



TINCITY

Journal of

LIBRARY, ARCHIVAL AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

(T-JOLAIS)

JOURNAL OF THE NIGERIAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION, PLATEAU STATE CHAPTER

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Public Recognition and Librarians' Choice of Library Profession as a Career

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Abstract

The study sought to examine public recognition and its relationship with choice of library profession as a career. The survey design was used for the study. The population comprised the 86 librarians in 8 academic institutions. The hypothesis was tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistical technique and the relationship was established to be significant at 0.05 level. Public recognition had a significant relationship with librarians' choice of library profession. The results of data analysis showed a relatively high positive correlation (0.66) between public recognition and librarians' choice of career. The study concluded that public recognition was a very strong factor in Librarians' choice of career. The study recommended that librarians should engage in activities that would create awareness by using their wealth of knowledge in developing the cultural taste of library patrons. This will thus serve as an index for individuals' choices of the profession as a career in tertiary institutions.

Keywords: Self-esteem, self-satisfaction, career, public recognition.

Introduction

The status of the library profession is determined by the society's perception of the nature of librarians' duties and social responsibilities. Even though the society fails to realize these duties, librarians are often expected to take part in community affairs, cooperating in the preparation of exhibitions, presenting book reviews and explaining library use to community organizations. As professionals, they are also expected to use their wealth of knowledge in developing the cultural taste of library patrons. This feature of the library profession is an index for its choice by librarians in tertiary institutions. When compared to older professions like Law and Medicine in any society, the consensus of opinions

among experts in library and information science is that Librarians and Information Scientists still have a problem of recognition and respect (Aguolu, 1976; Dewey, 1977; Aguolu and Aguolu, 2002; Ugah and Ntui, 2005). As Darch (1975:499) viewed it, "the concern for status among librarians is perhaps more than simply an anxious pre-occupation with academic, social climbing, is as true in Africa as everywhere". This further explains that despite its educational requirements, Library and Information Science has not been widely accepted by aspiring students as their first choice in the university. Thus the problem of status of the library profession is not restricted to any one group of librarians and yet it is

generally agreed that the library is the heart of the university and therefore, the quality of the university is reflected by the quality of the library. As in other professions, there is no clear-cut distinction between professional librarians and their various subordinate staff members working in the university library. This therefore does not create room for proper recognition that should be accorded librarians as professionals.

Statement of the Problem

The library profession seems not to have gained popularity in Nigeria till today, in spite of the crucial role it plays both in the academic and other sectors. This has resulted in the dearth of librarians prevalent in our society as well as the comparatively low enrolment of undergraduates for the programmes, especially as first choice. The low representation of librarians in private and public appointments also robs off on the image of the librarian. It therefore becomes pertinent to investigate and confirm if public recognition is an index for poor choice of library profession as a career.

Objective of the Study - This paper specifically seeks to determine the relationship between public recognition and librarians' choice of the library profession

Research Question - What relationship exists between public recognition and librarians' choice of the library profession?

Hypothesis - Public recognition has no significant relationship with librarians' choice of the library profession.

Review of Related Literature

Public recognition is a recognized factor that influences people's career option. One of the attributes of a profession according to Hernon (1991), is that society holds the profession in esteem. Onyemerekeye and Uhegbu (1998) attested to this fact when they argued that individuals prefer one profession to the other due to the social prestige attached to it. It may be on the basis of how the society views those in that profession, the ethics of the job or the respect accorded individuals in a particular profession. Abubakar (2004) identified possible factors that create low public image for the library and information science profession to include the following:

- (i) the services provided are not appreciated by the society,
- (ii) low status of library and information workers in the society,
- (iii) librarianship is a work that can be done without a degree, and
- (iv) it is not a money-making profession. However, the last two no longer seem to be tenable.

From Abubakar's (2004) study, it is deduced that many librarians did not choose the profession because

of the status it held in the society but only opted for it as the next available option. For instance, Berry (2007) in a research on why people chose librarianship reported that an equal number opted for librarianship after trying other professions and careers, though they didn't fail at the other work, they didn't just like it and ultimately found librarianship.

The indecision about choosing a career in librarianship stems from an individual's understanding of the profession and public understanding and acceptance of the importance of the library in that society. Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) lent support to the above misconception of the role of libraries in National development as a problem facing the library profession in Nigeria. The authors also indicated that very few Nigerians can be said to understand librarians' social role. Thus, the primary problem of the library profession is that of being misunderstood by the members of the society. This is evident in the lack of the appreciation of the crucial value of information in the solution of our complex economic, political and technological problems.

The status of the profession is therefore, determined by the public or society's recognition of what librarians' duties and social responsibilities are. To boost public recognition of Librarians, the Federal Government has conferred on the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) the powers to maintain discipline within the profession, determine standards of knowledge and skills to be attained by persons seeking to be registered as Librarians. These powers were conferred on LRCN by Decree Number 12 of 1995 and the council was inaugurated on the 28th of May, 2002 by the Honourable Minister of Education. To earn societal acceptance, librarians are often expected to take part in community affairs, cooperating in the preparation of exhibits, presenting book reviews and explaining library use to community organisations.

Failure to do the above erodes public recognition as recognition of a profession by the public depends on the nature of service which the profession renders. It must be such service that society recognises to be very essential to humanity. Where there is underutilisation, redundancy sets in and this can result in practitioners' low self-esteem and low self-satisfaction. Joshua (1994) carried out a study on career choice of senior secondary students in Calabar municipality. The author ~~used~~ a sample of 280 students randomly selected from four schools in the municipality and found that youths opted for more prestigious jobs with 28.6% aspiring to medicine, 24.5% to accountancy and banking; 9.6% to engineering and 6.4% to education (teaching). Youth's preference for medicine as against teaching was a clear indication that public

recognition of practitioners in a particular profession influenced choices in that profession. Unagha (2007) accepted this view by stating that "Librarians, it would seem, have not convinced the society at large that its services are necessary in the same way as engineering, law, medicine and even journalism.

