
**LIBRARIANS' IMAGE AND STUDENTS' CAREER CHOICE: THE REPORT FROM
BABCOCK UNIVERSITY, NIGERIA****Onuoha, Uloma Doris***Department of Information Resources Management**Babcock University,**Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria***ABSTRACT**

This study examined the perception of librarians' professional image and how it affects the career choice decision of students of Information Resources Management (IRM). The descriptive research design was used for the study. The study population comprised of 185 students 400 and 300 levels respectively. Data was collected by means of a structured questionnaire and analysed using frequency counts and percentage. Findings revealed that most of the respondents have a positive perception of librarians as well as the library profession. The study also affirmed that attitude rather than media portrayals have greater impact on how people perceive librarians/the library profession. Career choice was found to be mostly influenced by academic ability, personal interest and learning experience rather than gender, parental choice, salary or image associated with the profession. Based on the findings, the study concluded that librarians are no longer tied down by negative media portrayals associated with the early 1920s and recommended that librarians conduct themselves in a manner that would promote the image of the library profession; relate well with students and library users and employ the use of modern technology in the teaching of library based courses in order to stimulate interest, enhance academic abilities and make students more willing to embrace the library profession.

Keywords: *Career choice, Librarians' image, Perception of librarians*

Introduction

Most people work hard to create a positive professional image for themselves. Unfortunately, the assessment of professional image for a profession does not recognize isolated individual cases, neither is it always carried out by those with deep understanding of the profession which they assess. The professional image of librarians has been under scrutiny since the early 1920s with media portrayal of librarians as cranky old women. Hall (1992) summarised the librarian in the public eye as a woman of indeterminate age, who wears spectacles; a person with either a timorous disposition or an austere disposition, wearing a long sleeved blouse buttoned to the neck; someone who loves silence, likes books, and suffers people. Fisher (1988) also affirms that several studies have seen librarians' scoring below average in terms of leadership and self-confidence; irritable; insecure; suffering from inferiority complexes; more sure of themselves than "normal" people; the male librarian being more feminine in his interests than men in general; less assertive than normal; more orderly and conscientious; authoritarian; little tendency towards innovation; lack of good supervisory abilities, etc. The negative image, according to Kiladitis (2011), continues to exacerbate librarian stereotypes, leading librarians to create new identities as "information professionals," "information scientists," or "media professionals."

Although professional image may have contributed to the recent search for new identities by librarians, the role of technological advancement, however, cannot be downplayed. The library profession like other professions in recent times has undergone changes brought about by advancement in technology both in services offered to library users and in the curriculum of library schools. Most library schools have added technology based courses to their curriculum to equip students with skills and competencies needed in the 21st century library (Minishi-Majanja, 2007; Edegbo, 2011) and as such many library school graduates who perform well in computer based courses such as Web Design and Database Management and can look for work outside the traditional library setting (Breitkopf, 2011). Citing a report by the United States Bureau of Statistics, Ismail (2006) affirms that library science graduates are now courted for jobs as Database Managers, Webmasters, and Information Network Administrators. To buttress this Okoro (2009) in a study of career choice of students of Library and Information Science in Imo State, Nigeria affirms that most of the students are not interested in practicing librarianship upon graduation.

The Department of Information Resources Management, Babcock University, Nigeria, started out as Department of Library Studies in 1999. It was however, renamed Information Resources Management (IRM) in 2002 with the introduction of courses from other departments, notably, Computer Science, Mass Communication and Business Management with the aim of enriching the library curriculum so that students can have diverse learning experience especially as it relates to information technology. The move was in the right direction as the renamed department (IRM.) soon experienced a boom in students' enrolment.

Statement of the Problem

Career choice is a critical decision that each individual has to make at a certain stage in life. Among the students enrolled each year into the Department of Information Resources Management, it is not out of place to hear expressions of desire to pursue careers outside the field of librarianship. While this is a welcome development as the course exposes students to different aspects of Information Management which can be applied to different sectors of the society, it however, raises concern over the future of the library profession. An understanding of students' perception of librarians' image would, no doubt, lead to the development of management strategies aimed at attracting new entrants into the library profession. It is in the light of the above that the present study investigates perception of librarians and the career choice of undergraduates of Information Resources Management, Babcock University.

