



**EXPLORING THE PERCEPTION OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE
PROGRAMME AMONG UNDERGRADUATES STUDENTS OF UMARU MUSA YAR'ADUA
UNIVERSITY, KATSINA**

By

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored the perception of library and information science programme among undergraduate students of Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina. It aimed to determine how other undergraduate students of other departments perceive LIS programme and the factors that influenced their perceptions. Qualitative research method was adopted and a case study research design was used for the study. Undergraduate students from other departments formed the population of the study where- 20 students were drawn purposively from all the 4 faculties as sample size. Interview was used as instrument for data collection. The study found that most respondents perceive LIS programme as a less activity course; not a recognised programme; an excellent course for women while others see it as an interesting course to pursue in the university. It concluded that students from other programmes viewed LIS programme with mixed feelings. The need for University management to set up career guidance and counselling units with desk officers in all faculties to guide, educate and enlighten students about the prospects and career opportunities of library and information science in Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina was recommended. This will broaden students understanding and horizon in such a way that LIS programme is not misinterpreted; thus leading to misconceptions and inferiority complex among students.

Introduction

Library and Information Science (LIS) programme is one of the earlier courses introduced in Nigerian universities since 1960s. Essentially, the programme is designed primarily to train information professionals who can utilize both traditional methods/skills and emerging technologies in the provision of value-added library information services to the various sectors of the nation's economy. Advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs) and increasing demand for information products and services as well as librarians' quest for relevance have contributed immensely in revolutionizing the LIS programme through concerted reviews of LIS curriculum in library schools in Nigeria. Also, this development has resulted in massive increase in the number of candidates applying to gain admission into LIS programme across Nigerian universities. While in the early 2000, LIS programme witnessed few

numbers of candidates seeking to gain admission into Bachelor of Library Science. On this trend, Issa and Nwalo (2008) reported that:

many of the new entrants in LIS schools would have preferred other courses of study to librarianship. It seems also that many fresh students in these schools offered to study librarianship only after being rejected by the department of first choice owing to low scores obtained at the University Matriculation Examination. They probably have tried in vain to secure admission into other choice courses and opted to study librarianship only as last resort. It has been observed that only a few of them usually apply to read library and information science as a first choice course. In fact, some of the students often express readiness to defect, as it were, to other professions on completing their programme in library and information studies.

This situation was due to the lack of proper career guidance; understanding of the relevance of LIS programme among elites in the society and recurring inactivity and silence of librarians. Today, LIS programme is now considered as the best brand among academic programmes in the university in terms of admission requests and career opportunities of its products. Many elites have now realised the indispensable place of librarians in nation building, (Evans & Baker, 2011). Virtually, there is no organisation that can survive and grow without utilisation of information. Thus, information and librarians are considered as strategic asset in every profit or non-profit making organisation.

Statement of the Problem

Library and information science is a professional, multi-faceted discipline that produces graduates of immense value to the society, particularly in the 21st century where information is considered as a strategic asset. The field exposes students to countless opportunities with training in different patterns of information management and organization. It also produces graduates with practical know-how, in such a way that one can even be self-employed. Graduates of the programme have opportunities to work in organizations such as corporate organizations, hospitals, financial institutions, industries, research institutes; unique places of historic collections, consultancy in independent research and publishing industries. However, in spite of all these opportunities of LIS programme many students of other programmes viewed the programme with mixed feelings. They tend to underestimate the value and relevance of the programme in the society. This misconception was observed among undergraduate students of Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina. This situation therefore becomes a source of concern to both the students and the professionals. It against this background that this study set out to explore the perception of LIS programme among the undergraduates of Umaru Musa Yar'adua University Katsina.

Research Questions

This study provided answers to the following questions:-

1. What is the perception of LIS programme among students of Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina?
2. What factors influence the perception of the students on LIS programme in Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. explore the perception of Library and Information Science Programme among students of Umaru Musa Yar'adua University Katsina; and
2. determine the factors that influence the perception of students on LIS in Umaru Musa Yar'adua University Katsina.

Scope of the Study

The study explores the perception of LIS programme among students of Umaru Musa Yar'adua University Katsina. The study covers only undergraduate students from other departments excluding those in LIS department. The essence is to aggregate the views of the students who are not on the LIS programme.

Literature Review

Perception entails a process of selection, organization and interpretation of information inputs to create a reality that is meaningful to the perceiver. Weiten (2008) states that perception depends not only on the physical stimuli but also on the stimuli's relation to the surrounding field and on conditions within the individuals exposed to the same reality. The fact that some perceptual processes appear to be innate does not mean that all people perceive in the same way. A number of factors operate to shape and sometimes distort perception. These factors can be within the perceiver or target being perceived or in the context of the situation in which the perception is made. Rao (2008) divides the factors into three groups-namely:

1. Factors in the perceiver; attitudes, motives, interests, experience and expectations;
2. Factors in the situation; time, work setting and social setting;
3. Factors in the target; novelty, motion, sounds, size, background, proximity and similarity.

