School Library Media Research: An Analysis of Articles Found in School Library Media Research and the ERIC Database

Best of ERIC

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The purpose of this paper is to study the research that has been completed on school library media centers in recent years. This paper attempts to build upon similar studies that were published in 1993 by Grover and Fowler and in 2003 by Clyde. Studying the research published in School Library Media Research (1998-2004) and the ERIC database (1992-2003) will summarize for the professional community information on many aspects of school library research. This study contributes to the professional literature by determining what types of research methods have been most prevalent in school library research articles, what topics have been addressed by the research, what grade levels have been the focus of the research, and how recent research studies compare to prior studies of school library media research conducted by Grover and Fowler (1993) and Clyde (2003).

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Introduction

Research is a vital component to almost every profession today, and research in the field of library and information science is no exception. The lack of research completed by current library practitioners is a recognized concern in the library and information science (LIS) field. Practicing librarians often do not see themselves as members of the research community, and academic researchers have a tendency to believe that the research completed by LIS practitioners is not as significant as their own (McNicol 2004).

Research is often informally completed by librarians in various library areas, such as public, special, academic, and school libraries. Most often, the results of practitioners are used only for the purpose of furthering the needs of their particular library without considering the research important to anyone else. However, in order for research findings to be implemented in the practice of librarianship, it is necessary for those research reports to be published in professional and research journals (Clyde 2003).

The concept of evidence-based librarianship (EBL) has created an awareness of the value of

ERIC Subject Descriptors

ERIC subject descriptors search the subject headings that bri

regarding school libraries and academic achievement, perhaps there would be more support for school libraries in general.

Literature Review

Literature Regarding *SLMR*

The online journal *SLMR* exists as the scholarly refereed journal of the American Association of School Librarians. As such, the journal provides a full description of the literature, methods, and results of research that has been completed regarding many aspects of school library media centers. Compared to a print journal, *SLMR*'s electronic format allows for nearly unlimited space for the research information along with charts, tables, and graphs that may be included to summarize research findings (Callison 2004).

Maintaining high standards for research articles is important to the journal's editorial board. As stated by the current editor, Daniel Callison, "successful manuscripts for future publication in *SLMR* should include:

- clear research questions grounded in the literature;
- measurement of actions taken by educators to improve learning;
- rigorous research methods that generate convincing evidence; and
- a fair interpretation of findings that illustrate problems as well as successes." (Callison 2004, 19)

A study completed in 2005 surveyed the value of more than seventy refereed library and information science research journals. Deans and directors from ALA-accredited institutions across the continent ranked the value of these journals in promotion and tenure evaluations. In this study, *SLMR* ranked sixteenth and was the top ranked journal in the school library media field. According to the *SLMR* Web site, the journal was also the only online journal to be ranked in the top twenty (www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/slmrb/slmrranking/ranking.htm). This survey helped to validate the importance of *SLMR* in the field of school library research.

Literature Regarding the ERIC database

The primary mission of the ERIC system is "to i

relevant to the current research in that it showed ERIC was a viable source for information regarding librarianship, although it was not devoted to that subject. The ERIC database would be a likely source for education professionals and researchers to use when trying to identify information regarding school libraries.

Literature on Studies of LIS Research

Kumar (1995) analyzed the content of ten LIS journals published from June 1994 to June 1995. This research identified information regarding subject trends and authorship characteristics, as well as author affiliation. Each article's subject was categorized to determine whether it was a research or non-research based article. Kumar's research determined that the most popular research method was the survey method and that 71 percent of the articles in the study were non-research based. This study was relevant to the current study in that it analyzed articles to determine the research method used and trends of subject matter published in the field of LIS.

Peritz examined a core list of thirty-nine LIS journals over a number of years to determine the subject of the research, as well as the research method used (1980). Nour analyzed research articles in forty-one LIS journals, identified the research method used, and then classified the do-dedeTee3-Td   ()4(h16)-10(e)11.94010(L5)-2 [ode4(t-6(icr-12(e)46(be4(tr)(n2e)4)2-7(e)4h-4(ti)-6(e)46(i

A total of thirty-one different nations (not including the international studies) were included in Clyde's research study. Other nations represented included Kenya, Sierra Leone, Korea, Taiwan, France, and Latvia (all with one article each). Clyde used population figures, as well as the number of library schools offering research degrees in each nation, to analyze the output of research articles per nation. This research seemed to indicate that school library research was important across the world, although the importance of the research seemed to vary.

In the same study, Clyde also analyzed the publications where the research is reported, conferences that published papers (in English) in the field of school librarianship, author productivity, research methods used, and research topics of the various studies. Clyde used Jarvelin and Vakkari's (1990) classifications for analyzing research methods and found that many of the methods identified by the 1990 study were not used in the ten years examined in Clyde's study. Clyde also determined that Jarvelin and Vakkari's classifications for the analysis of research topics did not prove to be useful for Clyde's study, as the classifications were not truly compatible for school library research. Clyde added six classification categories of research topics to the original twelve topics identified by Jarvelin and Vakkari.

