

## **Architects as Fashion Designers: An Emerging Enterprise for Sustainable Growth**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Overtime the fashion world in Nigeria has largely depended on imported products. Statistics show that most of these products do not meet the socio-cultural and economic needs of the people. However, efforts made by fashion designers to bridge this gap by rolling out innovative fashion products and adequate skill-sets have suffered setbacks. To sustain this creative industry amidst the economic recession, this research explores the potential of architects - the master designers' contributions to the fashion enterprise as one that has the potential for significant growth. The research explored the frontiers of fashion design and how architects can get involved to improve processes, products, and services through mixed research methods encircling data collected from literature reviews, interviews, case studies, and observation. The research results reveal that architects can function as fashion designers as 41 out of the 50 respondents constituting 95.3% of the studied population comprised of fashion designers and users were positive that the input of architects in the field of fashion is essentially needed to artfully realize the sustainable growth of the industry, 68% of the respondents strongly agreed that fashion designers share a similar skill set with architects, 44.9% of the respondents and 53.1% agree and strongly agree respectively that architects can become fashion designers, while 95.3% of the respondents are enthusiastic about seeing more architects in the fashion industry. The architects' richness in artistic skills and creativity encapsulated in their sufficient knowledge of anthropometrics and ergonomic, user preferences, elements and principles of design will bring a significant boost to the fashion industry with new and improved articles of clothing which will, in turn, generate revenue for them, promote the growth of the Nigerian Gross Domestic Product (GDP), propagate the nation's cultural heritage and tourism, stimulate her global recognition and attention.*

**Keywords:** Architects, Entrepreneurship, Emerging Enterprise, Fashion Design, Sustainability.

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Right from the creation of man, clothing has been a necessity of life. In our world today, different climes, races, groups, and localities, etc. are identified by what they put on to cover and adorn their body. Some of these wears, clothing, and ornaments and so on further define people across the globe. Our clothes are part of a mutual process in which we seek significance, affiliation, and acknowledgment. It is a medium of communicating to others how we feel about ourselves in relation to a specific moment and location. It's a choice between blending in and sticking out or both. Richard Sennett views garments as "guides to the real self of the wearer" when worn and seen [1]. This strong form of self-expression gives fashion designers a responsibility beyond the manufacture of marketable clothes as the developers of these guides.

Notably, there have been transitory changes in the type, design, and make-up of these clothing. However, the quest to always bring out something new, aesthetic and perfectly represent and propagate the cultural make-up of the people has always been in the light of the discussion.

Everyone sees fashion as an entity that defines a person and a people, hence, ought to be evolving in place of time to satisfy the contemporary needs of the people. Furthermore, different skilled persons in our society today such as fashion stylists, tailors, and seamstresses, embroiders, textile makers, fashion illustrators, fashion designers, make-up artists and so on are involved in producing these elements or products we put on. These professionals and craftsmen also make use of different tools and equipment in contributing meaningfully to the fashion industry.

These players in the fashion industry have made efforts in understanding user habits, anthropometry, ergonomic, material properties, colour, texture, elements, and principles of design in fashion making.

In Nigeria today, there seems to be a high need to evolve creative, affordable, and durable fashion designs in order to keep the industry exciting as well as stimulate and propagate the cultural richness of the country.

To actualize this, support from a skilled person who adequately understands design, and considers the behaviour of users, materials and local factors becomes essential. To play this role, this study presents the architect - who possesses great communication and drawing skills, keen attention to detail and adaptability, a sense of style, and is trained to stimulate creativity and artistic ability, all of which are essential for fashion design, illustration, visualization, marketing, business and production to contribute towards the sustainable growth of the fashion industry.

The global economic landscape has generally experienced a high level of instability and stress in this present time, especially with the global pandemic that has crippled many economies and some countries are still rising from the ashes of the burnout economic growth. Argentina, Belarus, Ecuador, Egypt, Ghana, Ukraine, Tunisia, and Nigeria are all countries experiencing biting economic challenges [14]. Nigeria is not left out of the whole picture of this economic recession. In the same vein, the built environment has suffered a lot, cutting across the high cost of building materials, the low purchasing power of clients, and the poor remuneration of architects. To withstand this economic shock, a search to brace up for this situation by the architect becomes paramount. In the mix of these things, the fashion industry stands as one of the fields that can be explored with respect to its similarities and the fact that people are in constant desire for creative fashion design of apparel, wears, caps, hats, and other articles of clothing. Hence, the need to blend architecture with fashion tailored toward flooding the fashion industry with a wide variety of designs arises.

