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South African Library and Information Science (LIS) Students’ Perceptions, Motivations and Reasons for Enrolling in the LIS Program

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Abstract: Library and Information Science (LIS) has gone through many changes over the past two decades. These changes have had an impact on the youth who want to study LIS. Lack of knowledge about LIS and its career opportunities makes it difficult for young people to consider studying towards a LIS qualification. Literature reveals that most LIS students end up in the program accidentally and without knowledge of the content. This study investigated students’ perceptions regarding LIS, the reasons for enrolling, and motivating factors that make students study LIS. The study was informed by the Circumscription and Compromise theory. To answer the research questions, a survey was conducted in three LIS schools in South Africa. A questionnaire was sent to first and final year students, and 165 responded. The findings indicate that before they enrolled, many students had a slight idea of what LIS programs were and prepared them to be. The students’ decision to study LIS was mainly influenced by information brochures, followed by relatives, teachers, friends, and parents. Most of the students decided to study LIS when they were already accepted to enroll at university but did not choose LIS as their first-choice program of study. The availability of job opportunities and a stable LIS work environment are the main factors that motivated students to continue to study LIS. Students also indicated that they were satisfied with LIS and would recommend it to others to study LIS. The study concludes that LIS is a compromise field of study because students did not initially want to study it. Interestingly, after enrolment, they became satisfied and motivated to continue with the program. Public awareness campaigns, especially in high schools, are encouraged to sensitize people about LIS.

Keywords: library and information science, LIS schools, LIS students, LIS perceptions, South Africa, students’ perceptions

1 Introduction

Choosing a career is not a decision that should be taken lightly, and the decision to pursue librarianship is no exception. According to Newbutt and Sen (2009), the lack of understanding of the role of a librarian, and lack of awareness of librarianship as a profession, results in young people avoiding librarianship. Many students do not initially decide to pursue a career in librarianship (Newbutt and Sen 2009), suggesting that librarianship is not appealing to young people. Studies agree that librarianship is regarded by many as a profession of low status and librarians as old people “shushing”, shelving, and stamping library collections (Egunjobi, Salisu, and Ogunkeye 2014; Madu, Odenigbo, and Tongs 2014; Newbutt and Sen 2009). Professions in LIS were named in a Forbes article as the worst to pursue because of low salaries and slow growth (Smith, as cited in Goodsett and Koziura 2016). It is therefore imperative to determine the influences and motivations of students to study LIS and measure their perceptions concerning the profession.

Ismail (2006) states that there is a need to determine how students perceive LIS and its job opportunities. Mugot (2012) concurs that there is a need to understand how undergraduate students perceive LIS qualifications and career opportunities. Cherry et al. (2011, 121) assert that “existing research has focused less on students’ perceptions of their programs.” Mansourian (2010) agrees that little attention has been paid to LIS students’ perceptions of their program, while Cherry et al. (2011) believe that a better understanding of how students view the nature and quality of their education is necessary. Taylor et al. (2010) state that it is imperative to investigate why students choose to study LIS so that the field can actively recruit new students and avoid the enrolment of students who are not interested in the course.

In South Africa (SA), students’ perceptions of LIS programs are not known. This has denied LIS schools...
Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Theories have been developed over the years to explain university students’ course choices. Examples include Musgrave (1967), Brown (2002) and many others. This study was informed by the Circumscription and Compromise Theory by Gottfredson (1981, 2002). A brief discussion of the theory is provided in the subsection that follows.

2.1 The Circumscription and Compromise Theory (Gottfredson 1981, 2002)

Gottfredson’s theory explains the development of occupational aspirations at certain ages of the human life, focusing mainly on young people from the age of three to adolescence. The core concepts of the theory are self-concept, occupational images, cognitive map of occupations, occupational preferences, perceived accessibility of an occupation, occupational alternatives, social space, and occupational aspirations (Gottfredson 1981).

According to Gottfredson (1981, 2002), the self-concept refers to one’s view of himself/herself. This view includes issues of gender, values, appearance, and other factors related to describing oneself. Occupational images have to do with the image that one has of an occupation. This includes images about the people occupying certain occupations, such as the life they lead, the work they do, and the rewards and conditions of the work they do. These images make up the cognitive map of occupations. Cognitive maps can be distinguished by sex-type, prestige of the job, and field of work (Gottfredson 1981, 2002).