Objectives of the Study

The major objective of this study was to ascertain the perception of librarians' professional image and how it affects the career choice of I.R.M students at Babcock University. The specific objectives were to:

- i. Ascertain IRM students' perception of librarians;
- ii. determine the students' perception of the library profession;
- iii. identify the factors responsible for way librarians/the library profession is perceived by students of IRM; and
- iv. establish the factors influencing the career choice of IRM students.

Review of Related Literature

The quest for career choice begins to manifest mostly during the late teenage years as high school students become conscious of their social expectations and begin preparation for career

exploration (Dupont & Gingras, 1991). This quest is usually accompanied by the need to gather information about different careers after which a choice of career is settled for. In planning for career, high school students acquire career information from different sources such as family members (Olayinka, 1993), and Internet and teachers (McKnight, 2009). In a study by Patton and McCrindle (2001), on senior students' view on career information at Queensland, it was equally revealed that the state's tertiary courses publications were most useful for acquiring career information followed by school career advisors. A similar study by Offer (1999) found out that 80% of college students gained career information from a computer than from a book or a person.

Different factors which can be intrinsic, extrinsic or both have been noted for influencing career decisions in literature. According to Hewitt (2010) most people are influenced by careers that their parents favour, others follow their passion regardless of how much or little it will make them while some choose the careers with highest income level. Koc (2008) identified the top three criteria for a job as opportunity for advancement, job security and a good insurance package. Lent et al (2002) noted that interests and work-relevant experiences were frequently cited as bases for career selection; while negative expectations of work conditions and negative family influence were cited as reasons to reject choices.

Swinhoe (1967) in a study on factors affecting the career choice of college students carried out preliminary questioning of important factors in deciding their career out of which the most commonly mentioned factors were found to be: intrinsic interest in the work, variety in the job, opportunity to meet people, good salary, good chances of getting on, responsibility involved, value of the work to the community, safety and job security, freedom from supervision, freedom from undue strain and amount of travel involved. In a similar study by Issa and Nwalo (2008) on factors affecting the career choice of undergraduates in Nigerian library and information science schools, it was revealed that only 472 (38.44%) out of 1228 respondents choose the course as their first choice of course. Among the 472 respondents, only 9.96% choose librarianship on account of high social status and respect accorded the profession. Majority of the respondents (68.86%), however, affirmed that they choose the course as a result of previous library working experience.

The word "librarian" has often had different meanings for individuals. The confusion in the meaning is portrayed by Siess (2003) who opined that many people think that anyone who works in a library is a librarian- including clerks, pages, and other non-professionals. The depth of this confusion is reflected in Fagan's (2002) observation that students in academic institutions often assume that the librarian's knowledge is limited to the physical library and that librarianship as a profession does not need a broad education. A study by Ajidahun (1997) borne out of observed occurrence whereby librarians are treated with ignominy and reproach without observance of courtesy and regards to their status, identified ignorance on the part of the student library users about who a librarian is; his duties and required qualification as the probable cause for negative perception of librarians.

Shao-Chun (2003) argues that one of the main reasons librarians suffer image problems is due to stereotyped presentations of them in various media. Shu-hsien and Pei-Yu (2007) in a study of library users' view of librarians at Taipei Public Library, however, established that library users have a very positive opinion of librarians in contrast to the librarian image depicted in many Western literary works and some of the professional literature. This was also similar to the findings of Bloch and Bloch (1981) whose study on occupational perception of librarians by high school students revealed that their perception is quite favourable, in contrast to some negative stereotypes found in library literature.

Methodology

The descriptive research approach was used for the study. The study population was made up of 185 students of IRM in 400 and 300 levels respectively as at 2014/15 academic year. Students in the lower levels (100 and 200) were excluded from the study as they were yet to be introduced to some higher level courses and as such might not have formed a strong opinion of their career choice. Considering the manageable number of the population size, all 185 respondents were given the opportunity to participate in the study through the use of a questionnaire titled “Professional Image and Students’ Career Choice Questionnaire (PISCC)”. Data collected was analysed using frequency counts and mean deviation.

Presentation of Findings

Table 1: Respondents Distribution by Level of Study

Level	Frequency	Percentage
300	42	32.3%
400	88	67.7%
Total	130	100.0%

Table 1 indicates that 130 respondents participated in the study from the population size of 185. Most of the respondents (67.7%) were in the final year of study (400 level) while 32.3% were in 300 level.