In this study, we will find out how an architect performs this role, uncover the unique connection between the worlds of fashion and architecture, and the best way to exploit, expand and export the uniqueness in the fashion industry bearing in mind the socio-economic state of nations. This research work is aimed at analyzing the basic skills of an architect to uncover the tendency of these skills to be utilized in fashion design with the sole aim of expanding the horizons of architecture which will in turn generate revenue for architects amidst a dwindling global economy. To fulfill the objectives of this study we evaluated the state of the fashion industry in Nigeria to ascertain the level of progress recorded in the industry by collecting data from observations and structured surveys conducted on several fashion designers from different parts of Nigeria. In summation, we determined the fundamental skills to practice fashion design and the capacity of architects to function as fashion designers.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Most people define fashion as a current style that is not only associated with clothing, jewellery, or behaviour but also seen as a component of manners [6]. In a broader sense, fashion is also related to vogue, mode, fancy, and expensive items. The definition was extrapolated from the verb "to fashion," which implies shaping anything into a certain or necessary form [11]. Fashion design is the art, science, and craft of applying design to the making of clothing and its accessories. It is influenced by culture and trends and has varied over time and place. Clothes, hair, make-up, and other items are also tied to fashion, according to [8], as they depict the popular trends at a given time (Merriam, 2005). Additionally, Collins Dictionary has even expanded the meaning of fashion to include the field of endeavour (appearance and clothing trends). The reason is that fashion has developed into a discipline of design that contributes to the formation of style for a human body through clothes [7], or a manner of acting that exemplifies a certain attribute at a given term [11]. Although general, this definition, unfortunately, neglects to highlight the cerebral level of fashion, which should be distinguished from the concept of clothes.

A fashion designer is someone who conceptualizes and oversees the whole creative process involved in producing apparel, from the initial idea to the final item. Basically, this process starts when designers have an idea, which they then sketch out. Then, based on their findings, they develop a pattern and decide on details like the garment's measurement, colour, and fabric.

### **2.1 The state of the fashion industry in Nigeria**

With a population of approximately 219,109,853 people, Nigeria remains the largest black nation in the world. Her impact on art and entertainment has been acknowledged and recognized worldwide. Notably, owing to her large market facilitated by her growing population, world fashion capitals such as Paris, New York, and London have hugely extended their interest in Nigeria as a home for their sundry fashion products and accessories. Additionally, the enthusiasm of the Nigerian population to embrace global fashion trends is another factor that has precipitated the high import of fashion products to the country. Laden with 371 ethnic groups, the fashion industry in Nigeria is ever-changing to meet the needs of her people of diverse cultures. More so, the industry still provides space for more innovative fashion products and accessories tailored toward meeting the desires of the indigenous people of Nigeria.

Fashion in Nigeria has been dynamic and bold. The massive embrace of contemporary trends in her fashion industry is largely seen among the youth. To further ensure these fashion trends locally fits into her socio-cultural landscape, Nigerian fashion

makers have made some efforts over the years in infusing elements of global trends into their indigenous designs. However, the fashion industry in Nigeria has a lot to do in churning out products for exports to boost her GDP in lieu of relying on heavy imports from other countries. To ensure her sustainable growth in becoming a world fashion capital, the fashion industry has to maximize the opportunities hidden in its diversity.

### 2.2 Fundamentals skills required in the fashion industry

Fashion designers strive to design clothes that are functional as well as aesthetically pleasing. They consider who is likely to wear a garment and the situations in which it will be worn, and they work within a wide range of materials, colors, patterns and styles. However, to perfectly realize all these they put to play certain prerequisite skills that any player in the fashion industry must possess. These skill-sets include; Good Business Sense, Good Communication Skills, Competitive Spirit, Creativity, Artistic Ability, Sense of Style, Strong Sewing Skills, Team Spirit, Knowledge of Current Fashion Trends, Strong Visualization Skills, Computer Skills, Decision-Making Skills, Keen on Details.

### 2.3 Designing a garment

Fashion designers work in different ways. Some sketch their ideas on paper, while others develop their patterns of fabric in a dress form. Some designers use certain applications that can aid the enhancement of their ideas on a design. When designers are satisfied with a muslin (the first sample), they will consult a pattern maker who then makes the working version of the pattern out of card or via a computer program. Finally, a sample garment is made up and tested on a model to make sure it is an operational outfit. Fashion design is expressive; the designers create art that may be functional or non-functional.

