

Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (siwes) as a quality assurance tool: perceptions of the students in department of library and information science, Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria

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Abstract

The main aim of this study was to investigate the general perceptions of the students of Library and Information Science Department, Benue State University, Makurdi about the Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES). SIWES is a very crucial aspect in the professional development of would be Librarians. It provides an opportunity for would be Librarians to demonstrate practically the theoretical knowledge acquired during lectures. SIWES as quality assurance in librarianship is significant to the overall attainment of quality Librarians. It is a requirement for graduation and therefore, much attention is given to its implementation and execution. But despite the time and financial commitment invested into the programme, quality assurance appears to be an elusive dream. Against this background, the paper examined SIWES programme in the context of the students' perception about the programme in relation to its relevance, duration, compulsory nature, problems encountered and possible suggestions for its improvement. One hundred and eighty five (185) students were sampled from the population for the study. Five research questions were stated to guide the study and the instrument for data collection was questionnaire. The outcome of findings showed that SIWES programme helps the students to develop basic professional skills and it is beneficial to their overall educational development and should be sustained.

Keywords: Perception, Quality assurance tool, SIWES, Professional Skills, Librarianship

Introduction

Student industrial work experience scheme (SIWES) was established by industrial training fund (ITF) in 1973 to solve the problem of lack of adequate practical skills preparatory for employment in industries by Nigerian graduates of tertiary institutions. The Scheme exposes students to industry based skills necessary for a smooth transition from the classroom to the world of work. It affords students of tertiary institutions the opportunity of being familiarized and exposed to the needed experience in handling machinery and equipment which are usually not available in the educational institutions. Participation in SIWES has become a necessary pre-condition for the award of Diploma and Degree certificates in specific disciplines in most institutions of higher learning in the country in accordance with the education policy of Nigerian government. The Operators of the programme are Industrial Training Fund (ITF) and other coordinating agencies such as National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTEB), employers of labour, educational institutions etc. The programme is solely funded by the Federal Government of Nigeria and the beneficiaries are usually undergraduate students of the following disciplines: Agriculture, Engineering, Technology, Environmental Science, Education, Medical Science, Pure and Applied Sciences. The duration of SIWES varies from one programme to another. For example, it is four months for Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, and Six months for the University undergraduates.

SIWES is the accepted training programme approved as Minimum Academic Standard in the various degree programmes for all Nigerian universities aimed at bridging the existing gap between theory and practice of all professional courses in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. It is aimed at exposing equipment, professional work methods and ways of safeguarding the work areas and workers in laboratories, hospitals and other organizations. Prior to establishing the Scheme, industrialists and other employers of labour felt concerned that university graduates were deficient in practical background studies preparatory for employment in industries and other organizations. The employers thus concluded that the theoretical education being received in our universities are not responsive to the needs of the employers of labour. Consequently, the rationale for initiating and designing the scheme by Industrial Training Fund (ITF) in 1973.

In library and Information Science Department of Benue State University, SIWES is a pre-condition for award of degree in Library Science in accordance with national policy on Education. Thus, over the years, 400 level students have been participating in the programme in order to meet the requirement for their graduation. The duration for the programme is usually six months and students are allowed to make choices for their postings which are restricted within Nigeria. At the end of the exercise, students were required to write report of their experiences during the exercise and most of the reports were not very impressive. Some have openly expressed their negativism about the programme and even wished it was scrapped out. Apart from their

negative reports about the programme, most of the training institutions visited during supervisions have also complained of low performance of students. It may also be presumed that their employers are also complaining of their low output. If quality librarians cannot be produced, it therefore means that SIWES has failed and cannot justify its being a quality assurance tool. Considering this situation, can it be reliably said that SIWES is a quality assurance scheme or what is really wrong with programme? And why are the students showing this apathy towards the programme designed to equip them with the practical aspect of their course? It is this worry that necessitated the paper to investigate the general perceptions of the students about SIWES programme.

Conceptual Frame work

The Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) is a skills training programme designed to expose and prepare students of universities and other tertiary institutions for the Industrial Work situation they are likely to meet after graduation. It is also a planned and structured programme based on stated and specific career objectives which are geared towards developing the occupational competencies of participants (Mafe, 2009). Consequently, the SIWES programme is a compulsory graduation requirement for all Nigerian university students offering certain professional courses.