Occupational aspirations revolve around whether the occupation is accessible and compatible with the person wishing to occupy it. Compatibility refers to whether the person is suitable for or compatible with the occupation, while accessibility has to do with whether the job is easily accessible to the person (Gottfredson 2002). Social space refers to the range of alternatives in the person’s mind that are considered acceptable. It reflects where the person might fit into society when they choose a specific occupation.

Circumscription is the process by which youngsters eliminate undesired occupational alternatives until they arrive at their best choice (Gottfredson 1981, 2002). Gottfredson (1981, 2002) states that this process is influenced by the cognitive development of the individual. There are four stages of circumscription: “orientation to size and power (ages 3–5 years), orientation to sex roles (ages 6–8 years), orientation to social valuation (about ages 9–13 years), and orientation to the internal, unique self (beginning around age 14 years)” (Gottfredson 1981, 545). According to Gottfredson, these developmental stages are influenced by cognitive development and one’s social environment. Circumscription and compromise take place at stage four (Gottfredson 1981, 2002).

Compromise is the process by which youngsters begin to relinquish their most preferred alternatives for less compatible ones that they perceive as more accessible (Gottfredson 2002, 93). This happens when people realize that their primary occupational choices cannot be fulfilled, and therefore choose alternative occupations. According to Gottfredson (1981), it is at the end of high school that the reality of the job market is realized by young people. This reality usually forces youngsters to compromise or to change their goals to accommodate uncontrollable circumstances. Gottfredson states that the degree of compromise could be low or high: “The greater the compromise the higher the concern over it” (Gottfredson 2002, 103).

Compromise is influenced by sex-type, prestige, and interests (which is the main factor that influences career choice) (Gottfredson 2002). Gottfredson (2002) states that these three variables are considered according to the degree of compromise. For example, when people face major compromises, they will sacrifice interests and rather consider sex-type and prestige instead. According to Gottfredson (2002), there are many combinations of sacrifice among the three variables.

This theory has been tested extensively in schools and universities. Examples include Blanchard and Lichtenberg (2003), who found that occupational interest was important in a low degree of career compromise, followed by prestige and sex-type. In moderate and high degrees of compromise, they found no differences between prestige and sex-type but noted that they were significantly higher than interest. Their results partially supported the theory. Junk (2008) tested the theory and found that prestige and
interest were more stable than sex-type, thus refuting the theory. Ivers, Milsom, and Newsome (2012) used the theory to develop a counselling framework for Latino students. Their study lent support to the circumscription and compromise theory as a framework for conceptualizing one aspect of Latino dropout problems. Prescod and Daire (2013) used the theory to identify challenges encountered by young Black mothers who are either at school or who have dropped out of school to provide information about culturally sensitive career development and counselling. Ibrahimovic and Potter (2014) used the theory to analyze low-income students’ career trajectories. Their analysis concluded that career counselors should try to guide the youth to overcome career barriers. Tsaousides and Jome (2008) applied the theory to investigate perceived career compromise, effect and work-related satisfaction in college students and concluded that career compromise is common and consequential.

As much as the theory was developed to explain career choices, we found it useful to investigate study choices. It informs our understanding of students’ perceptions about LIS programs and also whether students choose a course as an ideal course or as a compromise choice. Three constructs of the theory are applicable to this study: occupational images, occupational aspirations, and circumscription and compromise. Only the accessibility construct of occupational aspirations is relevant. It sheds light on whether the program is easily accessible to students, hence influencing their choice. The circumscription and compromise constructs determine whether students selected the program as a compromise, or as an ideal choice. Occupational images explain how students view LIS occupations.

2.2 LIS Education and Training in South Africa

A previous study by Ocholla and Ocholla (2014) determined that there are 12 LIS schools in South Africa. The figure has been revised to nine, currently at the Universities of Cape Town, Fort Hare, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, South Africa, Walter Sisulu, Western Cape, Zululand, and the Durban University of Technology. The Durban University of Technology is unique in that it is the only university of technology among traditional universities. Three schools revised their curricula to focus more on non-LIS courses but retained some core LIS courses: the Universities of Pretoria, Johannes- burg, and Stellenbosch. LIS schools offer undergraduate and postgraduate studies, such as undergraduate diplomas, bachelor’s degrees, postgraduate diplomas, and Honours, Masters, and Doctoral studies.