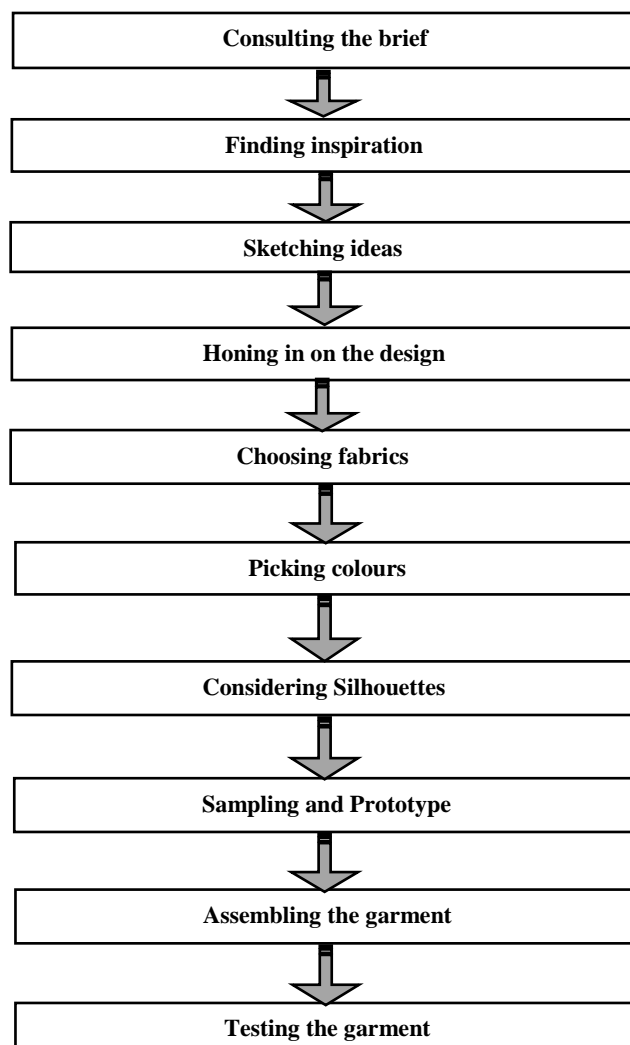


Figure 2.1: The systematic process of developing a garment

### 2.4 Architects who became fashion designers

The fashion design industry may open up various job opportunities for architects who might wish to digress from their major field of study to another field where they can express and practice creative design skills.

(Darcella, 2017) was able to draw out the connection between architecture and fashion as the author studied some architects who later became notable fashion designers [2]. The author opined that there is an interesting relationship between the worlds of fashion and architecture, where masters of each of these fields will have to consider elements of form, beauty and function among others in creating their respective designs. Nevertheless, there are not too many designers who can practice both architecture and fashion, but there are a few that have transcended both worlds. Here are some favourite designers, who went from designing buildings to designing apparel.

i. Pierre Cardin: His name is often recognized with respect to design thanks to his structured silhouettes and his famed "Bubble Palace" house near Cannes. Furthermore, he briefly studied architecture before moving to Paris. Interestingly, it didn't last until he got a job with the house of Paquin. He later worked at Schiaparelli and Dior. In 2012, he nearly returned to architectural practice, working with his nephew (an architect) to create a skyscraper in Venice. Unfortunately, the building was canceled a year later.

ii. Tom Ford: It's hard to imagine Tom Ford doing anything other than fashion. The designer graduated from the New York fashion school Parsons, but with a degree in architecture. He realized his deep passion for fashion before graduating and pursued the industry after graduating. "Architecture was just way too... seriously," he once said. "I realized that fashion was the right balance between art and commerce, and that was it." [2]

iii. Virgil Abloh: He is a brilliant designer and a renowned genius in fashion. Abloh holds a degree in civil engineering as well as a master's degree in architecture. The true Renaissance man that he is, his recent fashion success hasn't held Abloh back from accomplishing his original pursuits—he recently designed the Chicago restaurant Honey's. [2]

iv. Thierry Mugler: "I am an architect who completely reinvents a woman's body," Thierry Mugler once said [2]. He could not be more right - Mugler's corsets and tailoring transformed the body into angular shapes that brought his extreme fashion illustrations to life. With that in mind, it's easy to see how his alleged architectural past helped shape how he looked at clothes. These days Mugler (who now goes by the first name Manfred) has turned his eye back on buildings and is collaborating with the architectural firm - Cassia on a brand of luxury hotels.

