# Characteristics of Articles Coauthored by Researchers and Practitioners in Library and Information Science Journals

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## ABSTRACT

This study combined bibliometric analysis and content analysis to investigate the characteristics of articles coauthored by researchers and practitioners in library and information science (LIS) journals on the basis of 2241 articles published in six LIS journals during 1995–2014. The findings indicate that articles authored by researchers and practitioners (RP articles) accounted for only 10% of the articles. However, a slight increasing trend was identified in the annual percentages of RP articles, evidencing that research–practice divides in LIS have narrowed. Notably, preference for research subjects differs between researchers and practitioners; 13 out of 15 research subjects were identified from the RP articles. "Users and user services" was the most prevalent research subject, followed by "technical services," "LIS staff and organizations," and "library management."

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## INTRODUCTION

Although academics commonly publish numerous research results, practitioners typically apply limited research results (Powell, Baker, & Mika, 2002). Keefer and Keefer and Stone (2009) claimed that researchers and practitioners hold varying views and values concerning research. Practitioners do not typically believe that practice has a high association with research (Anderson, Herriot, & Hodgkinson, 2001; Panda & Gupta, 2014; Wofford & Troilo, 2013). Furthermore, Haddow and Klobas (2004) identified 11 types of research–practice divides in library and information science (LIS), representing the differences in characteristics between LIS practitioners and researchers.

To reduce the negative impact of research–practice divides on long-term professional development, practitioners are encouraged to conduct research and publish research results (Haddow & Klobas, 2004; Horowitz & Martin, 2013; Kernaghan, 2009). Although these research–practice divides in LIS still exist, determining whether they have eased over time was appealing to us. Therefore, this study focused on the trends among research–practice divides: Diminishing research–practice divides can signal improved interactions between academics and practitioners. Notably, few studies have focused on research collaborations among practitioners and researchers in LIS from the perspective of research–practice divides. To expand our understanding of the trends among researcher–practitioner collaborations in LIS, the current study explored researcher–practitioner collaboration in LIS from the perspective of authorship, concerning LIS articles coauthored by academics and practitioners

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during a 20-year period (1995–2014). The trends among research–practice divides were also analyzed according to the annual changes in the proportion of articles coauthored by practitioners and researchers. Moreover, this study focused on the research subjects of the articles produced from researcher–practitioner collaborations. It is assumed that researchers tend to study theory-oriented subjects, whereas practitioners are concerned with practice-oriented subjects. Therefore, resolving the question as to which research subjects dominated LIS articles coauthored by practitioners and researchers over the aforementioned 20-year period is imperative.

Various types of research collaborations have become prevalent in numerous disciplines. However, few empirical studies have noted collaborations between researchers and practitioners. This shows that researcher–practitioner collaborations are rare and more challenging than other types of research collaboration. Librarians are the primary LIS practitioners and are expected to conduct and publish research. The trend of researcher–practitioner collaborations may affect librarians' attempts to build partnerships with researchers. This may also affect researchers' choices of research partners. Therefore, the findings of this study could fill the research gap regarding researcher–practitioner collaborations and may be referenced by authors who are interested in the topic of research collaborations.

Two main research questions were addressed in this study:

(a) Is the annual percentage of articles coauthored by academics and practitioners increasing?
(b) What research subjects are featured in articles resulting from researcher–practitioner collaborations? Which research subject is the most prevalent?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Various aspects of research–practice divides have been studied in the field of LIS. Four groups of studies have been identified in the LIS literature on research–practice divides. The first group focused on possible causes of research–practice divides (Chu, 2007; Clapton, 2010; Haddow & Klobas, 2004; Ponti, 2008, 2012; Spring, Doherty, Boyes, & Wilshaw, 2014). Among the various research barriers for librarians, the main barrier is that librarians typically do not value research or rely on research results to solve practical problems (Eve & Schenk, 2006; Hall, 2010). Publishing research results is usually not a job requirement for librarians (Bradley, 2008; Kim & Lee, 2011), excepting for librarians with faculty status or who are pursuing tenure in certain countries (Ameen & Ullah, 2013; Best & Kneip, 2010; Fox, 2007; Henry & Neville, 2004; Jayasundara, 2011; Opoku, 2013; Salaam & Onifade, 2009). Academic librarians holding faculty status constitute most librarian authors (Galbraith, Smart, Smith, & Reed, 2014). The possible motivations for the few librarian researchers without faculty status to conduct research and publish their results include idea sharing, personal interest, and professional development (Clapton, 2010). In addition, numerous studies have mentioned other possible barriers to practitioner engagement in research including lack of time, financial resources, research skills, job relevance, and expectations and support from organizations (Clapton, 2010; Fox, 2007; Powell et al., 2002; Spring et al., 2014).