A review of South African literature reveals that research on LIS schools has focused on four areas: LIS employment opportunities, and knowledge and skills requirements at the workplace; the curriculum; the influence of information technology (IT) on LIS; and alumni’s perceptions. Tracer studies, newspaper scanning, and surveys were used to conduct the majority of these studies. LIS employment studies have focused on the employability of LIS graduates (Shongwe and Ocholla 2011), measuring the size of the LIS job market and investigating LIS professionals’ knowledge and skills requirements (Ocholla and Shongwe 2013; Raju 2017b). Curriculum issues have been investigated by Ocholla and Ocholla (2014) and Sibiya and Shongwe (2018), who found that the curriculum is well suited to the job market. The influence of IT on LIS has been investigated by Shongwe (2014) and Raju (2017a), who found that IT has a significant influence on LIS, specifically influencing job roles and titles. Stilwell (2004) looked at alumni’s perceptions. However, no study was found on students’ perceptions, influences, and motivations to enroll into LIS programs.

2.3 Students’ Perceptions and Motivation to Enroll in LIS Programs: A Global Perspective

Numerous studies (Issa 2012; Lo et al. 2016; Singh and Chander 2013) focusing on LIS students’ perceptions and motivations have been conducted over the years, and research is ongoing. The studies have tended to focus on three broad areas: students’ satisfaction and dissatisfaction with LIS; students’ awareness of programs and career opportunities in LIS; and reasons and motivations to enroll in LIS and choose LIS as a profession.

Studies on LIS satisfaction indicate that there are two factions: those who are satisfied and those who are not. Frey et al. (2004) found that students were satisfied with LIS and that convenience, flexibility, accreditation, and clarity about the programs’ objectives were the main reasons for their satisfaction. Cherry, Freund and Duff (2013) found that students were satisfied because the LIS programs provided education that facilitated career growth and development, and that LIS fostered professional identity and created an intellectual community. Hollister (2017) noted high levels of satisfaction in students taking the scholarly communication courses because they are interesting, important, and relevant to their career prospects. On the other hand, Cherry et al. (2011) found that students were dissatisfied with their LIS programs. The
students were of the view that courses in the programs did not prepare them for professional positions. The programs were also criticized for not enabling students to gain field experience. Students in Goodsett and Koziura’s (2016) study expressed similar sentiments; LIS students felt that the program would have been more valuable if it had given them more practical exposure and experience, and they suggested that more technology courses are necessary. In Nigeria, Issa (2012) found that many students were not interested in LIS, and therefore it wasn’t their first choice of study.

Other researchers have investigated students’ awareness of LIS as a program of study and as a profession. Ismail (2006) found that students had a very low level of awareness and understanding of LIS as a field of study and its career opportunities. They further found that students were not even aware of LIS job opportunities and higher education institutions that were offering librarianship courses. They were also ignorant of the qualifications that librarians must have, and rated librarianship lowest among 10 other occupations. White (2009) found that students could not differentiate between the LIS degree and the Bachelor of Information Science degree. Students believed that there is a difference in social status between librarians and information scientists, the former having a low status in society and the latter having a higher status. Additionally, students thought that librarians and information scientists perform different job functions.

Mansourian (2010) sought to determine undergraduates’ knowledge of LIS and found that students did not have a clear understanding of LIS programs and that they were confused about future job opportunities. Dali and Caidi (2016) found that those who were aware of LIS jobs preferred to work in libraries, archives and records management centers, academia, and non-traditional library settings (such as government institutions, private organizations, research institutions, and other non-library occupations). Ard et al. (2006) surveyed LIS students to understand their reasons for choosing LIS as a career. Their results revealed that the main reason was that they were optimistic about future employment opportunities. Egunjobi, Salisu, and Ogunkeye (2014) found that interest in LIS programs was the main reason for enrolling in LIS. Lo et al. (2015) discovered that the top reasons that influenced many students to choose LIS were career advancement, being able to assist library patrons, job security, a stable work environment, intellectual development, and career change. Singh and Chander (2013) discovered that people joined the program because they were inspired by their friends, families, guardians, relatives, teachers, and librarians. Lo et al. (2016) found that students were motivated by the LIS employment environment, professional factors, skills and knowledge transferable to future LIS work, and that the library is an ideal place to work in.

