

# Cultural Preferences Vs. Digital Exposure: Primary Influence on Nigerian Students' Tech Career Aspirations

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors influencing Nigerian students' career aspirations, focusing on whether cultural preferences or exposure to digital environments play the primary role. Using surveys of 35 respondents (secondary and undergraduate students) and interviews with 10 secondary school students and 5 teacher, the research examined access to digital tools, exposure to digital skills, and community perceptions of career prestige. Findings revealed a strong bias toward traditional careers, with 68.6% of respondents identifying medicine, law, engineering, or accounting as the most respected, compared to only 5.7% for technology-related fields. While 60% rated their access to digital tools as good or excellent, only 20% of secondary school students reported learning any digital skills, compared to higher rates among undergraduates, most of whom were self-taught. Interviews further highlighted parental and community influence, with one teacher noting that parents “aren’t exposed to digital courses or environments, so they push their children toward culturally acceptable careers.” The study concludes that cultural pressures and digital exposure are deeply intertwined, shaping career decisions in complex ways.

## INTRODUCTION

Technology is shaping the world in ways that affect almost every career today. Jobs in fields like software development, data analysis, and cybersecurity are among the fastest-growing globally, and the skills needed for these roles are becoming essential for young people to learn early. Yet in my community, most students still aim for the same traditional careers such as medicine, law, or engineering. This raises the question of whether students avoid technology careers mainly because they have never been exposed to digital and learning environments, or because cultural beliefs and expectations push them toward certain professions.

Several studies have shown that ICT literacy among Nigerian youths remains very low. A 2023 report by UNICEF noted that only 7% of Nigerian youths possess ICT skills (Punch, 2023). Similarly, a survey by GetBundi revealed that 85% of Nigerian graduates lack digital skills, with only 19 out of 100 NYSC members demonstrating competence beyond basic tools (BusinessDay, 2023). Afolayan, Ojokoh, and Akinrinwa (2017) also found that differences in ICT facilities in schools significantly influenced whether secondary students in Akure considered IT careers. More recently, a 2025 case study showed that 70% of Nigerian youths shaped their career goals based on exposure to digital platforms like LinkedIn and Jobberman (Enems Project, 2025). These findings suggest that digital environments and exposure can strongly shape students' awareness and career aspirations.

On the other hand, cultural and parental influences are equally powerful. A Punch investigation in 2023 reported how students were often pressured into medicine, law, or engineering because these careers are seen as most prestigious in Nigerian society (Punch, 2023). In Enugu South, Egbo (2017) found that parents' education and occupation significantly shaped students' career decisions, while Okesina and Famolu (2022) reported similar results in Ilorin, where parental guidance was a decisive factor in career choice. A more recent study in Jos North confirmed that parental socio-cultural and economic influence had a strong impact on career selection among secondary school students (WJARR, 2024). These studies make it clear that while poor ICT access and low digital exposure are important, cultural expectations and stereotypes also play a major role in career decisions.

This research focuses on my school and surrounding neighborhood, using surveys with students to compare the effects of low exposure to digital environments with cultural preferences for traditional careers. The aim is to determine which factor has the greater influence and to propose ways that schools and communities can make technology careers more attractive and accessible to students. This study initially set out to identify which factor—cultural preferences or digital exposure—had a stronger influence. However, it also considers the possibility that the two may interact in shaping students' career aspirations.

## HYPOTHESIS

Students' career aspirations are not shaped by one single factor, but by the interaction between cultural preferences and exposure to digital environments.

## METHODS

### 1. Participants

#### **survey respondents :**

- A total of 33 respondents
- Mix of secondary school students (SS1-SS3) and undergraduate/college students
- Participation was voluntary and anonymous

#### **Student interviews :**

- A small group of SS1 and SS2 students were interviewed separately
- Provided deeper insights into their career aspirations, digital exposure and the influence of parents/community
- Participation was voluntary

#### **Teacher interviews (planned) :**

- 3-5 teachers from different subject areas (science, arts )
- Will share perspective on common student career aspirations, parental influence, and availability of digital exposure

### 2. Survey Design

#### **Format :**

- conducted using Google forms
- Combination of multi-choice, checkbox, and open-ended questions

#### **Respondents :**

- Secondary school students (SS1–SS3 at Dominion College International)
- Undergraduate/college students who also completed the same survey questions

#### **Content areas covered :**

- Digital Access: Frequency of access to computers, smartphones, and stable internet.
- Skill Acquisition: Whether students had learned digital skills, and how (e.g., school, self- learning).
- Career Preferences: Ideal career choices and motivations behind them.
- Cultural Perceptions: Views on which careers are most respected in their communities.
- Barriers to Tech Careers: Reasons students believe peers avoid technology-related fields.

