Original Research

Assessment of Factors Influencing the Choice of Specialization among Art and Design Students in Nigerian Universities

Adeloye Adebayo Abiodun[1]*, Odewole Peter Oluwagbenga[2], Afolabi Benjamin Eni-itan Fisayo[3], Kayode Tope Dare[4], Adedeji Deborah Oluwayemisi[5]

[1,2,3] Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Faculty of Environmental Studies, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria.

[4]Department of Fine Art and Industrial Design/Faculty of Environmental Studies, Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo. Ondo State, Nigeria.

[5]Department of Clothing and Textile Design/Faculty of Sciences, University of Ilesa, Ilesa, Osun State, Nigeria.

Abstract	Article Information
This study investigates the factors influencing specialization choices among art and design students in Nigerian universities. Specialization is a critical phase in students' academic and professional development, with options including painting, sculpture, textiles, ceramics, graphic design, and art history. The study was guided by Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which emphasizes self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. The study aims to identify the major triggers shaping these choices. Using a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 167 students in 200-level courses and above through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. Descriptive analysis revealed that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals influence specialization decisions. Hypothesis testing further showed that gender has a significant relationship with specialization choice, indicating that culturally shaped gender norms influence how students align with particular disciplines. ANOVA results indicated that students' perceptions of financial stability significantly influence their specialization choices, affirming financial expectations as a critical decision-making factor. Contextual influences such as departmental orientation, parental guidance, lecturer preference, and learning experiences had minimal impact. The study concludes that specialization choices are shaped by intrinsic motivations, perceived career prospects, and demographic influences and recommends enhanced career guidance and entrepreneurship-focused curriculum development in art and design programs.	

INTRODUCTION

The history of art and design education in Nigeria aligns with the country's cultural and economic development. Art and design education in Nigeria dates back to the pre-colonial era, when artistic traditions were part of the daily lives of the people.

Traditional crafts such as pottery, weaving, carving, beadwork, and textile dyeing were transmitted through apprenticeships within families or guilds. These crafts were functional, symbolic, and often spiritual. They served as mediums for storytelling,

religious expression, and social organization (Owino & Odundo, 2016). The advent of Western education introduced formalized art instruction. Missionary schools initially emphasized craft-based skills, such as drawing and sewing, as part of their vocational training programs. Art as a discipline gained prominence in the 20th century with the establishment of specialized art schools (Adeloye et al., 2010). Notable among these was the founding of the Department of Fine Arts at the Nigerian College of Arts, Science, and Technology (now Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria) in 1952. This institution played a major role in shaping modern art education in Nigeria (Evans et al., 2025).

Art and design are taught in various tiers of the education system in Nigeria, including secondary schools, colleges of education, polytechnics, and universities. Art is often introduced as a subject in junior and senior secondary schools. The focus is typically on basic skills such as drawing, painting, and crafts. Colleges of education offer specialized teacher training programs in fine and applied arts. Graduates from these institutions are equipped to teach art at the primary and secondary school levels. Universities and polytechnics provide more specialized training in art and design. Universities are known for their robust art programs, which emphasize a blend of theory and practice. Polytechnics, on the other hand, focus on applied and technical aspects of art and design (Akinnibosun et al., 2024).

Fine and applied arts are taught in conventional universities to train students in art and design, while science-oriented universities offer the course as industrial design. Both fine and applied arts and industrial design have different specializations from which students choose. The specialization options are art history, ceramics, graphics, painting, sculpture, and textiles (Adeloye et al., 2024). The selection of a particular specialization influences academic continuity, student satisfaction, career and employment opportunities, financial compensation, and the social status of students. There are numerous factors influencing specialization decisions. Making informed and well-guided choices regarding specialization in the arts helps students to stand out in the field, increases their satisfaction, and influences their career opportunities. In addition to all these, it also improves their academic results.