Other studies investigated students’ perceptions of librarians and their duties, the image of librarianship, and salary issues (Baruchson-Arib and Mendelovitz 2004; Chaputula 2014). Findings from these studies show that librarianship is regarded as a profession with low social status and that librarians’ roles are not recognized by organizations and society in general.

Overall, the literature provides different students’ opinions on the LIS field. Some students in the studies were satisfied with LIS programs, while others were not. At the early stages of their enrolment, studies show that students are not aware of the LIS program but come to understand the program later. The main reasons for choosing LIS are revealed as job satisfaction and a stable work environment.

In South Africa, the current students’ perceptions of the LIS program are unknown. It is also not clear what influences and motivates them to study towards a LIS qualification. Students are future LIS professionals whose attitudes towards the field should be known for recruitment purposes and to understand the motivation behind the selection of LIS programs (Ard et al. 2006; Cherry et al. 2011; Mugot 2012). This study address these concerns.

3 Methodology

A survey of LIS students was conducted to answer the study’s research questions. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) explain that a survey is suitable when the population of a study is large, and a sample is drawn from the population. A census of all first and final year students was conducted in three LIS schools in South Africa. The main advantage of a census is that the results drawn are largely accurate and reliable (Surbhi 2016).

Initially, five LIS schools were targeted for this study: two that offer LIS courses at postgraduate level only; two offering four-year Bachelor’s degrees in LIS; and one offering an undergraduate diploma. The schools were selected in order to gather data from different types of schools. In total, three schools participated, two that offer Bachelor’s degrees and one that offers an undergraduate diploma. We were not granted access to conduct the research in the two schools that offer LIS programs at postgraduate level. First year students were targeted because they had just enrolled in the program and the aim was to get freshmen’s perceptions, while final year students were targeted because of their familiarity with the program. Cherry et al. (2011) state that a few studies have
examined students’ perceptions upon entry and during their enrolment. A questionnaire developed by the researchers was distributed to all the participants. The questionnaire had open and closed-ended questions. Data was collected at one school at a time over a period of six months (October to April). In two schools, data was collected by distributing the questionnaire physically to the respondents, and in one school data was collected online. A pre-test of the questionnaire was conducted before data collection commenced. In total, there were 165 respondents: 88 (53%) first year students and 77 (47%) final year students. Triangulation (Konecki 2008) was used at the data analysis phase. Descriptive statistics by means of frequency distribution (Pietersen and Maree 2007) were used to analyze quantitative data, while content analysis (Elo and Kyngäs 2008) was used to analyze qualitative data.

Miles and Huberman’s (1994) model was adopted to analyze qualitative data. The model states that qualitative data is analyzed in three processes: data reduction, data display, and data verification and conclusions (Miles and Huberman 1994, 12). The lead author conducted all these processes in this study because they are familiar with the coding process. Data reduction involved coding, writing summaries, and categories. That was followed by organizing the data in tables and categories and deciding which data should be placed where. The last stage was to verify the data, draw conclusions and decide on final categories and themes. The findings are presented in the following section.

4 Findings

This section presents students’ perceptions about LIS programs; the factors that influenced them to enroll in LIS; decision stages to study LIS; motivating factors to continue to study LIS; and students’ satisfaction with LIS programs. In total, there were 165 respondents: 88 (53%) first year students and 77 (47%) final year students.

4.1 Students’ Perceptions Regarding LIS Programs

Students were asked to state their opinions about the LIS programs they were enrolled in. They were required to state their current perceptions about the LIS program and how they perceived LIS before their enrolment. The responses were combined for both first and final year students.

Some of the responses regarding their perceptions prior to enrolment were as follows:

“I thought LIS was a profession which enables someone to work in the library,” was a response from a first year student. Another first year responded as follows: “[I thought] It was the course that you study when you want to work in libraries.”

“I thought it was a program that has to do with books and working in the library as an information provider,” was the response from a final year student.