On the other hand, Sharma (2015) describes factors that affect people's perception as:

1. **Perception learning**; this is based on past experiences or any special training we tend to acquire. There is emphasis on some sensory inputs while ignoring others.
2. **Mental set**; this has to do with expectancy. This prepares the perceiver with good attention and concentration.
3. **Motives and needs**; these definitely influence our perception. For instance, a hungry person is motivated towards the recognition of food items only among other articles up to the satisfaction of his motives.
4. **Cognitive styles**; every individual has his or her own way of understanding a situation; and also the way they process information.

Perception of LIS Programme

Burke and Peter (1992) argued that it is "clear that students come to the course (LIS) with sometimes, vague expectations, often based on elderly ideas of what the library profession involves, or with a fixed intention to follow down a specific road". Consequently, the emergence of LIS schools as a potent factor in shaping new philosophies and fostering new attitudes has come to be identified as one of the most significant aspects of the evolution of librarianship in the 21st century (Kargbo, 1999).

The perception about the library profession will be categorized into 3 main facets of the social image of any group, occupation or profession which according to Slatter (1981) include "the public image" which refers to the way the society sees a profession; "the self-facet" which concerns itself with the way those in the profession see themselves and "the ideal facet" which refers to what the image of a particular profession should be. It is against this backdrop that Kantumoya (1993) underscores the negative image of librarianship in Zambia while Awaritefe (1983) confirmed the negative attitude towards the library profession as users and the general public do not appreciate it and fail to accord equal importance as accorded to other professions of similar levels of academic qualification.

Methodology

This study employed qualitative method. The research design adopted was case study. The population of this study consisted of the undergraduate students of Umaru Musa Yar'adua University Katsina which comprised of students from 4 faculties and their departments excluding library and information science. The faculties are: Education, Social and Management sciences, Humanities and Natural and Applied Sciences. However, the Faculty of Law was excluded for the study due to the fact that their students were not on session at the time of data collection. To select the sample for this study, purposive sampling technique was used. Welman, C. et al (2005) posited that the sampling technique allow researchers to rely on their experience and ingenuity to deliberately obtain units of analysis in such a manner that the sample may be regarded as being representative.

On this note, 20 students were selected with 5 students each from each faculty as sample size for this study. The choice of 20 respondents was in line with the Green and Thorogood (2009) who state that that "the experience of most qualitative researchers is that in interview studies little that is 'new' comes out of transcripts after you have interviewed 20 or so people". Interview was the instrument used for data collection from the respondents. Items of the interview were structured in such a way that it covered the perception of the respondents toward LIS programme and factors that influence such perception.

Findings and Discussion

Out of the total number of 20 respondents sampled for the interview from the faculties, only 19 respondents were interviewed. This is as a result of the fact that respondents were providing repetitive responses in such a way that no new ideas were obtained from the last respondent. This is in line with the principles of data saturation in qualitative research. The responses of the students interviewed were analysed using narratives from the respondents which were transcribed, read, and examined. Thus, the responses of the respondents were presented as follows:

Perception and Understanding of Library and Information Science Programme

The undergraduate students from other departments were asked about their perception and understanding of LIS programme. Their responses were grouped and presented below:

Preparatory Course for Management of Library

A significant proportion of the responses of the respondents perceived the LIS programme as a preparatory course for the management of the library. The respondents opined that a student that passes through the LIS programme "only prepares him/herself to become a librarian". An attempt to further ask the respondents for other opportunities that awaits LIS graduates, the respondents could not think of other opportunities except that of becoming librarians and nothing more. This understanding is not surprising because the respondents do not have much knowledge of the LIS profession vis-a-vis its carrier opportunities. This finding is in line with that of Fagan (2002) who lamented that most undergraduates limit the activities/role of the librarian to mere book arrangement; limiting the knowledge within the physical library walls and nothing more. He stated that "students in academic institutions often assumed that the librarians' knowledge is limited to the physical library". He further stated that the public do not comprehend the role of a librarian or what it means to be a professional in the field of librarianship and do not believe that librarians need broad education".

LIS is an Interesting Course

The respondents expressed their appreciation of the course as 'interesting and which serves to broaden one's understanding to other aspects of learning'. They argued a student of LIS becomes more knowledgeable and current due to his knowledge and understanding of how to access Internet and newspapers. They opined that the students were exposed to varieties of information resources skills, techniques and strategies of accessing information regardless of their format.

LIS programme is not a recognised course

Some respondents from the faculties of Humanities and Natural and Applied Sciences opined that the LIS programme is not recognised by majority of people as an important programme. They argued that even the students that applied to read LIS did so because ‘admission requirement into the programme is somewhat loose’. One respondent emphasised that the present increase in admission into the programme is not because the course is an important one but due to loose nature of the admission policy. To buttress their opinion, some respondents compared the LIS programme with other programmes like law that have produced high ranking citizens in the society. Stressing repeatedly that “we are yet to see any achievement from the Librarians who are products of LIS programme”. This corroborates the assertion by Njoku (2008) which outlined lack of recognition of the profession as one of the major challenges affecting the profession. He further lamented that until recently, the profession was seen as reserved for people with little or no ambition and for those who were not intelligent enough to gain admission to another course of study.