Clyde's study was important to the current research in that it provided an analysis of trends across the world for school librarianship research. The current research also attempted to identify the research methods used in school library research and it categorized the research topics of various studies. Clyde's analysis of research methods was used to help determine the method of

Results of Grover and Fowler's study indicated that a majority of the research on school libraries

- **Other methods:** Two articles used different methods from those listed above. One used the phenomenological method and another used the ethnography method, both of which are different types of qualitative design studies (Leedy 2005, 144).
- **Two or more methods:** Six research articles used two or more methods (16.2 percent). Of these, five used qualitative and survey methods, while one used experimental and qualitative methods.

Figure 1. Methods Used in School Library Research (*SLMR* and ERIC)

The thirty-eight school library research articles identified from the ERIC database indicated the following results regarding school library research methods:

- **Survey/Questionnaire:** Sixteen of the thirty-eight school library research articles identified the survey or questionnaire as the method for the research completed (42.1 percent).
- **Qualitative:** Fifteen research articles used some form of qualitative method (39.5 percent). Eleven of these fifteen used interviews as a part of the data collection procedure, while six used observation a part of the data collection procedure. Five articles included two or more different types of qualitative data collection.
- **Experimental:** Zero used experimental methods.
- **Content Analysis:** Zero used content analysis methods.
- **Literature Review:** Ten of the thirty-eight research articles used the literature review method (26.3 percent).
- **Other Methods:** Two methods different from the rest of the categories were noted. One study was a bibliometric study and one was a historical study. Both of these methods were part of Clyde's classification, but as this study also indicates these methods were not widely used in school library media research studies of the time period.
- **Two or more methods:** Of the thirty-eight school library research articles from ERIC during this time period, four used two or more different research methods from the categories identified (10.5 percent). Of these four, three used qualitative and survey methods, while one used literature review and survey methods.

The research indicated that overall, the survey method was the most used research method (40 percent), followed closely by qualitative methods (38.7 percent--see figure 1). These methods were followed by literature review (26.7 percent), other methods (5.3 percent), experimental (2.7

more than one method. Because some studies used more than one method, the totals for this portion of the research added up to more than 100 percent. This was done to get a full understanding of all of the different types of methods that were used in the research on school libraries.
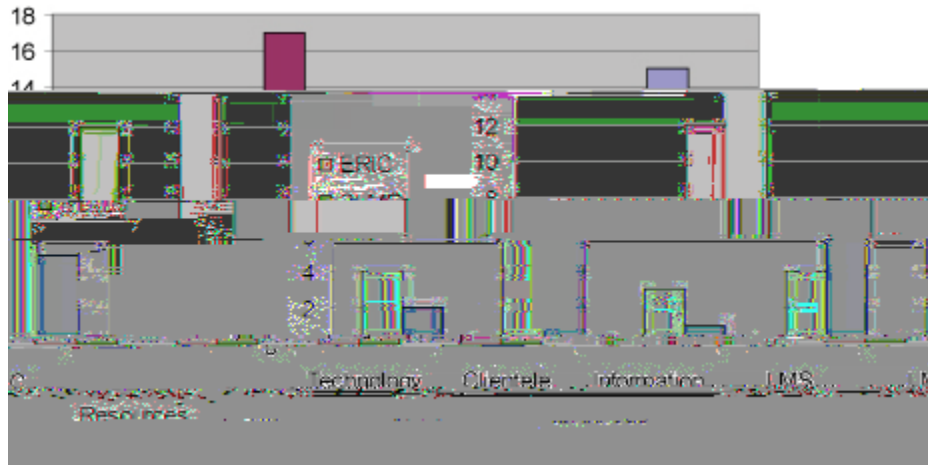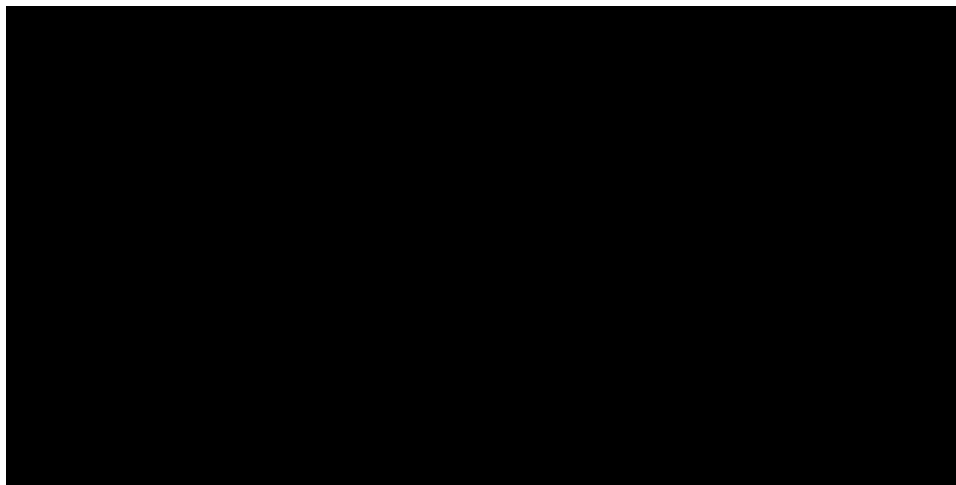
Research Question #2:
## What topics have been addressed by the research?