v. Pierre Balmain: Pierre Balmain had prime passion for fashion, but he briefly studied architecture at École des Beaux Arts in Paris, France. Later on, Balmain left to become an assistant to the Parisian couturier - Lucien Lelong, and eventually opened up his own fashion house. While in 1934, he switched from architecture to fashion when he was offered a job at the "Edward Molyneux" fashion studio Elle- Balmain. However, he finally opened his own couture house and became known for structured silhouettes and sleeves. "Balmain" was clear in his words for incorporating architectural elements into his designs, stating that: "Dressmaking is the Architecture of Movement" [5]

vi. Gianfranco Ferré: "Gianfranco Ferré's" was a well-known Italian fashion designer who attended the "Milan Polytechnic Institute" in Milan, Italy, from August 1944 to June 2007. Owing to his architectural training and pioneering approach to fashion design, he was sometimes referred to as "The Architect of Fashion" [12]. "Ferré" started his fashion career in 1970 by creating accessories, then from 1972 to 1974 he created raincoats. After that, in 1974, he founded his own business, "Baila," and in 1978, he unveiled his iconic women's line. In 1982, he debuted his first collection for men, and in 1986, he debuted his first couture line in Rome. Then in 1989, "Ferré" was chosen by "Bernard Arnault" the owner of "Christian Dior" to replace its director "Marc Bohan" [2].

## **2.5 Fashion designers in Nigeria**

The fashion industry in Nigeria still stands out as one of the best in Africa owing to the richness and diversity in its socio-cultural makeup. Reviewed in table 1 below are some notable fashion designers in Nigeria taking cognizance of their educational backgrounds and their source of inspiration.

**Table 2.1: A background of some selected fashion designers in Nigeria**

<b>Fashion Designer</b>	<b>Specialization</b>	<b>Source of Inspiration</b>	<b>Educational Background</b>
<b>Lanre Da-Silva Ajayi</b>	Deals on making unique lace style designs, gown styles, Ankara/Asoebi design. She creatively combines pattern, and part of tradition fabric.	Natural talent in fusing pattern into tradition fabric to create astounding design.	None in Fashion design
<b>Kathy Anthony</b>	Use of unique Ankara fabric to make stylish outfit (in male clothing design)	Driven by passion to create men wears and to groom others in the same field.	None in Fashion design
<b>Toju Foyeh</b>	Designs and sews stylish Nigerian outfit for celebrities.	Natural talent	One in fashion
<b>Kunbi Oyelese</b>	Specializes in the design and making of beautiful bridal pieces and designs for celebrities such as Agbani Darego.	Passion for choice of colors (love for color blending)	A graduate of Fashion Institute of Technology in New York.
<b>Soares Anthony</b>	Men's wears	Talent in sketching and drawing	Not captured
<b>Ituen Basi</b>	Skills in print manipulation and fabric treatment.	Passion to develop her skills as an undergraduate of Theatre Arts in the University of Ife as she designs costumes for school stage plays and campus beauty pageants.	Bachelor of Arts in Theatre of Arts, American College and London College of Fashion.
<b>Deola Sagoe</b>	Use of African hand-woven material in her works	Insight from her mother's tailoring outfit called Odua creations	Not in Fashion design

*Source:* Adapted from Nigerian finder, Top 10 Fashion Designers in Nigeria, 2023 [13]

## 2.6 Primary objective of the study

This study is rooted on unraveling the tendency and ability of architects to instrumentally function in the fashion industry with aim of applying their skill sets in generating more revenue for themselves to withstand the shocks of the current dwindling economy. This will invariably be analysed to evaluate if this move will trigger a rise in the level innovation and development in the fashion industry.

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

To derive precise research results that actually represent the aim of this study, this work adopts a quantitative research methodology composed of 4 steps ranging from data collection, analysis to presentation. A sincere effort was made in collecting data from 50 respondents of whose population is composed of fashion designers and users.

### i. Survey on target population

To address the research objectives of this study an electronic survey was carried out across the fashion designers and users in the 6 geopolitical zones of Nigeria (North-central, North-east, North-west, South-east, South-west and South-south).