The creative industry is competitive; both employers and clients most of the time seek individuals with specialized skills to meet specific needs. According to Taskesen (2019), specialization increases employability by equipping graduates with the skills required by industry. Research suggests that specialized knowledge and skills are major criteria for hiring creative professionals, as they demonstrate a high level of expertise and commitment to the craft (Odewole et al., 2024). The global creative economy is growing fast, with art and design disciplines playing a pivotal role. In Nigeria, the creative industry, which includes fashion, film, and visual arts, contributes significantly to GDP and job creation. Specialization allows professionals to carve out niches that align with market demands, which drives innovation and economic growth (Akinnibosun et al., 2024). Specialization encourages innovation because individuals explore and experiment in their area of focus. This often leads to the creation of unique styles, techniques, or products that make practitioners stand out among their peers.

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) was adopted as the theoretical framework of this study. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provides a clear approach for examining how individuals develop career interests, make choices, and achieve performance goals. The theory emphasizes the connection of personal cognitive factors, such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations, with contextual and experiential influences, making it relevant to understanding the academic and career pathways of students (Esparza et al., 2025).

Self-efficacy is central to SCCT; this is an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform specific tasks (Lent & Brown, 2019). In art and design education, students' self-efficacy beliefs can influence their choice of specialization. A

student who has confidence in his/her ability to work with digital tools may gravitate toward graphic design, while another who feels proficient in textile techniques may choose textile design. These beliefs are often shaped by early exposure, learning environments, and feedback received from peers and instructors. Self-efficacy plays a critical role in specialization decisions. Outcome expectation is another concept associated with SCCT (Esparza et al., 2025). In specialization decisions, students often weigh the perceived benefits of various fields. A specialization in graphic design may be seen as leading to higher income or better job opportunities, especially in Nigeria's growing digital and advertising sectors, while some specializations are perceived as less lucrative, influencing students to make choices based on perceived economic viability. These outcome expectations are shaped by societal norms, market conditions, family expectations, and observations of successful professionals within and outside the academic environment.

Another critically important aspect of SCCT is the role of personal goals (Lent & Brown, 2019). These include the aspirations or intentions to pursue specific academic or career paths. Students' long-term goals can influence how they interpret both their abilities and the possible outcomes of various specializations. A student who aspires to become a fashion designer might deliberately choose textile design as a specialization, aligning their academic path with their career vision. The formation of these goals is influenced by learning experiences, personal interests, and socio-cultural values. In Nigeria, where structured career guidance is often lacking, students' goals may be vague or heavily influenced by external pressures, including parental expectations and cultural attitudes toward creative professions. SCCT also places a strong emphasis on contextual influences, both proximal and distal. Proximal factors include immediate social and educational environments, such as the availability of qualified instructors, access to facilities, and peer influence. Distal factors include broader socio-economic and cultural realities, including gender roles and economic constraints; such factors can be

influential to students' specialization decisions (Lent & Brown, 2019; Samara, 2021). Certain specializations, like textiles, are often dominated by female students, while sculpture remains male-dominated, reflecting broader gender stereotypes and societal expectations. SCCT acknowledges the impact of learning experiences in shaping individuals' interests and capabilities. These experiences can stem from formal education, personal experimentation, mentorship, or role models. Positive reinforcement and success in a specific domain often lead to increased interest and self-efficacy in that area (Odewole et al., 2024). In Nigeria, disparities in exposure during secondary education and foundational university courses can lead to uneven development of skills and confidence across different areas of art and design. This suggests that early and equitable exposure to the range of specializations is crucial for enabling informed decision-making among students.