Another final year student wrote: “It is all about shelving books and making library cards and train [sic] people to use computers.”

The responses above show that before enrolment, students had an idea of what LIS is.

A follow-up question was asked about their current perceptions of LIS. A summary of the responses indicates that students were of the view that LIS programs prepare them for their future role as librarians and information providers. Examples of their responses are as follows:

“It teaches us to provide authentic information to people,” responded a first year student.

“[It is about] using electronic devices and technology to help in finding, obtaining and using information from information sources,” responded another first year student.

“I think it is about helping you [people] understand how to process and handle information, and on how to use it. It also helps you [people] to find the information you [they] need and teaches you [them] computer skills,” was a response from a final year student.

“Is all about making information available to patrons/users and give [sic] them information literacy skills so that they can be well equipped in their information seeking behavior,” was another response from a final year student.

4.2 Students’ Influences to Enroll in LIS

Students were asked to state what or who influenced them to enroll in LIS. Respondents were given options to choose from, and could choose more than one option. This question presents joint findings of the first and final year students. We did not believe that separating responses was going to yield different results. Table 1 shows the results.

The findings reveal that students were mainly influenced to enroll in LIS by information brochures, followed by relatives, teachers, friends, parents, and other factors.

Students were then asked to list the other factors that influenced them to choose a LIS program apart from the ones they chose above. Two broad factors were identified:
accessibility and awareness of LIS programs. The responses presented are for both first and final year students.

Students who enrolled because the program is accessible generally responded as follows:

“I was accepted,” responded a first year student, while another wrote, “The criteria were easy to meet.”

A final year student wrote that, “I just added the course after having a gap year, I was just like trying my luck or just in case. I wasn’t even sure if they would offer me a space to study it.” These responses denote easy access.

“My brother in law actually stated [that] I should do LIS because it has a lot of opportunities and also, he works at the Department of Arts and Culture; he has more knowledge, he explained everything to me,” wrote a first year student. This denotes students who were influenced by their awareness of the program.

A final year student wrote: “As I was doing my study time to pass matric, one of the librarians noticed me and I was visiting it [library] regularly and it is when I developed the love for being a librarian and the librarian explained the course [program] to me.”

“I applied for it, I heard on [the] radio that South Africa has a shortage of librarians”, was another response from a final year student.

4.3 Decision to Study LIS

When asked at what stage of their schooling they decided to enroll in LIS, the majority indicated that they decided to enroll in LIS after they were accepted to study at university. Others mentioned other stages of their schooling, and some made the decision at high school. Only one indicated that they made the decision in primary school. The findings presented in Table 2 are for both first and final year students.

4.4 LIS Applications

When asked if they actually applied to study LIS, the majority (82%) indicated that they applied, while others did not (21%). We believe that the 21% were rejected from their preferred choices but found a space in LIS. It is common in some South African universities that students are admitted to programs they did not apply for as long as they meet the minimum university and program requirements. Such situations happen when programs have reached their maximum enrolment numbers and applicants are willing to sacrifice their preferred choices for a space at university. Some students either did not remember or did not respond to the question. Table 3 presents the results.

