

Final Research Proposal

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LIBS 612: Research Methods in Library and Information Studies

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December 12, 2023

Introduction

Libraries have been seen as a safe place and community hub for many of the community patrons. From the time they were created to present day, they have served as a liaison between information and people. They provide information about “health, education, business, childcare, computers, the environment, job opportunities... and much more” (American Library Association, 2007). One of the ways that they make this connection between information and people is through programming. Libraries have a mission to provide a wide variety of diverse and inclusive programming for the entire community from birth through adulthood. Programming offers many benefits for the community including encouraging lifelong learning and providing opportunities for patrons of all ages to improve their quality of life. Whether it is an early literacy, coding, book club or financial program, they all make a huge difference in the lives of the community (American Library Association, 2007).

As stated previously, it is vital that programming is offered for all ages. When looking at data and research from other scholars, it shows that sometimes an underserved or underrepresented population is our teens. “Library usage unfortunately decreases as children develop into teens” (Ornstein & Reid, 2022, p. 451). This population is known to be difficult to reach at times especially with how quickly their needs and technology changes. “Whether it’s scarcity of resources, a reduction in open hours, or the absence of dedicated teen-serving staff, some public libraries have found themselves struggling to provide even minimal services for teens” (Boeglen & Cherrington-Stoddart, 2017, p.25). Looking at the previous research of the libraries that have successful teen programming and outreach, it shows that the teens require their own welcoming space, no matter how small, dedicated staff, and a little autonomy to be creative with their interest (Ornstein & Reid, 2022).

Although there is research done about library services to teens and what they require, the big issue remains that there is limited funding. This study plans to look at the future of the services provided and provide more up to date data about the interests of teens. This in turn may show how services may be affected if more resources are not allocated to this age group. The research questions are as followed: **What do teens actually want or require when they come into the library? What type of programs and resources will assist in meeting their needs? How can libraries accomplish these goals on a limited budget?** Since the pandemic, library services to all have changed drastically and thankfully mostly for the better. Libraries are now able to reach people and provide resources to those all around the world. It has essentially created a library without walls because of the amount of people libraries are able to connect and interact with (American Library Association, 2014). As stated previously, it would be beneficial to update data post pandemic as it relates to the needs of teen services in large and small libraries.

The purpose of this study is to figure out how to continue meeting the needs of the teens since the pandemic. One way this can be done is through connected learning. “Connected learning capitalizes on research that has shown that students achieve higher-order learning outcomes when their work is focused on topics that are personally interesting and relevant to them” (American Library Association, 2014). The proposed hypothesis for this study is that librarians will need to practice the theory of connected learning in the future more than ever to connect with teens and bring them back into the library. With the interest and needs changing, librarians have to be flexible in their approaches to getting teens through the door and with how they acquire additional funding. Teens have so much technology at their fingertips already, so I feel that librarians may fulfilling more social, emotional, and mental needs for our teens.

This study is significant because it follows the concept of connected learning and will provide practical ways libraries can effectively and efficiently meet the needs of teenagers. It will assist in solving the problem when it comes to funding because the data collected will prove why resources and proper funding are necessary. The goal of the library is providing services for all and that includes the teens. Libraries must acknowledge that teenagers have specific wants and need their own space to flourish instead of being grouped together with younger children.

Literature Review

The review of literature is a vital part of the research process and research related to Youth Services to teens has been studied for this review. During this review information will be provided supporting the engagement of teens in the library. Through research, it has been shown that a large number of teens across the globe value having a safe and welcoming environment and a place where they can be themselves to learn and grow. In order for libraries to provide space, programs, and services, they must have financial support and administrative support.