Statement of the Problem

Specialization in art and design education is an important component of students' academic development, professional formation, and career outcomes. In Nigerian universities, students are expected to choose from a range of creative disciplines such as painting, sculpture, ceramics, textiles, graphics, and art history. This decision has long-term implications for employability, creative identity, and professional visibility. Despite the importance of specialization to creative education, there is limited empirical documentation of what truly motivates students to choose one specialization over another**.** The rapid growth of Nigeria's creative economy has reshaped the expectations surrounding art and design careers, introducing new entrepreneurial and professional opportunities. Students' perceptions of lucrativeness, employability, and industry visibility may therefore increasingly influence specialization choices. There is, however, inadequate research examining how outcome expectations interact with students' internal motivations, self-efficacy beliefs, and personal goals in the Nigerian university system. This knowledge gap limits institutions'

ability to design effective career guidance systems or align specializations with emerging industry demands. The research problem centers on the need to empirically determine the dominant factors influencing specialization choices among art and design students in Nigerian higher institutions and provide insight that can strengthen academic guidance and curriculum planning in the creative disciplines.

Despite the growing body of research on career choice and academic specialization in higher education, previous studies focused largely on disciplines such as engineering, business, and the social sciences. Limited attention has been given to specialization decisions in creative disciplines. Existing literature tends to emphasize broad career motivations without integrating psychological constructs such as self-efficacy and personal goals, among others. There is insufficient empirical evidence explaining how internal factors and economic considerations collectively shape specialization decisions among art and design students in Nigerian universities. This study, therefore, addresses this gap by examining the dominant specialization triggers in Nigerian art and design education. SCCT provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the internal and external factors that influence specialization among art and design students. Its components, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, goals, contextual influences, and learning experiences, collectively offer insight into students' decision-making process. The objective of this study is to identify the factors responsible for the specialization choices of art and design students in Nigerian universities. The following hypotheses were proposed for this study:

H1: There is a significant relationship between students' gender and their specialization choices in art and design disciplines.

H2: Perception of financial stability significantly influences students' specialization choices in art and design disciplines.

Research questions

1. What factors influence the specialization choices of art and design students in Nigerian universities?
2. What is the relationship between students' gender and their specialization choices in art and design disciplines?
3. How do students' perceptions of financial stability influence their specialization choices in art and design disciplines?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a quantitative survey research design to investigate specialization triggers among art and design students in Nigerian universities. The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire, developed and administered via Google Forms to facilitate ease of access and broad participation. The link to the online survey was distributed through various art and design students' social media platforms, enabling a voluntary response sampling of respondents across the targeted institutions and students. Only students in 200-level and above were selected because some schools specialize at the 200-level, while most schools specialize at the 300-level. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no form of coercion or incentive was employed to solicit responses, ensuring ethical compliance in line with standard research protocols. The questionnaire comprised five-point Likert-scale items designed to measure the level of agreement with the questionnaire items. A total of 167 valid responses were obtained within the designated data collection period. This sample size meets the minimum threshold recommended by Odewole et al. (2024), who proposed at least 150 respondents for robust analysis. SPSS software was used to conduct descriptive analysis on the dataset. The hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics. Chi-square was used for hypothesis one, while one-way ANOVA was used for hypothesis two. The full range of constructs and their corresponding items are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Questionnaire Variables