| Table 1: Students’ sources of influence to enroll for LIS. | Table 2: Decision to study LIS. |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| **Responses**                                            | **Decision to study LIS**     |
| Information brochures                                    | **Responses**                 |
| Frequency: 35                                           | Frequency: 165                |
| Percentages: 21                                         | Percentages: 100              |
| Relatives                                               | After university acceptance   |
| Frequency: 28                                           | Frequency: 80                 |
| Percentages: 17                                         | Percentages: 48               |
| Teachers                                                | Other                         |
| Frequency: 16                                           | Frequency: 50                 |
| Percentages: 10                                         | Percentages: 30               |
| Friends                                                 | At high school                |
| Frequency: 15                                           | Frequency: 18                 |
| Percentages: 9                                          | Percentages: 11               |
| Other motivations                                       | After high school and at university |
| Frequency: 13                                           | Frequency: 7                  |
| Percentages: 8                                          | Percentages: 4                |
| Relatives and information brochures                     | At high school and after finishing high school |
| Frequency: 13                                           | Frequency: 6                  |
| Percentages: 8                                          | Percentages: 4                |
| Parents                                                 | At high school, and at university |
| Frequency: 11                                           | Frequency: 2                  |
| Percentages: 7                                          | Percentages: 1                |
| Schoolmates                                             | At primary school             |
| Frequency: 5                                            | Frequency: 1                  |
| Percentages: 3                                          | Percentages: 1                |
| Teachers, information brochures, parents, and other     | No response                   |
| Frequency: 5                                            | Frequency: 1                  |
| Percentages: 3                                          | Percentages: 1                |
| Schoolmates, teachers, and information brochures        | Total                         |
| Frequency: 4                                            | Frequency: 165                |
| Percentages: 2                                          | Percentages: 100              |
| Friends and information brochures                        |                               |
| Frequency: 4                                            |                               |
| Percentages: 2                                          |                               |
| Relatives, friends, and information brochures           |                               |
| Frequency: 4                                            |                               |
| Percentages: 2                                          |                               |
| Teachers and information brochures                       |                               |
| Frequency: 3                                            |                               |
| Percentages: 2                                          |                               |
| Information brochures and other                         |                               |
| Frequency: 3                                            |                               |
| Percentages: 2                                          |                               |
| Parents and other                                       |                               |
| Frequency: 2                                            |                               |
| Percentages: 1                                          |                               |
| No response                                             |                               |
| Frequency: 2                                            |                               |
| Percentages: 1                                          |                               |
| Relatives, teachers, and parents                        |                               |
| Frequency: 1                                            |                               |
| Percentages: 1                                          |                               |
| Schoolmates, teachers, and parents                      |                               |
| Frequency: 1                                            |                               |
| Percentages: 1                                          |                               |
| Total                                                   | Total                         |
| Frequency: 165                                          | Frequency: 165                |
| Percentages: 100                                        | Percentages: 100              |

| Table 3: LIS applications. | Application to LIS |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| **Responses**              | **Frequency**      |
| Yes                        | 135                 |
| No                         | 21                  |
| No response                | 5                   |
| I Do not remember          | 4                   |
| Total                      | 165                 |
When further asked about what choice they put down for LIS in their application forms, 58 (35%) indicated that it was their first choice. Ninety-two (55%) indicated that it was either their second or a subsequent choice, while 15 (9%) students did not remember. Table 4 presents the results.

The findings clearly indicate that for the majority, LIS was not their first choice. This is worrying because we would expect students to make their preferred program number one on the application form.

### 4.5 Motivating Factors to Continue to Study LIS

Students were asked what motivates them to continue to study LIS. These findings are reported according to first and final year students. This was done because the two groups were at different stages in their studies, and we believed that they could have different motivating factors. First year students’ responses are presented in Table 5.

The first year students’ responses indicated that they were motivated by four main factors to continue to study LIS: the availability of job opportunities; LIS work environment; a combination of job opportunities, salary, work environment, and prestige of the LIS profession; and a combination of job opportunities and work environment.

The findings of final year students are presented in Table 6. They indicate a slightly different pattern compared to that of first years. A good work environment motivates final year students the most, followed by the availability of job opportunities, the prestige of the profession, and salary.

The findings show that both groups of students were motivated by similar factors, but with a different order of importance. For example, for first year students, job opportunities were more important. For final year students, it was a good LIS working environment.

### 4.6 Satisfaction with LIS Programs

Students were asked to indicate whether they were satisfied with the scholarly content offered in LIS programs. The
findings compared the responses of the two groups. Table 7 presents the first years’ responses.

Most first year students indicated that they were satisfied with the content in the programs they were enrolled for. Seventeen percent were not sure, and 5% were not satisfied. This clearly shows that first year students were happy to be studying towards a LIS qualification.

Table 8 presents final year students’ findings. An overwhelming majority of 82% indicated that they were satisfied with LIS. Only 4% indicated that they were not. Another 10% indicated that they were not sure. The findings reveal a high satisfaction rate among final year students.

### 4.7 Reasons for Satisfaction

Students were asked to state why they were satisfied with studying LIS, and five themes were revealed: perception changes about LIS; the availability of job opportunities in the LIS field; the ease of the subject; a love for helping others; and a love for reading.

