School Research Around the World

Where It's Been and Where It's Headed

Karen Gavigan
kgavigan@mailbox.sc.edu

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Editor's Note: This article is adapted from a chapter written by the author in *School Librarianship: Past, Present, and Future*, edited by Susan Alman (Rowman & Littlefield 2017).

Although their research agendas may vary widely, school library researchers from around the world share the common goal of conducting studies designed to advance the field of school librarianship. International school library scholars are united in their efforts to prove that quality school library programs can have a significant impact on student achievement in their countries and around the world. This article provides a selective overview of global studies related to school librarianship. These studies are of interest to researchers as well as practicing school librarians who want to incorporate the results from these studies into their library programs. The studies selected are from issues of the journal *School Libraries Worldwide* from 2010 to 2016 and from papers presented at international school library conferences during those years. After analyzing the articles and papers to determine recurring topics, the following five themes emerged from the study: advocacy, collaboration, impact studies, reading and reading program, and technology.

Advocacy

Since 2010, the topic of school library advocacy has been well represented in papers and presentations around the world. For example, the advocacy topics listed below were presented at the 2014 conference of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA):

- Genevieve Hart examined advocacy initiatives in South Africa.

- Hanna Chaterina George and Diljit Singh studied the significant role that two national school library associations in Indonesia played in advancing school library programs.

- Maud Hell examined school library legislative actions and collaborations in Sweden.

- Katherine J. Philip and Emmanuel E. Okon described an advocacy plan for secondary school libraries in Nigeria.

Elizabeth A. Burns and Ross J. Todd from the United States also presented at this 2014 IFLA conference. In her paper, Burns described the advocacy strategies of a group of twelve practicing school librarians in Virginia. The librarians promoted their resources, programming, and library facility through reports and social media. The participants recognized the value of being a leader in the school, and an indispensable member of the school community. Todd's paper provided an analysis of ten years of research regarding school library advocacy initiatives in the United States.

Advocacy studies conducted in the United States have also appeared in recent issues of *School Libraries Worldwide*. For example, Ann D. Ewbank (2011) published an article describing a study in which she surveyed 381 school librarians from around the United States. Ewbank found that only half of the respondents reported that they engaged in advocacy activities, with the most frequent obstacles being lack of time and lack of awareness. She followed this national study with her study examining the use of Twitter for school library advocacy (Ewbank 2015). More recently, the January 2016 issue of *School Libraries Worldwide* included an article by Ken Haycock and Cheryl Stenström. In this advocacy study, findings suggested

that school librarians can use their interpersonal relations with decision-makers to help influence school library funding.

Collaboration

A significant body of international research in the school library field has focused on collaboration. A study in Australia determined that strong collaborations between school librarians and teachers had a positive impact on a project conducted to help students avoid plagiarism (Williamson, Archibald, and McGregor 2010). Similarly, a group of librarians and teachers in the United States collaborated to design a professional development program for elementary school librarians and teachers (Montiel-Overall 2010). The findings revealed that knowledge sharing, relationship building, and environment factors played essential roles in developing these successful collaborations.

Another researcher in the United States conducted interviews with three second-grade teachers to learn about their experiences collaborating with school librarians. The study demonstrated that teachers recognized school librarians to be experts about instructional resources and to have an important role in instructional planning (Kimmel 2012). Finally, a study in Israel examined the role that leadership efficacy plays in school librarian and teacher collaborations. The study was based on surveys administered to school librarians, teachers, and principals in Israel. Findings revealed that strong leadership skills had a positive impact on collaborations between librarians and teachers (Ash-Argyle and Shoham 2012).

Impact Studies

For the past four decades, studies worldwide have demonstrated that school libraries, properly staffed

and resourced, can have a significant impact on teaching and learning. A study published in *School Libraries Worldwide* provided an overview of school library impact studies conducted in the United States from 1993 to 2005. Alison G. Kaplan examined the effect of these impact studies and determined that the results of the studies were not effectively communicated to stakeholders, thus having a minimal effect on decisions and legislation related to the support of school library programs (2010). A Canadian-based study conducted by Ken Haycock built on the findings of previous impact studies. The data revealed that higher standardized test scores for students were associated with school libraries that were more accessible, better funded, professionally staffed, and with more resources (2011). Finally, as part of the proceedings of the 2015 IASL School Library Regional Meeting in Austin, Texas, Keith Curry Lance and I presented the results of the South Carolina Association of School Librarians' school library impact study, which built on the research of at least twenty-five previous school library impact studies conducted in the United States (Lance and Gavigan 2015). The findings from this study demonstrated that South Carolina's school librarians and school library programs can significantly impact student achievement, as evidenced by the results on state tests for elementary through high school students.