SN	Items	Variables
Self-Efficacy		
1.	VAR 1	I chose my area of specialization because it is my area of strength.
2.	VAR 2	Previous experience in my area of specialization influenced my choice.
Outcome expectations		
3.	VAR 3	I chose my specialization because of its entrepreneurship prospects.
4.	VAR 4	I believe my specialization is more lucrative.
5.	VAR 5	My specialization has better visibility than other specializations.
Personal Goals		
6.	VAR 6	I am passionate about my area of specialization.
7.	VAR 7	I chose my area of specialization because it has a wider scope of practice.
Contextual Influences		
8.	VAR 8	Departmental orientation influenced my decision.
9.	VAR 9	The department imposed the option on me.
10.	VAR 10	Fear or likeness of lecturers in other options influenced my specialization choice.
11.	VAR 11	Practicing role models in the industry influenced my specialization decision.
12.	VAR 12	My parents influenced my choice of specialization.
Learning Experiences		
13.	VAR 13	I chose my area of specialization because it is easier than other options.
14.	VAR 14	I was careful not to choose a stressful specialization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
Results
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The distribution reveals adequate gender representation, with 100 male respondents (59.9%) and 67 female respondents (40.1%), indicating a fairly balanced gender composition. In terms of institutional representation, the sample also reflects a good balance, comprising 79 students (47.3%) from federal universities and 88 students (52.7%) from state universities. The data also indicates that students across all areas of specialization within art and design were included in the survey. Specifically, 10 students (6%) specialized in ceramics, 39 (23.4%) in graphics, 49 (29.3%) in painting, 55 (32.9%) in textiles, 8 (4.8%) in art history, and 6 (3.6%) in sculpture. These also suggest relative levels of student interest and enrollment in each specialization. It is also notable that first-year (100-level) students were not included in the study, as specialization typically begins at the 200 level or 300 level, depending on the institution. The level distribution shows that 15 students (9%) were in the 200-level, 36 (21.6%) in the 300-level, 73 (43.7%) in the 400-level, and 43 (25.7%) in the 500-level. This reflects comprehensive sampling across all stages of specialization. The frequency distribution of respondents, as shown in Table 2, confirms that the sample is representative of the target population in terms of gender, institution type, area of specialization, and academic level.

Table 2

Respondents' demographic characteristics

Respondents' demographic characteristics	Frequency (n=167)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	100	59.9
Female	67	40.1
University Type		
Federal	79	47.3
State	88	52.7
Educational Level		
200	15	9
300	36	21.6
400	73	43.7
500	43	25.7
Area of Specialization		
Ceramics	10	6
Graphics	39	23.4
Painting	49	29.3
Textiles	55	32.9
Art History	8	4.8
Sculpture	6	3.6

Assessment of Self-efficacy as a Factor Influencing Specialization

Table 3 presents the results related to self-efficacy as a factor influencing the specialization choices of art and design students. The data reveal that 58 students (34.7%) strongly agreed that they selected their area of specialization because it aligns with their personal strengths, while 41 students (24.6%) agreed. Twenty-three students (13.8%) were neutral, 36 (21.6%) disagreed, and 9 (5.4%) strongly disagreed. The mean score for this variable is 3.62. This suggests that perceived strength in a particular area significantly influences students' specialization decisions. The table indicates that 32 students (19.2%) strongly agreed that previous experience influenced their choice of specialization, 74 (44.3%) agreed, 34 (20.4%) were neutral, 22 (13.2%) disagreed, and 5 (3.0%) strongly disagreed. The mean score for this variable is 3.63. This further supports the notion that prior experience in a specific area attracts students to that specialization. Given that the mean scores for both variables, 3.62 and 3.63, fall within the agreement range, it can be concluded that self-efficacy, in the form of perceived personal strengths and previous experience, plays a significant role in influencing the specialization choices of art and design students.

Table 3

Assessment Factor Influencing Specialization

Variables	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score	Remarks	Missing system
Assessment of Self-efficacy as a Factor Influencing Specialization								
V1	58 (34.7)	41 (24.6)	23 (13.8)	36 (21.6)	9 (5.4)	3.62	A	
V2	32 (19.2)	74 (44.3)	34 (20.4)	22 (13.2)	5 (3.0)	3.63	A	

Table 3 continues.

