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Factors Affecting the Career Choice of Undergraduates in Nigerian Library and Information Science Schools

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Abstract

It has been observed that not many undergraduates of Nigerian universities apply to study library and information science (LIS) in the first instance but as a last resort. This situation is unwholesome for the future of LIS profession in Nigeria. The objective of this study, therefore, was to investigate the low preference for library and information science as a first-choice course of study by the undergraduates of Nigerian library schools. The survey research design was adopted, with the Career Choice Influence Questionnaire, as the main data collection instrument. In all, 1,228 students from eight Nigerian university library schools participated in the study. The study revealed that majority of the students did not make LIS course their first choice, but ended up in the library school as a last resort. However, 38.4% who chose the course were influenced mostly by previous library work experience. Available sources of information on the course include parents/relations (29.9%) and peers (9.20%).

There are slightly more male LIS students (50.3%) than females (49.7%), indicating its equal popularity among both sexes. That 46.9% of them were in the 22-26 age bracket showed that the younger undergraduates constitute the majority. The study concludes that despite the evidence of improved popularity of the programme among the respondents, it remains largely unpopular among prospective undergraduates in Nigeria, when compared with such other courses as accountancy, medicine and law. The paper recommends that public awareness about the profession and the programme be intensified by all stakeholders if it must attract some of the best brains in the country who can meet the challenges of the profession in Nigeria.

Introduction

Generally, researchers have investigated issues relating to aspects of career choice by teenagers (Breakwell, et al., 1988; Dick and Rallis, 1991; Jawitz, et al. 2000; Woolnough, 1994). Southwick (2000), for example, observes the trend toward a decline in graduate enrolments in health-related fields, as well as science and engineering, having recorded enrolment decline from 1993–1997, after four decades of annual increases. A continuing decline of admissions in these areas may lead to a shortage of skilled health and science workers and this could ultimately hurt the society. Palmer (2005) also observes the reduction in the numbers and calibre of students seeking admissions into engineering education in Australia. Poor image of the engineering profession generally and the poor understanding of engineering in schools were identified as contributing reasons for this situation.

In Nigeria, many youths make wrong career choices due to ignorance, inexperience, peer pressure, advice from friends, parents and teachers, or as a result of the prestige attached to certain jobs without adequate vocational guidance and career counselling (Salami, 1999). Consequently, many of them are unsuited for their careers, as they usually find themselves in jobs that do not satisfy their value needs. When this occurs, they constitute nuisance to themselves and their employers. They are usually unable to contribute meaningfully to the society, and they ultimately become liability to the nation.

A survey of the career choice of MLS students at both the Ibadan and Zaria library schools by Bello (1991) focussed on the 1989-91 sets, with an enrolment capacity of 115 students from both library schools. Some of its outcomes are that median age bracket of the students falls within the age range 26-30 years, and are predominantly males, are already having work experiences; majority of whom have first-degree background in Arts, Education and Social Sciences. Similarly, Alemna (1991), in a survey of the careers and characteristics of past post-graduate diploma students of the Department of Library and Archival Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, covering 1981/82 to 1987/88, examined such variables as sex, choice of career, pre-career jobs, job mobility, job satisfaction, and the relevance of the course contents to their present employment. Findings on the choice of librarianship as a career revealed that most respondents had previous work experience especially in teaching with only a few having worked in the library before enrolment. The respondents' choice was predicated on opportunity for intellectual development and for continuing formal education, and that graduates showed a liking for books; job security, advice from a librarian, good salary and attractive working environment, in that order. Kisiedu (1993) surveyed past post-graduate diploma students of the same department for the period 1970/71 to 1980/81 and found that most Ghanaian librarians first considered librarianship as a career after but not during their secondary education.

Literature Review

Sax (1994) examines students' initial interest in scientific careers, factors influencing career choice during college, and how these factors differ between

men and women. Men who abandon career aspirations appear to be driven by financial concerns, whereas women who decide not to pursue scientific career appear more concerned with the social good of their career choice. Ferry (2006) asserts that adolescent occupational choice is influenced by many factors, including life context, personal aptitudes, and educational attainment. He contends further that whether college-bound or work-bound, meeting the challenge of this developmental milestone is critical in adolescents' lives.

Students all over the world are usually faced with the task of career decision making. The choice of careers, subjects, and courses of study in schools and of subsequent paths to follow is always difficult problems facing prospective undergraduates. Often, choosing the right subject combination leading to the right profession can make the difference between enjoying and detesting the career in future. Dedicating oneself to career choices that are unattainable leads to frustration. Each individual undertaking the process is influenced by many factors, including the context in which they live, their personal aptitudes, and educational attainment (Bandura, et al. 2001).

