

Whither Urban and Regional Planning? An Investigation into the Popularity of and Satisfaction with Urban and Regional Planning as a Course of Study among Secondary School and University Students in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the level of awareness of Urban and Regional Planning (URP) both as a course and a profession among 553 secondary school and 453 undergraduate students of Urban and Regional Planning across responding universities in Nigeria. It was observed that about 70% of the secondary school students correctly identified what Town Planners do, about 96% of them recognized the need for Town Planners and almost half offered Geography (41.38%) or like Geography (50.83%). Also, URP was not among the popular courses of choice to be pursued at the tertiary level among the students. From the four-year admission data obtained from the Federal University of Technology Minna, about half (241) of the 485 candidates were admitted from those rejected from the Architecture Department. Overall, about 70% of URP students felt satisfied with the course and 87% will recommend it to others. Therefore, the study recommends up-scaling of career talks centering on the job prospects for URP graduates. This should be complemented by strong advocacy in the government circle on the need to create vacancies for planners in planning-oriented agencies.

Keywords: Urban and Regional Planning, Enrolment, Perception, Satisfaction, Career education, Professional courses

1.0 Introduction

Professionals have always been concerned about the future of their professions especially in the face of changing social, economic and technological systems. The dwindling employment opportunities has meant that students confronted with choice of course to study at the university level will have to evaluate the prospects of available courses and in most cases, the choice of course determines whether one becomes a civil servant or a professional. Even among the established professional courses, revision of curricula has created a new challenge and rivalry where lawyers now feel they are competent to perform the job of an Estate Surveyor and Land Surveyor seeing himself as a Town Planner and consequently competing and bidding for the same jobs. The situation has reached a point where the position of the Director of Physical Planning in the government Ministries, Corporations and Tertiary Institutions are now filled with Engineers and Architects and not professional Physical Planners.

Interest in this study was kindled by the concern and discussions by lecturers of Urban and Regional Planning expressed through their WhatsApp social media platform – “Association of Town Planning Educators.” The group had seen the low cut-off marks for candidates seeking admission into the Departments of Urban and Regional Planning (URP) in tertiary institutions, which can be as low as 160 compared to about 240 and above, for Architecture and some other professional courses, out of the maximum score of 400, as an indicator of dwindling attraction of the profession. The contributors posited that lack of awareness especially at the secondary school level, bleak employment opportunities after graduation and insistence on making Geography, which they claimed is no longer a popular subject in secondary schools, as a compulsory subject

in the admission requirements are responsible for low enrolment in the discipline. In view of these, this study aims to investigate the level of awareness of and satisfaction with Urban and Regional Planning as a course of study and a profession to be pursued in life among both the secondary and undergraduate students. The objectives of this research are to assess the level of awareness of and desirability for Town Planning by students at secondary school level and evaluate the level of satisfaction with URP as a course of study among university students. The research questions to which this study seeks answers are:

- i. What is the level of awareness of Urban and Regional Planning as a career worth pursuing at tertiary level among secondary school students?
- ii. Does offering Geography as a subject have any impact on choice of URP at the university level by secondary school students?
- iii. How satisfied are the URP students with their course of study?

2.0 Literature Review

Decision on the choice of course of study to pursue at the tertiary level, though may be unrealistic, usually start at the Senior Secondary level. At this level, students are already sorted out into subject clusters like Science, Arts, Commercial and Social Science classes and the final determinant factor is the pass level in various subjects at various examinations such as Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) and Ordinary Level examinations. This is corroborated by George and Wystrach (1987), who observed among Chemistry students of the University of Pretoria that 64.1% of Chemistry students surveyed indicated that their interest in a possible career in chemistry developed in high school, 24.7% in junior high, and 11.2% in elementary school.

Factors that significantly influence career choice have been identified in the literature and these include personality, interest, self-concept, socialisation, identity, globalisation, role model, social support and available resources like information and finance (Kerka 1998, Olufunmilayo 2013). Ogowewo (2010) in her study among secondary school students in Guyana observed that the choice of career was gender biased and the factors that influenced the students' choice of career were interest, life ambition, challenging nature of the career, prestige attached to profession, intellectual ability, high salary potentials and prospects of job opportunity. Consequently, there is always high demand for courses like Engineering, Accounting, Law, Medicine, Computer Science, Information and Communication Technology, Architecture and other similarly perceived "hot cake" courses.

