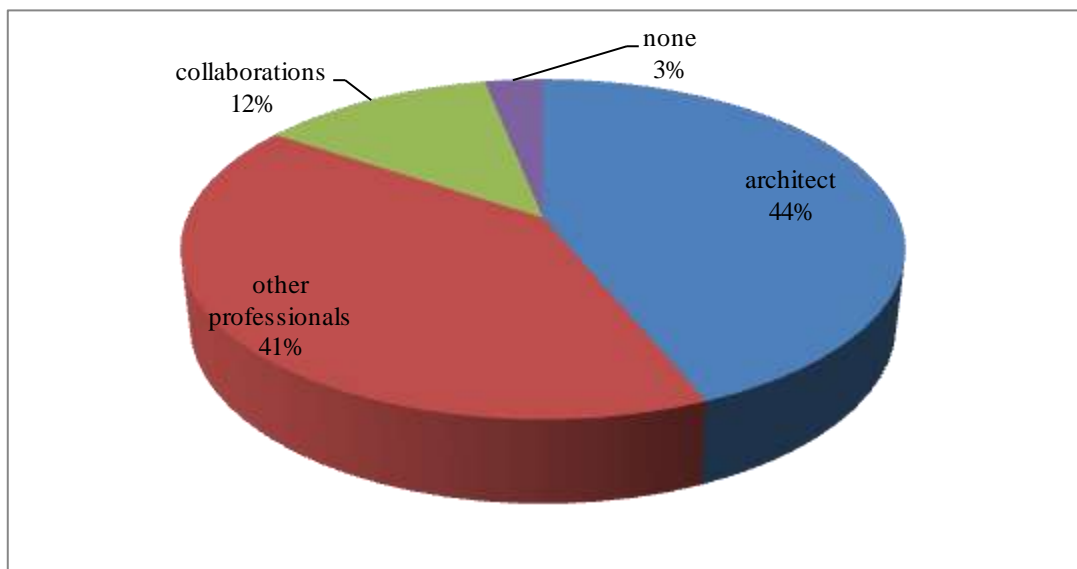


Figure 1: Preferred choice of Prime Consultant by respondents in the study.

Table 3: Clients level of satisfaction with service delivery of architects and allied building professionals

Traits	Satisfied			Undecided			Unsatisfied		
	A	O	C	A	O	C	A	O	C
Professionalism	78.6	92.3	100	21.4	7.7	-	-	-	-
Integrity	71.4	69.2	100	21.4	23.1	-	7.2	7.7	-
Competence	78.6	61.5	100	14.3	23.1	-	7.1	14.4	-
Diligence	64.3	61.5	100	28.6	23.1	-	7.1	14.4	-
Punctuality	28.6	53.8	75	35.7	30.8	-	35.7	14.4	25
Fees and other charges	42.8	61.5	50	28.6	23.1	25	28.6	14.4	25
Attitude/Ideology	78.6	76.9	100	14.3	7.7	-	7.1	14.4	-
Literacy and eloquence	85.8	61.5	100	7.1	30.8	-	7.1	7.7	-
Average	66.1	67.3	90.6	21.4	21.2	3.2	12.5	11.5	6.2

Key: A = architects; O = other allied professionals (made up of engineers, builders, contractors, quantity surveyors etc.); C = collaborations between architects and allied professionals.

A closer inspection of the individual variables of professional service in Table 3 showed that architects were adjudged to be the most literate and eloquent professionals in the building industry (85.8% satisfaction level) but the least time conscious (28.6% satisfaction level). Clients were significantly dissatisfied with the fees and charges billed for the services of Prime Consultants with architects being the least favourable option (42.8% level of satisfaction as against 61.5% for other allied professionals). Even where collaborative billing is accepted, the findings seem to suggest that client discontent is higher when the architect is thrown into the mix (down to 50% level of satisfaction).

This outcome was supported by additional findings showing that more than half (55%) of the respondents engaged the services of the Prime Consultant during the pre-design and design stages (land procurement, project feasibility, sketch design and detailed working drawing stage) during which the services of the architect are mandatory for the preparation of all architectural documents including the sketch and detailed drawings, the specifications and the bill of quantities for approval by local, state and national planning authorities (as shown in Figure 2). Only 45% of the respondents continued the services of the architect during the stages of construction and post-construction management: stages

which are not covered by the scaled fees but are rather remunerated by man-hourly rates as prescribed by the Conditions of Engagement and Remuneration for Professional Architects approved by ARCON (2011). The decision to forgo the services of the architect beyond the stage of design is largely attributed to the finding that 50% of the clients who preferred the services of an allied professional felt the man-hour rates for architects were too expensive (Figure 3).

