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## School Librarians' Involvement in Research: An Analysis of IASL Research Papers, 2013-2023

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates the professional profiles and geographical origins of authors who presented research papers at IASL conferences from 2013 and 2023. It focuses on the involvement of practicing school librarians in conducting research and their participation in research forums at these conferences. Employing a quantitative approach, the study applies content analysis on a sample of 215 research papers drawn from 10 IASL conference proceedings (2013–2023). The findings reveal that the majority of research papers are authored by university faculty, with only a small proportion authored or co-authored by practicing school librarians. The United States stands out as the country with the highest number of research paper authors. Additionally, the study highlights the significant presence of collaborative authorship in school librarianship research, with half of the papers being co-authored. The authors emphasize the need for further investigation into strategies to encourage and support school librarians in engaging with empirical research, fostering their active contribution to the field.*

**Keywords:** *school librarianship, empirical research, collaborative research, school librarians, IASL conferences*

## Introduction

School librarians contribute to teaching and learning in the school environment in many ways, and to further enhance school library input to teaching and learning, it is important to collect and analyze the evidence of effective library practices. Therefore, the evidence-based library and information practice (EBLIP) is commonly recognized as an effective strategy to substantiate these contributions. According to Todd (2009), scientifically based research forms a critical component of EBLIP, as it provides a solid framework for informed professional decision-making, ultimately boosting the credibility and integration of school libraries within the educational landscape. However, many practicing school librarians may feel uncertain or lack comprehensive knowledge about research methods and the process of conducting empirical research. To address this problem, Todd (2009) proposed the model of participatory research, which encourages collaboration between school library researchers, educators, and practitioners. This model fosters shared learning and engagement, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Participatory research not only enhances the skills and confidence of librarians but also ensures that the research being conducted directly informs and benefits day-to-day practices within school libraries. This approach underscores Todd's emphasis on collaboration, professional development, and creating a robust body of evidence to demonstrate the impactful role of school libraries in education.

In this study, the authors examine the involvement of practicing school librarians in empirical research by analyzing their participation in Research Forums at the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) conferences. These forums provide a platform for school librarians to present their research, share findings, and engage in scholarly discussions with peers and researchers in the field. By conducting this investigation, the authors aim to shed light on the contributions of school librarians to the research community, identify potential barriers to their active participation, and explore ways to encourage greater engagement. Additionally, the study seeks to update and expand the existing body of knowledge on school library research, offering insights that can inform both practice and future research initiatives.

## Literature Review

The recent research literature on publishing practices in school librarianship shows that university faculty and doctoral students dominate as authors of research papers published in academic journals and presented at conferences, while practicing school librarians are represented by a small number of works (Clyde & Oberg, 2004; Oberg, 2006; Mardis, 2011; Morris & Cahill, 2017). Clyde & Oberg (2004) analyzed articles in *School Libraries Worldwide* journal from 1995 to 2003 and found that university faculty and Ph.D. students authored 80.6% of research papers while school librarians authored only 2.3%. Oberg (2006) analyzed papers published in *School Libraries Worldwide* from 1995 to 2006 and found that school librarians published best-practices papers more often than research papers and that altogether they published a very low percentage of papers. Mardis (2011) analyzed research papers presented at IASL conferences over 11 years (1998 - 2009) and found that university faculty or students wrote around 77% of the research papers while school librarians authored about 6% of the papers. Morris & Cahill (2017) examined research papers published in the journals *School Libraries Worldwide* and *School Library Research* from 2007 to July 2015 and concluded that only a few papers involved school librarians as authors of research papers. Although Library and Information Science (LIS) schools include research methods in their curriculum many practicing librarians do not engage in research because they do not feel competent in it (Wilson, 2016).

The low engagement of practicing school librarians in research does not mean that they are not interested in conducting research in their school libraries. The findings from the study by Dukić & Rebrović-Habek (2019) indicate that school librarians are eager to conduct empirical research in their libraries and have clear ideas about what they would like to learn about their library practice through research. The authors examined the effectiveness of the professional development course in research methods for school librarians in Croatia, organized by the local school library association. After finishing the course, even 70% of attendees stated that they planned to conduct research in their libraries soon. They wanted to explore the needs of their library users, their satisfaction with library services, and how to improve library collections and services.

