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**A SURVEY OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE AND IMAGE OF SCHOOL
LIBRARIANS IN IBADAN SOUTH-WEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF OYO
STATE**

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates perception of students of the role and image of the school/teacher librarian in selected secondary schools in Ibadan South West Local Government Area of Oyo State. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 10 schools from 25 public secondary schools in Ibadan South -West Local Government Area of Oyo State. Two hundred students in the selected schools constituted the sample of the study. Data was collected using a validated questionnaire tagged 'Perception of Librarian's Role and Image' Two research questions and three null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The data were analysed using simple percentages and students T- Test statistics. The findings show that students have good perception of the role and image of the school librarian. There was no significant difference between male and female students' perception of the role of the librarian. There was a significant difference between the perception of students in arts and science class. It is recommended that information literacy skills instruction programme should be integrated into the school curriculum and library hour on the school time-table.

INTRODUCTION

All over the world, growing attention is being paid to the school library as the learning laboratory that supports teaching and learning in schools. The school library assists and supports the educational programme of the school by storing instructional materials for use in teaching and learning. Onwubiko and Uzoigwe (2004) describe the school library as a miniaturized intellectual power house or information centre found in primary schools, secondary schools and teacher training colleges. According to them, an effective use of the library by the students can contribute immensely to the child's intellectual development.

The school librarian/media specialist is the director of the school library. He/she has to provide services to the library users to support the academic activities in the school. Apart from the traditional role of acquiring and organizing the resources (print, audio-visuals, and

electronic), he should be competent enough to equip the students and teachers with information literacy skills necessary for their survival in the information age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perception is an important variable to consider in the study of human behaviour and a vital concept to look into in understanding organisational behaviour. A general meaning of the word 'perception' is immediate awareness. Perception is a major cognitive input and explanation for behaviour. Little wonder that the emphasis on the cognitive dimension of public perceptions of science (operationalized as scientific literacy of the 'know-what' type) paved the way for a change of perspective in the study of public attitudes towards science (Parvo and Calvo, 2004).

Students' awareness of the role and the professional image of the school librarian/media specialist as a guide to the use of the information resources in their library will assist them in developing a positive attitude towards the library staff and the use of the library multi-media resources. This is in line with Luthan's (1998) assertion that behaviour is largely a product of the way people perceive themselves and the world around them. The strong relationship between perception and human behaviour (attitude) has also been identified in Usherwood's (2005) report that public perception of museums, libraries and archives can have consequences for use and value. Directly implied in this assertion is that perception of the public about the importance and value of the materials and human resources in these repositories can influence their effective use.

Similarly, a positive perception of the personality and professional competency of the school librarian/teacher-librarian by the students will form the basis for their judgment and decision about the use of the library. Habermas (1997) reasoned the same way by associating perception with the development beliefs. According to him, the notion of public perception is used to highlight the character of processes inherent in the development of beliefs; it is about the social grasp of events, people, or topics of public interest. This implies that students' belief in the role of the librarian and the positive image of their professional status will enhance librarians' confidence in their ability to contribute positively to their lifelong learning and overall academic achievement.

The school library and the librarian have a key role to play in making the students information literate. Fayose (1995) opines that a good school library resource centre and its staff will develop in children good reading skills and encourage long-term learning habits through listening, reading and viewing a wide variety of learning resources. It is in realization of these noble goals that the National Policy of Education which was revised in 1981 identified the library as one of the most important aspects of educational services in Nigeria. This policy statement was very emphatic on the need for libraries to be established in and around schools to aid the educational process of learning and teaching. To be able to function effectively, the minimum standards for staff requirements for school libraries in Nigeria was suggested to be a school librarian who should possess a minimum of Bachelor Degree in Library Science. The school librarian was expected to be a professional and the administrative head of the library.

The integration of Information Literacy Instruction Programme in the school curriculum requires a new breed of school librarians/media specialists who are equipped with information searching skills and competent in the use of information management technologies. In this regard, the American Library Association, Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (1989) wrote:

...producing information literate people will require that schools and colleges appreciate and integrate the concept of information literacy into their learning programs and that they play a leadership role in equipping individuals to take advantage of the opportunities inherent within the information age.