### ii. Data collection using Google forms

To collect data from the selected fashion designers and users in Nigeria, this study utilized Google forms to collect data in form of responses to the questionnaire developed for the study. With that, data was collected from 50 respondents.

### iii. Data analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)

IBM SPSS Version 25 was used to quantitatively analyze the collected data to draw out accurate research results. Descriptive statistics was applied in analyzing the state of the fashion industry in Nigeria to ascertain the level of progress recorded in the

industry as well as to determine the fundamental skills to practice fashion design and check the capacity of architects to function as fashion designers while inferential statistics was applied to evaluate the ability of architects in the art, science, and craft of fashion. These data analysis procedures were characterized by different charts graphically representing the analyzed data for easy interpretation.

**iv. Application of Analytical reasoning to draw out and present research results**

In presenting and discussing research results accordingly, a sequential breakdown of the findings was followed in line with the related responses captured in the questionnaire. The well-articulated findings addressing the individual research objectives were further summarized to justify the purpose of this study.

**4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The interpreted research results provided answers to the posed research objectives evidenced by an investigative study on the analyzed responses from 50 fashion designers and users in Nigeria as presented by the developed questionnaire for data collection from all the States in Nigeria. From the research result, it was uncovered that 36 out of the 50 respondents constituting 72% of the population are knowledgeable of the processes involved in making fashion designers showings that the answers they provided in the questionnaires are well-informed and genuine.

It was also revealed that 15 out of the 50 respondents (i.e., 32.6% of the population) as well as 30 out of the respondents (i.e. 65.2% of the population) agreed and strongly agreed respectively that they value the fashion products they make or use at every given time affirming the fact that fashion contributes to a major component of human existence.

Furthermore, this study evolved a list of skills attributed to fashion designers which included good business sense, good communication skills, Creativity, Good artistic and drawing skills, a Sense of style, Impeccable design skills, Teamwork, Knowledge of current trends, Strong visualization skills, Computer skills, Problem-solving ability, Detail – oriented as confirmed by 40 out of the 50 respondents constituting 80% of the population with creativity chosen more by 10 percent of the respondents.

**Table 4.1: The skills required to be a fashion designer**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	GOOD COMMUNICATION SKILLS	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	CREATIVITY	5	10.0	10.0	12.0
	SENSE OF STYLE	1	2.0	2.0	14.0
	STRONG VISUALIZATION	1	2.0	2.0	16.0
	COMPUTER SKILLS	1	2.0	2.0	18.0
	PROBLEM-SOLVING ABILITY	1	2.0	2.0	20.0
	ALL OF THE ABOVE	40	80.0	80.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	