Those who indicated that it is because of plenty of job opportunities responded as follows:

“It is a career with a lot of opportunities” (final year student)

“I’m happy about LIS because one can work in different sectors in an information environment” (final year student)

Students also indicated that they were happy because the program had changed their perceptions about LIS:

“I have learned a lot and now I know LIS is not about stamping books or shelving” (first year student)

“It has taught me much and made me change my perceptions on what LIS is all about” (first year student)

Others indicated that it was their love of books that made them satisfied:

“From a very young age, I have always loved reading books” (first year student)

“It is a great choice for people who are interested in theory and reading books”

“It is a good program and it encourages reading” (final year student)

The students also revealed that the LIS program was easy to understand, hence their satisfaction. These responses were obtained from both groups:

“It is flexible and easy to understand”

“It is enjoyable, understandable and also has many opportunities”

“It is simple and enjoyable”

Lastly, students indicated that they were satisfied because LIS in general enables one to work with people. Specifically, they indicated that a LIS qualification will enable them to help people find information:

“This program teaches us on how to work with other people and motivate people about the importance of using, searching and also retrieving information,” (final year student)

“It motivated me on how to work with other people and also how information is disseminated” (final year student)

“I’ve learnt more about LIS now. I can be able to do education and teach LIS to develop others’ knowledge” (first year student)

### 4.8 LIS Recommendation to Potential Students

To find out if students were confident about LIS, they were asked whether they would recommend it to other people. The findings are presented in Tables 9 and 10. Table 9 presents first year students’ responses.

Seventy percent of first year students indicated that they would recommend LIS programs to potential
students, while 21% indicated that they might, and only 3% indicated that they wouldn’t. The findings mean that first year students are confident enough about LIS to recommend it to other people.

Similar findings were noted in the final year group, where 82% indicated that they would recommend LIS to others. Fourteen percent stated they might, and only one said they wouldn’t. These are encouraging findings. Table 10 presents the responses of the final year students.

### 4.9 Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that when students first heard about LIS, they had a slight idea about what it was, but gained more knowledge and understanding of the program once they enrolled. This agrees with Ismail (2006) in Malaysia and Mansourian (2010) in Iran, who likewise found that students in high school and in their first year of study usually do not understand LIS, scope and functions. The current students’ perceptions about LIS is that it trains them to work in information and library environments and that LIS professionals are information providers. This shows a better understanding of LIS after enrolling. Mansourian (2010) found that once students enroll and study LIS, they become familiar with the course. These LIS perceptions are what Gottfredson (1981) refers to as occupational images (how one perceives an occupation).

The study also found that most students decided to enroll for LIS at university. These findings are consistent with Taylor et al. (2010) in the United States of America and Alansari (2011) in Kuwait, who found that professional librarians and LIS students decided to study LIS during or after college.

Factors that influence and motivate students to study LIS have been widely reported in literature on the subject. The love for books; job functions; influence by professors, mentors, co-workers, friends, relatives, etc.; compensation; career progression; reputation of the university and LIS academics; location of school; economic factors; and interests are some of the factors found in literature (Alansari 2011; Dalí and Caidi 2016; Egunjobi, Salisu, and Ogunkeye 2014; Lo et al. 2015; Simon and Taylor 2011; Taylor et al. 2010). Interestingly, it would appear that in South Africa, information brochures are the main influence, followed by relatives, teachers, friends, and parents. Hodges and Karpova (2010) refer to the latter as interpersonal factors.

It was further revealed by most students that they did not choose LIS as their first choice, but as a second or subsequent choice. This means that most students did not intend to study LIS. Simon and Taylor (2011) call this an accidental route to LIS. Alansari (2011) observed a similar trend with professional librarians. Alansari’s study found that professional librarians had no intention to work in a library environment but “drifted” into librarianship. Ismail (2006) found that most students do not decide on LIS programs from the start, but choose it either because of influences, or as the only alternative left. Gottfredson (1981, 2002) refers to this stage as compromise. This means that the students were not interested in LIS, but had to take it as a compromise course because it was accessible to them. Gottfredson (1981, 2002) states that easy access to a profession is a factor that enables entry. It is further stated by Gottfredson that the compromise stage usually happens at the end of high school. In this study, compromise was found to have happened mainly at the start of university. This is because the majority of respondents indicated that they got to know about LIS at university. This is in contrast to Egunjobi, Salisu, and Ogunkeye’s (2014) study in Nigeria where most students indicated that they chose LIS as either their first or second choice.