Assessment of Outcome Expectations as a Factor Influencing Specialization

						Mean	Rating	
V3	61 (36.5)	84 (50.3)	19 (10.2)	3 (1.8)	-	4.23	SA	2 (1.2)
V4	72 (43.1)	86 (51.5)	7 (4.2)	2 (1.2)	-	4.37	SA	
V5	37 (22.2)	61 (36.5)	49 (29.3)	18 (10.8)	2 (1.2)	3.68	A	
Assessment of Personal Goals as Factors Influencing Specialization								
V6	75 (44.9)	89 (53.3)	-	3 (1.8)	-	4.41	SA	
V7	43 (25.7)	73 (43.7)	36 (21.6)	15 (9.0)	-	3.86	A	
V8	10 (6.0)	62 (37.1)	31 (18.6)	52 (31.1)	12 (7.2)	3.04	N	
V9	4 (2.4)	15 (9.0)	5 (3.0)	94 (56.3)	49 (29.3)	1.99	D	
V10	-	8 (4.8)	19 (11.4)	98 (58.7)	42 (25.1)	1.96	D	
V11	26 (15.6)	56 (33.5)	40 (24.0)	40 (24.0)	5 (3.0)	3.35	N	
V12	5 (3.0)	20 (12.0)	30 (18.0)	77 (46.1)	35 (21.0)	2.30	D	
Assessment of Learning Experience as a Factor Influencing Specialization								
V13	19 (11.4)	30 (18.0)	34 (20.4)	56 (33.5)	28 (16.8)	2.74	N	
V14	7 (4.2)	32 (19.2)	32 (19.2)	64 (38.3)	32 (19.2)	2.51	D	

Keys: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

Mean score rating key: 1.00 – 1.80 (SD); 1.81 – 2.60 (D); 2.61 – 3.40 (N); 3.41 – 4.20 (A); 4.21 – 5.00 (SA)

V1: I chose my area of specialization because it is my area of strength. V2: Previous experience in my area of specialization influenced my choice. V3: I chose my specialization because of its entrepreneurship prospects. V4: I believe my specialization is more lucrative. V5: My specialization has better visibility than other specializations. V6: I am passionate about my area of specialization. V7: I chose my area of specialization because it has a wider scope of practice. V8: Departmental orientation influenced my decision. V9: The department imposed the option on me. V10: Fear or likeness of lecturers in other options influenced my specialization choice. V11: Practicing role models in the industry influenced my specialization decision. V12: My parents influenced my choice of specialization. V13: I chose my area of specialization because it is easier than other options. V14: I was careful not to choose a stressful specialization.

Assessment of Outcome Expectations as a Factor Influencing Specialization

Table 3 also shows the results related to outcome expectations as a factor influencing the specialization choices of art and design students.

According to the data, 61 students (36.5%) strongly agreed that they chose their specialization based on its entrepreneurial prospects, while 84 (50.3%) agreed, 19 (10.2%) were neutral, 3 (1.8%) disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. The mean score for this variable is 4.23, indicating that entrepreneurial potential is a major consideration for students when selecting a specialization. The table also reveals that 72 students (43.1%) strongly agreed that they chose their specialization because they believe it is more lucrative; 86 (51.5%) agreed; 7 (4.2%) were neutral, 2 (1.2%) disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. The mean score for this variable is 4.37, further suggesting that perceived financial rewards significantly influence specialization choices. Thirty-seven students (22.2%) strongly agreed that they chose their area of specialization because they believe it would enhance their visibility as artists, 61 (36.5%) agreed, 49 (29.3%) were neutral, 18 (10.8%) disagreed, and 2 (1.2%) strongly disagreed. The mean score for this variable is 3.68, indicating that the desire for professional visibility also plays a role in students' decision-making. Given that the mean scores for the three variables, 4.23, 4.37, and 3.68, fall within the range of agreement, with two reflecting strong agreement,

it can be concluded that outcome expectations significantly influence the specialization choices of art and design students.

Assessment of Personal Goals as Factors Influencing Specialization

Results related to personal goals as a factor influencing the specialization choices of art and design students are also presented in Table 3. The data show that 75 students (44.9%) strongly agreed that they chose their specialization based on passion, while 89 (53.3%) agreed. No student was neutral, 3 (1.8%) disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. The mean score for this variable is 4.41, indicating that passion is a major motivating factor in students' specialization decisions. The table also shows that 43 students (25.7%) strongly agreed that they chose their specialization because they believe it offers a broader scope than others, 73 (43.7%) agreed, 36 (21.6%) were neutral; 15 (9.0%) disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. The mean score for this variable is 3.86, suggesting that the perceived versatility of a specialization is also an important consideration for students. Given the mean scores of 4.41 and 3.86, one indicating strong agreement and the other agreement, it can be concluded that personal goals, particularly passion and perceived scope, significantly influence the specialization choices of art and design students.