However, despite the fact that much has been written about the individual variables affecting career aspirations and of the relationships among them, a survey of the literature, however, revealed that very little empirical studies on this subject exist, especially regarding Nigerian library and information science school students. This study, therefore, serves to fill the gap in this aspect of the literature.

The Current Challenges in the Library and Information Science Profession

The changes affecting LIS, especially in recent times, have been phenomenal. Some of these are the expanding frontiers of knowledge, the improvement in and application of modern technology and the increased awareness and complexity in demand for information by the society the library exists to serve (Kargbo, 1999). The contemporary scenario predominated by information and knowledge perspectives indicates the pressing need to educate and train the library and information manpower towards a sustainable professional competence. Thus, librarians in the electronic age need to be equipped with necessary skills and competence to

satisfy the high level, complex and ever-growing multifarious information needs of users. Present and future librarians are expected to explore and exploit the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for modern library practice. Only then would they be able to have greater access to a rich and diverse range of electronic library resources that are presently dominating the world of information storage, processing, retrieval and dissemination. Kigongo-Bukenya (1999) aptly summarises these requirements by asserting that library and information professionals are required to be "contingent", that is their orientation, skills and techniques, must be "the best fit" to measure up to the ever-changing information society needs. Thus, library and information science courses must review its philosophy and content continuously, so as to respond to the changing realities of the workplace and to the changing roles and expectations of the information professional.

Burke and Peter (1992) argue, however, that it is "clear that students come to the courses with, sometimes, vague expectations, often based on outdated ideas of what the library profession involves, or with a fixed intention to follow down a specific road".

Informal contacts by the authors with new entrants into some Nigerian library schools showed that many of them would have preferred other courses of study to library and information science. It seems also that many fresh students in these schools offered to study the course only after being rejected by the department of first choice, owing to low scores obtained at the University Matriculation Examination (UME).

It is on record, for instance, that the Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies, University of Ibadan had only 29 candidates who chose the course originally in the 2002/2003 academic session. Out of this, only 19 candidates, who scored above cut-off marks, were on the first admission list of 56 candidates. This means that many of the admitted students came from supplementary lists, consisting of candidates who, perhaps, could not meet up with the UME score requirements of their preferred courses. Discussion with some lecturers in other library schools showed that this trend pervades the schools. In fact, some of the students

often expressed readiness to defect, if possible to other professions on completing their programme in library and information studies.

Agumanu (1989) surveyed the second, third and fourth year students of the Imo State University library school with a view to identifying factors that influenced their choice of the courses and found that it was not a typical first choice for these students as 80% respondents had the initial choice of Law. The study by Akussah, Tackie and Tihamiyu (1999) examined the entry-level perceptions and motivations of sub-degree diploma and postgraduate degree students of the Department of Library and Archival Studies, University of Ghana, and found that archives diploma students are more confident of their programmes, profession and careers than their librarianship counterparts. Besides, young and diploma students were less committed to careers in their chosen professions than older and M.A. students hoping to use the diploma qualification to further their education in other subjects, if necessary.

Tihamiyu, Akussah and Tackie (1999) followed up with another study on changes in the entry-level perceptions and motivations of sub-degree diploma and post-graduate degree students after one year training at the same Department. Students' perceptions at the start of their programmes were compared to those given a year after. This revealed that both archives and library studies students improved their perceptions of the library professions and careers significantly. Librarianship students improved from an initially lower perception of their professions and careers compared to what archives students had of theirs. Archives students improved their perceptions most probably because they had attended the joint courses of the parallel archives and library programmes of the Department which probably enabled them to increase their awareness of the essence and importance of the librarianship profession and careers relative to theirs.

Research Problem

From the literature review, it is obvious that only a few undergraduate students in Nigeria usually apply to study library and information science as a first choice course. Many of those who are eventually admitted into the library schools came on account of their failure to secure admission to other preferred

departments. This development tends to turn library schools in Nigeria into dumping ground for candidates who could not be admitted to study their preferred courses. That the majority of prospective undergraduates chose to study this course only as a last resort is undesirable for the future of a profession as dynamic as LIS.

This study, therefore, investigated the factors affecting the career choice of undergraduates of Nigerian library schools. The motivating questions were: Why is library and information science not a popular course among the prospective students? Why do only a few applicants make LIS their first choice when applying to universities? What informed their preferences?