#### **Student Interviews :**

- Conducted with a small group of SS1 and SS2 students (7-10)

- Questions focused on career aspirations, parental/community influence, and access to digital skills
- Allowed for more detailed responses beyond the survey

**Teacher Interviews :**

- Will include 3–5 teachers from various subject areas
- Questions cover ideal careers for students, career guidance given to students, parental influence, and student digital exposure

This structure allowed for comparison between digital exposure and cultural expectations to determine which factor more strongly influences career decisions

### **3. Data Analysis**

**Survey Responses :**

- Exported directly from Google forms into Google sheets for organization and review
- Multiple - choice and checkbox responses were summarized into percentages and frequencies
- Results will be displayed with bar graphs, pie charts, and tables to show trends clearly

**Open ended responses :**

- Grouped into themes such as parental influence, lack of digital exposure, perceived prestige of careers, and student interest
- Representative student comments will be quoted to highlight recurring ideas

**Comparisons :**

- Survey Findings and Quotes from interviews would be compared

- Teacher interviews will be analyzed qualitatively by coding responses into categories (e.g., cultural expectations, digital access, career guidance)
- Quotes from students and teachers will be included to support key findings

#### **Ethical consideration :**

- Participation in both surveys and interviews was voluntary
- No personal information (e.g., names) were collected
- Responses are being used strictly for academic purposes

## **Results**

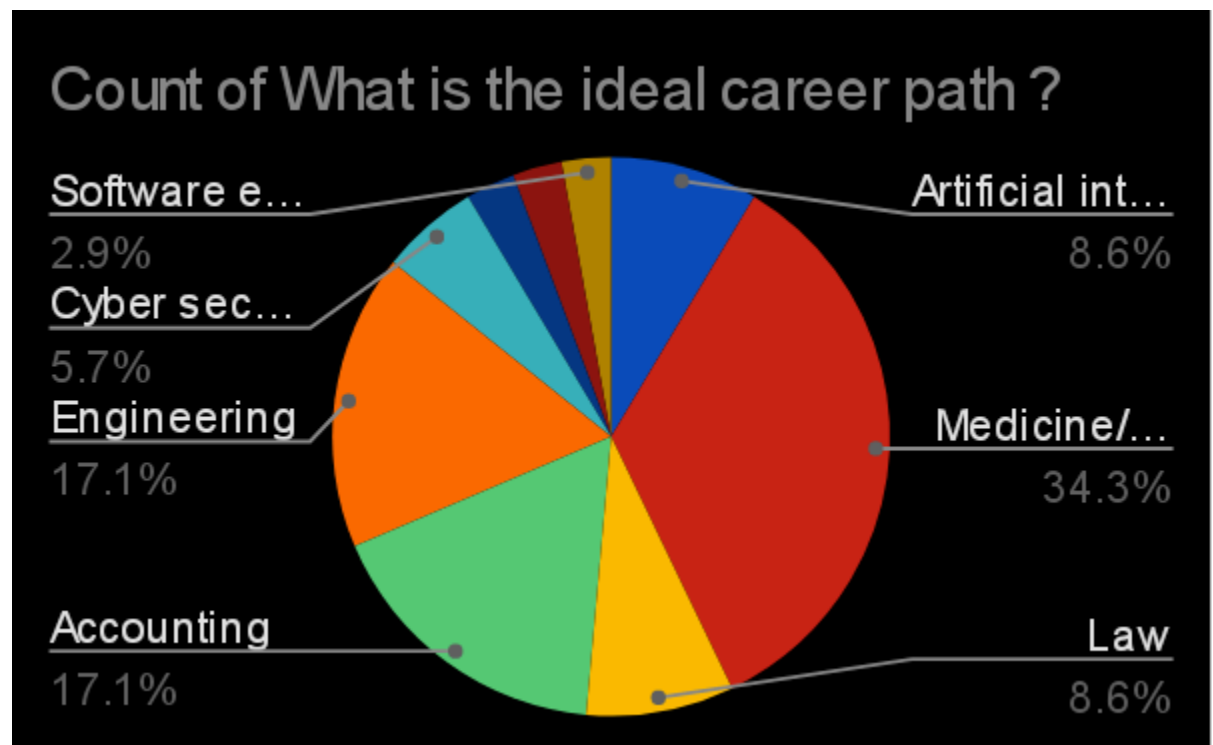
### **1. Career Preferences**

#### **Survey Findings :**

- Traditional careers (medicine, law, engineering, accounting): 77.1%
- Tech-oriented careers (computer science, data science, cybersecurity, etc.): 17.2%

#### **Visuals :**

fig.1



#### **Quotes :**

- “Medicine is the ideal career path for me because it pays a lot ”
- “My parents are pushing my life towards science related courses”
- “ I want to study medicine because my parents encourage it”

#### **Narrative :**

- The survey shows a clear preference for traditional professions among respondents. A

majority selected careers such as medicine, law, and engineering, while a substantially smaller share chose technology-oriented paths like computer science or cybersecurity. This pattern appears across both secondary and undergraduate groups, although undergraduates show slightly more openness to tech-related studies in a few cases. The accompanying pie chart (Figure 1) visually summarizes this distribution and helps highlight the relative gap between traditional and tech choices.