Assessment of Contextual Influences: Factors Influencing Specialization

Results for contextual influences as factors affecting the specialization choices of art and design students are also presented in Table 3. The data show that 10 students (6.0%) strongly agreed that departmental orientation influenced their choice of specialization; 62 (37.1%) agreed; 31 (18.6%) were neutral; 52 (31.1%) disagreed; and 12 (7.2%) strongly disagreed. The mean score for this variable is 3.04, indicating that departmental orientation has a limited influence on students' specialization decisions. Regarding whether students' specialization options were imposed on them, 4 students (2.4%) strongly agreed, 15 (9.0%) agreed, 5 (3.0%) were neutral, 94 (56.3%)

disagreed, and 49 (29.3%) strongly disagreed. The mean score of 1.99 suggests that students' choices are largely self-determined and not imposed. In terms of whether the fear or likeness of a lecturer influenced specialization choice, no student strongly agreed, 8 (4.8%) agreed, 19 (11.4%) were neutral, 98 (58.7%) disagreed, and 42 (25.1%) strongly disagreed. The resulting mean score of 1.96 indicates that lecturers' personal influence is not a significant factor. Twenty-six students (15.6%) strongly agreed that practicing role models in the industry influenced their specialization choice, 56 (33.5%) agreed, 40 (24.0%) were neutral, 40 (24.0%) disagreed, and 5 (3.0%) strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.35 suggests that role models in the industry have a moderate influence on students' decisions. Five students (3.0%) strongly agreed that their parents influenced their specialization choice, 20 (12.0%) agreed, 30 (18.0%) were neutral, 77 (46.1%) disagreed, and 35 (21.0%) strongly disagreed. The mean score for this variable is 2.30, indicating that parental influence is generally minimal. The mean scores for the five contextual variables, 3.04, 1.99, 1.96, 3.35, and 2.30, fall within the ranges of neutrality and disagreement. It can therefore be concluded that contextual influences have a limited impact on the specialization choices of art and design students.

Assessment of Learning Experience as a Factor Influencing Specialization

Table 3 also presents the results for learning experiences as factors influencing the specialization choices of art and design students. The data indicate that 19 students (11.4%) strongly agreed that they chose their specialization because it is easier than others; 34 (20.4%) agreed; 34 (20.4%) were neutral; 56 (33.5%) disagreed; and 28 (16.8%) strongly disagreed. The mean score for this variable is 2.74, suggesting that ease of specialization is not a significant factor in students' decision-making. When asked whether they chose their specialization because it is less stressful than others, 7 students (4.2%) strongly agreed, 32 (19.2%) agreed, 32 (19.2%) were neutral, 64

(38.3%) disagreed, and 32 (19.2%) strongly disagreed. The mean score for this variable is 2.51, indicating that avoidance of stress is also not a major consideration in specialization choice. Given that the mean scores for both variables, 2.74 and 2.51, fall within the range of neutrality and disagreement, it can be concluded that learning experiences, particularly perceptions of ease or stress, have minimal influence on the specialization choices of art and design students.

Inferential Analysis

The hypothesis sought to determine whether gender influences the choice of specialization among art and design students. To test this, a chi-square test of independence was conducted using a sample of 167 students across various specialization areas. The results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Chi-Square Tests

Item	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	33.381	5	< 0.001
Likelihood Ratio	36.573	5	< 0.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.934	1	.008
Cramer's V	.447	-	-
N of Valid Cases	167	-	-

The Pearson Chi-Square result shows that $\chi^2 = 33.381$, df = 5, and p = .000. Since the p-value is less than .05, the null hypothesis that gender and specialization are independent is rejected. This means that there is a statistically significant association between gender and specialization choice. This indicates that the pattern of specialization choices differs meaningfully between male and female students. Cramer's V = .447 shows a moderate-to-strong effect size on the relationship between students' gender and their specialization choices in art and design disciplines. This means that gender can be used in predicting specialization patterns.

