Chapter 1
The Evolving Landscape of Research Methods in Library and Information Science

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ABSTRACT

The library and information science (LIS) profession is influenced by multidisciplinary research strategies and techniques (research methods) that in themselves are also evolving. They represent established ways of approaching research questions (e.g., qualitative vs. quantitative methods). This chapter reviews the methods of research as expressed in literature, demonstrating how, where, and if they are interconnected. Chu concludes that popularly used approaches include the theoretical approach, experiment, content analysis, bibliometrics, questionnaire, and interview. It appears that most empirical research articles in Chu's analysis employed a quantitative approach. Although the survey emerged as the most frequently used research strategy, there is evidence that the number and variety of research methods and methodologies have been increasing. There is also evidence that qualitative approaches are gaining increasing importance and have a role to play in LIS, while mixed methods have not yet gained enough recognition in LIS research.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Library and information science (LIS) includes all aspects of human recorded information. According to Dick (2013, p.8), "there is a consistent effort in LIS to deal with the entire corpus of recorded human knowledge." As such, its research efforts overlap with other disciplines, e.g. communication, sociology, education, psychology, computer science, health, and more. To convey the idea that there must be mutual impact among various branches of knowledge and not exclusive to any specific one influencing the rest, Jamali (2018) proposes that high quality LIS research methods could be applied in other disciplines too. As a field consisting of both professional practice and scientific inquiry, the discussion

here is inclusive of both professional librarians and other information professionals who all appreciate the merits of methods used in information science research. In that regard, even the properties of theory used are articulated according to whether they are inductive (using various premises that are believed to be true) or deductive (data-generated new or emerging theory tested through deductive reasoning). Ritchie et. al. (2013, p.6) explains that "inductive processes involve using evidence as the genesis of a conclusion – evidence is collected first, and knowledge and theories built from this. Deductive processes use evidence in support of a conclusion – a hypothesis is first developed, and evidence is then collected to confirm or reject it." Quantitative research has a deductive approach where a hypothesis is expected before research progress is made, while the qualitative approach is inductive and concerned with generation of new theory emerging from research data.

The use of theory must be discussed because of its relevance to research. Ocholla and Le Roux (2011, p. 61) suggest that a theoretical framework is "informed by four major components: the hypothesis, the theoretical model, the research methodology – to be used to answer the hypothesis – and a well-defined literature review (supporting the focus of the research)," and this applies to the quantitative design. Creswell (2014, p. 67) points out that "how theory is used affects its placement in a qualitative study. In those studies, with a cultural theme or a theoretical lens, the theory occurs in the opening passages of the study. Consistent with the emerging design of qualitative inquiry, the theory may appear at the beginning and be modified or adjusted based on participant views." Thus, the approach to theory use varies depending on whether the study is qualitative or quantitative. Chapter Two further discusses the importance of theory to research.

The purpose of this chapter is to scan the unfolding research practice landscape that is based on qualitative and quantitative approaches, and an increasing mixed methods use, and alert librarian practitioners to the need to keep involved and updated about the impact of these in LIS research. The reason for compiling the chapter is the realization of a tendency to be minimally concerned with research once an individual attains the terminal degree which remains a masters level programme in library and information studies accredited or recognized by the ALA (or the appropriate national body of a country (ALA, 2019). But then as a natural progression of their careers, LIS professionals can enhance their expertise through becoming practitioner-researchers, evidence-based practitioners, with the ability to link theory with practice as in many other disciplines, while also following new and evolving trends. If that happens, research methods knowledge serves to build their confidence, develop them into informed consumers of research, enhance their ability to critically evaluate research, discuss and share research findings. It also helps them acquire a greater understanding of researchers' needs. Increasingly the ability to make informed decisions (evidence-based decision making and assessments), mentor and develop new researchers has become central to daily transactions. Librarians with research methods skills appreciate the development and use of theoretical foundations while conducting research and contribute to quality and rigor of the research environment.

The chapter is based on a review of literature that reveals the use of research methods, and how they are significant to LIS research. It provides an overview of the topic. The author also makes comments on the preparedness of LIS professionals to contribute to this research environment.

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