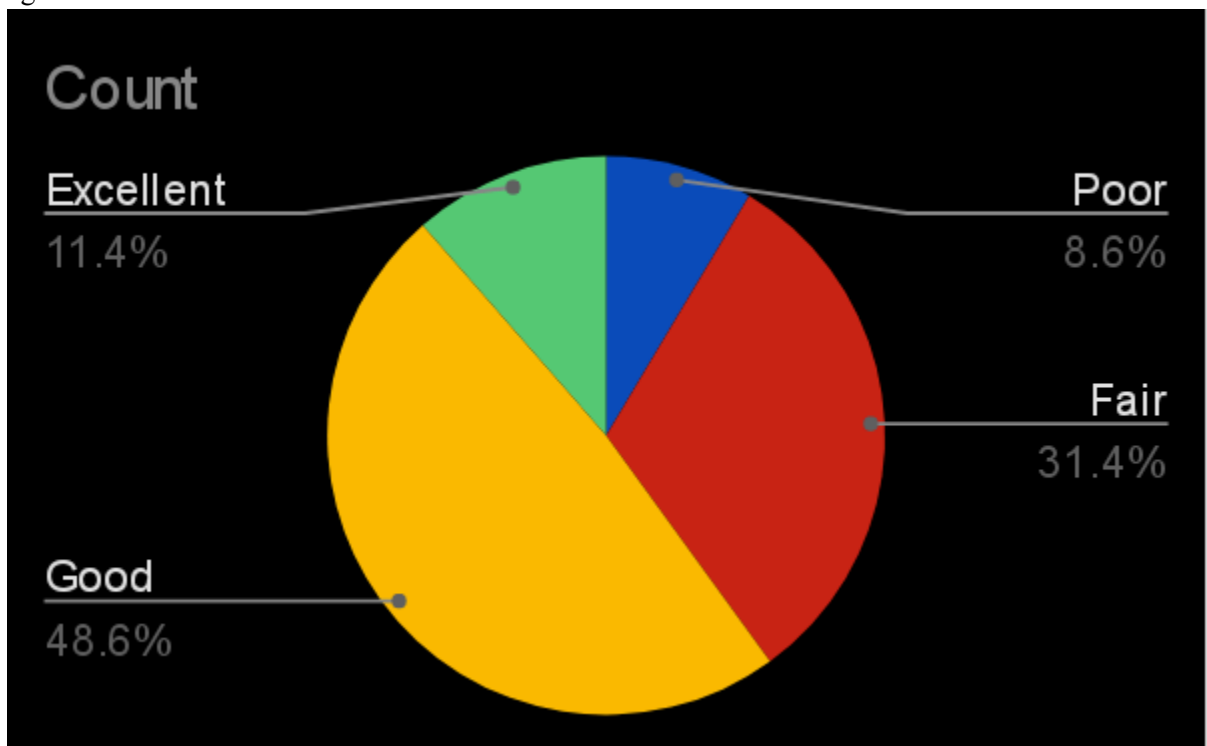
Student comments illuminate why the distribution looks like this. For example, the SS student who said their parents are “pushing my life towards science-related courses” illustrates parental steering toward culturally respected fields; the undergrad who expressed interest in computer science but lack of support shows that personal interest exists but is often constrained by social pressure. Taken together, the quantitative results and quotes suggest that while some students do want technology careers, social and familial expectations pull many toward established professions — a core tension your study investigates.

## 2. Access to Digital Tools And Skills

### Survey Findings:

- Excellent: 11.4%
- Good: 48.6%
- Fair: 31.4%
- Poor: 8.6%

Visual:  
fig.2



Interview Findings (n=10):

- 9 had smartphones
- 2 had computers
- 3 had consistent and stable internet

Quotes:

- “I have access to phones and the Internet - although not consistent - but not a laptop” (SS1 student)
- “ getting consistent internet is really expensive so I can't learn coding online efficiently ” (SS1 student)”

**Narrative :**

- Survey results showed that nearly half of the students (48.6%) rated their access to digital tools as Good and 11.4% rated it as Excellent. On the surface, this suggests that many students feel adequately connected. However, a sizable proportion of 31.4% reporting Fair access and 8.6% reporting Poor access, still experience limitations. Figure 2 illustrates this distribution, showing that while the majority lean toward positive ratings, a significant minority report ongoing struggles.

Interviews provided more detail about what “Good” or “Excellent” meant to students. Out of seven students interviewed, five reported owning smartphones, but only two had access to computers and just one had stable internet at home. This suggests that when students rate their access as “Good,” they may be referring mainly to smartphone ownership, which is useful for communication and entertainment but insufficient for learning advanced digital skills like coding.

The student quotes reinforce this interpretation. One SS1 student noted, “I have access to phones and the Internet - although not consistent - but not a laptop,” while another said, “Internet is too expensive, so I can’t learn coding online.” These comments show that cost and device shortages limit meaningful digital engagement. Taken together, the survey and interview findings indicate that although most students feel they have some access, it often does not translate into the kind of access required for building real technological competencies.

### 3. Exposure to Digital Skills

**Survey findings (n = 35) :**

- Students with at least one digital-skill training: 60%
- Students with none : 40%
- Sources of learning among the 21 students who learned: majority self-taught/online, several from friends/peers, and only  $\approx 3$  from school.