To test this hypothesis (H2) using ANOVA, a reliability analysis was conducted to determine the internal consistency of the three items measuring students' perception of financial stability as a trigger for specialization choice (Variables 3, 4, and 5 of the questionnaire). The result yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .661, based on 165 valid cases, as shown in Table 5. In social science research, reliability coefficients between .60 and .70 are considered acceptable for exploratory studies, especially when dealing with psychological or perceptual research (Taber, 2017). This indicates that the items moderately measure the same underlying concept of students' financial expectations in relation to their chosen specialization. This justifies the use of ANOVA to test the hypothesis.

Table 5

Reliability Test

Case Processing Summary		N	%
Cases	Valid	165	98.8
	Excluded	2	1.2
	Total	167	100.0
Reliability Statistics			
Cronbach's Alpha		N of Items	
0.661		3	

The one-way ANOVA shows a statistically significant difference in students' financial stability perceptions across specialization groups. The result, as seen in Table 6, shows that F = 2.844 and p = 0.017.

Table 6

One-way ANOVA

Item	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	04.975	5	.995	2.844	.017
Within Groups	56.333	161	.350	-	-
Total	61.308	166	-	-	-

The significance level ($p < .05$) supports the hypothesis that specialization choice is influenced by differences in how students perceive the financial stability of their area. This aligns with literature suggesting that financial expectations frequently guide specialization decisions in creative disciplines. These results confirm that students consider financial expectations as part of their decision-making when selecting a specialization.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study make a significant contribution to the growing body of knowledge on career decision-making in creative disciplines, with an emphasis on art and design education in Nigerian universities. Using the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) as a guide, the results reveal an interplay of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, personal goals, and contextual factors in shaping specialization choices among art and design students.

This study highlights the role of self-efficacy in shaping specialization choices. The findings show that students tend to specialize in areas where they perceive themselves to be competent or where they have had previous exposure. This pattern supports the core assumption of SCCT that individuals are more likely to pursue academic and career paths in areas of their strength. It also aligns with the submissions of Koranteng et al. (2025) and Owino and Odundo (2016) that prior exposure to artistic practices and perceived competence significantly influence students' specialization decisions in visual arts programs. This finding implies that foundational art courses in the early years of university education play a critical role in shaping students' specialization decisions.

The study also revealed that outcome expectations relating to financial prospects and professional visibility strongly influence specialization decisions. This finding reflects a new view of how students perceive art and design education. Creative disciplines were often pursued primarily for personal expression or cultural interest; however, Nigeria's creative economy has repositioned art and design as viable professional and entrepreneurial pathways. A similar observation was reported in Odewole et al. (2024), who note that students increasingly evaluate their specialization choices in relation to potential economic outcomes. This suggests that contemporary art students are more pragmatic in their decision-making, balancing artistic interest with economic considerations.

Personal goals were also identified as a major factor influencing specialization choices among art and design students. Artistic disciplines are associated with intrinsic motivation; the results of this study reinforce the idea that passion is central in creative education. However, the finding that students also evaluate the opportunities in each specialization suggests that passion alone is not the sole determinant of specialization decisions. Students appear to combine intrinsic interest with pragmatic evaluation of career possibilities. The

study also reveals that parental pressure, lecturer influence, and departmental orientation have relatively limited impact on specialization decisions. This result contradicts several earlier studies in education and career choice, such as Sankır and Sankır (2019) and Gbadegbe et al. (2024), which found that family expectations and teacher influence often play decisive roles in students' academic pathways. The relatively weak parental influence observed in this study indicates a gradual shift in societal attitudes toward creative professions. As Nigeria's creative industries gain global visibility through sectors such as fashion, film, and digital media, art and design careers are gradually gaining legitimacy in the eyes of families and society. The moderate influence of industry role models observed in this study highlights the importance of professional visibility and mentorship in shaping students' aspirations.