Teen Engagement

Ornstein and Reid (2022) stated that teens are widely considered to be one of the most difficult populations for public libraries to reach. One of the reasons they are hard to reach is because many library staff and administrators do not fully understand how to connect with them. In Ornstein and Reid's (2022) article they discuss the importance of talking to them like they are people and asking them what they want and need. During their research, Ornstein and Reid conducted a comparative case study of successfully teen services between a library in the United States and in Sweden. One of the major conclusions drawn from their research was respect. The teens in the two areas that Ornstein and Reid studied wanted their ideas and opinions to be taken

seriously which is why they concluded that successful teen services allow the teens the freedom to explore a wide range of interests (Ornstein & Reid, 2022).

Just as it is for children, successfully engaging teens and young adults in the library is so important. Asemi (2018) stated that “public libraries have a special responsibility to enrich the teenagers’ spare time. It is essential to have a careful plan for correctly guiding their inquiries” (p. 295). In order to guide the inquiries of the teens, libraries must find ways to reach out to them to find the programs and resources they require. Asemi (2018) surveyed a random sample of 328 teenagers in Iran ranging from 15-18 years old. These teens were given a questionnaire that asked questions about what they needed from the public library, how they felt their library was doing in providing services, and how much they utilized it. Through Asemi’s (2018) research, he concluded that libraries should develop their resources and programs based on the priorities and needs of the teens. This research further proved how important it is to communicate with the teens of the community because what library staff might think is necessary might not be what the teens actually need.

Libraries as a Third Space

“Libraries serve as ‘third spaces’: public spaces that are neither home nor work (or, in the case of teenagers, school), where people gather informally and voluntarily” (Oldenburg, 1989). Like all public spaces, libraries represent community ideals about who counts and what activities matter (Ornstein & Reid, 2022). Ornstein and Reid (2022) concluded through their case study that providing a space solely for teens, where they can experience a sense of ownership and belonging, is a key factor for successful teen-centered services. This proves how beneficial a welcoming and inviting space is to getting teens to utilize the library. Park and Oh (2022) also

found through their research on teen engagement in South Korea that an improvement in the space for teens was necessary to get the teens to come into the library.

Agosto et al. (2015) analyzed the recommendations of teenagers and librarians at a broad sampling of US public libraries and identified five main elements teen spaces should support: physical comfort, leisure activity and information needs, academic activity and information needs, teen space ownership and effective library policy display and marketing. The lack of a dedicated space that teenagers can call their own is a barrier and a major reason why some teens may not utilize public libraries as much. Agosto et al. (2016) conducted another study on teens, technology, and libraries and found that an uninviting atmosphere/space and staff causes teens to not want to come into a library (p.258). Many teens consider libraries to be a home away from home (Lin, et al., 2015). Teenagers want a comfortable space where they can hang out, do their homework, utilize technology etc. and public libraries must work to ensure they are meeting the needs of the teens in their communities.

Providing Programs and Services

“To uphold the Library Bill of Rights and serve the entire community, governing bodies, administrators, and library workers should embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion” (American Library Association, 2017). Teens are a valuable part of the community and diverse programs and services should be provided based on what they need. As much of the research on teen services concluded, public libraries should survey the teens of the community to see how libraries can fill any gaps and meet the needs of teens. In order to be inclusive there should also be programs in libraries for all backgrounds of teens including those with disabilities. Grassi (2018) concluded in her research that “librarians can recognize and validate young adults with disabilities for their interests, talents, strengths, and all of the qualities that make them a unique

individual- not what makes them different” (p. 377). Even though Grassi focused her research on providing programs for teenagers with disabilities in South Korea, her findings can be utilized when providing services to all teens. Grassi’s (2018) findings included respecting privacy, encouraging independence, developing a rapport, and inviting their input (p. 364). Each of these strategies are so beneficial especially when it comes to providing programs and services to teens. It is so vital that teens are included in the process to ensure that the proper services are being provided.

Technology is usually at the top of the improvement list when it comes to teens. “Makerspaces have become increasingly integrated by library programs throughout the nation to ensure all students have equal access to STEM” (Alvarez, 2017, p. 43). Digital literacy is a need for teens, but it has been shown that it is not the only thing they require. Alvarez (2017) discusses the idea of offering tabletop gaming as another programming idea for teenagers. They stated that “tabletop gaming is valuable play and can teach students to find confidence in their own unique strategic methods” (p. 43). Peyton’s (2018) research has shown that finding things such as games, current events, technology etc. that interest teenagers, and connecting their learning in the library to those interest may motivate teenagers to utilize the library which is the goal.