Taking Accounting as one of those "hot cake" disciplines, Myburgh (2005) found that among the first year Accounting students of the Pretoria University, most choose this career right from Grades 8 to 11 based on their perception of availability of employment. This is similar to the findings of Alshahrani *et. al.* (2018) in their study among Computer Science students in three Scottish universities where potential jobs, general value of a Computer Science education and the potential to make useful contributions to society were the major factors influencing career choice.

Even though, personality has been identified as an important factor in career choice by students (Kerka 1998, Olufunmilayo 2013, Alonderiene and Klimavičiene 2013), this has been found not to always be the case. Korir (2012) in a study among the Hospitality students at Moi University, Kenya concluded that that majority of students were influenced by opportunity and environmental factors and not by personal factors.

Irrespective of the factors

influencing students' career choice, in reality, many students still end up in different courses of study other than their dreamed ones. Many students do not get admitted into the courses of their choice due to their inability to meet the specific admission requirements of such courses such as the national cut-off marks, credit pass in relevant Ordinary Level (O/Level) subjects and appropriate subject combinations both in UME and O/Level. Such students are usually offered, or seek alternative courses so as not to sit at home for long. While some students will be contented with their new courses, others will still be nursing the ambition to change or re-sit the university entrance examination. A study of 550 students by Osiyi and Jiburum (2020) from various universities across Nigeria found that only 46% of the students intentionally applied for URP. The study identified lack of counselling or awareness as a major factor affecting the choice of URP as a course of study in the universities.

Contentment has been found to be an important factor in students' satisfaction with their course of study. For instance, Dhaqane and Afrah (2016) in their study of 133 third- and fourth-year students at Benadir University in Mogadishu observed a substantial link between students' satisfaction and academic performance and that satisfaction improves both academic accomplishment and student retention. Other researchers such as Wach *et. al.* (2016) and Weerasinghe and Latlitha (2017) concluded that students' satisfaction in terms of field of study is a multidimensional process influenced by Grade Point Average (GPA), personal factors (like age, gender, employment and preferred learning style) and institutional factors like quality of instructions, promptness of teacher response, clarity of expectation and teaching style, among others.

A study of 107 final year Urban and Regional Planning (URP) students from six universities in Nigeria by Morenikeji and

Shaibu (2006) revealed that 35.8% of the students intentionally chose URP and 59.4% that accidentally got into the programme had originally chosen Architecture (16.8%) and Accounting (12.6%). However, irrespective of the mode of entry or motives for choosing URP, 91.2% of the students did not see their choice as a mistake and thus, were contented with the course. This study therefore, will explore the causes of low enrolment and possible solutions.

3.0 Methodology

The study employs three sets of cross-sectional and one content analysis questionnaires using the Survey facilities in DATAtab online statistical software (DATAtab Team 2022) deployed to research volunteers. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents who were willing to participate. National Youth Service Corps members, secondary school teachers, younger colleagues in polytechnics and university were among those who volunteered as Research Coordinators. The secondary school students' survey was limited to only the Senior Secondary Students (SS3) preparing for university admission, two cities each were chosen from the North (Birnin Kebbi and Bauchi), Middle Belt (Minna and Jos) and South (Ibadan and Enugu) of Nigeria.

At least one private and one public school were included in the survey in each city. Additional surveys were carried out in Niger State to capture students schooling in rural areas and outside the state capitals. These students from Zungeru, Wushishi and villages around Kontagora were interviewed while registering for Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) at Computer-Based Testing Centres at Kontagora. Information sought included preferred course in the university, awareness of and need for Town Planning (Urban and Regional Planning) and likeness for Geography. Students' level of satisfaction is measured by arrays of questions asked

'whether they feel fulfilled in their present course, feel satisfied pursuing the course, whether the course can guarantee their life satisfaction, and whether they can recommend the course to others'. Cronbach's alpha for the five variables was 0.861, confirming the instrument's dependability.

For the undergraduate students' survey, universities having Faculty or School of Environmental Technology were identified. Secondary data was sourced from the Federal University of Technology Minna admission database to explore the trend in the popularity of courses among candidates seeking admission into the University for the period 2016 to 2020. Furthermore, questions were posted on the social media platform (WhatsApp) of the Association of Town Planning Educators. A total of 135 conversations covering the problems, causes and suggestions were subjected to content analysis to extract the threads running through the discussions.