**Visual :**

fig.3

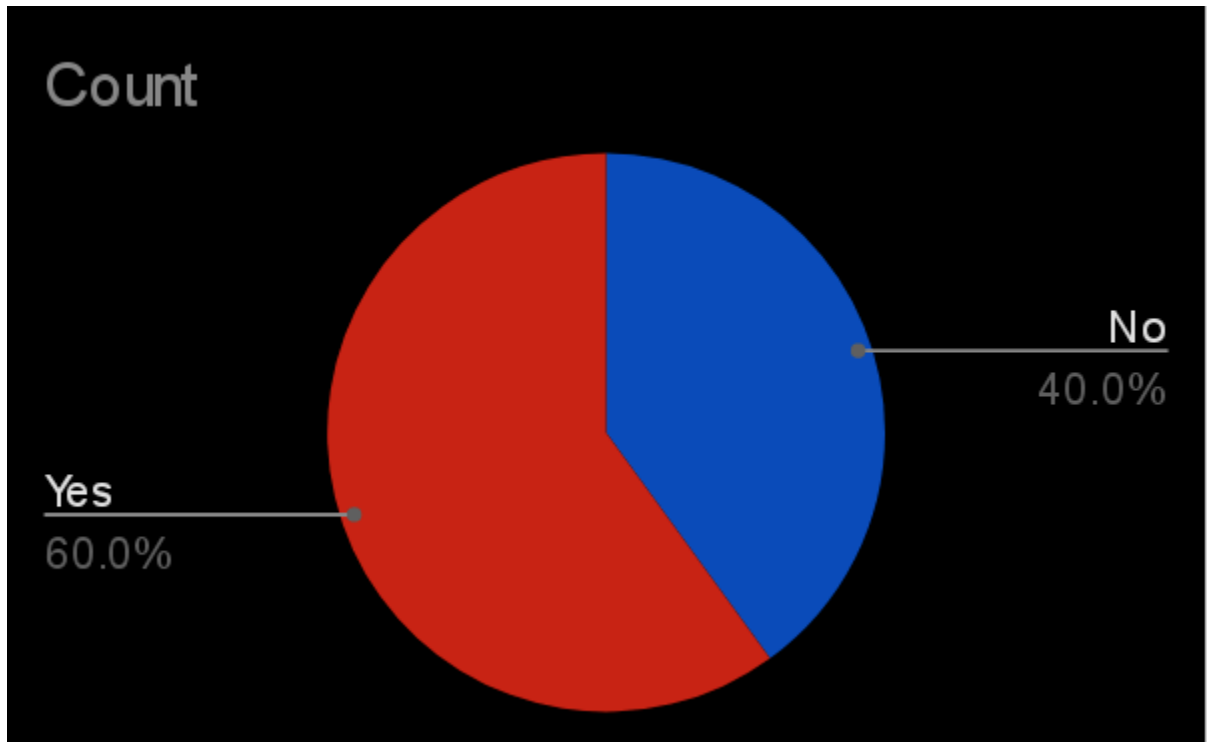
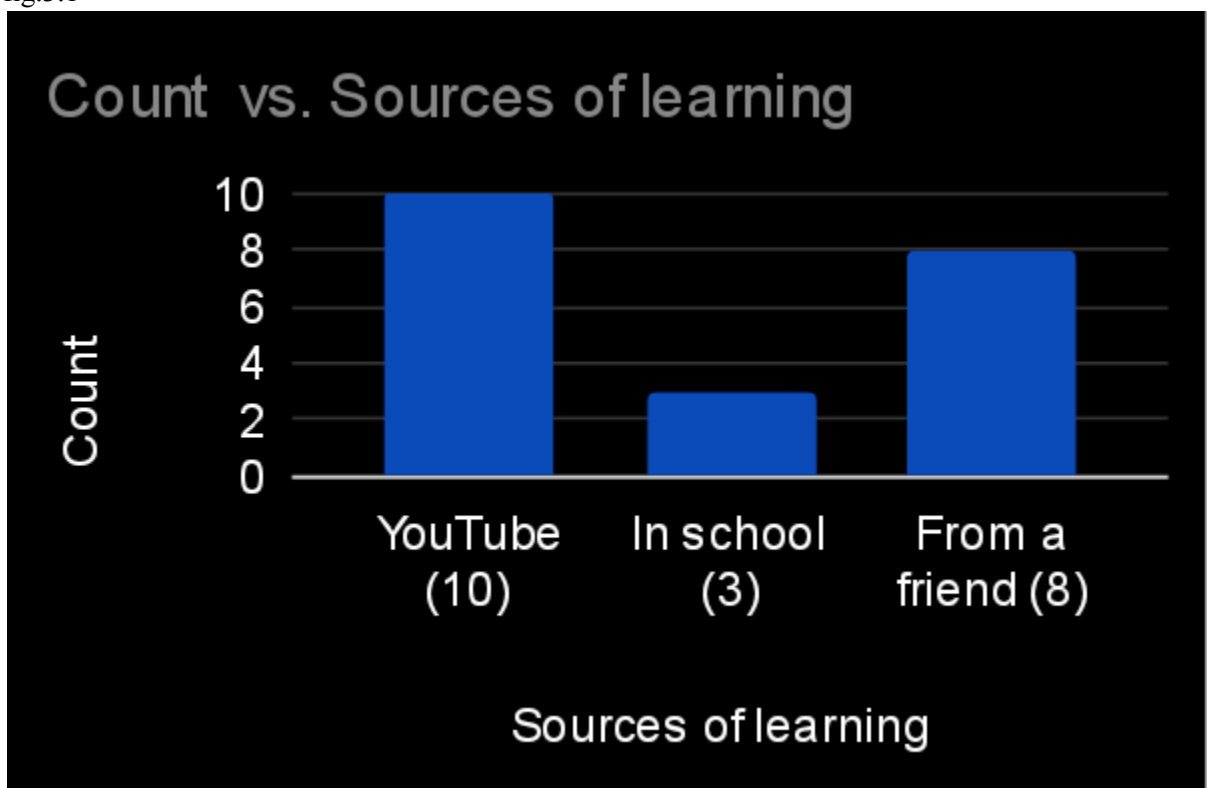