Regarding the authors' country of origin, findings from studies commonly show that most research papers published in journals or presented at conferences are written by authors from the USA, Canada, and Australia (Clyde, 2004; Mardis, 2011; Beesoon & Branch-Mueller, 2015;



Morris & Cahill, 2017). Clyde (2004) analyzed research articles and conference papers on school librarianship published in English between 1991 and 2000, using data from international and national online databases. Her findings revealed that authors from the United States wrote 41.5% of all papers, while authors from Canada and Australia contributed 11.9% and 9%, respectively. Beesoon and Branch-Mueller (2015) analyzed research journal articles on school librarianship published in English between 2009 and 2013. Their findings revealed that the majority of research in this field was conducted in the USA (77.8%), with Canada and Australia also contributing, though with significantly fewer publications. The analysis of research papers published in *Libraries Worldwide* and *School Library Research* by Morris and Cahill (2017) showed that U.S. authors published 71.1% of the articles, while authors from Canada contributed 5%, and those from Australia and New Zealand collectively accounted for 5%. Following the findings from her study that analyzed papers published in IASL conference proceedings, Mardis (2011) compiled a list of countries with the highest number of papers based on the first author's nationality. The United States ranked first with 30.2% of research papers, followed by Canada with 12.2% and Australia with 10.6%.

Further, research shows that in library and information science, co-authorship is on the rise and that major motivators for seeking collaborators are acquiring expertise lacked, sustaining research interest, finding colleagues for sharing ideas and experience or providing access to specific research population (Luo & McKinney, 2015; Blečić et al., 2017; Morris & Cahill, 2017; Tran & Chan, 2020). Luo & McKinney (2015) examined the peer-reviewed articles published in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* (JAL) from 2004 to 2013 and found that over half of the articles were co-authored. The authors claim that research collaboration is highly recommended because of its many benefits: it enables researchers to share skills and techniques, facilitates the cross-fertilization of ideas, provides intellectual companionship, involves the researcher in a wider professional and academic network, and enhances the visibility of the work. Blečić et al. (2017) examined the contributions of U.S. academic librarians to peer-reviewed library and information science journals over a ten-year period (2003–2012). Their analysis, which divided the time frame into two five-year intervals (2003–2007 and 2008–2012), revealed an increase in the percentage of coauthored articles from 48.62% to 53.55%. Based on these findings, the authors concluded that sole authorship declined while coauthorship became more prevalent. Tran & Chan (2020) conducted a survey involving librarians from academic, special, public, and school librarians, aiming to understand librarian co-authorship motivations, strategies, and outcomes. The findings from this study show that



librarians and LIS researchers are highly interested in collaborating on research. The major advantages of such collaboration include sharing ideas and experiences, gaining or providing expertise, and distributing the workload more effectively. Collaboration between school library researchers and practicing school librarians can be highly beneficial for both parties (Morris & Cahill, 2017). Working together in research teams allows school librarians to enhance their research skills and gain valuable insights. At the same time, researchers benefit from access to K–12 school participants, including students, teachers, and administrative staff. This partnership provides a deeper understanding of the challenges and issues affecting school libraries.

## **Problem Statement and Research Question**

The literature shows that in the field of school librarianship, the authors of published research papers are mostly university faculty, and few studies involve practicing school librarians as researchers. Furthermore, the authors of the largest number of research papers most often come from the USA, Australia, and Canada. Research papers presented at the IASL conferences from 1998 through 2009 follow the same pattern regarding the professional profile of the authors of research papers and the country they come from.

Given the results from previous studies, the authors initiated this research to examine the professional and geographical backgrounds of authors who presented their research papers at the IASL conference during the past ten years (2013-2023) to determine whether there are differences in research findings in comparison to the findings of earlier studies.

The authors of this study are particularly focused on the involvement of practicing school librarians in empirical research and explore their participation and presence as authors of research papers at the IASL conferences.

Two research questions guide this study:

1. What are the professional profiles and geographical backgrounds of authors who presented research papers at IASL conferences from 2013 to 2023?
2. To what extent are practicing school librarians represented as sole authors or co-authors of research papers presented at IASL conferences during the observed period?

## **Methodology**

Quantitative methodology is applied in this study. Data were collected by extracting research papers from the IASL conference proceedings from 2013 to 2023, downloaded from the associations' website. A total of 215 research papers were extracted from the proceedings of ten IASL conferences. Research papers included in the sample were analyzed using quantitative content analysis. The analysis focused on three characteristics of research paper authors: the type of authorship (single vs. multiple authors), professional profiles and affiliations of research paper authors, and their country of origin. The collected data were categorized and coded, and the results were analyzed and presented using descriptive statistics.