4.0 Results

4.1 Profile of the Respondents

In overall, a total of 553 secondary school students were sampled for this study, of which about 59% of the responses were from public schools, 53.53% were males and 54.43% from Science class (Table 1). Similarly, 454 Urban and Regional Planning students from the universities were sampled. Of those responding from the universities, about 45% were final year students (500 Level) and 72% were admitted through Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) (Table 1). Also, 82 responses were received from the responding key informants who were polytechnic and university lecturers. Their characteristics are presented in Table 2.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents from Secondary Students and Undergraduate across Nigeria

Secondary Students			Undergraduates		
Item	Frequency	Percent	Levels	Frequency	% of Total
<i>Location (N=553)</i>			<i>University (N = 453)</i>		
Bauchi	39	7.05	ABU Zaria	49	10.8 %
Birnin Kebbi	42	7.59	BSU Makurdi	16	3.5 %
Enugu	50	9.04	FUT Akure	38	8.4 %
Ibadan	119	21.52	FUT Minna	220	48.6 %
Jos	40	7.23	KUST Wudil	34	7.5 %
Kontagora	16	2.89	LAUTECH Ogbomosho	61	13.5 %
Minna	191	34.54	UI Ibadan	12	2.6 %
Wushishi	28	5.06	University of Jos	8	1.8 %
Zungeru	28	5.06	University of Ilorin	15	3.3 %
<i>School type (N=543)</i>			<i>Level (N=452)</i>		
Private school	224	41.25	100L	55	12.2 %
Public school	319	58.75	200L	52	11.5 %
<i>Class (N=553)</i>			300L	73	16.2 %
Arts class	156	28.21	400L	69	15.3 %
Science class	301	54.43	500L	203	44.9 %
Social science class	96	17.36	<i>Mode of entry (N=357)</i>		
<i>Gender (N=553)</i>			<i>Direct Entry</i>	53	14.9 %
Female	257	46.47	Pre-Degree/Remedial 100L	47	13.2 %
Male	296	53.53	UTME 100L	257	72.0 %

Table 2: Distribution of Urban and Regional Planning

Institution	Frequency	Percent
<i>Institution (N=82)</i>	10	12.20
Kaduna Polytechnic	9	10.98
Federal Polytechnic Bida	8	9.76
Federal Universities of Technology Minna	6	7.32
Federal University of Technology Akure	6	7.32
University of Ilorin	6	7.32
University of Lagos	5	6.10
The Polytechnic Ibadan	3	3.66
Bayero University Kano	3	3.66
Kano University of Science and Technology Wudil	3	3.66
Modibbo Adama university of Technology Yola	3	3.66
Niger State Polytechnic, Zungeru	3	3.66
Olabisi Onabanjo University	2	2.44
Ahmadu Bello University	2	2.44
Lagos State University	2	2.44
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife	2	2.44
Rivers State University	2	2.44
The Oke-Ogun Polytechnic Saki	2	2.44
Bells University of technology	1	1.22
Federal University Birnin Kebbi	1	1.22
Imo State University Owerri	1	1.22
The Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti	1	1.22
University of Delta, Agbor	1	1.22
University of Ibadan	1	1.22
Yaba college of Technology	1	1.22
<i>Qualification (N=82)</i>		
M.Sc/M. Tech	39	47.56
Ph. D.	30	36.59
B.Sc/B.Tech	9	10.98
HND	2	2.44
<i>Professional Registration (N=82)</i>		
Yes	60	73.17
No	20	24.39
<i>Studied abroad</i>		
Yes Abroad	19	23.17
No Nigeria	57	69.51

Source: Authors' field work (2021).

4.2 Awareness of URP/Town Planning at the Secondary School Level

Majority of the secondary students were aware of the discipline called Town Planning (71.09%) and they correctly identified the roles and functions of the professional Town Planners as people who

prevent illegal constructions (51.65%) and design layouts and cities (28.94%). About 96% of the students recognized the need for Town Planners. Among them, almost half offered Geography (41.38%) or like Geography (50.83%) as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Students' Opinions on Town Planning and Geography Disciplines

Item	Frequency	%
<i>Aware of Town Planning (N=550)</i>		
No	159	28.91
Yes	391	71.09
<i>What Planners do (N=546)</i>		
They are agents of government to punish people	4	0.73
They design layouts and cities	158	28.94
They don't allow you to build anyhow	282	51.65
They draw building plan for people	95	17.4
They knock down houses, shops, religious buildings that they don't like	7	1.28
<i>Any need for Planners (N=547)</i>		
No	22	4.02
Yes	525	95.98
<i>Offer Geography (N=551)</i>		
No	323	58.62
Yes	228	41.38
<i>Like Geography (N=545)</i>		
No	268	49.17
Yes	277	50.83

Source: Authors' field work (2021).