The research indicated that in the *SLMR* journal, the topic of clientele was addressed most often, followed by research on the SLMS, the school library media center, technology, and information resources. These results may indicate that research about the clientele of the school library has been emphasized by the editors of the *SLMR*. However, without further research or a lengthier study, the reason for these numbers can not be determined.

The research articles found in the ERIC database showed slightly different results. The largest number of articles focused on research about the library media center (fifteen articles), followed by clientele (twelve articles). Studies on technology and the SLMS were the next greatest number (four articles each), with information resources having the least number (three articles). One may hypothesize that articles found in ERIC may deal with the LMC on a frequent basis because of the fact that the LMC is an integral part of the school system and the research focusing on that aspect is important to the education database. Again, this can not be determined from the research conducted, but might be a suggestion for future studies.

While figure 2 shows the breakdown of topics between the articles found in ERIC and in *SLMR*, figure 3 shows the total results of the topics on school library research from both resources. The topic of clientele proved to be the most prevalent of the five categories (39 percent of articles), followed by the library media center (27 percent) and SLMS (21 percent). This finding seemed to correspond to the prevalent methods used, in that these types of topics would seem to be well-suited to research using survey and qualitative methods. Research on technology (8 percent) and information resources (5 percent) was very small in comparison to the other topics. The low number of technology research articles was surprising considering the increasing role that technology has played in the school library setting.

Figure 2. Topics of Research in Both ERIC and *SLMR*

Figure 3. Total Results for Topics of School Library Research

Research Question #3:
What grade levels have been the focus of the research about school libraries?

The research indicated that the largest category of research by grade level was that of "unspecified" (twenty-six total articles, see figure 4). This category referred to studies that did not indicate a specific grade level to be discussed in the research. Both the *SLMR* and ERIC articles had the largest portion of their articles fall into this category (10 and 16 articles respectively). This seems to indicate that the research conducted on school libraries often is researching general information without focusing on a specific group in the research, or that the grade level is not significant enough to indicate in the research findings.

Figure 5. Comparison of Frequency of Methods
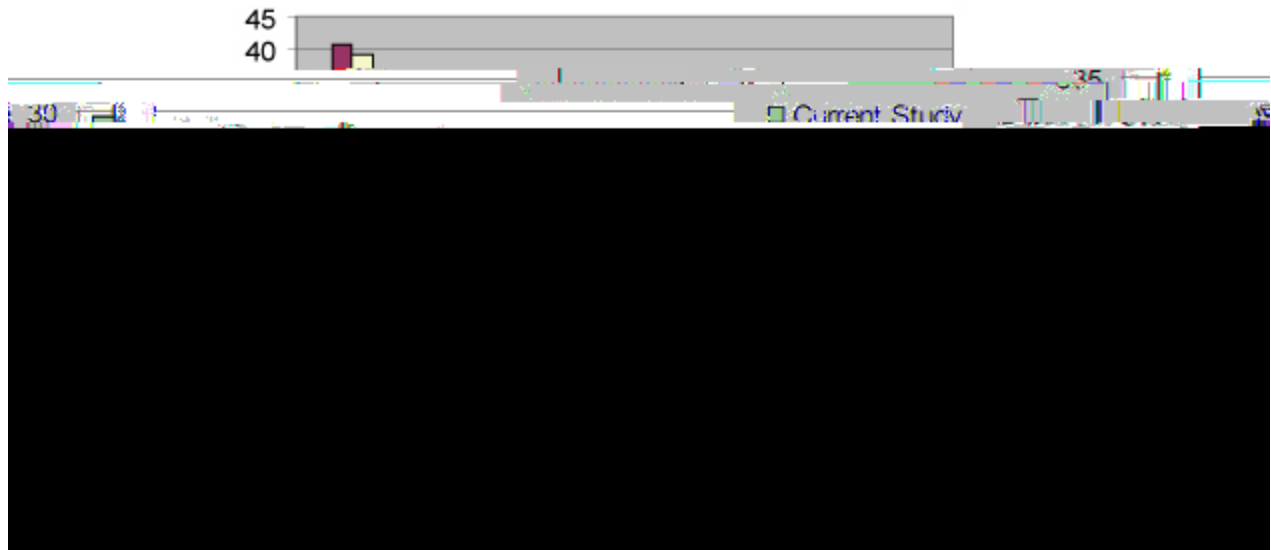
The second most commonly used method from the current research was the qualitative method. Clyde's study indicated that in the research articles from 1991 to 2000, qualitative methods were used in 19.6 percent of the studies, which was also the second most common method in that study (2003, 10). Clyde's research also indicated that the use of qualitative methods increased over the time period studied. Interviews accounted for only 2.7 percent of the research methods found in Grover and Fowler's study (1993, table 1). The current research may provide some evidence that Clyde's analysis has merit, as 38.7 percent of the research from the current study used qualitative methods. However, the current research included case studies and action research as part of the qualitative field, while Clyde separated those categories. If case/action research was added to qualitative methods in Clyde's study, the total (28.7 percent) would be closer to the current research findings.