Table 2: Students’ Perception of Librarians

S/N	Librarians to me are:	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1.	Hard- working	44(33.8)	50(38.5)	26(20)	10(7.7)	2.98
2.	approachable	43(33.1)	44(33.8)	38(29.2)	5(3.8)	2.96
3.	intelligent	30(23.1)	70(53.8)	43(33.1)	4(3.1)	2.90
4.	self-confident	27(20)	75(57.7)	16(12.3)	12(9.2)	2.90
5.	highly educated	37(28.5)	46(35.4)	43(33.1)	4(3.1)	2.89
6.	Assertive	11(8.5)	81(62.3)	19(14.6)	19(14.6)	2.65
7.	innovative	17(13.1)	53(40.8)	39(30)	21(16.2)	2.51
8.	kind	11(8.5)	55(42.3)	52(40)	12(9.2)	2.50
9.	any of the people working in the library	28(21.5)	25(19.2)	54(41.5)	23(17.7)	2.45

Table 2 revealed the respondents perception of Librarians. Most of the respondents saw them as hard working people (mean value of 2.98), approachable (mean value of 2.96) and intelligent (mean value of 2.90). The respondents were also found to have a good understanding of who librarians are as they do not see everyone working in the library as librarians.

Table 3: Students’ Perception of the Library Profession

S/N	The library profession:	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1.	is quite challenging	22(16.9)	92(70.8)	12(9.2)	4(3.1)	3.02
2.	offers opportunities of	34(26.2)	47(36.2)	28(21.5)	21(16.2)	2.72

	meeting people					
3.	enjoys positive professional image	36(27.7)	34(26.2)	41(31.5)	19(14.6)	2.67
4.	contributes to societal growth	26(20)	51(39.2)	33(25.4)	20(15.4)	2.64
5.	offers good advancement opportunities	27(20.8)	46(35.4)	36(27.7)	21(16.2)	2.61
6.	is valued by the government	24(18.5)	45(34.5)	38(29.2)	23(17.7)	2.54
7.	offers job security	11(8.5)	43(33.1)	47(36.2)	29(22.3)	2.28
8.	gives you high salary	4(3.1)	34(26.2)	67(51.5)	25(19.2)	2.13

Table 3 revealed the perception of the library profession. From the result of the analysis it is revealed that most of the respondents see the library profession as challenging with a mean value of 3.02, offers opportunities of meeting people with a mean value 2.72 and enjoys positive professional image with the mean score of 2.67. However, in the aspect of salary and job security, most of the respondents scored it low with mean scores of 2.13 and 2.28 respectively.

Table 4: Factors Responsible for the way Librarians /Librarianship is Perceived by Students

S/N	Factors responsible for the way you see librarians/the library profession are:	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1	Attitude of librarians towards library users	36(27.7)	34(26.2)	41(31.5)	19(14.6)	3.22
2	Attitude of academic (teaching) librarians towards students	52(40)	57(43.8)	18(13.8)	3(2.3)	3.22
3	Office environment of librarians	49(37.7)	64(49.2)	14(10.8)	3(2.3)	2.96
4	Dressing of librarians	32(24.6)	60(46.2)	35(26.9)	3(2.3)	2.93
5	What I read about librarians/ librarianship	27(20.8)	66(50.8)	33(25.4)	4(3.1)	2.89
6	Media portrayal of librarians	37(28.5)	54(41.5)	26(20)	13(10)	2.88
7	What I hear librarians say about their profession	32(24.6)	59(45.4)	24(18.5)	15(11.5)	2.83
8	Personal estimation of librarians' salary	33(25.4)	66(5.8)	24(18.5)	7(5.4)	2.76
9	What those around me say about librarians	33(25.4)	41(31.5)	38(29.2)	18(13.8)	2.68

Table 4 revealed the factors responsible for the way librarians/the library profession is perceived. From this analysis it was revealed that attitude rather than what people hear has greater impact on the perception of librarians/the library profession. Most of the respondents affirmed that attitude of librarians towards library users and attitude of teaching librarians towards students more than any other factor influenced their perception of librarians with mean scores of 3.22