Job opportunities, prestige of the profession, and a stable work environment motivate students to continue to study LIS. This is true to both groups of respondents. It is surprising that salary was ranked low as a motivating

### Table 9: LIS recommendation to potential students: first-year responses.

| Responses       | Frequency | Percentages |
|-----------------|-----------|-------------|
| Yes             | 61        | 70          |
| Maybe           | 18        | 21          |
| I don’t know    | 3         | 3           |
| No              | 3         | 3           |
| No response     | 3         | 3           |
| Total           | 88        | 100         |

### Table 10: LIS recommendation to potential students: final-year responses.

| Responses       | Frequency | Percentages |
|-----------------|-----------|-------------|
| Yes             | 63        | 82          |
| Maybe           | 11        | 14          |
| No              | 1         | 1           |
| No response     | 1         | 1           |
| I don’t know    | 1         | 1           |
| Total           | 77        | 100         |
factor. Lo et al. (2015) in Hong Kong also found that a small number of students listed salary as a motivating factor when choosing LIS. Hodges and Karpova (2010) state that subject choices are influenced by personal, interpersonal, and environmental factors. They further state that interpersonal and environmental factors are mainly considered for alternative choices. In this study it was found that interpersonal (brochures, relatives, etc.) and environmental (job opportunities and work environment) factors were major influences on students to choose and study LIS, thus confirming Hodges and Karpova’s theory. Stair et al. (2016) found that students are influenced by personal, interpersonal, and environmental factors to study LIS.

It is surprising that South African students stated that prestige of the profession is a motivating factor when literature (Madu, Odenigbo, and Tongs 2014; Newbut and Sen 2009) indicates that the LIS profession has a low status. These findings are unique to the South African context.

The majority of LIS students were satisfied with the LIS program and they indicated that they would recommend it to others. It is encouraging to learn that first year students are satisfied with LIS having studied for less than a year, and that they would recommend others to enroll. Alansari (2011) found that professional librarians are satisfied with the profession, even though many librarians decided quite late to become LIS professionals. Frey et al. (2004) in the United States of America and Cherry, Freund, and Duff (2013) in Canada likewise found a high level of satisfaction among LIS students.

A comparison of the findings of this study and other studies around the globe shows differences and similarities in students’ perceptions of LIS. For example, Cherry et al. (2011) and Goodsett and Koziura (2016) found that students were dissatisfied with LIS while in South Africa, a high level of satisfaction was found. In South Africa it was found that the understanding and knowledge of LIS before and after enrolment was high, yet in other parts of the world it was found to be low (Mansourian 2010). Students’ influences to study and motivating factors to continue their studies in LIS are the same in South Africa and other parts of the world (Lo et al. 2016; Singh and Chander 2013).

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings indicate that students decided to study LIS at university because of easy access to the program. They are mainly influenced by information brochures to study LIS. Most enrolled with a slight understanding of the field, but this changed after enrollment. It was also found that LIS was not the first choice of most, which makes it a compromise program of study, but the availability of job opportunities and a good LIS work environment motivates them to continue to study LIS. Students stated that they are satisfied with the LIS program, hence they will recommend it to other people to study.

The findings of the study will provide LIS schools with the opportunity to revisit their recruitment and public awareness policies. This is because the findings clearly indicate that many people are not aware of LIS programs and LIS schools end up with students who were not interested in the program.

The study recommends that awareness campaigns need to be conducted in society, especially targeting high school students who are about to enter university. LIS schools must run roadshows and participate in career fairs and open days to sensitize the public about LIS. Caidi and Dali (2015) agree that continuous outreach and promotion of LIS should be done in communities outside academia to improve the prestige and significance of LIS in the eyes of future applicants and improve public understanding and awareness of the field.

6 Limitations of the Study

The limitation of the study is that LIS schools that offer postgraduate programs only were not involved in the study. This is because we were not granted access to the research sites. We believe that data from these schools could have produced different results because students enrolled at these schools already have an undergraduate qualification, therefore their reasons for enrolling for a postgraduate LIS program could have been different from those of undergraduates.

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