4.3 Preferred Courses of Choice among Secondary School Students

Table 4 shows that the majority of the students planned to pursue Medical sciences (28.9%), Engineering (11.9%) and Law (11.2%). Other courses preferred by the students included Accountancy (8.9%),

Business Administration and Mass Communication (4.7%) and Computer Science (4.0%). Only 0.18% of the students intended to pursue Estate Management, Land Surveying, and Urban and Regional Planning.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents from Secondary Students and Undergraduate across Nigeria Secondary Students

Levels	Freq (%)	Levels	Freq (%)	Levels	Freq (%)
Medical	160(28.93)	Visual art	3 (0.54)	Entrepreneurship	1(0.18)
Engineering	66(11.93)	Agriculture	2 (0.36)	Environmental Management	1(0.18)
Law	62(11.21)	Arabic Islamic studies	2 (0.36)	Estate Management	1(0.18)
Accountancy	49 (8.86)	Biochemistry	2 (0.36)	Food science	1(0.18)
Business Administration	26 (4.70)	Community	2 (0.36)	Forestry	1(0.18)
Mass Communication	26 (4.70)	Economics	2 (0.36)	Industrial Chemistry	1(0.18)
Computer science	22 (3.98)	Geology	2 (0.36)	International relations	1(0.18)
Microbiology	18 (3.30)	Marketing	2 (0.36)	Languages	1(0.18)
Political Science	15 (2.71)	Marketing	2 (0.36)	Linguistics	1(0.18)
Economics	12 (2.17)	Psychology	2 (0.36)	Management Course	1(0.18)
Architecture	10 (1.81)	Public Administration	2 (0.36)	Mathematics	1(0.18)
Theatre Art	10 (1.81)	Public Administration	2 (0.36)	Public relations	1(0.18)
Banking and finance	7 (1.27)	Quantity surveying	2 (0.36)	Safety and security	1(0.18)
Sociology	6 (1.08)	Zoology	2 (0.36)	Secretarial	1(0.18)
Criminology	4 (0.72)	Biochemistry	1(0.18)	Surveying	1(0.18)
Education	4 (0.72)	Biology	1(0.18)	Urban and Regional Planning	1(0.18)
Geography	3 (0.54)	Biotechnology	1(0.18)		
Psychology	3 (0.54)	English language	1(0.18)		

Source: Authors' field work (2021).

4.4 Number of Applications and Admitted Candidates into Environmental Courses in FUT Minna (2017-2020)

From the four-year records, a total of 213 candidates applied originally into the URP Department and this reduced to 179 after screening. As a result of the low cut-off mark of 180, some candidates changed from other courses and were received into URP and the number of candidates increased to 397 during the screening exercises, while

after the admission process, the figure jumped to 485 as a result of candidates that transferred to the Department, having been rejected in their Department of original choices. Data on the candidates that changed courses from within the School of Environmental Technology was analysed and it was discovered that about 50% of the 485 candidates admitted into URP were from Architecture Department as presented in Figure 1.