This perception might perhaps be connected to the way and manner librarians conduct themselves with less or no visibility in the development of the society. It might also be as a result of the fact that our society is a poor information environment " (Ladzani, 2001). According to Fadehan (2016) studies and practice have shown that the issue of low reading habit has been a problem dominating the literature of library and information studies for many years. People are not aware of the significance of information as a vital ingredient for societal development. They are not even aware of their information needs as such do not value information. Thus, they could not be any regard for librarians as information providers.

LIS Programme is a Science based course

Also, from the responses of the respondents, LIS programme was viewed as a science based course. This is simply because of the appearance of the word “science” on its title. Some respondents confessed that they did not apply for the course due to fear of mathematical calculations. They hold the belief that “science” connotes “calculations”. However, some few respondents had no idea at all of what the LIS programme entailed and so had nothing to say about it. This is also expected because most of the students interviewed do not have prior knowledge of the LIS programme. This situation calls for concern among LIS professionals to device strategies to enlighten people about their profession. On the contrary, some respondents stressed the need for studying LIS course due to librarians' contribution to the society in terms of service through information provision.

LIS Programme is an Excellent Course for Women

In addition to that, respondents especially from the Faculty of Education viewed the programme as an excellent one and a career for women. They felt that working in the library limit the level at which women can become exposed to their male counterparts and occupational hazards. Similarly, a respondent noted that the programme does not have peculiar dressing codes as in other professions like banking sector and medical sciences which makes it an excellent choice for women.

LIS programme is a Less Activity Course

Some respondents stated that LIS programme is a course that does not contain much of work. According to a respondent ‘LIS programme is inactive and cheap’, a tendency that explains why the programme is an excellent course for women. There is the advantage of less work and not having to carry heavy/bulky items around. This perspective was mainly based on the cultural belief of the respondent who pointed exposure as less interaction with outsiders especially of the male gender while on the other hand, there are no stipulated dress codes which might go against someone’s belief like short skirts instead one only needs to dress smart. This tallies with Freeman (1996) and Harris and Wilkinson (2001) literature about the professional image of the librarian being feminine and powerless.

Factors Influencing the Perceptions of Library and Information Science Programme

The respondents were further asked to express their opinion regarding the factors that influenced their perception of LIS programme. The factors/reasons highlighted were presented below:

Library Visitations and Interaction with Librarians

Most respondents' perception about the programme was mainly based on their visits to the library and interactions with the librarians. They expressed their experiences with libraries; some even recalled that their view was traced back to their childhood when they were made to adhere to the "library hour" on the schools time-table. They also recalled the "core course" they were made to register in their first year in the university which the "use of library" is part of.

Societal Impact and Recognition

Some respondents perceived LIS programme based on expectations; social status and respect. They compared the placement of professionals in the society to those of other professions that are highly recognized like the doctors, lawyers and politicians. The issue of financial benefit and recognition also surfaced among other factors; i.e. librarians in developed/western nations being more valued and well remunerated compared with the "Nigerian situation". They opined that libraries and librarians are not valued in Nigeria compared to other developed countries.

Ignorance of the LIS Programme

The findings also indicated ignorance as a factor in perceiving the programme as a 'science course'. This perception contradicted the definition of Ottong and Ottong (2013) which defined LIS as an interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary field that applies the practices, perspectives and tools of management, information technology and education and other areas of library. It also involves collection, organization, preservation and dissemination of information resources and the political economy of information. Other factors include the emergence of technology and the type of information environment. The incorporation of ICT based courses into the programme has made the programme to be perceived positively and even being equated with other professions like computer science. The programme being viewed as an excellent course for the female gender is being influenced by culture. This entails the mode of dressing, activity and interaction as viewed by the respondents. They believe that the profession does not adhere to a particular dress code which could go against the cultural practices of the society; the university being situated in a Hausa community.

Conclusion

Based on the analyses, the study concluded that many students from other programmes viewed LIS programme with mixed feelings. This can be attributed to the fact that many of them do not often patronise libraries and librarians in their search for information resources for their academic activities. Therefore, unless the students value information and patronise libraries, the identity, status and relevance of LIS and librarians will continue to be low. This way the misconceptions about the LIS programme will become a thing of the past.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) The teaching of "use of library" as a general studies course should be introduced and made compulsory to all undergraduate students in Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina.
- 2) Seasoned accomplished librarians should be invited for talks and presentation especially in organized programmes like the "NALISS Week". This will help to enlighten and broaden the understanding of students from other department about the course and profession.



- 3) Internship programme should be introduced for the graduates of LIS programme.
- 4) The LIS department in conjunction with university library should intensify efforts aimed at sensitising and enlighten students about the prospects and career opportunities of LIS programme in Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina.

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