Expanding the Range of Evidence Use in School Library Practice

Annie Tam
Head Librarian and Teacher,
The ISF Academy, Hong Kong
atam@isf.edu.hk

Ružica Rebrović-Habek
Teacher Librarian,
OŠ braće Radić, Zagreb, Croatia
ruzicahabek29@gmail.com

Zvjezdana Dukić
Independent researcher,
Zagreb, Croatia
dana.dukic@gmail.com

Abstract: *The study explores the involvement of school librarians from Croatia and Hong Kong in EBLIP. The main goal of this study is to find out what types of evidence school librarians from Croatia and Hong Kong use in their library practice and how useful they find different evidence types. The research method used in this study is survey and data were collected with an online questionnaire created and delivered with SurveyMonkey. The study reveals that school librarians in Croatia and Hong Kong use a wide variety of evidence sources in support of their library practice. Most often they use evidence from observation, professional interactions and library statistics. School librarians in both regions agree that these three types of evidence are the most useful for their library practice. However, if school librarians wish to demonstrate to stakeholders how school libraries contribute to teaching and learning they need to generate some more objective evidence through formal research. LIS educators and local school library associations may be encouraged to develop educational programs that will enhance school librarians' competences in formal research and involve them in a participatory research community.*

Keywords: *EBLIP, school library, Croatia, Hong Kong*

Introduction

Evidence-based Library and Information Practice (EBLIP) is commonly described as a process of examining library practice, thoroughly collecting various types of evidence from many sources, assessing gathered evidence, and using it to improve library practice (Brettle, 2017). This study investigates EBLIP in the school librarianship on the sample of school librarians from Australia, Canada, China, Croatia, Hong Kong, Philippines, and United Kingdom.

Literature Review

The concept of Evidence-Based Librarianship (EBL) is introduced to librarianship by medical librarians. Eldredge (2000) defines EBL as librarians' endeavor to integrate the library research with library practice. Booth (2002) describes EBL as collecting, interpreting, and applying valid and applicable evidence of library practice that may be reported by users, observed by librarians, and derived from empirical research. EBL is widely researched and discussed in recent literature in librarianship and in this short literature review only studies most relevant for this research will be reviewed.

Todd (2009) defines EBLIP in the context of school librarianship. His model consists of the three dimensions: (1) evidence of practice represented by empirical research, (2) evidence in practice referring to local evidence conjoined with school librarian's professional expertise and (3) evidence of practice involves the evaluation of school library practice, based on users' feedback. Koufogiannakis (2011) investigates what types of evidence practicing librarians working in different contexts utilize in their decision making and comes up with a model that entails three components: local evidence, research evidence, and professional knowledge. Local evidence includes library users' feedback, librarian observation, interaction with colleagues, assessment and evaluation of programs, usage data, and organizational data. Professional knowledge includes formal and informal learning, on the job training, tacit knowledge, and reflection. Richey and Cahill (2014) conducted a survey with school librarians from Texas (USA) to find out how they apply various components of EBLIB in their daily library practice. Following the research findings authors conclude that school librarians apply fourteen types of evidence: circulation statistics, student assessment and learning, library usage, surveys, anecdotal, programming, collection analysis, collaboration, financial data, formal evaluation, requests, communication, and professional development. Gillespie et al. (2017) conducted qualitative research to find out what Australian librarians from public and academic libraries experience as evidence in their professional practice. Based on their research findings authors identified six types of evidence: observation, feedback, professional colleagues, research literature, statistics, and intuition. Librarians use

their professional knowledge and experience to assess various types of evidence and make decisions. Anonymous (2019a) researched school librarians from Australia, China, and Hong Kong to find out what kinds of evidence they apply in their library practice following the evidence categorization model provided by Gillespie et al. (2017). The study findings indicate that school librarians from all three regions widely utilize all evidence types from the model applied and describe additional evidence types that they apply. In another work Anonymous (2019b) analysed the finding from the same research involving the evidence use practice of school librarians from Hong Kong and Croatia.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The main goal of this study is to examine what school librarians experience as evidence in their professional practice and what types of evidence they collect and use in addition to evidence types described in previous studies. The study builds upon previous research exploring how school librarians from different countries apply various kinds of evidence in their library practice (Anonymous, 2019a; Anonymous 2019ab). To enlarge the research sample and accumulate more empirical data, the authors applied the same survey to collect responses from school librarians in Canada, Philippines, and the United Kingdom.