Students' interaction with the librarian and their experiences with him could be the basis of their perception and potent factors that could shape their conception of the role and image of the librarians and the library profession. This underpins the advocacy for employment of competent school librarians to man the school libraries. Librarians' understanding of the significant role they could play in the education of the students could influence the way they comport themselves. Green (1994) argues that contributing factors to non-use and under-use are also those images and perceptions which librarians themselves hold of their profession and of potential users and their information needs. According to him, it is not only negative images and perceptions that need to be overcome but also barriers caused by lack of awareness of the 'library world' and unrealistic expectations.

The widespread ignorance of the public about the role of the teacher - librarian has been reported in the literature. Miller (n.d) explains how she spent twenty years as a classroom teacher in four secondary schools with very little idea or understanding of the role of the teacher-librarian. According to him, after two decades of teaching experience, he knew little of what the teacher - librarian could do for him. He expressed his concern by what he saw as a serious problem in schools today- the apparent lack of understanding on the part of teachers and administrators about the role of teacher - librarians in the public school system. The inability to identify the professional role the librarian should play is a matter of general concern to many people. Nwafor(1980) voiced out that it was still not clear what role the librarians should play as professionals in the Nigerian setting. He therefore calls for research which should help to find the librarian's professional bearing. Beebe (1973) believes that the school library and the librarian are playing a minor role in the education of the children because of lack of understanding of what the school library should be doing to improve the education of the children. She suggested a good programme for the school library, to enable it to fulfil its mission in the overall educational picture.

Perception of poor quality of service can contribute to poor perception of the image of the librarian (Freeman, 1996). A skilled librarian would attract the attention of the students when he solves their information problems. His competence in the use of technology to locate and access information could make the students to evaluate him as an indispensable agent in their academic pursuit. Birdsball (1982) lamented that librarians have not made it easy for the public to understand who they are as a result of their failure to define for themselves and the society the purpose of their profession. Reiss in Edeka(1983);

Akintunde and Selbar (1985); Sherdin and Beaubien (1995) all agreed in their studies that the public have a poor conception of the professional image of the librarian. Akintunde and Selbar (1995) identified some psychological and social factor characteristics of librarians such as self-concept, self-presentation, the environment and reflected appraisal from the society as being responsible for the formation of the poor image of the librarians.

Although perception of the role of the teacher-librarian by the principals, the administrators, and the class teachers has been well documented in the literature, yet there appears to be little research on how the students perceive the role and the image of the school/teacher-librarian. There is the urgent need to focus research in this area because an understanding of students' perception of the role and image of the librarian would reveal the extent to which the students are making effective use of their library resources. It will also provide baseline information on possible intervention measures to be taken to address school library development.

Statement of the Problem

There seems to be a consensus among the experts on school librarianship that the school library has a lot to contribute to a child's intellectual development. It is also a common knowledge that school libraries were established to assist and support the educational programme of the school by providing instructional materials for use in teaching and learning. Despite the high level of awareness of the place of libraries in the school system, a major concern expressed by the librarians and the general public, especially the educated, is that students do not fully appreciate the existence of the library and the librarian as part of the school system. Although several researches have been conducted to determine the factors responsible for students' under-use of libraries, it appears as if little or no work has been done to look at the impact of students' perception of the role and image of librarians on their use of libraries.

This investigation is an attempt to empirically ascertain the perception of the students about the role and image of the school/teacher librarian. This becomes necessary as erroneous perception of teacher-librarian will hinder the students from maximizing the resources available to them. The findings of the study would also allow the librarians to see themselves as the students see them and the importance of their roles to students' education.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the above objective, two research questions are posed to guide the study.

1. How do the students view the role of the school/teacher librarian in the school?
2. How do the students perceive the image of the school/teacher-librarian as compared to other professionals in the society?

Hypotheses

Three null hypotheses were stated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no statistically significant difference in perception of the role of the librarian between male and female students.
2. There is no significant difference in perception of the role of the librarians

between the students in arts and science class.