The main objectives of this study were to find out the subject background of trainees in library and information science schools in Nigeria, the reasons for choosing library and information science, and the sources of information used in choosing library and information science.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design targeting thousands of undergraduates spread across several university-based library schools in Nigeria. At the time of this study in 2004, there were 15 library schools. However, a preliminary survey revealed that some library schools existed only as appendages of other independent departments under which they operate, such that only a few courses on LIS were offered as cognate or minor. Others were either of a complete departure from the conventional LIS programme or the enrolment number was too low to

meet the requirement of this research. In these categories are Awka, Ekpoma, Enugu, Uyo, Babcock and Madonna. The Minna library school was only in its third year, and, therefore was used for the pilot study. Eight library schools located in Ibadan, Zaria, Kano, Maiduguri, Nsukka, Uturu, Abraka and Owerri were used for the study. The eight schools had a student population of 3067 at the time of the study.

From the study population of 3067, a sample size of 1,240 (40.3%) was drawn, using the stratified proportional random sampling technique to ensure equitable representation and reduce bias. Each library school was stratified into four levels of 100, 200, 300 and 400 and 40% of the population at each level was drawn as the sample size. Table 1 shows the distribution of the study and sample populations.

Thus, 1240 respondents were drawn as sample from the study population (3067) to ensure that the study sample cuts across the old and new generations of library schools. In each level, 40% of the population was selected as sample, making for both consistency and uniformity in the sample sizes drawn from across the selected library schools. It is also indicative of the proportional stratified sampling technique employed in determining the sample for the study. This is representative, as it constitutes 40% of the study population. The sample size is therefore considered adequate for the study. Data for the study were collected from primary and secondary sources. The Career Choice Influence Questionnaire (CCIQ), as well as participant observation and verification of the students' entry records, served as instruments for data collection. Descriptive statistical techniques like tables of frequency counts and percentages were employed in the analysis.

Table: 1 Study Population and Sample

S/N.	Library School	Study Population	Study Sample
1.	Abia State University, Uturu	353	142
2.	Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	308	125
3.	Bayero University, Kano	744	302
4.	Delta State University, Abraka	381	154
5.	Imo State University, Owerri	459	185
6.	University of Ibadan, Ibadan	189	76
7.	University of Maiduguri	433	176
8	University of Nigeria, Nsukka	200	80
	Total	3,067	1,240

Findings and Discussions of the Results

Out of the 1240 copies of the questionnaire administered, 1228 (99.03%) were completed, returned and found useable for the analysis. The total number of respondents was 1228, comprising of 618 (50.33%) male and 610 (49.67%) female. This shows that LIS profession can no longer be considered a female-dominated profession. The breakdown of

Table 2. Respondents' GCE/Ordinary Level/NECO Subject Background

S/N.	Subject Background	Respondents	%
1.	Commercial	98	7.98
2.	Science	280	22.80
3.	Social Science	402	32.74
4.	Arts	448	36.48
	Total	1228	100

their age brackets indicates that the majority were in the 22-26 years bracket, which has a total figure of 576 (46.91%).

Table 3: First Choice Programmes of Respondents

S/N	Programmes	Respondents	%
1.	Medicine	5	0.41
2.	Pharmacy	9	0.73
3.	Engineering	26	2.12
4.	Education	28	2.27
5.	Arts/Humanities	152	12.38
6.	Sciences	176	14.33
7.	Social Sciences	360	29.32
8.	Library and Information Science	472	38.44
	Total	1228	100

Looking at the secondary school subject background of respondents, table 2 shows that Arts had the highest rate of 36.48%, followed by Social

Science (32.74%), Science (22.80%) and Commercial (7.98%). Although, more respondents had Arts and Social Science backgrounds and fewer had Science and Commercial subject backgrounds, the diverse range of subject backgrounds of respondents shown in table 2 allows for a unique learning environment, a demonstration of the multi-disciplinary nature of the course.

The results in table 3 indicate that a significant proportion (38.44%) of the respondents made library and information science their first choice. This was mainly influenced by previous library work experience, and, expectations, therefore, thus expecting prospects of career progression. This was followed by Social Sciences (29.32%), Sciences (14.33%), Arts and Humanities (12.38%), Education (2.27%); Engineering (2.12%), followed by Pharmacy (0.73%) and Medicine (0.41%) in that order. These showed a wide range of first choice courses, which, when grouped into library and information science and others revealed a higher first choice preference for courses other than library and information science.