Two research questions are formulated to address the research goals:

RQ1. What evidence types do school librarians from Australia, Canada, China, Croatia, Hong Kong and Philippines use in their daily practices?

RQ2. What other types of evidence school librarians from 7 countries aside from those described in earlier studies?

Methodology

In this study, mixed methods research approach has been applied. The research method is a survey, and data were collected with an online questionnaire containing twelve closed questions and three open questions. The questionnaire was developed with *SurveyMonkey* and was delivered to school librarians in various countries via their local school library associations. Altogether, we received 235 valid responses. Quantitative data are analyzed by applying descriptive statistics, and qualitative data from open questions (68 responses) were analyzed by conducting a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Findings and Discussion

The study findings indicate that school librarians from Canada, Philippines, and the United Kingdom extensively use evidence from library statistics, users' feedback, interactions with colleagues, research and non-research literature, observation, and intuition. Some similarities in findings are identified between this study and the other two studies researching school librarians from Australia, China, Croatia, and Hong Kong. School librarians from all 7 locations more often use evidence from observation and informal professional interactions with colleagues. In the category of library statistics study participants from all regions most often use evidence from a library management system, library instruction, reading activities, and library budget and staff.

The thematic analysis applied to qualitative data collected from the open-ended question about other evidence types that respondents apply in their library practice shows that school librarians use types of evidence that were not included in the model applied in our research. From the thematic analysis, 4 new categories of evidence emerged: Evidence from other schools and district libraries, Evidence from students' learning and activities outside the library, Evidence from communication and collaboration with teachers, school administration, and parents, and Evidence from formal and informal learning (academic study and professional development).

Implications and Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that school librarians commonly use various types of evidence in their school library practice. The qualitative analysis of open questions about other types of evidence reveals additional evidence types to be included in the EBLIP model for school librarians. Further research on EBLIP in school librarianship in various localities is recommended.

References

Anonymous (2019a)

Anonymous (2019b)

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Booth, A. (2002). From EBM to EBL: Two steps forward or one step back? *Medical Reference Services Quarterly*, 21(3), 51-64.

Brettle, A. (2017). Gathering Evidence for Routine Decision-making. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 12(4), 193-198.

Eldredge, J. D. (2000). Evidence-based Librarianship: An Overview. *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* 88(4), 289–302.

Gillespie, A., Miller, F., Partridge, H., Bruce, C. & Howlett, A. (2017). What do Australian library and information professionals experience as evidence? *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 12 (1), 97-108.

Koufogiannakis, D. (2011). Considering the place of practice-based evidence within Evidence Based Library and Information Practice (EBLIP). In: *Library and Information Research*, 35(111), 41–58.

Richey, J. and Cahill, M. (2014) School Librarians' Experiences with Evidence-Based Library and Information Practice. *School Library Research*, 17. Retrieved from <www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aaslpubsandjournals/slr/vol17/SLR_ EvidenceBasedLibrary_V17.pdf> (accessed January 8, 2021)

Todd, R. J. (2009). School librarianship and evidence based practice: Progress, perspectives, and challenges. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 4 (2), 78-96.

Biographies

Annie Tam (MEd in Teacher Librarianship, Charles Sturt University and MEd in English Language Teaching, The University of Melbourne, Australia) is the Teacher and Head Librarian of Secondary School of the ISF Academy in Hong Kong. She presents at local and international conferences.

Ružica Rebrović-Habek (BA, University of Zagreb, Croatia) is a teacher-librarian in a primary school in Zagreb, Croatia. She organizes professional development events for school librarians from Zagreb and presents at conferences.

Zvjezdana Dukic (Ph.D LIS, University of Zagreb, Croatia) has working experience in academic, special and school libraries and also taught LIS courses at The University of Hong Kong. She presents at conferences and publishes papers in academic journals.