



Evidence Summary

There is a Relationship between Resource Expenditures and Reference Transactions in Academic Libraries

A Review of:

Dubnjakovic, A. (2012). Electronic resource expenditure and the decline in reference transaction statistics in academic libraries. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 38(2), 94-100. doi: 10.1016/j.acalib.2012.01.001

Reviewed by:

Annie M. Hughes
Reference Librarian
Wilson Dental Library, University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA, United States of America
Email: amhughes@usc.edu

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Abstract

Objective – To provide an analysis of the impact of expenditures on electronic resources and gate counts on the increase or decrease in reference transactions.

Design – Analysis of results of existing survey data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) 2006 *Academic Library Survey* (ALS).

Setting – Academic libraries in the United States.

Subjects – 3925 academic library respondents.

Methods – The author chose to use survey data collected from the 2006 ALS conducted by the NCES. The survey included data on various topics related to academic libraries, but in the case of this study, the author chose to analyze three of the 193 variables included. The three variables: electronic books expenditure, computer hardware and software, and expenditures on bibliographic utilities, were combined into one variable called electronic resource expenditure. Gate counts were also considered as a variable. Electronic resource expenditure was also split as a variable into three groups: low, medium, and high. Multiple regression analysis and general linear modeling, along with tests of reliability, were employed.

Main Results – The author determined that low, medium, and high spenders with regard to electronic resources exhibited differences in gate counts, and gate counts have an effect on reference transactions in any given week. Gate counts tend to not have much of an effect on reference transactions for the higher spenders, and higher spenders tend to have a higher number of reference transactions overall. Low spenders have lower gate counts and also a lower amount of reference transactions.

Conclusion – The findings from this study show that academic libraries spending more on electronic resources also tend to have an increase with regard to reference transactions. The author also concludes that library spaces are no longer the determining factor with regard to number of reference transactions. Spending more on electronic resources is also important to increase both in-person and electronic reference transactions.

Commentary

In this study, the author chose to address a gap in the current research regarding electronic expenditure and its relation to an increase or decrease in reference transactions. According to the author, multivariate analysis is a rare choice with regard to studying this topic, and often, the sample size chosen is small. The article analyzes previously published survey data that include a larger sample size than most studies on the topic choose to address.

Data from the *ALS* 2006 were utilized for this study, and variables related to electronic expenditure were analyzed. However, there is uncertainty with regard to how data were collected in the original study, and the author does not go into great detail or include the original survey instrument or the portions of the instrument used. Total gate counts and total reference transactions used in the calculations were not included. More information is needed on how the variables from the *ALS* study were used to create the one encompassing variable called electronic resources expenditure.

The author split the gate count and expenditure variables into three categories (low, medium, and high) which allowed for a depiction that higher spenders tended toward more reference transactions and higher gate count also tended toward higher reference transactions, but low spenders and low gate count equated to lower rate of reference transactions. One problem is that it does not look as if the author considered confounding variables affecting reference transactions, such as outreach to the user population, level of instruction provided on use of electronic resources, and the physical space itself. Level of expenditure may be correlated with a higher level of spending on librarian resources and therefore outreach to the community. Resources might be more abundant in the higher spending category and therefore instruction may be more available to those using electronic resources. Physical space may be more appealing as well in the higher spender category.

Electronic resources play an important role with regard to a collection and its use. However, it is not clear from this study that electronic resource expenditures are the real reason for increase or decrease in reference transactions. Perhaps if the author coded the original data provided by the *ALS* survey as to what type of reference transaction occurred (for example, Are the questions regarding use of electronic resources?), then the impact of electronic resources on reference transactions could be accurately calculated. The split variables included in the study do provide an interesting analysis with regard to higher spenders versus lower spenders, concluding that higher spenders do tend to experience more volume with regard to transactions; however, it is difficult to conclude that an increase or decrease in transactions is wholly due to these factors.

A final limitation with regard to the study is that it does not include a discussion section where the author could comment on methodological issues or address any bias of the survey conducted.

References

Glynn, L. (2006). A critical appraisal tool for library and information research. *Library Hi Tech*, 24(3), 387-399. doi: 10.1108/07378830610692154