Significance of the study

The study will be of immense benefits to the students, Institutions, and Industrial Training fund (ITF), National Universities Commission (NUC) and SIWES Supervisors. Specifically, the study will be of great benefit to the students because it will provide them with the opportunity to air their views on the concept of the programme. In addition, the study will be beneficial to the students as it will help to address some of the problems affecting their smooth participation in the programme. It will significantly help to contribute to the planning and execution of SIWES as it will provide useful insights to the training intuitions, Industrial Training Fund (ITF), NUC, and other stakeholders for proper organization of the programme in Benue State University. It is also hoped that the outcome of this study would certainly serve as a useful source of information for supervisors on how they could strategize to make their supervisions better and efficient.

Purpose of the study

The main aim of this study is to investigate the general perception of the students of Library and Information Science students of Benue State University, Makurdi about the Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES). Specifically, the study intends to:

Methodology: The study adopted Simple Descriptive design aimed at investigating the perception of the students of Library and Information Science about the SIWES programme. Five research questions were stated to guide the study. One hundred and eighty five (185) students who have finished their SIWES were sampled from the population for the study. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire. The questionnaire which allowed for objective due to the use of close-ended item was presented in three scale rating, ranging from: Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Undecided(U). Correspondingly, each of the options attracts the following: Agree (A-3), Disagree (D-2) and Undecided (U-1). The response percentage rate of 50% and above was considered acceptable while response percentage rate of 49% and below was considered unacceptable.

Data analysis: Data collected were presented and analyzed using descriptive statistical tool such as frequencies and percentages.

Results of the Findings

Table 1: Research Question One: Is the SIWES programme relevant to students?

To answer the question on the relevance of SIWES, data was collected using the items in the instrument. The analysed data is presented on the Table below:

Table 1: Relevance of SIWES programme to Students

S/N	Option	Response rate	Percentage Response (%)
1	Agree	150	81.08
2	Disagree	30	16.22
3	Undecided	5	2.70
4	Total	185	100

As it could be observed from table, the respondents were varied in their opinions. One hundred and fifty respondents (81.08%) expressed their opinion that SIWES was very beneficial and relevant to them and should be sustained. While on the contrary 30 respondents (16.22) disagreed with the opinion that the programme was relevant, 5 respondents (2.70) were undecided.

Research Question 2: Should the SIWES programme be made a compulsory requirement for students' graduation?

To answer the question on if SIWES programme should be made a compulsory requirement for students' graduation, data was collected using the items in the instrument. The analysed data is presented on the table below:

Table 2: Compulsory requirement of SIWES programme for Students

S/N	Option	Response rate	Percentage Response (%)
1	Agree	180	97.30
2	Disagree	4	2.16
3	Undecided	1	.54
4	Total	185	100

On whether the SIWES programme should be made a compulsory requirement, one hundred and eighty respondents representing 97.30% expressed the opinion that SIWES should be made a compulsory requirement for students' graduation. While four respondents representing 2.16% disagreed with the opinion, one respondent representing 0.54% was undecided.

Research Question 3: Should the duration for the SIWES programme be reduced?

To answer the question on if the duration of SIWES should be reduced, data was collected based on the items in the instrument. The analysed data is presented on the Table below:

Table 3: Reduction in the duration for the SIWES programme

S/N	Option	Response rate	Percentage Response(%)
1	Agree	134	72.43
2	Disagree	48	25.95
3	Undecided	3	1.62
4	Total	185	100

Answering the above question, the respondents were varied in their opinions. While 134 respondents (72.43%) agreed that the six month duration was too long and should be reduced, 48 respondent (25.95%)

Table 5: Problems encountered during SIWES programme

S/N	Basic problems encountered during SIWES	A	D	U	Total
1	Delay in the payment of SIWES allowances	150 81.08%	30 16.22%	5 2.70%	185 100%
2	Unfriendly attitude of supervisors	128 69.195%	30 16.25%	27 14.50%	185 100%
3	Postage to distance places	145 78.40%	35 18.91%	5 2.70%	185 100%
4	Lack of basic training equipment	160 86.50%	15 8.10%	10 5.40%	185 100%
5	The period for SIWES programme is too long	155 83.80%	25 13.50%	5 2.70%	185 100%

The Table above analysed the basic problems encountered by students during SIWES. From the table, 150 respondents (81.08) mentioned delay in the payment of allowances as a problem, 128 respondents (69.1%) stated unfriendly attitude of supervisor while 145 respondents (78.40%) declared that postage of students was a problem. Lack of basic training equipment was mentioned as a problem by 160 respondents (86.50%) and 155 respondents (83.80%) stated accommodation as one of the problems encountered.

disagreed with the opinion implying that the status quo of six months duration should be maintained, and 3 respondents (1.62%) were undecided on the issue.