fig.3.1



**Interview Findings :**

- Students interviewed about skills: 10 (mainly secondary school students)
- Of these, 2 / 10 (20%) reported having learned any digital skill; 8 / 10 (80%) had not.

**Quotes :**

- “I haven't learned any digital skill, though I would love to learn some in school but I haven't yet because my school lacks the facilities” (SS2 Student)
- “i learned how to use Excel from watching YouTube videos”(undergrad)



- “I haven't learned any digital skills and neither do I want to learn them, because I think they're stupid”(SS1 Student)

**Narrative :**

The survey showed that 60% of respondents claimed to have learned at least one digital skill. However, this overall figure hides an important divide. The majority of those who had learned digital skills were undergraduates, while secondary school students made up most of those without exposure. This pattern was confirmed in the interviews: only 2 out of 10 secondary school students reported any digital training, meaning 80% had none.

Even among those who had learned, formal instruction was rare. Of the 21 respondents with skills, only about three credited their schools, while the majority learned independently online or with help from friends. This reliance on informal learning highlights the limited role of the formal school system in preparing students digitally.

The student voices echo this divide. An undergraduate explained, “I learned how to use Excel from YouTube,” demonstrating self-directed learning. A secondary school student lamented, “We don’t get real computer classes apart from typing,” while another dismissed the subject entirely, saying, “I haven’t learned any digital skill because I think they’re stupid.” These remarks show both the lack of structured opportunities and the negative perceptions some secondary school students hold toward digital skills.

Taken together, the findings show that digital skill exposure is concentrated among undergraduates, leaving secondary school students — who are still forming their career choices — with little or no preparation for technology-oriented futures.

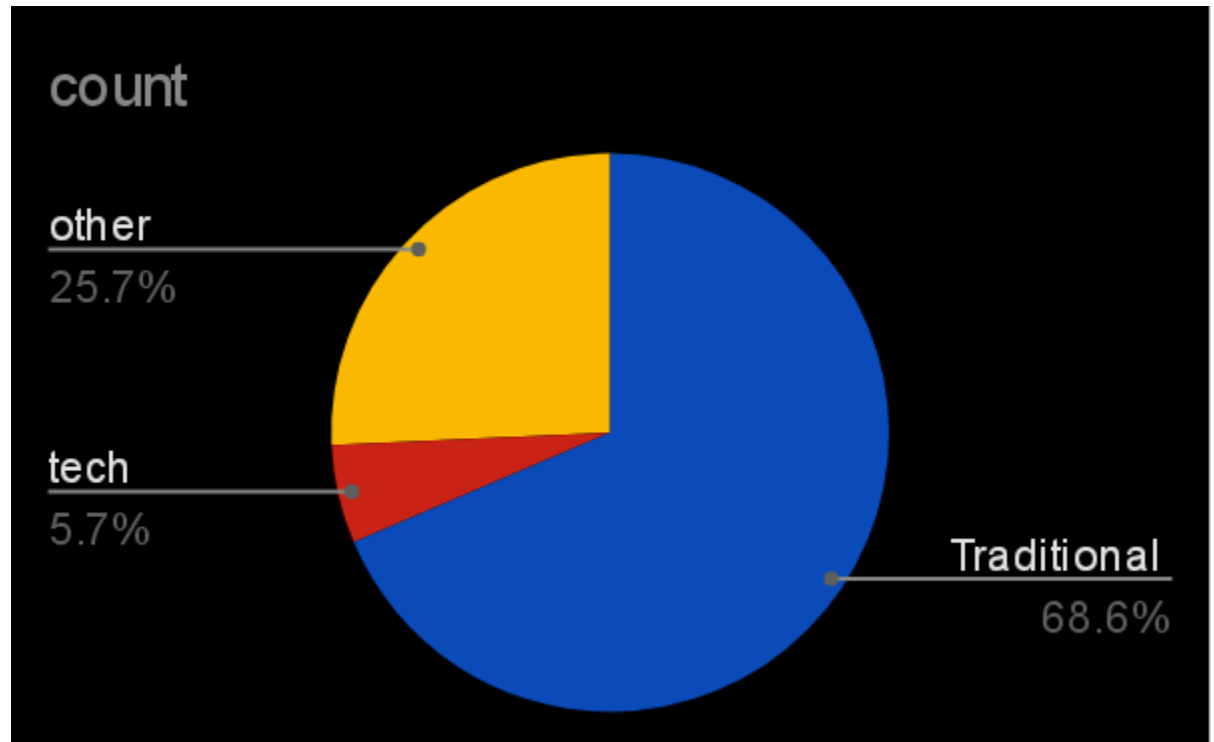
#### 4. Cultural or Community Influence

**Survey Findings (n = 35) :**

- When asked which careers are most respected in their community, 68.6% of students selected traditional careers such as medicine, law, engineering, and accounting. Only 5.7% chose technology-oriented careers, while 25.7% named other options such as teaching, business, or the arts.