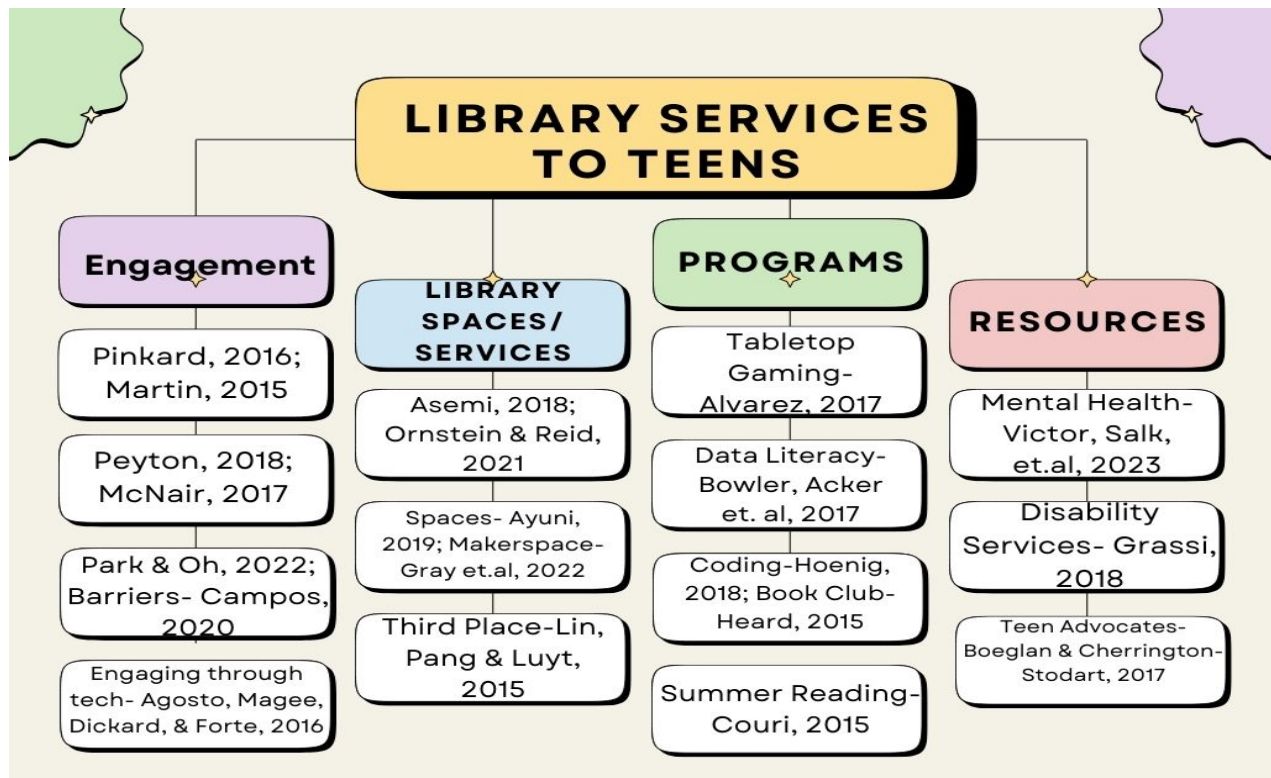
Funding

Roughly 13 percent of the total U.S. population consists to tweens and teens ages 10-19 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Even with these statistics, teens are still underserved and underrepresented in many public libraries. Two of the main causes of them being underserved are funding and lack of trained staff. In order for library administrations and other funding sources to provide financial support, library staff and the community must advocate for teen