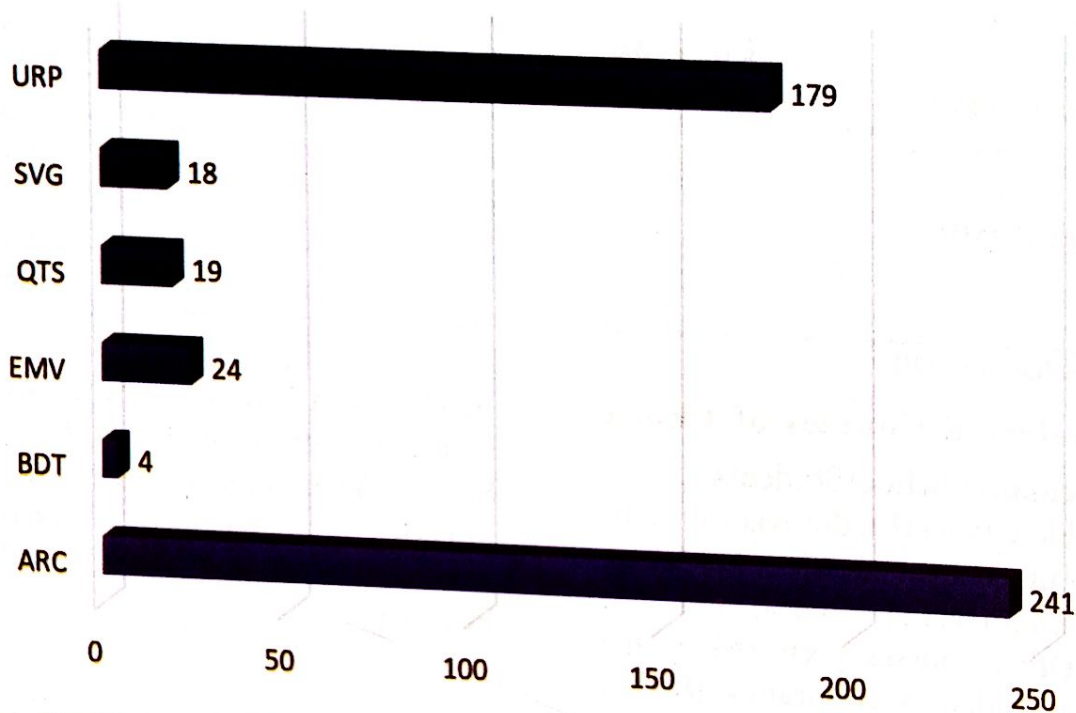


Fig. 1: Sources of URP Candidates (2017-2020) in the Federal University of Technology, Minna

4.41 Feelings of Undergraduate Students that Changed from Other Departments to URP

From the survey, 62 of the respondents (13.69%) changed from other Departments into the URP Department. The reasons advanced by 24 responding students, among the 62, for changing from another Department into URP Department were lack of interest in the former Department (50.00%), poor academic performance in the former Department (25%), inappropriate O/Level results (16.67%), low JAMB score and inappropriate Ordinary National Diploma (OND) background (1.00% each).

4.42 Level of Satisfaction with URP Programme among the Students

Satisfaction among students with their choice of URP programme was assessed as presented in Table 5. The result reveals that 319 (70.42%) of all the respondents felt satisfied continuing with URP and indeed 369 (87.03) believed the course can guarantee them life satisfaction while 268 (62.33%) will recommend the course to others. It was also observed that 52.46% of those that changed Department did not feel unfulfilled by that change.

Table 5: Satisfaction Levels among URP Students

Items	Counts	%
<i>Change Department (N=453)</i>		
No	391	86.31
Yes	62	13.69
<i>Unfulfilled changing Department (N=61)</i>		
No	32	52.46
Yes	29	47.54
<i>Satisfied with the Course (N=453)</i>		
Neither yes or no	73	16.11
No	61	13.47
Yes	319	70.42
<i>Life satisfaction guaranteed (N=424)</i>		
No	55	12.97
Yes	369	87.03
<i>Will recommend course (N=430)</i>		
No	162	37.67
Yes	268	62.33

Source: Authors' analysis of field data (2021)

4.5 Reasons for Level of Satisfaction and Perceived Bleak Future by URP Students

About 40% of the students believed that it is what individuals make out of the course of study that matters and not the course itself but only 6.74% believed that the course is prestigious enough as presented. Other students that felt contented with the course believed that they planned to become consultants (26.42%) or that they will add values by upgrading themselves to becoming

major players in the Built Environment and look beyond URP (18.33%) as shown in Table 6. Similarly, the students who were not assured of life satisfaction with URP. Majority of the students (68.13%) believed that there is not much employment opportunities as the services of Town Planners are not in high demand and 21.88% of the respondents felt that the course is inferior to other built environment professions while 8.13% believed that the course is not lucrative.

Table 6: Reasons for Level of Satisfaction and Perceived Bleak Future by URP Students

Item	Count	%
<i>Reasons for Level of Satisfaction (N=371)</i>		
It is not the course you studied that matters but what you can make of it	148	39.89
The Course has gone beyond Theories. I plan to become a consultant on environmental/Built Environment matters	98	26.42
I will upgrade myself to become a major player in the Built Environment	68	18.33
I can fit into any job by my training as employers no longer place emphasis on course studied but ability	30	8.09
The Course is prestigious, my services will be in high demand and it is lucrative enough	25	6.74
Follow my dreams	1	0.27
There's no wasted knowledge	1	0.27
<i>Reasons for the perceived bleak future by URP Students(N=160)</i>		
Not much employment opportunities/Service not in high demand	109	68.13
I feel the Course is inferior to other Built Environment professions	35	21.88
It is not lucrative	13	8.13
I intend to be very wealthy	2	1.25
I do not derive pleasure from doing it	1	0.63

Source: Authors' field work (2021).