Table 4 reveals that those who made LIS a first choice course had a variety of reasons for doing so, but were also mostly influenced by previous library work experience. It is noteworthy that only 9.96% made their choice on account of 'high social status and respect. This is highly indicative of the low popularity level of the course in Nigeria. Interestingly, good pay was not prominent among the influencing factors. This is in contrast with the findings of Ahmed et. al (1997) that "students who intend to pursue a Chartered Accountancy (CA) career place significantly greater importance on financial and job-related factors and perceived benefit-cost ratio than those who chose a non-accounting career." It partly

Table 4: Reasons for the First Choice of Library and Information Science Programme

S/N.	Reasons for the Choice	Frequency	Proportion of Respondents (%)
1.	High social status and respect	47	9.96
2.	Prospect of well-paid jobs	52	11.02
3.	Bright future career prospects	59	12.50
4.	Good working conditions	60	12.71
5.	Prospect of well-secured jobs	74	15.68
6.	Library working experience	325	68.86

N = 472

agrees, however, with that of Rooney et al. (2004) that majority of their study's participants had 'a secure attachment style implying that they are people-oriented and satisfied with their choice of career.' However, Saxton and Davies (2000) found that the three factors most frequently cited by students as important influences in career choice were that the course 'allows for professional development' (94%), 'use of professional knowledge' (94%), and 'finding the work personally rewarding' (89%).

Table 5: When Respondents First Became Aware of the Programme

S/N	First Awareness Period	Respondents	%
1.	Primary school	39	3.18
2.	Secondary school	151	12.30
3.	After secondary school	282	22.96
4.	Inability to secure admission to preferred course	756	61.56
	Total	1228	100

The results concerning respondents' first awareness of the course as indicated in table 5 are broadly categorised into 'before' and 'after' secondary school. Only 3.18% had early awareness (during primary school), followed by 12.30% who became aware of LIS while in secondary school. It is unfortunate that as much as 61.56% of the respondents got to know about the course only after

failing to secure admission to a preferred course in the university. Overall, the total proportion of students who were aware of the course before getting to the university was only stands at 38.44%. Ignorance about library and information science among most post-primary school leavers is therefore likely to be a key factor responsible for its low-level preference and popularity. This is unlike the case of other professions such as medicine, pharmacy, engineering and accountancy, where awareness of and interest among students is very high before they are ready for tertiary level education.

Availability of information sources on LIS is likely to be an important determinant when respondents first became aware of the course as shown in table 6. It is interesting that parents and/or relations constituted the main source of information for the respondents on the course prior to their admission. Parents and/or relations are known to have great influence on the career choice of their children and wards. This finding is in support of that by Sukovieff (2004), which correlated parent and parental occupation with students' career choice.

When the respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they believed that LIS possesses the characteristics of a good future career, the majority (55.80%) affirmed it, (17.51%) did not, while 26.63% were undecided. The bulk of respondents in the last two categories were found to be new entrants at the 100 and 200 levels of the course. This is an indication that their current views could be influenced by longer stay in the library school.

Table 6: Available Sources of Information on Library and Information Science

S/N.	Sources of Information	Frequency	Proportion of Respondents (%)
1.	Secondary School Guidance-Counsellor	89	7.24
2.	Secondary School Principal	98	7.98
3.	Secondary School Teacher	102	8.31
4.	Peers	113	9.20
5.	Radio, Television and Newspapers	181	14.74
6.	UME/JAMB Brochure	203	16.53
7.	On Campus During Admission Period	295	24.02
8.	Parents and/or Relations	367	29.89

N = 472

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study shed more light on the impression that library schools in Nigeria are dumping ground for unintelligent students. In particular, the findings that 38.44% of the respondents made library and information science their first choice course, is a sign that LIS is gaining popularity among the youth in the country. This also differs from those of Agumanu (1989) and Kantumoya (1993) where the general perception of LIS profession was largely negative.

That majority of those who chose the course initially had previous library work experience imply that sufficient exposure to library work is a key factor in the choice made. Their positive perceptions of the profession were the basis for the choice made. Conversely, that many others did not make such a choice might be due to ignorance about the course. Furthermore, that the majority of those who do not wish to remain in the profession were mainly first and second year students indicated that their current disposition could be changed by longer stay in the library school. These findings confirm that ignorance or inadequate awareness about library and information science programme among post-primary school leavers was a key factor responsible for its low-level preference and popularity. This agrees with the assertion by Hoppock (1976) that career choice information helps the individual to discover the career that meets his needs, what it offers and demands. Indeed, satisfying vocational choices become more likely when the individual successfully tests knowledge of assets and abilities against that of occupations and their characteristics. The emphasis is that "having complete insight into personal traits would not be enough in making vocational plans, until knowledge of occupations become available".