Reading and Reading Promotion

School library researchers representing countries around the world have repeatedly demonstrated the role that school libraries and school librarians have on students' reading comprehension and motivation. A variety of articles about reading and the promotion of reading in school libraries were published from 2010 to 2016. A study from Nigeria examined the participants' attitudes about reading, reading habits, reading speed, and their use of the library (Oyelude 2013). Findings from the study suggested a need for schools to collaborate on cooperative programs and competitions to motivate students to read. The idea of developing partnerships to promote reading was also the theme of a Jamaican study presented at the 2010 IFLA Conference (Stewart and Williams 2010). The study found that the partnership between public and school librarians played a positive role in helping to develop students' reading skills. A study conducted by Kasey L. Garrison, Danielle E. Forest, and Sue C. Kimmel examined the ways that books that won the Mildred L. Batchelder Award 2001 to 2013 supported awareness of global human rights and promoted global citizenship. The researchers recommended that librarians from around the world acquire translated titles from other countries as well as native-language titles that promote the basic tenets of global citizenship (2014).

Two *School Libraries Worldwide* articles by researchers in the United States described reading issues pertaining to marginalized readers. Nancy F. Knapp conducted a study with struggling third-grade readers in an effort to improve their reading test scores and reading motivation. As a result of a reading intervention conducted by volunteers, the students showed a significant gain in their test scores, and teachers reported positive changes in learners' reading skills and motivation (2013). In a recent *School Libraries Worldwide* article, Stephen Krashen described the reading challenges of another group of marginalized students, children

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of poverty. Krashen determined that reading comprehension and motivation of children in poverty can improve by investing more money in libraries, having students participate in self-selected reading, and providing reading programs that allow for a wide range of reading choices (2016).

Technology

Over a dozen articles related to school library technology studies were published in *School Libraries Worldwide* from 2010 to 2016. Many of them demonstrated the substantial role that school libraries and school librarians play in technology infrastructure and instruction. A Canadian study by Jennifer Branch-Mueller and Joanne deGroot examined the experiences that school librarians and teachers had after completing a course on Web 2.0 technologies. The participants reported that they gained competence and confidence in their technology skills, and they became technology leaders in their schools (2011). Similarly, an Australian study surveyed school librarians to obtain their insights regarding their roles in digital environments. The librarians felt a strong need to develop and use their technology skills to become technology leaders (O'Connell 2014). In another case study, Judi Moreillon examined the creation of a Twitter chat group for professional development activities. The results of the study revealed the value that the participating librarians placed on this social media tool (2015).

In an effort to help educators develop an understanding of challenges and solutions regarding digital learning resources, Marcia A. Mardis et al. synthesized the research regarding digital library technology, including the role of the school librarian (2012). In addition, Melissa P. Johnston investigated the

practices of school librarians with National Board Certification who were successful technology integration leaders. Johnston found that relationships and collaborations with principals and teachers helped school librarians play a leadership role in technology integration (2012). These findings were corroborated by a study in New Zealand in which the researcher examined school librarians' positions as technology leaders within their schools; Susan Clephane found that the two most important factors that enabled librarians to become technology leaders were the support of principals and school librarians' being proactive in the way they approached their technology role (2014).

One of the roles of the school librarian is teaching students and faculty about digital learning resources. Two articles published in the July 2013 issue of *School Libraries Worldwide* focused on digital storytelling. A study by Rebecca J. Morris investigated ways in which the interactive and participatory role of listeners in traditional library storytelling could be extended to digital storytelling spaces (2013). In another study Lucy Santos Green built the case for collaboration between school librarians and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers to design student-centered digital story projects. Her article provides an overview of the theories and pedagogy relative to using digital storytelling with ESL students (2013).

Additional topics represented in school library studies are digital textbooks and gaming. In their study Ji Hei Kang and Nancy Everhart compared the dissemination of digital textbooks in South Korea and the United States (2014). A Canadian study by Teddy Moline examined the learning experiences of eight teenagers when they took part in gaming activities, and the

implications that digital gaming has for school librarians. The results of the study suggest that learners maximize their understanding during challenging, self-regulated, situated learning activities such as gaming, and that school librarians can capitalize on the inquiry skills and strategies developed through gaming (2010).

Additional Studies

Due to space limitations, a variety of worthy studies were not included in this article. Some other important issues that school library researchers around the world examined from 2010 to 2016 include the following:

- diversity in school libraries,
- school library collections,
- school library facilities and learning commons,
- information literacy,
- school library leadership,
- school and public library cooperation,
- school library staffing, and
- stakeholders' perceptions of school librarians.

To access studies focused on these topics and to read the studies presented in this article, please see the International Association of School Librarians (IASL) and International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) websites; also search for articles on the websites of *School Library Research* and *School Libraries Worldwide*.

Professional Associations and School Library Research

Professional school librarian associations like the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), IASL, and IFLA play significant roles in encouraging the publica-

Table 1. Responses to query about topics for future research related to school libraries.