Academic Background of URP Lecturers

About 37% of the Lecturers possessed Ph.D certificate, 73.17% were professionally registered with 70% having studied locally in Nigeria. Of the ten responding lecturers that passed through HND, nine studied URP and one Estate Management at HND level before obtaining their First Degree. Of those with First Degree and above, URP and Geography related courses accounted for the highest certificates earned. From Table 7, between 22 and 50 lecturers had URP degree all through from B.Sc/BURP to M.Sc/M.Tech and Ph.D.

Geography/GIS/Environmental Management came second (13 at undergraduate, 5 at Master and 2 at Doctorate levels). Other areas of specialization of staff include Environmental Management, Housing, Transport and Urban Governance, among others. On the issue of Geography being made compulsory, 54 lecturers (70.13%) were in favour and further 62 (74.49%) confirmed that Geography was a compulsory requirement for their admission.

Table 7: Areas of Specialization of URP Lecturers at various Degrees

B. Sc Degree (N=64)		M. Sc. Degree (N=68)		Ph. D. Degree(N=30)	
Specialization	N (%)	Specialization	N (%)	Specialization	N (%)
Urban and Regional Planning	44(68.75)	Urban and Regional Planning	50(73.53)	Urban and Regional Planning	22(73.33)
Geography	13(20.31)	GIS and Remote Sensing	5(7.35)	Geography	2(6.67)
Architecture	2(3.13)	Environmental Management	4(5.88)	Transport Management Technology	2(6.67)
Estate Management	1(1.56)	Housing	3(4.41)	Entrepreneurship	1(3.33)
Housing	1(1.56)	Disaster Risk Management	1(1.47)	Estate Management	1(3.33)
Infrastructure Planning	1(1.56)	Estate Management	1(1.47)	Housing Development	1(3.33)
Infrastructure planning	1(1.56)	Governance and poverty studies	1(1.47)	Tourism and recreation	1(3.33)
Transportation	1(1.56)	Project Management	1(1.47)		
		Sustainable Urban Development	1(1.47)		
		Transport Studies	1(1.47)		

Source: Authors' field work (2021).

Problem and Causes of Low Enrolment in Urban and Regional Planning

Contributors observed that the low cut-off point usually assigned to URP for admission purposes is an indicator of low demand, a reflection of the public perception and a form of rating for the Course. This was succinctly put by a contributor who stated:

"Perhaps we can adopt a simple logic that courses considered profitable and more desirable tend to be more competitive, hence the higher cut-off mark compared to URP."

This view is substantiated by the four-year admission data from the Federal University of Technology, Minna showing the number of candidates that intentionally chose each course in the School of Environmental Technology originally. Table 8 shows that URP with a total admission demand of 213 has consistently recorded the lowest figures during the period.

Table 8: Total admission demand for URP (2017 – 2020)

Department	No. of Enrolment per Year				Total
	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Architecture	414	342	363	388	1507
Building	65	86	119	97	367
Estate Management and Valuation	80	78	109	74	341
Quantity Survey	85	136	137	106	464
Survey and Geoinformatics	74	112	107	110	403
Urban and Regional Planning	57	60	57	39	213
Total	775	814	892	814	3295

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the Information Technology Services FUT Minna (2021)

On the causes of low enrolment, 61 comments were made and Geography was mentioned 39 times. Most commentators argued that Geography is no longer a popular subject at the secondary school level and therefore many candidates seeking admission into the university do not possess the subject and being a compulsory requirement, may not be qualified to study URP. The position of those who held this view and called for the delisting of Geography as a compulsory subject is summarized by a commentator thus:

“Even the few that picked interest in URP were rejected because they do not have geography. It is only in Nigeria that we insist on Geography as a compulsory subject. I have checked the admission requirements in most universities in South Africa and UK, geography is listed as optional but not compulsory entry subject. The relevance of the subject is not even the bone of contention here. We identified low enrolment and we have also discovered one of the factors is the insistence on presenting Geography as a compulsory subject.”

There was, however, the other group that believed that Geography cannot be held responsible as there are more than enough students studying Geography as a course at

both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in Nigerian universities. One of such views supporting Geography being made a compulsory requirement is the one held by a contributor who observed that:

“Most courses in environmental sciences have one compulsory subject in their requirements apart from the general ones. For instance, Architecture has Physics, while Estate Management has Economics. If we delist geography from URP it means we will not have any compulsory subject like our allied disciplines. Will that not have an adverse effect? We will end up admitting rejects from other departments.”