Research Question 4: Does SIWES help students to develop basic professional skills?

To answer the question on whether SIWES programme helps students to develop basic professional skills, data was collected based on the items in the instrument. The analysed data is presented on the Table below:

Table 4: Development of professional skills from SIWES programme by Students

S/N	Option	Response rate	Percentage Response(%)
1	Agree	108	58.38
2	Disagree	75	40.54
3	Undecided	2	1.08
4	Total	185	100

On whether the SIWES programme helps the students to develop basic professional skills, 108 respondents (58.38%) expressed the opinion that the programme helped them to develop basic professional skills while 75 respondents (40.54%) disagreed in their opinion that the programme did not in any way help them to develop basic professional skills. Two respondents (1.08%) were completely undecided about the question.

Research Question 5: What are the basic problems encountered during SIWES?

On the question on what were the basic problems encountered during SIWES, data was collected based on the items in the instrument. The analysed data is presented on the Table below:

Research Question 6: What are the suggestions toward improving SIWES programme?

On the question on what were the suggestions toward improving SIWES, data was collected based on the items in the instrument. The analysed data is presented on the table below.

Table 6: Suggestions toward improving SIWES programme

S/ N	Suggestions toward improving SIWES programme	A	D	U	Total
1	Prompt payment of SIWES allowances	180 97.30	2 1.08	3 1.62%	185 100%
2	Supervisors should be friendly to students	175 94.60	8 4.32	2 1.08%	185 100%
3	Postage of students should be limited to places near by	175 94.60	6 3.24	4 2.16%	185 100%
4	Provision of basic training equipment	170 91.80	10 5.40	5 2.70%	185 100%
5	The period of SIWES programmw should be shortened	182 98.38	1 0.54	2 1.08%	185 100%

From the Table above, the suggestions towards improving on SIWES programme is very glaring. 180 respondents (97.30%) suggested prompt payment of their allowance, 175 respondents (94.60%) suggested that supervisors should turn out for supervision and be friendly and 175 respondents (94.60%) suggested that postage of students should be limited to nearby places. While another 170 respondents (91.80%) made suggestion for the provision of basic training equipment, 182 respondents (98.38%) suggested reduction in the duration of SIWES programme as one of the ways toward improving SIWES programme.

Discussion

Relevance of SIWES to students. The outcome of the findings from research question one clearly revealed that the SIWES programme is very relevant and beneficial to students. Considering the high response percentage rate (80%) of the respondents on the relevance of the programme, one may rightly speculate that SIWES programme is positively impacting on the lives of the students and as such has overwhelmingly received the blessing of the students and should be sustained. The opinions of the students conform to a similar study by Owusu & Brown (2014) on the relevance of teaching practice. The result of the finding revealed that teaching practice is of immense relevance to the students.

Research questions two which sought to investigate if SIWES should be made a compulsory requirement for graduation revealed that the students were divided in their opinions. While a majority of the respondents unequivocally express their opinions that SIWES should be made a compulsory requirement for graduation, a handful number kicked against the opinion. But since the percentage of those who expressed their opinions in favour of making SIWES a requirement for graduation far out weight those against, it can conclusively be agreed that the programme should be sustained as compulsory requirement for

graduation. This standpoint conforms to Ngara, Ngwarai & Ngara (2013) on Teaching Practice Supervision and Assessment as a Quality Assurance Tool with the outcome that teaching practice should be made compulsory for students.

The outcome of the findings on research question 3 revealed that the students are clamoring for the reduction of the period of SIWES exercise. Though the respondents are varied in their opinion but majority expressed their negation for the duration. The general opinion from the result of the findings revealed that the duration of six months is too long and should be reduced. This view point may certainly not be unconnected with some of the difficulties the students encounter during the exercise and want the period reduced in order to shorten the period of their sufferings. In a related study by Azeem (2011) which looked at the duration of teaching practice, the outcome of the findings revealed that students have negative perception about the duration of teaching practice and argued for its reduction. It would therefore, not be out of place for one to support the agitation for the reduction of the period allocated for SIWES, more so as the outcome of earlier study supports the agitation for the reduction of the period of the exercise.