3. There is no significant difference in the perception of the image of librarians between students in mixed and single-sex schools.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey method was adopted in this study which investigated the perception of students in selected public secondary schools in Ibadan South -West Local Government Area of Oyo State. Stratified random sampling technique was used to conduct the study. 200 Senior Secondary I students were randomly selected from 10 secondary schools, which were randomly selected from 25 public secondary schools in Ibadan South-West Local Government Area of Oyo State using a simple ballot system. Seventy (35%) of the students selected were males while 130 (65%) were females. A self-developed validated questionnaire called "*Perception of Librarians' Role and Image*" (PLRI) was used to collect data. Section A contained demographic information on the respondents. Section B elicited information on the perception of the role and image of the librarian by the students using a 27 -item scale with Likert-type scores. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity before administration. The questionnaire was administered by a research assistant with the assistance of the school teachers. Two hundred copies of the questionnaire were distributed, completed and collected. Data collected was analysed using the descriptive statistics of percentages. The Students't -test was used to establish whether there exists any statistically significant difference between the perception of male and female students, arts and science class, mixed and single-sex schools in their perceptions of the role and image of librarians.

FINDINGS

The results of the analyses are presented in accordance with the research questions which guided the study.

Research question 1

How do the students view the role of the school/teacher librarian in the school system?

Table 1: Students' Perception of the Librarian's Role

The Librarian is the one who:	Rating
1. teaches one or two subjects alongside his librarianship job	33% A or SA
2. selects and orders new books and other materials for the library	87% A or SA
3. processes new books and puts them on the shelves	96% A or SA
4. recommends and helps students in choosing relevant materials	87% A or SA
5. conducts programmes of instruction on the use of the library for students	71% A or SA
6. keeps records of incoming materials as well as those going out	93% A or SA

7. publicises library activities and resources through regular display and exhibitions	51% A or SA
8. is always available to help the students in using the library	95% A or SA

Item 1 on Table 1 reveals that 33% of the subjects sampled perceived the librarian as one who teaches one or two subjects alongside his librarianship job. The remaining 67% see the librarian from another perspective. 87% of the respondents understand the librarian as the one who selects and order new books and other materials for the library. Item 3 shows that the students have knowledge of the professional activities of the librarian. They agreed that the librarian processes new books and put them on the shelves. A critical look at all the items indicates that the students have a positive perception of the roles of the school/teacher-librarian. This is evident in their responses to the items where high percentage of the respondents agreed with the roles of the librarian in each of the items except in item 1 where 67% disagreed with the instructional role of the librarian.

Research Question 2

How do the students perceive the image of the school/teacher-librarian as compared to other professionals in the society?

Table 2: Students' Perception of the Image of the Librarian

The librarian	Rating
1. is well educated and enlightened.	96% A or SA
2. is easily approachable and always ready to assist the students.	90% A or SA
3. can be compared to other professionals like bankers, engineers, and lawyers in terms of appearance and level of education.	82% A or SA
4. bullies and makes students uncomfortable in the library.	78% D or SD
5. is hardly seen or known by the students.	79% D or SD
6. is easily available to the teacher than the students.	51% D or SD

Item 1 on Table 2 reveals that 96% of the students surveyed agreed that librarians are well educated and enlightened. The responses indicate a positive perception of the image of the school/ teacher-librarian by the public. Item 2 reveals that the students perceive the librarian as being courteous and polite as indicated by 90% who agreed that the librarian is easily approachable and always ready to assist students. For Item 3, 82% of the respondents subscribed to the notion that librarian can be compared with other professionals like bankers, engineers and lawyers. This conception rates librarianship as equally important as other lucrative professions. A close look at all the items shows that majority of the students

have a positive image of the librarian. This is contrary to the stereotype of the public that librarians have poor self-image.

Hypothesis 1

There is no statistically significant difference in perception of the role of the librarian between male and female students.

Table 3: T-test, means and standard deviation comparing male and female students' perception of school/teacher-librarian

Variable-	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	P
Males	70	11.50	1.3	14	1.76	3.40	0.05
Female	130	18.0	0.9				

Significant at P<0.05

Table 3 shows that the t calculated value of 1.76 is less than the critical value 3.40, which was significant at 0.05 alpha level. This implies that there is no significant difference between male and female students in their perception of the role of the school/teacher librarian. The finding indicates that the earlier postulated null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant difference in perception of the role of the librarian between male and female students should be accepted.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in perception of the role of the librarians between the students in arts and science class.