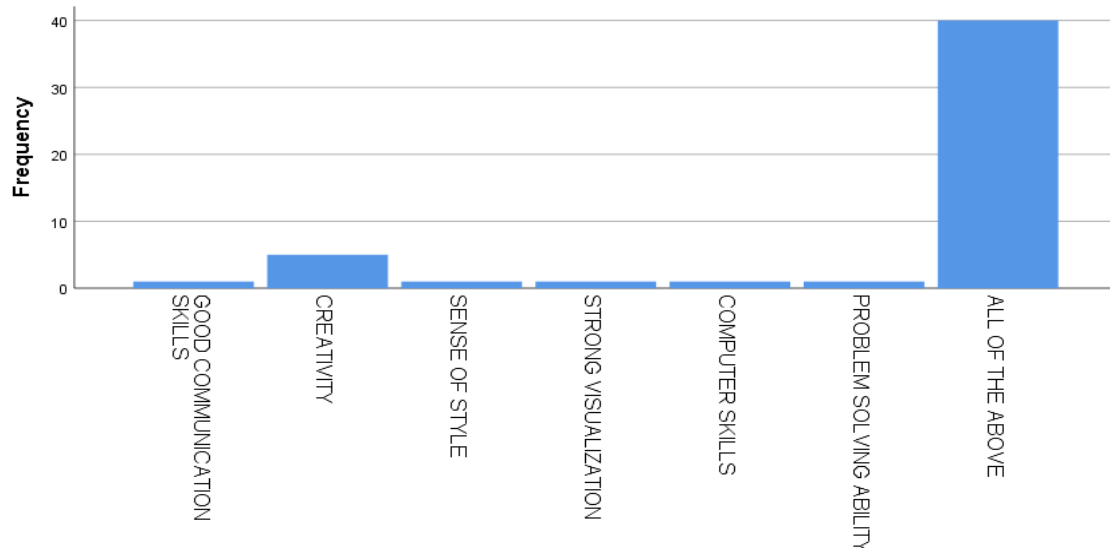


Figure 4.1: The skills required to be a fashion designer

Acquainted with the skill set of a fashion designer, 34 out of 50 respondents (i.e. 68% of the population) strongly agreed that fashion designers share a similar skill set with architects as the summary of the responses gathered evidenced most of the respondents who selected almost the listed skill set of the fashion designer as well as the “All of the above” which simply indicates a selection of all the presented fashion designers skill set were all seen selecting similar options in response to the following question which captures fashion designers sharing common skill set with architects, although with more respondents indicating their choice for creativity, good artistic and drawing skills, strong visualization skills.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	GOOD COMMUNICATION SKILLS	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	CREATIVITY	8	16.0	16.0	18.0
	GOOD ARTISTIC AND DRAWING SKILLS	4	8.0	8.0	26.0
	SENSE OF STYLE	1	2.0	2.0	28.0
	STRONG VISUALIZATION SKILLS	2	4.0	4.0	32.0
	ALL OF THE ABOVE	34	68.0	68.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

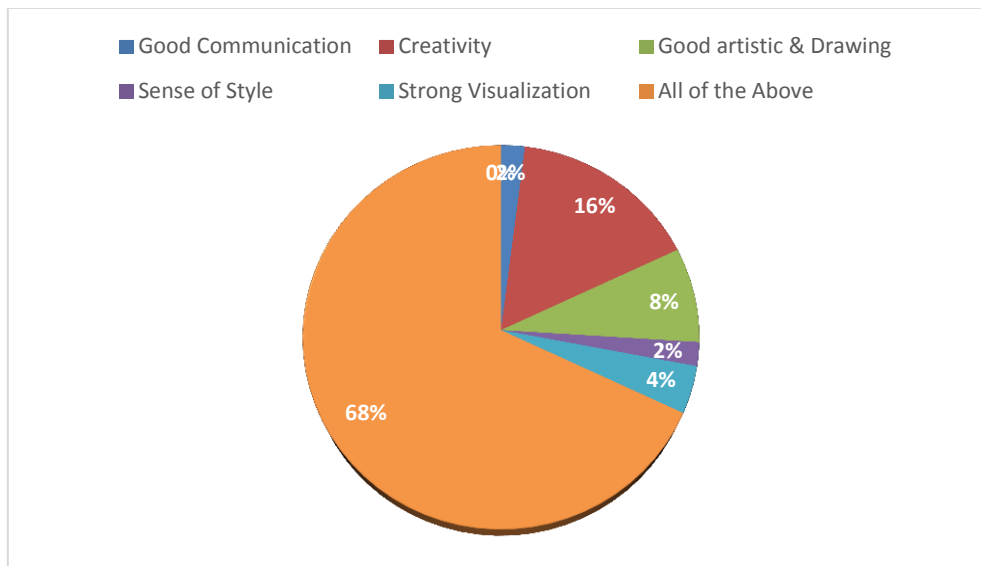


Figure 4.2: The skills architects and fashion designers share in common

The research found that 22 out of the 50 respondents (i.e., 44.9% of the population) and 26 out of the 50 respondents (i.e. 53.1% of the population) agree and strongly agree respectively that architects can become fashion designers, which is essential in helping architects chart the path alongside other prominent architects who also went into fashion design and that became strong support, especially in the midst of dwindling economic situations. The analyzed data revealed that architects can become fashion designers, and this was affirmed by 41 out of the 50 respondents constituting 95.3% of the population being enthusiastic about seeing more architects in the fashion industry. In summation, the strongest factor to consider by fashion designers and users in making or choosing any fashion product is the sense of style, however, architects in their making are known for their great sense of style which shows their propensity to function as fashion designers as proven by this study.