The major limitation of this study is that it is based only on quantitative data. Including some qualitative data may provide insights into school librarians' views regarding their engagement in research and whether they perceive conducting research as being feasible, valuable, and empowering for them.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The IASL is established to promote and encourage the development of school libraries all over the world and to cultivate a sense of community among practicing school librarians and researchers in school librarianship. The association also provides an international discussion forum for all LIS professionals interested in promoting effective school library programs. In addition, the IASL fosters research in school librarianship, organizes annual conferences and coordinates various activities and projects.

The IASL annual conferences take place in countries in various parts of the world to enable the participation of school librarianship professionals from different countries.

**Table 1. IASL conference dates, locations, and the number of research papers (2013-2023)**

Conference dates	Conference locations	Number of research papers N = 215
2013	Bali, Indonesia	18
2014	Moscow, Russian Federation	18
2015	Maastricht, The Netherlands	32
2016	Tokyo, Japan	23
2017	Long Beach, California, USA	20
2018	Istanbul, Turkey	17
2019	Dubrovnik, Croatia	24
2021	Denton, Texas, USA	23
2022	Columbia, South Carolina, USA	19
2023	Rome, Italy	21

The list of countries where IASL conferences were held from 2013 to 2023, as shown in Table 1, underscores the association's role as an international forum for the exchange of ideas and knowledge in the field of school librarianship. The number of research papers presented at these conferences, ranging from 17 to 32, reflects the strong interest of professionals in school librarianship in actively engaging with the work of IASL conferences. It is important to note that these figures pertain exclusively to research papers. Many professional papers are also presented at IASL conferences, offering valuable insights into the professional practices of school librarians across various countries. Since this paper focuses exclusively on the research activity of practicing school librarians, the professional works presented are not included in this presentation. However, this paper focuses exclusively on the research activities of practicing school librarians. Therefore, professional papers presented at IASL conferences during the observed period are not included in the analysis. The analysis of the research papers presented at IASL conferences over the past 10 years centers on three key aspects: the type of authorship (single vs. multiple authors), the professional profiles and affiliations of the authors, and the countries of the authors' origin.

**Table 2. Types of IASL conferences research papers authorship**

	Number of research papers N = 215
Single-author papers	50.7% (109)
Multi- author papers	49.3% (106)

A review of the data in Table 2 about the authorship types of research papers presented at the IASL conferences during the past 10 years reveals that 50.7% (109) of all papers were written by single authors while 49.3% (106) papers were written in co-authorship. This balance suggests that IASL conference research papers have a mix of individual and collaborative research efforts, indicating both independent scholarship and teamwork in research activities. It reflects a dynamic academic environment where both solo and joint work are valued.

These findings, which highlight the prevalence of co-authored research papers, align closely with previous studies examining authorship trends in Library and Information Science (LIS) research literature. These studies consistently show that research collaboration is a widespread practice among scholars in the field of librarianship (Luo & McKinney, 2015; Blečić et al., 2017).

**Table 3. Professional profiles of research paper authors**

Single author papers n = 109 (100%)		Multiple authors papers n = 106 (100%)	
University faculty	62.4% (68)	University faculty	56.6% (60)
School librarians	21.1% (23)	University faculty & school librarians	16.0% (17)
Other librarians	1.8% (2)	University faculty & MS or PhD students	15.1% (16)
Students (MS, PhD)	6.4% (7)	University faculty & other librarians	8.5% (9)
Others (teachers, administrators)	8.3% (9)	School librarians & others	2.8% (3)
		Library administrators	1.0% (1)



Considering the professional profiles and affiliations of the research paper authors, the research findings in Table 3 show that university faculty constitute the majority of single authors, accounting for 62.4% (68) of research papers. School librarians represent 21.1% (23 papers) of single author papers, showing a notable but smaller contribution compared to university faculty. Other librarians and students (MS, PhD) contribute a small percentage of research papers, at 1.8% (2 papers) and 6.4% (7 papers) respectively. Others (teachers and educational administrators) make up 8.3% (9 papers) of single-author contributions.