**Visual :**

fig.4



**Quotes :**

- “My mom encourages me to become a medical doctor” (SS1 student)
- “My Dad wants me to follow in his footsteps and become a surveyor or engineer and he has suggested them to me countless times.” (SS1 Student)
- “My parents are pushing my life towards science related courses” (SS1 student)
- “My Teachers advised me to go for careers like medicine, Accounting or engineering” (SS2 student)
- “ based on the countless conversations I've had with different adults in my time, I can conclude that Doctors and lawyers are believed to be more successful in our community” (Under grad student)

**Narrative :**

- The data show that traditional careers dominate community perceptions of respect, with more than two-thirds (67.6%) of respondents reporting medicine, law, engineering, or accounting as the most valued paths. Tech-oriented careers, by contrast, were chosen by only 5.9% of students, indicating that technology is rarely associated with social prestige. Interestingly, 26.5% selected “other” careers, such as teaching or business, suggesting that while these are not seen as elite, they still carry more recognition than technology fields.

These results highlight the strong cultural weight placed on traditional professions and help explain why many students feel pressured to pursue them. As one undergrad put it, “Most people in my community see doctors and lawyers as the most successful.” A secondary school student added, “My parents think tech jobs are not serious,” reflecting how parental attitudes reinforce these stereotypes. This cultural bias makes it difficult for students to consider technology careers as equally valid, even when they may have personal interest or aptitude.

## 5. Barriers To Pursuing Tech Careers

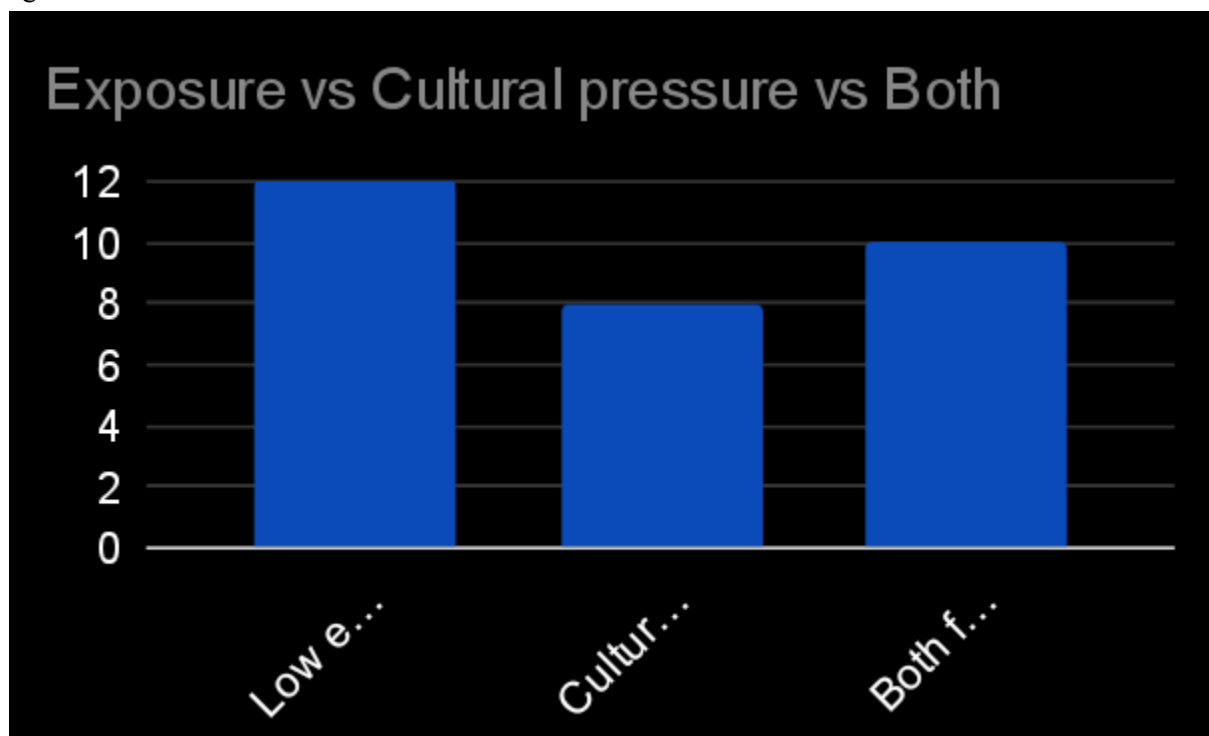
### Survey Findings :

When asked why students in their community often avoid pursuing technology careers, responses fell into three categories:

- Low exposure/awareness of digital environments (e.g., lack of access to computers, internet, or information about tech careers).
- Cultural pressure to pursue traditional and “prestigious” careers such as medicine, law, engineering, or accounting.
- A combination of both factors, where limited exposure reinforces cultural stereotypes.

visual :

fig.5



### Quotes :

- “We don’t really see much about tech, so it’s hard to even think of it as a career.” (SS1 student)
- “Parents and teachers push us to medicine and law because they believe it’s the best.” (SS2 student)
- It’s not just one thing — both exposure and pressure make people avoid tech.” (Undergrad respondent)
- Parents aren’t exposed to digital courses or environments, so they push their children to pursue more culturally acceptable careers like medicine, law, accounting, or engineering.” (Teacher interview)

**Narrative :**

- The results suggest that students avoid technology careers for overlapping reasons. Many students emphasized low exposure and awareness, noting that without access to digital tools or role models, it is difficult to see technology as a viable path. Others pointed to cultural pressure, where families and teachers elevate traditional careers as the most respected. Importantly, a significant number described the issue as a combination of both, showing how limited exposure to digital environments reinforces cultural preferences.