On the question whether SIWES programme helps the students to develop basic professional skills, the result of the findings clearly showed that majority of the students expressed the view that SIWES programme helps them to develop basic professional skills and it is beneficial to their overall educational development. The students' overwhelming positive response may be correct because the basic training equipment they are exposed to during the SIWES programme may have helped in the development of their basic professional skills. This line of argument concurs with the study of Kpanja (2001) on effect of video tape recording in microteaching training. The result of the findings revealed that the use of video tape recording in microteaching helps the students to

develop basic professional skills. Conclusively, one may be safe to say that the use of basic training tools during practical exercises helps students to develop basic professional skills.

The results of the findings on 'what are the basic problems students encountered during SIWES' shows unanimous response from the respondents. The result clearly reveals that the students enumerated the problems they encountered during SIWES ranging from delay in the payment of their allowances, and unfriendly attitude of supervisor. They also complained that they were posted to distant and far places, while others said they encountered lack of basic training tools and accommodation problems. Sincerely speaking, the problems enumerated by the students are very obvious and should not be taken lightly. These are students who are not working and are posted to distant places where they have to rent accommodation, cook and fend for themselves, coupled with the payment of their school fees. Even the meager allowances which are never paid in good time certainly cannot take care of the above mentioned financial exigencies. This lamentable situation conforms to the study by Bhargava (2009) on teaching practice for student teachers of B.Ed programme: Issues, predicament and suggestions. The outcome of the study revealed that lack of finance, postage problem and accommodation problems were among the problems the students encountered.

The outcome of the investigation on the suggestions for improvement on the SIWES programme clearly indicated payment of students' allowances before the commencement of SIWES, reduction of the duration of SIWES to four months, limiting the posting of students for SIWES to nearby places, provision of basic training tools, and proper and humane supervision by the supervisors. They further suggested that if their allowances are paid before the commencement of the SIWES, it will enable them to take care of their teething financial problems ahead of time, and that posting to nearby places where they can operate from their homes or schools will ease the problem of accommodation. They are also of the opinion that if the period of SIWES is reduced, it will also reduce the period of their predicaments. They are of opinion that the provision of basic training tools is very crucial as that enhances the development of basic professional skills. These suggestions put forward by the students out rightly agree with the similar study by Zindi, Nyota & Batidzirayi (2003) on improving teaching practice guide. The outcome of the study among other things suggests: prompt payment of teaching practice allowance, posting of students to convenient places, reduction of teaching practice period and provision of teaching instructional materials. The confirmation by this study further strengthen the genuineness and validity of the suggestions put forward by the students.

Recommendation

Based on the findings from the study, the following are recommended. In order to alleviate the financial burdens of the students, ITF which is responsible for the payment of SIWES allowance should ensure that the disbursement of such allowances is done before the commencement of the programme or soon after the commencement of the programme.

The training institutions should ensure that basic training tools are adequately provided in order to enhance the development of basic professional skills amongst the students.

The posting of students for SIWES exercise should be carefully planned in such a way that students are not posted to remote areas where they will be honest strangers.

The Industrial Training Fund ITF and the coordinating stake holders such as National Universities Commission and educational institutions should consider very seriously the possibility of reducing the period allocated for the SIWES programme since the students have complained bitterly that the period is too long. Lastly the SIWES supervisors should be humane by showing friendly attitude to students during supervisions.

Conclusions

The Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) is a skill training programme designed to expose and prepare students of universities and other tertiary institutions for the Industrial Work situation they are likely to meet after graduation. The students are the major participants of the programme and their opinions on the issue are therefore, very crucial and should be taken into consideration in the planning and execution of the programme. From the findings, the students have unequivocally identified major problems hindering their smooth participation in SIWES and those problems should be addressed to avoid a total collapse of the programme. In addition, they offered useful suggestions for the improvement of SIWES, and those suggestions should be the guiding principles to the stakeholders of SIWES in the implementation of the programme. Finally, there is every need to critically review and revamp the overall operational process of SIWES for effective and maximal results.

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