The literature review was used the third most often in the current research (26.7 percent). This related more closely to Grover and Fowler's study (16.9 percent--the second most frequently used) than to Clyde's study (4.5 percent--the seventh most frequently used). There was no apparent indication as to why these number varied so greatly, and therefore this might be an area for future research.

Experimental (2.7 percent) and content analysis (1.3 percent) were rarely seen in the current research study. Clyde's study indicated that experimental methods were used in 5.8 percent of the research studies on school libraries, and content analysis was used 5.6 percent of the time (2003, 11). The current research was similar to Clyde's in that experimental and content analysis were the fifth and sixth most frequently used methods in both studies. Grover and Fowler's study (1993) differed from the current study's results in that their research showed that experimental methods were used 6.7 percent of the time, and content analysis was used in 10.8 percent of the research studies (1993, table 3).

The use of "other" methods ranked fourth in popularity in both the current research (5.3 percent) and in Clyde's research (8.5 percent). This was interesting because of the fact that Clyde used eighteen different methods for classification and the current research used five methods (not

counting "other" or two methods). This perhaps indicates that the most popular methods found in Clyde's study continue to be the most common methods used by school library researchers.

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gathering data by experimental methods was important for studying clientele, but that overall experimental studies are not widely used in the field of school library science research (1993, online). The use of experimental methods was very infrequent in the current study, with only 1.3 percent of the articles analyzed using this method.

As for the research topics in school library research studies, the results were fairly similar between the current study and Grover and Fowler's study (see figure 6). The percentage of research articles that dealt with technology in Grover and Fowler's study was 8.2 percent, while the current research determined that 8 percent of the articles studied focused on technology. The Grover and Fowler study also found that 24.3 percent of the research dealt with the school library media center, and 27.7 percent of the research dealt with the SLMS (1993, table 3). The current research determined that 26.7 percent of the research examined with the school library media center and 20 percent of the research focused on the SLMS.

Figure 6. Frequency of Topics

The two major differences in topic areas came from studies about clientele and information resources. Grover and Fowler determined that studies focused on the library clientele 22.2 percent of the time, while the current research found that 40 percent of the studies focused on clientele. Studies on information resources were not as large a part of the research in the current study (5.3 percent), as compared to the study by Grover and Fowler (17.5 percent). These results may suggest that research on clientele has become more important to researchers in the recent past, and that information resources have become less important to the research on school libraries. Further studies would be needed to follow up on this hypothesis.

Grover and Fowler's study suggested that more research needed to completed in the area of technology in school libraries (1993). However, research collected by the current study would indicate that this has not been achieved in the years since Grover and Fowler's study. In terms of

Suggestions for future studies on this topic might include using a larger collection of journals for a longer period of time to gain a greater understanding of the trends of the research on school libraries. The scope of this study is very limited, using only two online data sources for limited years to gather the research. As the ERIC database is being discontinued, it may be of value for future studies to determine if similar trends will continue in the school library research found in that site. Likewise for the *School Library Media Research* journal, it may be of interest to researchers to study trends found in that online journal as it grows over time.

An important topic related to this issue would be to determine who is reading the research that is conducted on school libraries. This might be achieved by surveying people who work in positions, such as SLMS, school principals and administrators, as well as academic librarians. This survey might include questions about which, if any, professional journals they read; how often do they read professional articles related to library and information science; how often do they implement research results to their professional practice; and how often do they conduct research related to their profession.

Who is conducting research related to school libraries is another important aspect that could be
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Wells, A. T. 1993. A comparative analysis of ERIC and LISA with an emphasis on database composition and authority control as they relate to retrieval. Accessed Aug. 26, 2005,