services. Boeglen and Cherrington-Stoddart (2017) in their article discussed ways that youth library staff can combat lack of funding and unsupportive staff. They stated that youth services staff should “carefully compile list of statistics and research that demonstrate teen presence withing the community” (Boeglen & Cherrington-Stoddart, 2017, p. 28). By doing this, it can provide additional support on the importance of offering programs and services for teens. This also can support the need for hiring knowledgeable teen services staff especially in libraries that do not have dedicated staff for their teen department. Pinkard (2016) found through their research that there is a low percentage of public libraries that had a Young Adult staff member. As Grassi (2018) stated, in order to effectively engage teens, “library staff require a specific set of competencies, knowledge, and interpersonal skills” (p. 364).

Collaboration with community partners is another great method for public libraries to provide services to teens when budgets, staffing, and support is lacking. “Each partnership that the library creates serves to enhance the services and programming offered to teens so that their needs may be more effectively met” (Boeglen & Cherrington-Stoddart, 2017, p.28). Boeglen and Cherrington-Stoddart (2017) stated that library partnerships show that the library is not operating as a vacuum but is actively involved in various community organizations that allows libraries to reach more youth. This community role of libraries in turn allows libraries to effectively advocate for more funding and support that can increase programming and services to teens (p. 28). Public libraries should also be a strong community partner with the school libraries of the community. “If we can find out from students about the informal learning they do in the school library, we will be better equipped to describe all the learning students are doing” (Couri, 2015, p. 73)

Actively engaging and providing services to teenagers has fortunately been more of a priority for libraries over the last decade. Most of the research that has been done has been focused on engaging teens prior to the pandemic. Since the pandemic, libraries have had to rethink how they engage and provide programs to teens because some of their needs have changed (Orenstein & Reid, 2022). Since the pandemic, many libraries have been seeing a decline in the number of teens visiting and taking advantage of the services and resources provided by the library (Morris & Kammer, 2021). In order for librarians to be able to fully meet the needs of their community and adapt to the changes they also need to have funding and support from their administration. Just as for other demographics, it is important for public libraries to learn what current needs of teens are since the pandemic as well as additional ways to offer services and programs when there is a lack of funding which what my research aims to highlight.



Methodology

To conduct the research, the mixed methods approach will be utilized (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This approach will allow the usage of both quantitative and qualitative data from surveys and interviews of teens and library staff. Diversifying the type of data that is collected will provide a more complete understanding of my research problem than quantitative or qualitative data alone (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Since the goal of this research proposal is to see what teens require in a public library and how funding affects it, the mixed methods approach will create a better understanding of the research participants' perspectives. Personal experience will play a role as well which is why the mixed methods approach will be most beneficial for this proposal.

The pragmatic worldview will guide the study of how to engage teenagers in the public library. Since pragmatism does not commit the research to any one of system of philosophy, it will allow the freedom of choice (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The methods, techniques, and procedures of research chosen will best suit the study. A pragmatic worldview also believes there are consequences to actions which suits the research topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This study will focus on figuring out what encourages teens to utilize the library, so this problem and solution centered approach will be beneficial in conducting the study.

An explanatory sequential mixed methods research design will be the most helpful in gathering the information for this study. An explanatory sequential mixed methods research design will be used, and it will involve collecting quantitative data first and then explaining the quantitative results with in-depth follow-up qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). In the first phase of this study, statistics, and data on teen usage of libraries since the pandemic will be gathered from a sample of four public libraries that will be chosen based on recommendations from academic literature and research. This first phase will essentially be testing to see how many teens actually utilize the library and for what purposes. The second phase will be qualitative and will be a follow-up to the quantitative data that is received in the first phase of the research design. The explanation of the quantitative data will explain the relationship between teens usage of the public library and the space, programs, and services offered.

This study will be conducted using data on teen usage derived from a sample of public libraries of varying sizes in the United States. This will give an overall idea of how many teens are utilizing the library since the pandemic and if space, location, or funding play a role in the usage. To select the participating libraries, an investigation will take place to ensure that there is a diverse group of public libraries chosen (size, location). This part of the methodology will be

qualitative but quantitative data will be pulled based on the number of teens utilizing the participating libraries. The data that is collected will be organized in a table to compare the different library locations. Once the participating libraries are chosen, the quantitative data will be collected so that phase two can begin.

