



Evidence Summary

Lack of Congruence between Analyses and Conclusions Limits Usefulness of Study of Socio-cultural Influences on Student Choice of LIS Field in Greece

A Review of:

Moniarou-Papaconstantinou, V., Tsatsaroni, A., Katsis, A., & Koulaidis, V. (2010). LIS as a field of study: Socio-cultural influences on students' decision making. *Aslib Proceedings: New Information Perspectives*, 62(3), 321-344.

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Objective — To determine how social and cultural factors influence students' decision to study library and information science (LIS) as undergraduates.

Design — Semi-structured interviews and quantitative analysis of questionnaire data.

Setting — Three schools in Greece with LIS programs at the undergraduate level.

Subjects — One hundred eighty-seven first-year students enrolled in Greece's LIS schools' undergraduate programs in the autumn semester of the 2005-2006 academic year.

Methods — The authors piloted the questionnaire with 52 students at the LIS

school in Athens and had three faculty members review the questionnaire. After modification, the two-part questionnaire was administered during the first week of classes to all first-year undergraduate students enrolled in Greece's three LIS schools. The first section of the questionnaire collected data on student gender, age, area of residence, school from which they graduated, and parental occupation and level of education. The second part of the questionnaire covered students' reasons for choosing LIS as a field of study, the degree to which students agreed with dominant public views (i.e., stereotypes) of librarianship, and practical issues that influenced students' decision-making processes. The authors conducted two rounds of semi-structured interviews with students

from the same 2005-2006 cohort. They interviewed 41 self-selected students and then interviewed a purposive sample of 15 students from the same cohort in the fifth semester of the students' studies.

Main Results — The questionnaire was completed by 187 LIS students, with 177 responses considered relevant and used in the analyses. Demographic information showed that 78% of the respondents were female, 85.8% were from urban areas, and 98.9% graduated from public schools. The authors constructed two indices to assist with further analyses: the Educational Career Index, which quantified students' educational experience prior to study at the university, and the Divergence Index, which was created by comparing students' university entrance exam scores and students' ranking of LIS as a preferred field of study. The authors determined that 65% of the variance in the data was explained by two factors: students' responses to library stereotypes and students' self-reported reasons for choosing to study LIS. The self-reported reasons for studying LIS were combined into four variables (extrinsic reasons, intrinsic professional reasons, intrinsic academic reasons, and intrinsic social reasons) to be used in the multivariate analysis of variance tests (MANOVAs).

Three distinct clusters of students were found using the indices and parental education level in cluster analysis: Cluster 1 (low parental education, low Educational Career, and low Divergence indices scores), Cluster 2 (intermediate parental education, high Educational Career, and low Divergence scores), and Cluster 3 (high parental education, high Educational Career, and low Divergence scores). For three of the factors for choosing the LIS field (intrinsic professional reasons, intrinsic academic reasons, and intrinsic social reasons), Cluster 1 showed statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) from Cluster 2. Cluster 1 showed statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) from Cluster 3 for two aspects (intrinsic academic reasons and intrinsic social reasons). Cluster 2 and

Cluster 3 showed no statistically significant differences.

Conclusion — The authors concluded that students with different socio-cultural characteristics have different reasons for choosing LIS as a field of study and differ in their abilities to make competent decisions about their education. Students with high socio-cultural resources choose LIS for its intrinsic values and are able to make competent decisions. Students with low socio-cultural resources cannot make informed decisions regarding their chosen career paths and choose LIS purely for the prospect of future employment.

Commentary

The authors use theories and methodology influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu to analyze and explain why students choose to study LIS at Greek universities with respect to their socio-cultural backgrounds. It will be of interest to those desiring an international perspective on the demographics of LIS students; it is less useful for understanding how demographics impact decision-making processes.

Awkward language and lack of definitions for key sociological terms are hurdles that detract from the clarity of this article. Some awkwardness may be explained by translation issues if the authors' first language is not English. The more serious problem is the reliance on undefined sociological jargon. For example, for those unfamiliar with the specific usage in sociology of the terms "social capital," "agents," or "social actors" (p. 327), the jargon would pose a significant obstacle to understanding the theoretical framework.

The methodology and statistical analyses seem to be used appropriately, but inclusion of the questionnaire would have strengthened the article and clarified issues of data collection. The authors were clear on their use of statistics and there was only a minor discrepancy in the number of responses used in creating the

Divergence Index (136 noted in Table IV, but 128 according to calculations in the text). All variables were accounted for except age, and the authors did discuss some of the study's limitations.

The article's major flaw is that the conclusions appear to be based on the interviews rather than the analyses of the questionnaires. While the analyses did show statistically significant differences between the clusters, it is a stretch to conclude that students with lower socio-cultural resources have "a limited capacity to deal competently with complex decisions on educational matters" (p. 340) without also believing many of the assumptions upon which the authors built their analyses and conclusions. The authors cite their interview results to support this and other conclusions which could be valid, but lack of reported results from the interviews in this article makes it impossible to judge their validity.

The authors should be commended for integrating sociological theories in LIS research, but the lack of congruence between the questionnaire data analyzed and the interview results used to support the conclusions limits the usefulness of the article. This line of research warrants further study of the connections between students' backgrounds and their choice to study LIS, the results of which could be applied to the recruitment of future LIS students.