Countries	Suggested Research Topics
Canada	Information literacy (IL) and the importance of having trained librarians to teach IL skills
China	Public cultural service for children and young people
Croatia	How to introduce IL issues in recent movements toward a total reform of schooling and education in the country and the role of school libraries; also, LIS education and ongoing training of school librarians (very much connected to the first topic)
France	Creating/building school library events in primary school so the kids start thinking that visiting the library and reading for pleasure are common habits
	More research on information literacy instruction in secondary schools
Germany	Evolution of school libraries
Hungary	School children's usage of resources online in education and the school library's responsibility for making them available and educating students about proper usage of them
	Information design as a tool for information literacy
Italy	Environment and sustainability (e.g., developing a "green collection" and school librarians' role in fostering education on resource sustainability efforts and environmental awareness, etc.)
Japan	School children's usage of resources online in education and the school library's responsibility for making them available and educating students about proper usage of them
Kenya	Linkage between efficient school libraries and good academic performance in schools
	Future and sustainability of school libraries
Malaysia	A need to transform the school library to transform learning in school
	Impact of school libraries
New Zealand	School libraries and the difference they make to school learning outcomes
Norway	Information literacy instruction for high school students ages 16–19
	Role of technology integration in school libraries
Singapore	How to evaluate/measure school library effectiveness
	Information literacy through the implementation of the personal librarian program
South Africa	Global advocacy in best use of resources to bridge the knowledge gap between developed and developing countries
United States	School librarians' role in information and communications technology (ICT) integration

tion and promotion of studies that will be relevant to school librarians worldwide. For example, AASL's peer-reviewed journal, *School Library Research*, distributes major research findings to researchers and practitioners around the world by making its papers freely available at <www.ala.org/aasl/pubs/slr>.

IASL and IFLA have a strong history of advancing the field of school librarianship through school library research. IASL's peer-reviewed journal, *School Libraries Worldwide,* is published twice yearly, and its issues are available on the IASL website and in subscription databases. In addition, the annual IASL and IFLA conferences always include a variety of sessions dedicated to international school library research.

Future of School Library Research

School library researchers from around the world agree that additional research is needed to determine what effects school library programs have on student achievement. Conducting studies based on topics that are relevant to school librarians around the world can shape, change, and improve school library collections and programs. Several international school librarians and school librarian educators were polled at the 2017 IFLA Conference in Wroclaw, Poland, to determine pertinent topics for future school library research. The members of the IFLA School Library Section's Standing Committee, as well as other school library professionals attending the Standing Committee meetings, were asked the following question: What school library issue/topic would you like to see school library researchers examine in the coming years?

The twenty-one participants from fifteen countries around the world responded as listed in table 1.

Although the answers initially appear to be as diverse as the participants, three topics were mentioned by more than one participant. First, the need to conduct research regarding information literacy was listed by nine participants from the following seven countries: Canada, Croatia, France, Hungary (two), Japan, Singapore, and South Africa. Second, several librarians (from Kenya, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Singapore) listed the need for additional studies on the impact of school libraries. Finally, school library representatives from Italy and Kenya listed environmental and sustainability issues in libraries as an important research topic.

Conclusion

As information professionals in a rapidly changing world, school librarians need evidence-based research to help them improve their school library programs. Results from studies can help librarians learn best practices for how to develop effective library programs, acquire quality print and digital resources, and use these resources strategically with students and teachers. Identifying universal and cultural patterns in global studies can further benefit the field. For example, a consistent finding in the reading studies described in this article was that collaboration is a key component of effective reading instruction. Researchers in Nigeria, Jamaica, and the United States demonstrated that students' reading comprehension and motivation improved when school librarians collaborated with teachers, public librarians, and volunteers. Using these findings, along with the findings from other collaboration studies, can help librarians worldwide understand the value of partnering with others to improve student achievement.

Furthermore, international school library associations from around the world should encourage collaboration on school library studies between researchers from different countries. These associations can influence future global scholarship by providing funding for research, as well as providing opportunities for researchers to publish and present studies worldwide.

Finally, providing school library stakeholders with evidence-based research helps them to understand the potential of the school library program and the school librarian's role in impacting student achievement. As stated in the *IFLA School Library Guidelines*, librarians are encouraged to "call on educational decision-makers, including government legislators and school administrators, to consider the research evidence that shows the contributions that quality school library services can make to the educational success of its youth" (2015, 14).

Karen Gavigan *is an associate professor in the School of Library and Information Science at the University of South Carolina. Her research interests include the use of graphic novels in schools and school library access issues. Karen is a member of the AASL Practice Committee. She is also chair of the Joint Committee of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) School Libraries Section and the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL). She is coeditor (with Mary E. Styslinger and Kendra Albright) of the book* Literacy Behind Bars: Successful Reading and Writing Strategies for Use with Incarcerated Youth and Adults *(Rowman & Littlefield 2017).*

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