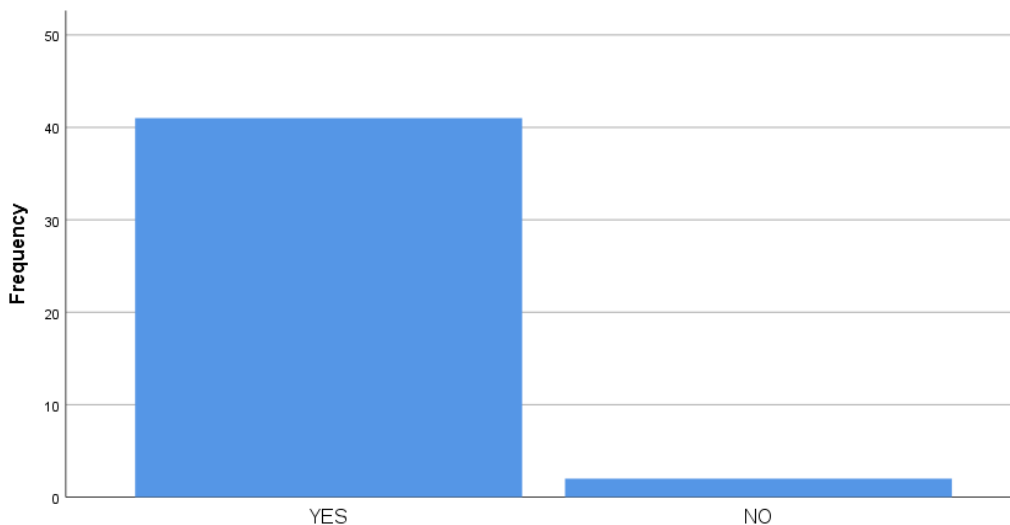


Figure 4.3: The extent of respondents that agree that architects can function as fashion designers

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

A quantitative analysis of the data collected from 50 selected fashion designers and users in Nigeria reveals that architects have a high coefficient to excel in fashion design. They can precisely contribute to the design of articles of clothing due to the fact that they are knowledgeable of the fundamental elements and principles of design. Moreover, architects by virtue of their training will find it easy to adapt to the fashion industry if exposed or trained in that field. To substantiate this fact, more than 77% of the prerequisite qualities of a professional fashion designer exhibited a high degree of similarity with the qualities of a professional architect pointing towards the fact that architects will be instrumental in the fashion industry if engaged. Furthermore, in the process of creating articles of clothing, sketching/drawing a proposed design model of articles of clothing is a key step in the production of these fashion products (fashion illustration), unarguably, architects are in good standing to perform this role owing to their drawing and artistic skills. They understand the fundamental techniques in graphically presenting concepts and designs as



such will beautifully flourish in the fashion industry. This study affirms that the fashion industry will be diversified and be constantly flooded with a wide range of products if the creative power of the architect is tapped. In addition, for the sustainable growth of Nigeria to become the fashion capital of Africa, architects have a major role to play and their engagement will in return generate more revenue for them to cope with the economic stress prevailing in the nation.

## **Recommendation**

1. Architects are encouraged to get involved in fashion design as fashion illustrators, managers, graphic designers, fashion designers, brand experts, product developers, CAD technicians, animators, etc. so as to bring their rich artistic qualities and design abilities in creating wears and related accessories that meet the needs of the society, thus, spicing up the fashion industry with a wide range of products.
2. Architectural education should incorporate fashion design as an emerging field for architects in the curriculum as one of the entrepreneurial skills required by an architectural student tailored towards preparing them to adapt easily to the prevailing economic realities of Nigeria as potential fashion designers, as entrepreneurship skills have become paramount (Mgbemena & Okonta, 2018). Architectural students should be thoroughly taught and exposed to this subject area to build their versatility.
4. Students should not be confined to architectural / construction firms, institutions, government agencies, and the like for their Industrial training or National Youth Service program but should be posted to fashion firms to enable them to gain experience in the fashion industry. Such exposure can trigger in the student the quest to evolve architectural solutions to some problems inherent in the fashion industry as well as empower them with the capacity to create other streams of income for themselves.
5. Training and workshops should be organized to make architects realize the efficacy of utilizing their creative capacity in designing fashion products. However, architects should ensure they secure patent rights for their innovations before selling them out to fashion labels if they are to freelance.
6. In pursuant of Continuous Professional Development Programs (CPDP) instituted by the Architectural Registration Council of Nigeria (ARCON), courses in related fields such as fashion should be incorporated to raise the skill, knowledge, and capacity of architects to function in the fashion industry.
7. A partnership between architects and fashion designers should be encouraged to support the growth and development of the fashion industry in Nigeria encapsulated in the production of a large spectrum of articles of clothing in the fashion market, increase revenue generation and exports, create job opportunities, and encourage the exchange of ideas. Architects are urged to utilize their skills in the area of fashion illustration manually and electronically to raise the value of the fashion industry in Nigeria.

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