

The relationship between culture and public library use: non-Western students in Scotland

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Abstract

Introduction: Individuals' cultural backgrounds influence their use of societal resources, including those offered in public libraries. Well-established in library research are explorations of the benefits of public library use to new-comer communities, including migrant workers, immigrants, forced migrants, and international students. However, to date no research has been completed on *why* these communities use *particular* resources.

Methods: The project outlined in this poster concerns international students from non-Western countries in Scotland. Using a mixed methods approach, the study presented will explore why international students from non-Western countries use specific public library resources, and the cultural factors that influence this use.

Analyses: Findings will derive from thematic analysis of participant responses in interview and questionnaire data.

Conclusion: An understanding of the perceived value of certain resources can assist in the effective tailoring of resources to serve new community members.

Research Questions

1. How do international students of non-Western background use public libraries during their period of study in a Western country?
2. Which cultural factors influence use of public library resources?
3. How do cultural factors that influence public library use vary by geographical region of country of origin of the international student?

Significance/Relevance

The pilot study described in the poster is part of a programme of doctoral research. This pilot is intended to examine the cultural aspects of information needs, seeking, searching, use, and sharing for international students who are new-comers to another culture. Drawing on the work of Shoham and Rabinovich (2008), for the purposes of this project 'culture' comprises the values systems, patterns of behaviours, and accepted norms derived from historical traditions and passed down to the next generation within a group. Researchers have shown that multiple influences shape information behaviours, including direct influences such as family and trusted information sources, and indirect influences such as political landscapes or social media (Jaeger and Burnett, 2010; Pendleton and Chatman, 1998; Peterson, 2014). It has also been suggested that an individual's cultural background may influence resource use, including information (Kitayama and Uskul, 2011).

Culture can be divided broadly into *Western*, typically referring to Europe, Australia, and North-America, and *non-Western*, typically referring to all other countries (Lillard, 1998; Tsai et al., 2006). In many Western countries, access to information through the public library is a basic right, regardless of socio-economic status, age, sex, or culture (ALA, 2016; CILIP, 2015). While Western countries have many public libraries committed to providing resources to communities, some non-Western cultures have different views regarding the purpose of public libraries, e.g., who can use them, and how to use them (Audunson *et al.*, 2011). This may influence non-Western individuals' public library use while in Western countries.

There is a large body of research on the information behaviours of new-comers (Borkert *et al.*, 2018; Caidi *et al.*, 2010; Hassan and Wolfram, 2019; Lingel, 2011). There is

also research on public library use by new-comer populations (Burke, 2008; Fisher *et al.*, 2004). However, little extant research considers how the culture of new-comers influences their information behaviours within the public library. These might include the value placed on information, trusted information sources, and acceptable information behaviours. Oh and Butler (2019) note that global movement and numbers of international students have been rising steadily over the past few years. As such, it is important that public libraries are prepared to serve possible new-comer communities effectively. There are constraints on the services public library staff are able to provide specific populations e.g., time, money. However, understanding the factors that influence decisions to use certain resources can help library staff make cost-efficient choices. Using international students as participants in a study such as this has limitations, not least because they have ready access to academic libraries and atypical needs when compared with other new-comer populations. However, there are also advantages to having international students as participants. This research goes beyond consideration of more obvious services provision, such as help with host country language skills (because international students have strong host country language skills). International students are also an accessible sample for a pilot study such as this, and may provide valuable information on the validity of research tools.

Content

Background

Cultural factors may have an influence on individuals' behaviours (Kitayama and Uskul, 2011). There is research on the information behaviours of new-comers and research on public library use by new-comers (Borkert *et al.*, 2018; Fisher *et al.*, 2004). However, little extant research considers how the culture of new-comers influences their information behaviours within the public library.

Research Questions

The aim of the pilot study is to provide insight into how cultural factors influence the public library use of international students. The research questions of the pilot study (listed above) will be included in this section.

Anticipated Contribution

It is expected that results will provide further insight into why certain public library resources are used over others by international students. This may inform further research on public library resource use in new-comer populations. (At the time of the submission of the abstract this work is in progress and not yet completed.).

Methodology

A mixed methods approach that comprises that analysis of data collected through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires is deployed in the study. In terms of theoretical underpinning, this work draws on Jaeger and Burnett's theory of information worlds.

Literature Cited

This section will contain a reference list of all literature cited in previous sections.

Additional information

Information on supporters of the research is given alongside main research contact details (email, website, PhD blog and Twitter feed).

Conclusion

This poster concerns a pilot study that investigates the cultural factors that influence public library use within a population of international students. The results of the pilot study, which contributes to a larger doctoral research, will assist in decision-making related to serving new-comer public library populations.

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