The second group of studies highlighted the means of easing research–practice divides. Eve and Schenk (2006) interviewed library and archive practitioners and lecturers and discussed examples of researcher–practitioner collaboration. In addition to publishing, conferences and research projects have been regarded as a means to assemble researchers and practitioners to further collaborate (Eve & Schenk, 2006; Ponti, 2012). Some organizations have been established to promote the application of research outcomes, LIS practitioner research, and research collaboration between practitioners and researchers (Haddow & Klobas, 2004; Hall, 2010; McBain, Culshaw, & Hall, 2013). Other researchers were concerned about quality improvement in library practice, teaching, and learning through faculty–librarian collaboration (Hrycaj & Russo, 2007; Lindstrom & Shonrock, 2006; Yousef, 2010).

The third group of studies observed how practitioners conducted research. Inconsistent findings have been presented. Powell et al. (2002) reported that a substantial proportion of practitioners (42% of 615 LIS practitioners) occasionally or frequently conducted research, and most of the practitioners who conducted research did not publish their results. Kennedy and Branclini (2012) surveyed the research activities of 918 academic librarians, observing that most librarians read research literature (88%) and conducted research (62%). Sugimoto et al. (2014) surveyed academic librarians and archivists at American research institutions in 2012, reporting that they obtained prior research papers and disseminated their own professional literature through various publication formats. Academic librarians and archivists mostly relied on peer-reviewed journals to explore current professional research; furthermore, they mostly preferred to disseminate research results in conference papers and presentations, followed by journal articles.

The fourth group analyzed the characteristics of LIS articles. Several of the studies have explored articles by librarian authors (Apolinario, Eclevia, Eclevia, & Lagrama, 2014; Krausse & Sieburth, 1985; Ocholla, Ocholla, & Onyancha, 2012; Watson, 1985; Weller, Hurd, & Wiberley, 1999; Wiberley, Hurd, & Weller, 2006; Xia, Wilhoite, & Myers, 2011). Few studies have investigated articles produced from librarian–academics collaborations. Apolinario et al. (2014) reported that single-authored articles were dominant according to the research output of Filipino librarians, for which most research collaborations were conducted between librarians in the same institutions. Chang (2015) investigated the characteristics of authors of LIS open access journals; coauthored articles written by librarians and researchers constituted the second most prevalent type of collaboration and confirmed that librarians engage in increasingly frequent interactions with researchers. Walters and Wilder (2015) identified the top 50 authors of 31 LIS journals for 2007–2012, in which librarians were evidenced as productive LIS contributors. In the study, authors were further divided into nine categories, which indicated that librarians contributed 23% of the articles; notably, except for the librarian category, authors in higher education and government/non-profit research were classified on the basis of their departmental affiliations. However, the differences in research output between research-based and practice-based authors were not the focus of the study.

Schlögl and Stock (2008) identified the differences between the main audiences of practitioner and academic LIS journals. Regarding LIS journal preferences, practitioner and academic submissions have different criteria. In addition, some researchers have investigated the research methods used by practitioners. Hildreth and Aytac (2007) mentioned that differences in research subjects and methods existed between LIS practitioners and researchers, on the basis of an investigation of 206 articles published between 2003 and 2005. Practitioners preferred to conduct library-specific studies and employed more questionnaires and observations in conducting their research than did academics; academic researchers conducted more user studies and more frequently applied bibliometric analysis, content analysis, and interviews than did practitioners.

## METHODOLOGY

### DATA COLLECTION

To identify LIS articles coauthored by academics and practitioners, two methods of bibliometric and content analyses were used for this study. The LIS journal candidates were selected from those classified in the subject category of Information Science and Library Science in the 2013 edition of *Journal Citation Reports*. The chosen journals had to meet three requirements. First, the journals had to publish research articles in English; only research articles published in English were identified as samples. Second, journals had to have been in print between 1995 and 2014. Third, articles had to list author affiliations, namely author names, institutions, and occupations, for determination of author type; two author types, namely academics and practitioners, were the main focus. Most LIS journals were excluded because they did not provide author occupation information or provided them only in limited issues. The common information listed in author affiliations consists of author names, institutions, department or equivalent unit, and institutions' countries. Finally, six library science-oriented journals published in the United States were selected (Table 1). Because only six journals met the requirements, a balanced number of researcher and practitioner journals were not considered as a fourth requirement. To reduce the limitations of journal samples, all research articles from the journals published during the 20-year period of 1995–2014 were analyzed.

Bibliographic records of research articles published in the six journals between 1995 and 2014 were obtained from Scopus, a large interdisciplinary citation index database covering 5000 journals across disciplines. The basic bibliographic data for each article included title, author name, journal title, publication year, volume number, and number of pages.

Data processing and analysis.

**Table 1**
List of journals.

| No. | Journal titles |
| --- | --- |
| 1 | *College & Research Libraries* |
| 2 | *Information Technology and Libraries* |
| 3 | *Library and Information Science Research* |
| 4 | *Library Quarterly* |
| 5 | *Library Resources and Technical Services* |
| 6 | *Library Trends* |