Table 5: Factors Influencing Students' Career Choice

S/N	Factors which influenced your career choice are:	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1.	Academic ability	72(55.4)	32(24.6)	13(10)	13(10)	3.25
2.	Personal interest	69(53.1)	32(24.6)	14(10.8)	15(11.5)	3.19
3.	Learning experience	49(37.7)	59(45.4)	14(10.8)	8(6.2)	3.15
4.	Job availability	51(39.2)	48(36.9)	17(13.1)	14(10.8)	3.05
5.	Job security	36(27.7)	44(33.8)	32(24.7)	18(13.8)	2.75
6.	Image associated with the profession	31(23.8)	47(36.2)	27(20.8)	25(19.2)	2.65
7.	Salary	29(22.3)	51(39.2)	24(18.5)	26(20)	2.64
8.	Parental choice	18(13.8)	31(23.8)	45(34.6)	36(27.7)	2.24
9.	Gender	20(15.4)	19(14.6)	63(48.5)	28(21.3)	2.24

Table 5 reveals the respondents view on the factors that influence their career choice. From the table it is revealed career choice is mostly influenced by academic ability, personal interest and learning experience with mean scores of 3.25, 3.19 and 3.15 respectively rather than gender, parental choice, salary and image associated with the profession which had lower mean scores of 2.24, 2.64 and 2.65 respectively.

Discussion of the Findings

From the findings, it was obvious that majority of the respondents have positive perception of librarians. Most of the respondents see librarians as hard-working, approachable, intelligent and self-confident as reflected in the mean scores. This is a major deviation from previous findings of Fisher (1988) and Hall (1992) who reported negative images associated with librarians. The study, however, corroborates the findings of Shu-hsien and Pei-Yu (2007); Bloch & Bloch (1981) whose studies affirm positive occupational perception of librarians. It was also evident that respondents have a clear understanding of who a librarian is, as they do not take everyone working in the library as a librarian. The finding in this aspect is in contrast to the conclusion drawn by Ajidahun (1997) who asserts that students treat librarians with ignominy out of ignorance about who a librarian is. The disparity in this case could be attributed to the diversity of respondents in each study.

While Ajidahun (1997) made a general observation of student library users, the respondents for this study are made up of students who are being prepared to work in the library environment and as such are expected to be familiar with the duties and required qualification for a career in librarianship. Findings also reveal a positive perception of the library profession. Most of the respondents see the profession as challenging, with opportunities of meeting people even though the salary maybe low. Attitude of practicing and academic librarians rather than stereotyped presentations of librarians in literature or the media was found to be mostly responsible for the way respondents perceive librarians. This is in disagreement with Shao-Chun (2003) who asserts that stereotyped presentations are a major reason why librarians suffer image problems.

Career choice was found to be mostly influenced by academic ability, personal interest and learning experience rather than gender, parental choice, salary or image associated with the profession. This is in contrast with the findings of Hewitt (2010) which revealed that most people are influenced by careers that their parents favour and Koc (2008) whose study identified the top three criteria for career decision as opportunity for advancement, job security and a good insurance

package. It was, however, in agreement with Issa and Nwalo (2008); Lent et al (2002) whose studies affirm that interest and work-relevant experience are the bases for career selection. The finding is not surprising as university undergraduates are expected to have come to the realization that specific skills and competencies are required to succeed in any given career.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Professional image has been a subject of concern for librarians and will continue to be for a long time. It is, however, encouraging to note that librarians are no longer tied down by negative media portrayals associated with the early 1920s. Librarians have the opportunity to rebuild their professional image and should seek every opportunity to portray the library profession in a positive light that will make the profession attractive to new entrants.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- 1 As ambassadors of the library profession, practising and teaching (academic) librarians should constantly conduct themselves in a manner that would promote the image of the library profession.
- 2 Librarians (practising and academic) should relate well with the students they meet in the classrooms and in the physical library as students are constantly judging the library profession through their attitude.
- 3 The teaching of library based courses should be done in a manner that would stimulate interest and enhance academic abilities as this would encourage personal interest thereby making students more willing to embrace the library profession. To achieve this, technology should be employed in the teaching of library courses so that students do not only associate modernity with computerrelated courses to the detriment of library courses which may be seen as out of touch with modern reality.

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