Conclusions

The evidence from this study of improved popularity of the course among the study's respondents notwithstanding, library and information science is still largely unpopular among prospective undergraduate students in Nigeria. This is so especially when compared with such other high profile courses as accountancy, medicine and law. However, the low popularity of the course among the youth is due more to ignorance on the essence,

utility and career prospects of the course than on the inherent nature of LIS. Ignorance about the existence of LIS and what it entails among most post-primary school leavers was a key factor affecting its low-level preference and popularity. Exposure of the students to the theory and practice of the programme, the profession and their prospects both to the society and the practitioners engendered in them a more positive impression of the programme.

The diverse subject backgrounds of undergraduate students in Nigerian library schools ranging from social sciences, arts, humanities to commercial, is a clear advantage to the profession. This allows for subject specialisation by graduates in their future career.

Recommendations

Generally, the findings of this study have implications for planning the recruitment into the LIS profession in Nigeria, as they suggest why the individual gets into such a career that could offer the highest income possible and provide several fringe benefits.

Based on the findings of the study, it is hereby recommended that: -

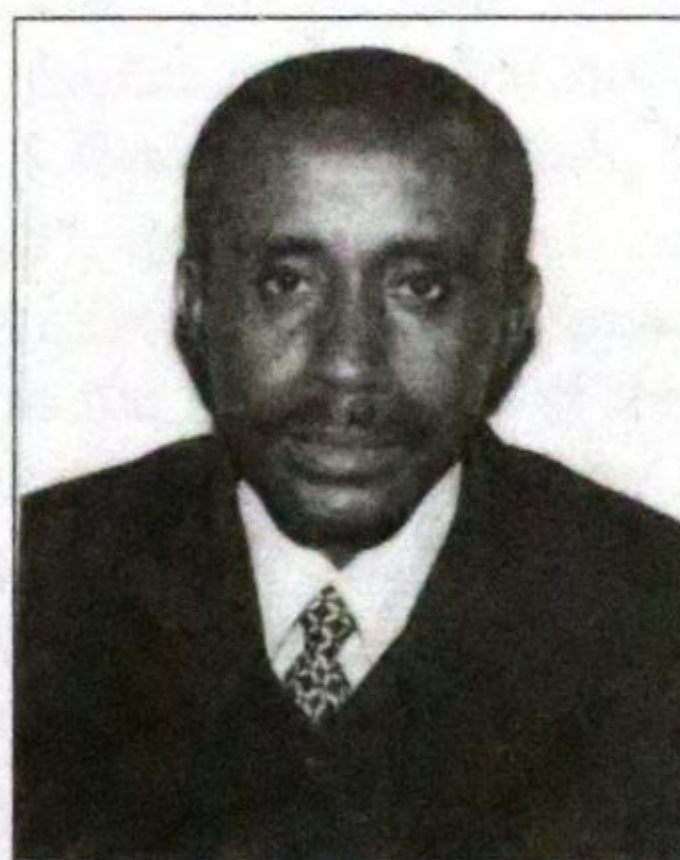
- Adequate and sustained publicity, especially among the youth in the primary and post-primary schools, should be made by the Nigerian Library Association, in order to increase awareness on the benefits of LIS to society and so popularise the profession. This publicity must be made in collaboration with government and other non-governmental agencies to reach the grassroots, especially primary and secondary schools. The guidance counsellors in schools will have an important role to play in this regard.
- Since young people are attracted more by what they can experience than by mere rhetorics, it is necessary to enforce the existing provision in the 6th National Policy on Education that every school should have a well equipped library and media resource centre. These should be manned by well trained personnel who can render modern library services to children and youth. The encounter by pupils and students with seasoned librarians and libraries in schools could positively influence the disposition of the children and youths to LIS.

- Accomplished library and information professionals –both academics and practitioners– should take up responsibilities in organising and sponsoring mass media publicity programmes on the LIS profession. Apart from its obvious advantage of wider outreach, this strategy can help to jump-start great public awareness about the programme and the profession among a wider audience. Public awareness on the LIS profession is very vital if the profession must attract some of the best brains in the country who can meet the challenges of 21st Century LIS in Nigeria.

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