The next phase of the methodology will consist of surveys and interviews that will be given to random sample of teens and library staff from the selected library locations. The same number of surveys and interviews will be given for each library location selected. The survey questions selected will attempt to support the data obtained from the first phase of the methodology. The survey questions will ask questions about what teens require from libraries and ask why they do or do not utilize their local libraries. The interviews will be conducted with some of the youth or teen library staff to see their perspective on teen services as it relates to funding and their needs since the pandemic.

The analysis of the data will be completed in a few steps. All the data obtained during the first phase will be compiled and will correlate with the qualitative data in the second phase. Data will be investigated and derived from libraries across the country. A variety of library publications and academic literature will be consulted to select the libraries for this study. Data requests will be administered to all the potential participants so that access could be given to their statistics as it relates to teens. To protect the potential participants of the study, it will be ensured that burdens are lessened as much as possible for them during the research process.

The second phase of the study will focus on more of a comparative study of teen services in four libraries in the United States. Through observation, surveys, and interviews with the participants, the study will provide qualitative data on what teens require and how much funding plays a role. The four types of public libraries that will be observed will be a large system, a rural

library, a small library system, and a mid-size library system. Participation of the teens and library staff in this phase will be done on a strictly voluntary basis. The information obtained through this research will be beneficial to the researcher as well as the participants. Through the research, the participants will be able to advocate for increased services and support for teens. It will also allow the teens and library staff to collaborate with each other to ensure the proper services are being provided.

The rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants will be considered to ensure the entire research is ethical (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This study will be following the code of ethics outlined in the American Library Association as well as the ethics of the institution backing the research. Safeguards will be put in place to protect the participants rights. Research objectives and plans will be given verbally and in writing to ensure participants understand the process and what will be required of them. Participants will also sign informed consent forms before being able to participate in the study. With these measures in place, both the researcher and participants will both be on the same page and know what to expect during the research process.

The same survey will be given to the teens in each of the chosen library systems. A population of 60 teens including both non-users and users of the public library will be utilized for each library system. The population of 60 was chosen to ensure there a good mix of teens and enough data to compare for each of the four public library systems. To acquire the teen participants and library staff for each of the chosen libraries, data will be collected at advertised city council and library meetings over a six-month period. The research will account for the response bias in case all the respondents do not respond to the surveys given out. Response bias could occur if there are not enough teens who are users and non-users of the library participating

(Creswell & Creswell, 2023). In this case, the sample size will have to be adjusted so that proper conclusions can be drawn.

Youth and teen services library staff will be interviewed at each of the participating libraries. Interviews will be done to find out how teen engagement has been since the pandemic and how and if funding and support effects the services they are providing. To ensure participants can speak freely during the interviews, their names will remain anonymous. Previous literature has shown that many libraries do not receive support from their administration to provide quality services for teens. This study will examine through the surveys and interviews the overall state of teen services for the chosen public libraries.

Validity and reliability will be of upheld throughout this research process. Before conclusions are finalized for the study and to check validity, member checking will be utilized to ensure that the participants agree with the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). To receive feedback on the major findings and comparative analysis, a follow-up focus group will be formed. Validity will also be upheld through spending prolonged time in the field observing the libraries and the teens usage as well through acknowledging the bias that the researcher brings to study. To ensure the approaches are reliable, there will be peer reviews and checks to ensure there are no mistakes throughout the research process. To establish trustworthiness and rigor multiple sources and participants will be utilized in the research. There will also be an assessment of how data is collected by taking detailed notes and being transparent regarding the process of sorting, choosing, and analyzing the data. After all the qualitative data is sorted and analyzed by the research team and participants, it will be used to compare to original quantitative data. At this point the final phase of the research study will begin, and conclusions and findings will be drawn.

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