The results also showed that most clients hold the opinion that the registration status of the architect matters a lot in negotiating professional fees and charges: fully registered architects were “less flexible” in negotiating deductions or fee waivers. This observation was distinctly gender neutral: 43% of the Prime Consultants under review in the study were female and 57% were male of which 87% of the female architects and 90% of the male architects polled in the study were fully registered and licensed to practice. The parity in the figures suggests that the gender of the architect did not play a role in billing practices and remuneration. However the findings in Table 4 revealed other areas where the gender of the Prime Consultant played a decisive role in negotiating remuneration namely industry-based constraints, cultural or sociological restrictions and financial challenges of the client to which female Prime Consultants were more sensitive. Despite client concerns about architects fees and billing, 67% of the clients agreed that the architect’s fees are a relatively small proportion of the total cost of a building project and the architect acting as the Prime Consultant can make positive and often considerable contribution to a project both in terms of cost efficiency and ultimate overall value.

Table 4: Gender differences between perceived constraints to negotiating billing and remuneration of Prime Consultants

Perceived constraints to negotiating billing/remuneration	% of Men	% of Women
Industry based factors (<i>lack of contracts, old boys' club, lack of competitions etc.</i>)	45.1	29.6
Financial challenges of the client	35.3	22.2
Recession/development control	15.7	12.3
Lack of skilled staff/adequate facilities	16.7	13.4
Non-sustainable practices (<i>lack of mentors, like-minded partners, lack of business skill etc.</i>)	26.5	33.3
Gender/cultural/sociological restrictions	6.9	24.5
Lack of respect for the role of the architect	46.1	34.6

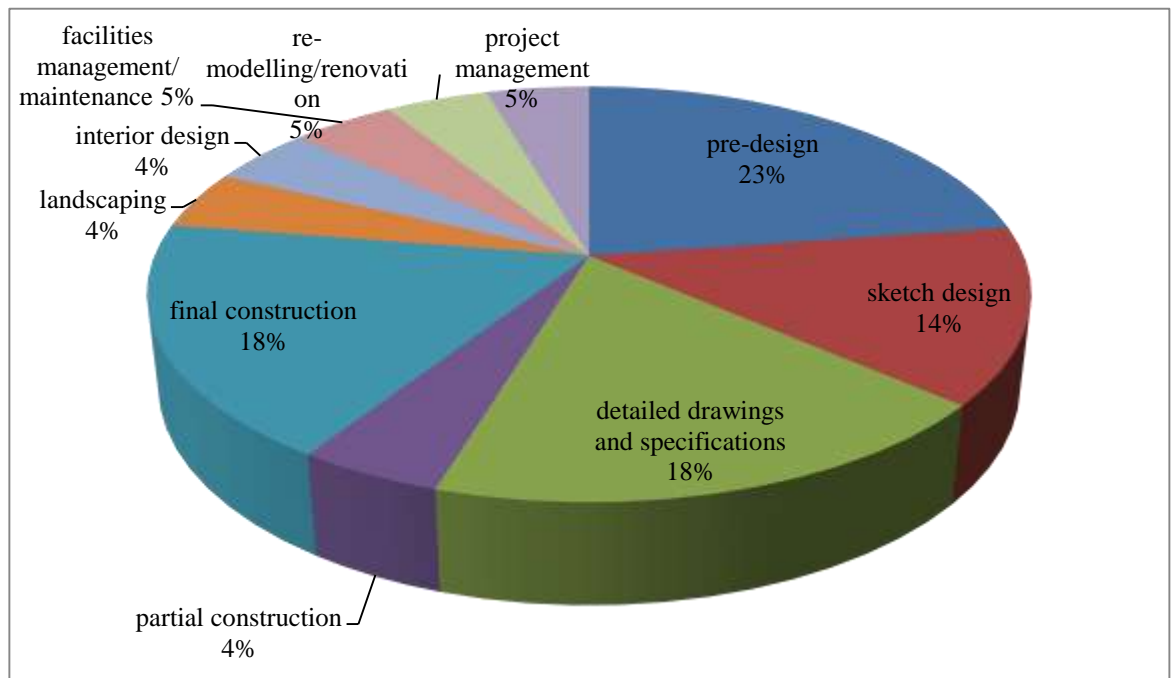


Figure 2: Clients perception of stages in the building process when the architect should serve as the Prime Consultant.