The voices of both students and teachers highlight this connection. One undergrad explained, “It’s not just one thing — both exposure and pressure make people avoid tech.” A teacher confirmed this perspective, observing, “Parents aren’t exposed to digital courses or environments, so they push their children to pursue more culturally acceptable careers like medicine, law, accounting, or engineering.” These insights suggest that addressing only one factor will not be enough; expanding awareness and access must go hand-in-hand with shifting cultural attitudes.

## 6. Teacher Insights

**Interview Findings :**

- Teachers report parental pressure, parents’ low exposure to digital fields, limited school curriculum, ad hoc student interest

**Representative Quotes :**

- “Parents aren’t exposed to digital courses or environments, so they push their children to pursue more culturally acceptable careers like medicine, law, accounting, or engineering.” (Teacher interview)
- “Most teachers in this school are still biased towards common and generally accepted careers, like medicine and engineering, often encouraging students to follow them because they believe it's best for them based on stereotypes of those careers getting the most pay.”
- “Students do not get access to Digital skills in this school, as it is not even part of the curriculum, and this is a major limiting factor to the exposure of students to tech related career paths.”

**Narrative:**

- Teacher interviews corroborate and extend the student data. Educators observed that parents often lack knowledge of modern digital careers and consequently recommend familiar, culturally validated professions. The teacher quote above succinctly ties parental lack of exposure to the transmission of cultural expectations. Teachers also reported limited curriculum time for meaningful digital skills and few school-based initiatives (such as coding clubs) that could spark and sustain student interest.

These comments suggest that any effort to boost tech career uptake must involve the adults who advise students — not just the students themselves. Parent/community outreach, teacher training, and curriculum development together could help shift the guidance students receive and increase the likelihood that interest in tech translates into concrete steps (courses, clubs, internships).

## 7. Key Themes across the Data Set

Summary :

- Across survey responses and interviews, five themes consistently emerge: (1) strong parental and community influence steering students toward traditional careers; (2) unequal access to appropriate digital tools and stable internet; (3) limited formal exposure to digital skills within schools; (4) negative or dismissive attitudes toward tech careers among some students and adults; and (5) a feedback loop in which parents' own low exposure reinforces cultural expectations that limit students' choices. Together these patterns show that culture and exposure are intertwined: lack of exposure makes cultural defaults more powerful, while exposure can disrupt those defaults when available.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether Nigerian students' avoidance of technology-related careers is primarily influenced by deeply rooted cultural preferences or by low exposure to digital environments. The results suggest that both factors play important roles, but they often intersect in ways that reinforce one another.

### Cultural Pressures and Career Choices

The dominance of traditional career aspirations in this study reflects long-standing cultural norms. Over two-thirds of respondents (68.6%) identified medicine, law, engineering, or accounting as the most respected careers in their communities, while only 5.7% selected technology fields. This finding is consistent with Egbo (n.d.) and Okesina & Famolu (n.d.), who documented strong parental influence in steering students toward culturally prestigious professions. A student quote from this study, "My parents are pushing my life towards science-related courses," mirrors what Egbo observed in Enugu and confirms that parental pressure is a powerful determinant of career choice.

This cultural dynamic is further reinforced by respect hierarchies in Nigerian communities, where professions like medicine and law symbolize success and stability (Enems Project, 2025). Technology-related fields, on the other hand, are rarely portrayed with the same prestige. The result is a generational cycle where both students and parents continue to value traditional careers over emerging fields.

### Exposure and Access to Digital Environments

While culture provides a powerful push toward traditional careers, exposure to digital environments plays an equally important role. The survey showed that 60% of respondents reported having learned a digital skill, but this figure was misleading. The majority of those with skills were undergraduates; among secondary school respondents, only 20% (2 out of 10 interviewed) had learned any digital skills at all. This supports UNICEF's (Edema, n.d.; Victor, 2024) finding that only 7% of Nigerian youth possess ICT skills. Lawal (2025) also reported that fewer than 30% of public schools have computer labs, reinforcing the conclusion that access to meaningful digital environments remains severely limited at the secondary level.

The quality of exposure is also important. Among those who had learned skills, most were self-taught through online resources or friends, while only three credited formal school instruction. As one student

explained, “We don’t get real computer classes apart from typing.” This aligns with Ajayi et al. (2018), who showed that the digital divide in Akure metropolis strongly constrained students’ ability to pursue IT careers. Thus, while exposure exists for some, it remains shallow, unstructured, and unevenly distributed.