Another counter-argument in support of Geography was made by a commentator in the following words:

“Having read with keen interest the ensuing argument as to whether or not geography as an entry subject for the study of URP is responsible for the low admission intake, my surmise is that this is largely not the case. Come to think of it, is geography such a difficult subject that any serious-minded student can't pass compared with other subjects like chemistry or physics. Blaming the low student enrolment into URP programmes on their inability to pass geography is one

way of saying that URP Course is not for serious minded students. To be sure there is apparent low level of awareness on what planning can offer in our Nigeria milieu. Rather than blame the entry requirement of geography, efforts should focus on improving the marketability of the discipline.”

Expressing a similar view, another contributor emphatically stated that:

“The issue of listing/delisting Geography as entry requirements is only a digression, as it only deals with low enrolment, as many have argued here that it is never a factor in their institutions because they have enough students. Meanwhile, the pertinent issue persists, and it has to do with prospects. Where do the large bulk of planners go after graduation? Especially these days that recruiting government agencies and private sectors are continuously delisting planners on the job portal. That should be the utmost concern.”

Aside from the issues of Geography (39 comments with only 11 supporting Geography) and employment prospects after graduation (12 comments), other factors identified included poor orientation at lower level (three comments), bad image and craze for quick money. Also, this study found out that propensity to choose URP as a course of study at the university level by the secondary school students was very low in spite of the fact that they are aware of the importance of the profession as far as urban planning is concerned. They prefer medical, engineering, and accountancy and law courses. This observation confirms the findings of Ogowewo (2010) who identified interest in and prestige attached to a course, among others as important factors in career choice.

Suggestions by Stakeholders

a) *The need for strong advocacy*

There were 46 relevant contributions after recoding, the most recurring words were awareness, orientation, campaign, sensitization, advocacy, and promote (16 times). The second group of common words were unbundling and rebranding (6 times each). From the arguments, campaigns or advocacy should be done at two levels, namely secondary schools and government agencies. It is believed that secondary school students are not sure of the job prospects of URP and hence will not choose the Course at the university level and that government agencies do not know what URP entails and thus do not list planners among those to be recruited or offered opportunities to serve the government in any way.

On the need for orientation at the two levels and the likely effects, a commentator remarked:

“I have followed the discussion and so I wish to add that orientation about the profession at the Secondary school level and to the general public needs to be intensified. When I was the NITP Chairman we tried it and today there is great improvement in the admission enrolment into the planning schools in the state.”

Contributors observed that other professions have adopted aggressive strategies to gain recognition and there is the need for URP practitioners to adopt similar strategies. This is captured in a view expressed by a contributor who compared URP with the Nursing profession as follows:

“I am well aware of how nursing profession and its national union fought, defended and penetrated both government agencies and private practice owners to ensure job opportunities cum good take home salaries for their professional members.”

Consequently, a commentator called for the “educating and re-educating government establishments and officials and the general public on who we are, what we do, how we do it and what are the beneficial impacts of all these for the society and individuals.”

Similarly, a contributor lamented thus:

“Unfortunately, most of our colleagues are yet to see things in that perspective. Until such a time when we have to unlearn what we have learned since 1966 to fit into the dynamics of 2021 and beyond, otherwise our dear poor 'Geography' would still be the scapegoat impeding the admissibility, employability and functionality of URP graduates. The time to act and promote our beloved URP is now!”

In doing so, a member on the platform posited that it will be realized that:

“We have employment opportunities, a graduate of urban and regional planning can work in an oil company, telecommunication firms and electricity and water supply firms but we need to create awareness of the profession's availability for study through the media as other prominent professions have been doing.”

b) *The need to Unbundle the Course*

There was an allusion to the structure of the URP curriculum as it is at present in most of the tertiary institutions offering the Course as being part of the problem. For instance, as observed by a participant in the discussion:

“Our best students are roaming about

the street because they don't know how to introduce themselves. Either as Urban Planners, Urban Designers, Rural Development Planners, Landscape Designers, Recreational and Tourism Planners, Transport Planners/Managers, Rural and Urban Policy Planners, Indigenous Knowledge Advocate/Planners, Facility Planners, Photographer OR Model Designers etc. Could we unbundle and specialize under the BIG umbrella of URP from the outset?”