When examining multiple-author works, university faculty remain the largest group, comprising 56.6% (60 papers). Collaborations between university faculty and school librarians account for 16.0% (17 papers), reflecting a significant level of interdisciplinary partnership. Joint efforts between university faculty and MS/PhD students constitute 15.1% (16 papers). Combinations involving university faculty and other librarians make up 8.5% (9 works). Collaborations between school librarians and other professionals are less common, totaling 2.8% (3 papers). Library administrators have a minimal presence, contributing just 1.0% (1 paper). These results highly correspond to results obtained by similar studies that conclude that in school librarianship authors of research papers are predominantly university faculty while a very small percentage of school librarians are authors of research papers (Clyde & Oberg, 2004; Oberg, 2006; Mardis, 2011; Morris & Cahill, 2017). In multiple-authored papers, data clearly show that university faculty are the most frequent partners in collaboration and this result supports the finding by Morris & Cahill (2017) that there is an association between the level of collaboration and the academic rank of the first author. The authors suggest that collaboration between school librarians and researchers may be helpful for both parties. School librarians would strengthen their research skills while researchers would benefit by gaining access to K-12 settings and getting a better insight into the school library landscape.

The analysis of the research results about the geographical origins of research paper authors shows that authors from 37 countries presented their research papers at the IASL conferences in the past 10 years. For the needs of this study, all data about the research paper authors' county of origin are organized under two categories, one comprising all single-authored papers and multiple-authored papers from the same country (Table 4) and the other including research papers by multiple authors from different countries (Table 5).

**Table 4. Research papers by authors' countries of origin**

	Number of research papers* n = 190
USA	30% (57)
Australia	9% (17)
Canada	8.4% (16)
Japan	6.9% (13)
Nigeria	4.7% (9)
Turkey	4.7% (9)
Brazil	4.2% (8)
Jamaica	4.2% (8)
Croatia	3.7% (7)
Sri Lanka	2.1% (4)
Italy	1.6% (3)
Singapore	1.6% (3)
Other countries	18.9% (36)

Notes:

\*Includes all single-authored papers and multiple-authored papers from the same country

According to data presented in Table 4, authors from the USA contributed the largest proportion of research papers, accounting for 30% (57 papers) of the total. Australia ranked second with 9% (17 papers) and Canada followed with 8.4% (16 papers). The data clearly shows a strong predominance of the USA authors, reflecting a leading role in research output in this field. Australia and Canada, while contributing significantly, show a notably lower output compared to the USA. The contributions from countries like Japan, Nigeria, Turkey, Brazil, Jamaica, and Croatia demonstrate some regional diversity, highlighting the participation of authors from various parts of the world. Authors from other countries collectively made up 18.9% (36 papers) of the total contributions, indicating a relatively diverse international input. These research results highlight both the concentration of research activity in a few leading countries and the increasingly global nature of scholarly contributions in school librarianship. The findings, showing a high contribution to Research forums at IASL conferences by authors from the USA, Australia, and Canada, closely correspond to the findings by Mardis (2011), which showed that the highest number of research papers presented at IASL conferences were written by authors from the USA, Canada, and Australia. Studies exploring research paper publishing in school librarianship journals also found that the highest percentage of research papers were written by authors from the same three countries (Clyde, 2004; Mardis, 2011; Beesoon and Branch-Mueller, 2015; Morris & Cahill, 2017).

Further, the present study reveals that 11.2% (25 papers) of research papers presented at IASL conferences are co-authored by authors coming from different countries. The results shown in Table 5 indicate that 16 (64%) out of 25 multi-author research papers involving contributors from different countries included authors from the USA collaborating with international partners. Most frequently, they collaborated with authors from Australia (6 papers). Additionally, authors from Hong Kong and Croatia collaborated on five research papers, while authors from Qatar and the USA co-authored four research papers. All other international collaborations resulted in just one research paper each. The findings about international co-authorship of research papers correspond closely to the findings from the study by Clyde & Oberg (2004), showing that 14.9% of research articles published in *School Libraries Worldwide* journal from 1995 to 2003 were written by researchers from two or more countries.