Table 4: T-test, means and standard deviation comparing arts and science students' perception of school/teacher-librarian's role

Variables	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	P
Science Class	100	64.0	1.42	38	1.9	1,68	0.05
Arts Class	100	48.5	1.20				

Significant at P<0.05

Table 4 shows that the t calculated value of 1.9 is greater than the t critical value of 1.68, which was significant at 0.05 alpha level. The finding implies that there is a significant difference between the students' perception of librarian's role in arts and science class. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant difference between the perception of students in mixed and single sex schools of the image of the librarian.

Table 5: T-test table showing the difference between students' perception of the image of librarian in mixed and single-sex schools.

Variable	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	P
Mixed Schools	120	33.8	0.92	18	3.52	1.75	0.05
Single Sex Schools	80	12.8	1.2				

Significant at $P < 0.05$

In Table 5 above, the computed t calculated value of 3.52 when compared with the critical t value of 1.73 indicated that there is a significant difference in the perception of the image of librarians between mixed and single sex school. The hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the students' perception of the image of librarian in mixed and single sex schools was thus rejected.

DISCUSSION

The finding that the students have positive perception of the role of librarians in the school system supports Lance, Rowley and Hamilton-Pennel's (2005) assertion that library media specialists positively impact student achievement. However, the finding of the study disagrees with James (1989); Nwafor (1980) and Miller (n.d) who all believe that the role of the librarian was not properly appreciated in the educational system. Miller (n.d) put it succinctly that the role of the teacher-librarian in public schools is the most misunderstood of all those that work in schools.

It is interesting to note that the image and perception the students hold of the school librarian is positive in relation to their education, professional competence, and self-confidence. This good judgment about the positive self-image of the librarian is not in line with the stereotypical negative image the administrators and novice teachers hold about teacher-librarian. According to Harzell (2002), principals see the people who run libraries as librarians and librarians as stereotypically fussy, difficult to get along with, more interested in things than in people, and isolated from the staff.

Pans and de Gier in Freeman (1996) attributed the poor perception of the image of the librarian by the public to the nature of their profession which keeps them inside a building rendering services. According to them, there is too much 'behind the scenes' activity and too little public contacts. This unfortunate situation has given the profession a passive image. The result has shown that there is no significant difference in perception of the role of the librarian between the male and female students. The knowledge of the students about the contribution and importance of the school libraries and the school librarians in the educational enterprise has helped in shaping their perception. This finding supports Elaturoti's (2004) finding that students are aware of services needed in the school libraries to facilitate the effective use implementation of the schools curricula.

The significant difference in perception of the role and image of the school librarian by the students in the arts and science class as well as the students in mixed and single sex schools, could be explained by the degree of exposure of the students to the library activities. The students who have functional libraries staffed with competent personnel will have a better understanding of the role and the image of the school librarian when compared with students in schools with no libraries or ill-equipped libraries. Literature has shown that perceptions are formed based on experiences and interactions. For example, the type of the library, the librarian and the services performed, could help to form students' view of the role and image of the school library and librarian.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has revealed that students' perception of the role and image of the school librarian is positive. This implies that the students do not hold erroneous perception of the role and image of the school librarian. The positive perception of the role and image of the school librarian could be a strong determinant of the use of the library resources by the students. It is therefore imperative for the school administration to integrate library instruction programme in the school curricula to facilitate interaction between the students, the library resources and their school librarian. This could be an effective means through which students could gain better understanding of the role and image of the librarian.

To improve the perception of the role and image of the school librarian by the students in secondary schools, the following recommendations are made.

1. The Government should provide competent, skilled and information literate librarians to man the school libraries.
2. Library periods should be provided on the school time-table to create time for systematic library and information literacy instruction.
3. The school libraries should be equipped with multi-media resources and information technology facilities.
4. The pre-service training of teachers should have programmes that will impart knowledge of the role of school/teacher librarian and how they could work in collaboration with teachers to develop course work.
5. Opportunities for attendance of seminars, conferences, and workshops should be provided for teacher-librarians to up-date their skills and knowledge.

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