Further argument in support of the above was advanced by another contributor who observed as follows:

“Truth is many of the things Geography teaches are being subsumed in most other fields (spatial analysis, GIS, map reading, surveying, social analysis etc). Geography has been unbundled. In some societies the unbundled components are now part of general knowledge. My foundation is geography, I have a master degree in it. Let's also not forget that planning used to be also called CIVIC DESIGN. So, our roots are diverse including civil engineering, architecture, social work, botany (Patrick Geddes), etc.”

The suggestions by the online commentators are not quite different from those obtained from those of the selected key informants. From Table 9, 40.05% called for strong advocacy 29.05% recommended rebranding including unbundling of the Course, while 20.02% clamoured for employment generation policies.

Table 9: Frequencies of Recommendations by Lecturers (N = 65)

Levels	Freq	% Total
Employment Policy	13	20.02
Enlightenment	26	40.05
Mentoring	2	3.16
Practical	5	7.72
Rebranding	19	29.05 %

c) Specific skills desired by the students

Table 10 reveals the students' thoughts on what can be done to increase their confidence about the future. The emphasis by 48.18% of the students was on adaptation and intensified use of technology

particularly handling/use of drones, Computer-Aided Designs, Geographic Information System and computer programming/coding. Another 30.66% emphasized fieldworks and practical works while 5.11% advocated for enriched entrepreneurship trainings.

Table 10: Specific skills desired by the students

Levels	Freq	% Total
Technology/CAD/GIS/Programming/Drone	66	48.18
Fieldwork/Practical	42	30.66
Professional practice/marketing/Managerial skills	11	8.03
Entrepreneurship	7	5.11
Arch Design/interior/landscape	5	3.65
Building Technology	2	1.46
Land surveying	2	1.46
Design/interior/landscape	2	1.46
Total	137	100

Source: Authors' field work (2021).

5.0 Discussions of Findings

Low propensity among the secondary students and consequently enrolment for URP Course at the university level is confirmed in this study. However, contrary to the assertion that poor level of awareness and declining interest in Geography at the secondary school level are responsible for the low enrolment in URP, this study shows that about 71.09% of the students were well aware of Town Planning and about 80.59% accurately identified what Town Planners do. A high level of awareness of the importance of the profession (95.98%) was found among the secondary school students which countered the earlier finding of Osiyi and Jiburum (2020) that identified lack of awareness as an important factor of low enrolment in the Course. However, in spite of the fact that 95.98% recognized the need for Town Planners, most of the students would rather choose Medical Sciences (28.93%), Engineering (11.93%), Law (11.21%) and Accountancy (8.86%) than URP that had only one mention out of 550. Also, Geography as a subject is still fairly popular at the secondary school level with 41.38% of the students actually offering,

and 50.83% liking the subject thus it can safely be stated that low interest in Geography is not one of the reasons for low enrolment into URP.

Similarly, after being admitted into the URP Departments, majority (70.42%) of the students were satisfied with the course and 62.33% of them will recommend the course to others believing that it is what one makes out of any course of study (39.89%) that matters, they can become consultants (26.42%) and upgrade their knowledge to become major players in environmental matters (18.33%). However, employment opportunity was the major concern (68.13%) of those not satisfied with the course. Furthermore, about 22% perceived the course to be inferior to other Built Environment courses.

6.0 Conclusion

Geography is still popular and being taught and there is equally a strong awareness of URP at the secondary school level but this observation has not translated into high choice of URP at the University level. The biggest source of candidates for URP in the university are those rejected

from other disciplines particularly Architecture.

Therefore, the study recommends up-scaling of career talks centering on the job prospects for URP graduates. This should be complemented by strong advocacy in the government circle on the need to create vacancies for planners in planning-oriented agencies like the Nigerian Airport Authority, Nigerian Port Authority, the Railway Corporation of Nigeria, among others. Moreover, the Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning Act of 1992 made provision for the establishment of the National Physical Planning Commission and the establishment of Local Planning Authorities in all the 774 Local Government Areas in the Country, these provisions should be actualised.

The Town Planners Registration Council of Nigeria (TOPREC) should continually impress it on the State Governments the need to prepare or revise their urban master plans to create jobs for the private consultants thereby creating more jobs and thus change the perception of both the secondary school and the undergraduate students of URP concerning the job prospects which they fear most. TOPREC again, should see to it that the Office of the Director of Physical Planning in all institutions, Ministries, Departments and Agencies are occupied by the professional physical planners. It is also suggested that at the Master level in all universities offering URP, the Course should be unbundled to allow for specializations as some universities are currently doing.

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