**Table 5. Research papers by multiple authors from different countries**

Countries n = 18	Number of research papers n = 25
Australia & USA	24% (6)
Qatar & USA	16% (4)
Canada & USA	4% (1)
Russia & USA	4% (1)
USA & Sweden	4% (1)
USA & China	4% (1)
USA, Indonesia, Nigeria	4% (1)
Japan, USA, Malaysia & Australia	4% (1)
Hong Kong & Croatia	20% (5)
Switzerland & Turkey	4% (1)
Taiwan & China	4% (1)
Singapore, Hong Kong & Japan	4% (1)
Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong & S.Korea	4% (1)

The results shown in Table 5 indicate that 64% (16 papers) of multi-author research papers involving contributors from different countries included authors from the USA collaborating with international partners. Most frequently they collaborated with authors from Australia (6 papers, 24%). Furthermore, authors from Hong Kong and Croatia collaborated on 5 research papers (20%), while authors from Qatar and the USA co-authored 4 research papers (16%). All other international collaborations resulted in just one research paper each.

Collaborating with researchers from other countries offers significant advantages, including the exchange of ideas, experiences, and knowledge with colleagues from diverse



social and cultural contexts, as well as getting opportunities to collect and compare empirical data from different geographical locations. A notable example is a study conducted by seven university faculty members from five regions in Asia (Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and China). The study examined and compared school library programs in these five countries and was presented at the IASL conference in 2013. Another example of international collaboration is a study comparing school library programs and activities involving primary and secondary school students in Croatia and Hong Kong. The authors of this study included four school librarians (three from Hong Kong and one from Croatia) and a university faculty member from Croatia, who presented their findings at the IASL conference in 2017. Additionally, some researchers from different countries regularly collaborate on research, presenting their findings at conferences and publishing papers together. For instance, as shown in Table 5, four papers were presented at IASL conferences by authors from the USA and Qatar. These papers were consistently co-authored by the same two individuals: a university faculty member from the USA and a practicing school librarian from Qatar. This collaboration demonstrates a mutually beneficial partnership, with the USA academic sharing research expertise and encouraging the Qatari school librarian to engage in research, while the USA researcher gains access to unique and valuable research data from Qatar.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study delivers a comprehensive analysis of the research papers presented at the IASL conferences in the past ten years, examining key variables such as professional profiles of the research paper authors, authorship types (single or multiple), and the geographical backgrounds of research papers authors. Regarding the professional profiles of presenters of research papers at IASL conferences, the study findings reveal that university faculty predominantly serve as authors of these papers. In contrast, a significantly smaller percentage of school librarians are represented as authors or co-authors. Other groups, such as K-12 teachers, educational administrators, master's and PhD LIS students, and librarians employed in other types of libraries, are represented at much lower rates. Further, the research findings reveal that collaborative authorship is largely represented in school librarianship research. Almost half of the research papers presented at the IASL conferences in the past 10 years are co-authored, and paper co-authors are most often university faculty. Research collaboration among university faculty and practicing school librarians is at a very low level. These results



may incite initiatives to promote and support the collaboration of university faculty with practicing school librarians in conducting research for the benefit of further development of school librarianship research. Collaboration among researchers from different countries should also be encouraged as it facilitates comparative studies of school library practices in different parts of the world. These findings can serve as a foundation for future study in this field and can also guide efforts to encourage and support collaboration in library and information science research practice. Considering the research paper authors' country of origin, the findings lead to the conclusion that the highest number of research paper authors originate from the United States. This is followed by contributions from authors in Australia and Canada, but their input is significantly lower compared to that of U.S. authors. All other countries contributed with a small number of papers each, but the regional diversity of countries involved shows the international character of the IASL conferences.

The findings from this study may be valuable to researchers in school librarianship, educators in school librarianship academic programs, practicing school librarians, and school library associations. Researchers may explore what are the benefits of the research from school librarians' perspectives. It would be valuable to determine whether school librarians believe that empirical research can enhance their library practices, improve their understanding of user needs, and support strategic planning efforts. Additionally, researchers might explore whether school librarians feel confident conducting research independently or if they prefer collaborating with experienced researchers. Further investigation could focus on strategies to motivate school librarians to engage in research within their field, as well as identifying potential barriers that may hinder their participation in such activities. Educators in school librarianship academic programs may consider developing teaching strategies that would encourage school librarians to engage in research. The practicing school librarians may be encouraged to seek to collaborate with colleagues proficient in empirical research and to explore opportunities to enhance their research skills in gathering and analyzing empirical evidence on their library practice. School library associations may help to boost school librarians' interest in research and help them to enhance their research skills by organizing workshops to enhance their research skills and by encouraging collaboration of university faculty with school librarians.

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