The study also reveals that the perceptions of ease or stress associated with different specializations did not significantly influence students' decisions. This finding challenges a common assumption that students select art specializations based on perceived convenience or lower academic demands. This suggests that art and design students approach specialization decisions with seriousness and intentionality. The implication of this is that specialization decisions in art education are informed by long-term professional considerations rather than short-term academic convenience. The study highlights the influence of gender on specialization patterns. The significant relationship between gender and specialization choice suggests that cultural perceptions about particular artistic disciplines continue to shape participation patterns. Certain areas of art and design have historically been gendered in many societies, with textile-related fields often attracting more female students and physically intensive disciplines such as sculpture attracting more male students.

The study generally highlights the relevance of social cognitive career theory in explaining specialization decisions in creative disciplines. The relationship between self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals provides a framework for understanding how students assess academic and career pathways. The limited role of contextual pressures suggests that art and design students in Nigerian universities are exercising considerable autonomy in shaping their academic paths. The findings also highlight the need for art and design programs to strengthen career guidance, industry engagement, and early exposure to multiple studio disciplines. Providing balanced exposure to all specialization areas and connecting students with practicing professionals and institutions can help students make more informed decisions that align both with their personal aspirations and with the demands of the creative economy.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the factors influencing specialization choices among art and design students in Nigerian universities using the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) as the guiding framework. The findings reveal that specialization decisions are primarily driven by internal factors such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. Students tend to select areas where they perceive themselves to have stronger abilities, previous exposure, and greater passion. Expectations about financial stability, entrepreneurial opportunities, and professional visibility also significantly shape specialization decisions. The study also reveals that contextual influences such as departmental orientation, parental pressure, and lecturer preferences have a limited impact on students' choices. This suggests that specialization decisions among art and design students are largely self-determined. The significant relationship between gender and specialization affirms that cultural perceptions still influence students' specialization choices in art and design.

The findings of this research have important implications for art and design education in Nigerian universities. It highlights the need for institutions to strengthen career guidance and mentoring systems in art programs so as to help

students make informed specialization decisions based on their strengths and career aspirations. It also raises the need for departments to ensure balanced and early exposure to all studio disciplines because early learning exposure contributes significantly to students' specialization preferences. The study also gives reasons for universities to integrate entrepreneurship and industry-oriented training in art and design curricula, since students strongly consider financial and professional prospects when choosing their specialization. It also highlights the need for departments to promote greater gender inclusivity across all specialization areas by challenging stereotypes and encouraging students to explore disciplines traditionally associated with a particular gender.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following practical recommendations are suggested. It is recommended that institutions should prioritize the development of career guidance and counseling services in art and design disciplines. Since students are largely influenced by self-efficacy and outcome expectations, early and continuous guidance can help them identify their strengths, evaluate potential career paths, and make informed decisions about their specialization. Universities can also integrate more entrepreneurial and industry-oriented content into the curriculum. It is also recommended that institutions adopt student-centered policies that preserve autonomy in specialization selection.

CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Adebayo Abiodun Adeloye: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft preparation, Writing – review and editing.

Peter Oluwagbenga Odewole: Supervision, Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing—review and editing, Validation.

Benjamin Eni-itan Fisayo Afolabi: Validation, Writing, review, and editing, Project administration.

Tope Dare Kayode: Methodology, Writing – review and editing.

Deborah Oluwayemisi Adedeji: Validation, Writing, review, and editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Ethical Approval

This study was conducted in accordance with standard ethical guidelines for social science research. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research. Consent was obtained from all participants, and respondents were assured that their identities and responses would remain anonymous and confidential.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The dataset is not publicly available to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the study participants.

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