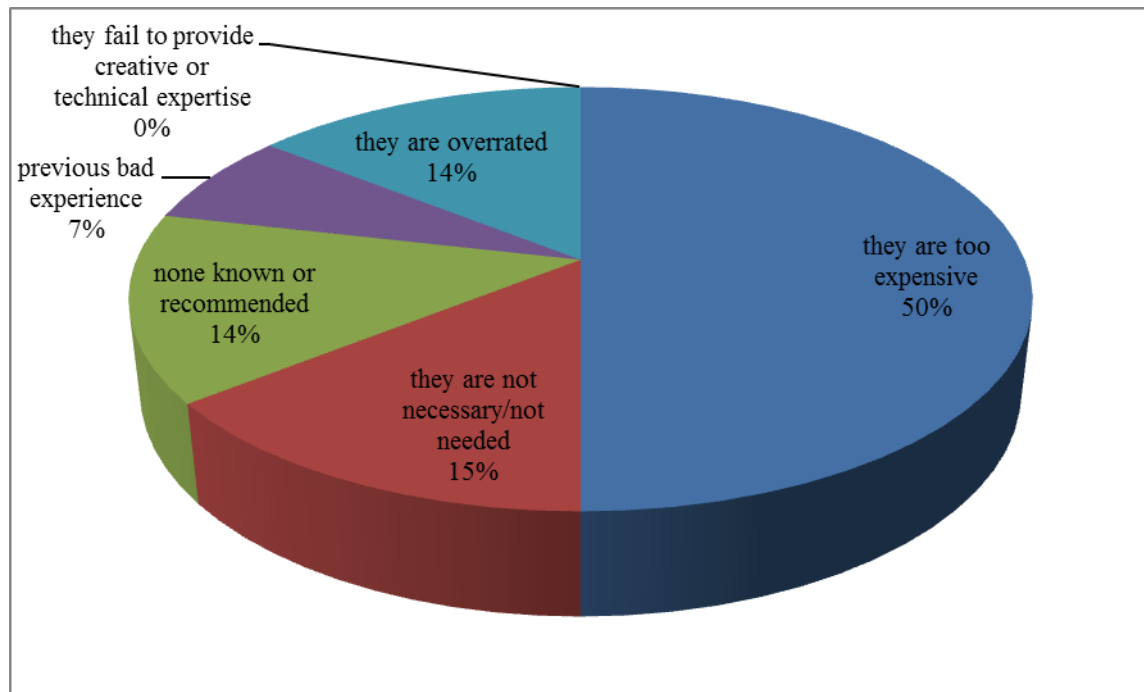


Figure 3: Reasons why clients forgo the services of an architect as the Prime Consultant.

The study underscored client desire to see improved architectural services to meet building needs and wants. The architect used to be seen as the professional who best represented client interest on the construction site but other professionals appear to have stepped in to provide these same services with just as much efficiency and with less hassle than the architect. The findings from this study show it is expected that the architectural profession re-examines its position in the built environment both in code and practice in order to stay relevant in the industry.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights client expectations and perceptions of the changing roles of the architect as the Prime Consultant in the Nigerian building industry. While some of the challenges emanate from the code of architectural practice in the profession, others arise from the inability of the architect to properly meet the needs of clients and to adapt to changing environments. Architects need to remember their basic duties to the client and

take advantage of specialised tools for project management, scheduling, cost reconciliation, etc. which have become more integral to handling larger projects. This study advocates further research and implementation of professional wholeness in building up a progressive construction industry. More than any other building professional, the architect has to take cognisance of the fact that the role of the Prime Consultant ceases to be a romanticised or idealised position held without due competence. Architects have a constitutionally-given duty to protect and promote the image of the profession and this is best achieved by an evolution of expanded roles geared towards remaining relevant in the construction industry. Architects need to “pay their dues” in training and practice development to ensure they improve the quality of their service delivery; legislature and professional bodies need to crack down on quackery and unlicensed practices to ensure fairness and parity in irregular billing practices. In the public sector, approval boards should ensure the professional in charge in building drawings approval is a well-trained architect. Most members of the public do not really know who an architect is or the role of an architect in the society and therefore make wrong conclusions by assuming anybody that can draw a building plan or has a little knowledge about building construction is an architect. This study therefore recommends regular and on-going public awareness initiatives by stakeholders in the profession on the role of the architect in society. The study also recommends awareness initiatives for architects in training about what it takes to become an architect, the challenges they may face in practice and how to handle such challenges without compromising with the professional standard.

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