Methodology

The survey research design was used for this study.

The study covered eight tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States of Nigeria. The population of the study comprised all the 86 professionally trained librarians in the 8 tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States, chosen for the study. The tertiary institutions that formed the population of the study were eight in number as shown in the table below:

Table 1: Population as classified by tertiary institutions

Tertiary institutions	Population of librarians	Sample of librarians	Percent (%)
University of Uyo, Uyo	25	25	100
College of Education, Afaha Nsit	6	6	100
College of Agriculture, Obio Akpa	2	2	100
Maritime Academy, Oron	2	2	100
Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua	2	2	100
University of Calabar, Calabar	41	41	100
Cross River State College of Technology	7	7	100
College of Education, Akamkpa	1	1	100
Total	86	86	100

The total population of 86 librarians were used as sample for the study. The use of the entire population was based on the fact that the population is small and accessible.

The distribution and sample of librarians in tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom and Cross River states are presented in the table above. The instrument used for data collection for this study was a researcher-developed questionnaire which was referred to as Public recognition and Librarians' Choice of Library Profession Questionnaire (PLCLPQ). To test the reliability of the instrument, 20 copies of the questionnaire was given to 20 librarians randomly sampled outside the area of study. The responses obtained were analysed using frequency count and

the data obtained were used to determine the reliability of the instrument using Cronbach's alpha reliability test. The hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) at 0.05 alpha level.

Data Analysis and Result

Public recognition has no significant relationship with librarians' choice of library profession. In the above hypothesis, the independent variable is public recognition while the librarians' choice of the library profession is the dependent variable. The hypothesis was tested using the PPMC results in Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) summary of analysis of scores on public recognition and the librarians choice of the library profession (N = 86)

Variables	X	X ²	XY	r _{xy} (Cal)	df	r _{xy} (Crit)
	Y	Y ²				
Public recognition (X)	725	6195	6261	0.66*	84	.20
Librarians choice of library p rofession (Y)	738	6376				

* Significant at p< .05 alpha

In Table 2, the calculated correlation index for the relationship between public recognition and librarians' choice of library profession, $r_{xy(cal)}$, is 0.66 while its corresponding critical or table value at df 84 and $p = 0.05$ alpha, $r_{xy(crit)}$, is 0.20. The calculated index is greater than the table value. This indicates that the relationship between public recognition and librarians' choice of library profession is statistically significant. That is, public recognition has a significant relationship with librarians' choice of their profession.

With this finding, null hypothesis five was rejected. The observed positive correlation index showed that the majority of the librarians took to the profession because of the recognition of librarians in tertiary institutions.

Discussion of Findings - In this regard, the result displayed in Table 2 showed a moderately high positive correlation between public recognition and librarians' choice of their career (index = 0.66). This implies that public recognition is a significant variable in librarians' choice of librarianship as a career. The

observation agrees with the observations made by Hernon (1991), Onyemerekeya and Uhegbu (1998) and Abubakar's (2004) that individuals prefer one profession to another due to the social prestige attached to it, and that the status of library profession is determined by the public or society's recognition of what librarians' duties and social responsibilities are.

The result of this study validates Joshua's (1994) study on career choice of senior secondary students in Calabar municipality. With a sample of 280 students, it was discovered that youths opted for more prestigious jobs with 28.6% aspiring to medicine, 24.5% to accountancy and banking, 9.6% to engineering and 6.4% to education (teaching). Youth's preference for medicine as against teaching was a clear indication that public recognition of practitioners influenced choices in that profession.

It should however be noted that in academic communities the grading definition of librarians according to salary and position is one of the most significant factors of status concern and contributes significantly to librarians' choice of career in academic libraries in tertiary institutions (Lawal, 2002). The observed high correlation between public recognition and librarians' choice of career in tertiary in libraries found in tertiary institutions made in this study could therefore be explained in terms of the high recognition accorded top library professionals in the institutions.

The Major Finding - There exists a relatively high positive correlation between public recognition and librarians' choice of library profession (index = 0.66). This indicates that a relatively high percentage of the librarians surveyed took to the career because of recognition accorded librarians in academic institutions.

Conclusion - Based on the findings in this study, one can conclude that, public recognition of Library and Information Science as a career in tertiary institutions, was a key factor for librarians' choice of the profession. The professional variables that determine librarians' choice of library profession are dynamic and susceptible to changes as the economy, availability of information and public awareness change. The implication of the findings is that we live in a society where the country's economy continues to expand following upsurge in technological advancements. Thus, the nature of many jobs changes and the techniques of its provision to individuals become important. Therefore the role of librarians in nation building cannot be over-emphasised as they are expected to update themselves in these latest technologies in order to be relevant to the society thereby motivating individuals to join the profession.

Recommendations - The study found that there is a relatively high positive correlation between public

recognition and librarians' choice of library profession. Based on this, this researcher recommended that:

- 1) The Federal Government should support the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) which is saddled with the responsibility of maintaining professional ethics, to achieve its broad goal.
- 2) Government should ensure that the bill on the seventy years working age for University and Deputy University Librarians is passed. These will thus create public awareness on the role librarians play in nation building.
- 3) As professionals, they are also expected to use their wealth of knowledge in developing the cultural taste of library patrons. This will invariably serve as an index for its choice in tertiary institutions.

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