### **Intersections of Culture and Exposure**

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study is that culture and exposure are not independent forces but are deeply interconnected. The teacher interview underscored this: “Parents aren’t exposed to digital courses or environments, so they push their children to pursue more culturally acceptable careers like medicine, law, accounting, or engineering.” This suggests that limited parental exposure feeds cultural stereotypes, which in turn restrict students’ options.

Other studies support this overlap. BusinessDay (2023) found that 85% of Nigerian graduates lack digital skills, meaning entire families and communities may have little experience with technology. In such contexts, cultural respect for traditional careers is not just a preference but also a consequence of unfamiliarity with digital work. Enems Project (2025) further observed that digital media platforms can shift career aspirations when students are exposed to them, suggesting that lack of awareness, rather than lack of ability, is a critical barrier.

### **Unexpected Findings: Negative Attitudes Toward Technology**

One surprising outcome of this study was the negative perception some students held toward digital skills. A secondary school respondent stated, “I haven’t learned any digital skill because I think they’re stupid.” While isolated, this view reflects how cultural stereotypes and lack of exposure can shape attitudes in ways that dismiss technology as unworthy. Such perceptions were not widely reported in earlier studies, which tended to focus on access and parental influence. This suggests that in addition to exposure and culture, student attitudes—shaped by both factors—may be an emerging barrier to technology careers.

### **Implications for Policy and Education**

These findings have important implications. First, interventions must address both cultural influence and exposure simultaneously, as they reinforce each other. Expanding computer labs and internet access, as Lawal (2025) recommends, is necessary but insufficient if cultural biases remain. Similarly, awareness campaigns highlighting the value of technology careers may fail if students lack access to digital environments where they can build real skills.

Second, parental and teacher engagement is crucial. Both Egbo (n.d.) and Okesina & Famolu (n.d.) emphasize that students’ career choices are strongly shaped by parental influence. The results of this study support that view, suggesting that programs designed to raise parents’ awareness of digital careers could help reduce cultural barriers.

Finally, digital literacy initiatives should target secondary school students earlier. By the time students reach university, many have already internalized cultural expectations and narrowed their options. Introducing technology clubs, online career workshops, and integrating ICT skills into the curriculum at the secondary level would help balance cultural influences with meaningful exposure.

### **Conclusion of Discussion**

In summary, this study shows that cultural stereotypes and lack of digital exposure are both major

influences on Nigerian students' career choices, but their interaction is particularly powerful. The cultural respect for medicine, law, and engineering is reinforced by parents' and students' own lack of exposure to digital environments. Addressing this gap requires a twofold strategy: expanding access to digital skills and reshaping cultural narratives around technology careers. Without both, students are likely to continue avoiding technology paths, even as the global economy demands them.

## Conclusion

This study set out to examine whether Nigerian students avoid technology-related careers because of cultural preferences or low exposure to digital environments. The findings reveal that both factors are important, but they are also deeply interconnected. On one hand, cultural norms continue to elevate medicine, law, engineering, and accounting as the most respected career paths, with 68.6% of students identifying them as prestigious. On the other hand, exposure to digital skills and environments remains uneven, with most secondary school students reporting little to no meaningful training.

The combination of these forces creates a reinforcing cycle. Parents and teachers, who themselves have limited exposure to digital careers, tend to push children toward traditional professions. Students, lacking role models, resources, and structured digital training, find it difficult to view technology as a serious option. In some cases, this even results in negative attitudes, with a few students dismissing digital skills altogether.

Breaking this cycle requires addressing culture and exposure at the same time. Schools should expand ICT facilities and integrate digital skills into the curriculum at earlier stages. At the same time, communities and parents must be made aware of the importance of technology careers for the future of work. Programs such as tech clubs, awareness workshops, and online learning platforms could help students see technology as both practical and prestigious.

In conclusion, the results suggest that Nigerian students' career aspirations are shaped not by a single barrier, but by the intersection of cultural expectations and digital exclusion. Tackling both issues simultaneously is critical if future generations are to see technology careers not as unusual or "unserious," but as respected pathways that match global trends.

## Recommendations :

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

### **1. Integrate digital skills into secondary school curricula**

Schools should move beyond basic computer typing lessons and include practical digital skills such as coding, data analysis, and online research.

### **2. Establish tech clubs and workshops**

Student-led and teacher-supported clubs can provide informal spaces to learn and practice digital skills, bridging the gap left by formal instruction.

### **3. Raise parental and community awareness**

Programs should be developed to inform parents about the value of technology careers, reducing the stigma that these fields are “less prestigious” compared to medicine or law.

### **4. Provide access to digital tools and resources**

Government and private sector partnerships can help ensure schools are equipped with computer labs, reliable internet, and up-to-date learning materials.

### **5. Highlight role models in technology**

Inviting guest speakers, showcasing success stories, or using media campaigns can give students real examples of Nigerians thriving in tech careers, countering cultural stereotypes.

### **6. Encourage blended learning approaches**

Schools should leverage online platforms in combination with classroom teaching, allowing students to benefit from global resources even when local infrastructure is limited.

### **7. Policy changes**

The government should mandate ICT labs in all secondary schools by 2030, addressing the gap noted by Lawal (2025) that fewer than 30% currently have computer labs

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