Teaching research methods in LIS programs in Latin America and the United States: A comparison of professional preparation models

Krystyna K. Matusiak[a], Mónica Colón-Aguirre[b], Kawanna M. Bright[c], Egbert John Sánchez Vanderkast[d]

[a]University of Denver, USA

[b]University of South Carolina, USA

[c] East Carolina University, USA

[d] National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico
krystyna.matusiak@du.edu, colonagm@mailbox.sc.edu, brightka19@ecu.edu, egbert@unam.mx

ABSTRACT

A strong education in research methods in library and information science (LIS) programs provides a foundation for preparing library and information professionals to serve users and engage in evidence-based practice. Library professionals use research skills and tools in their professional work to support users in a data-intensive environment. Researcher-practitioners engage in assessment, user studies, and empirical research to develop user-centered services and enhance practice (Alemanne, & Mandel, 2018; Applegate, 2016; Luo, 2011). Library practitioners are increasingly active contributors to LIS scholarship by conducting original research studies, presenting at conferences, and publishing scholarly papers (Berg & Banks, 2016; Chang, 2021; Crampsie et al., 2020). The coursework in research methods in professional preparation programs provides future practitioners with an introduction to basic concepts in research design and methodologies used in the field. However, the curricular models of research methods education vary widely internationally, depending on the models of professional preparation.

Professional qualifications for careers in librarianship can vary from country to country, with preparation programs offered at the Bachelor's and Master's levels. In many countries, an undergraduate degree in LIS represents a minimum qualification to enter the profession, while in other countries a graduate degree is expected, especially for academic library positions. The findings from the study conducted by the IFLA Building Strong LIS Education (BSLISE) group indicate that most countries require a Bachelor's degree as the first degree for professional practice (IFLA BSLISE, 2018). This is the model in most Latin American countries, where students begin their LIS education in undergraduate programs and may continue to receive a Master's degree. But in the United States (US), a Master's degree in LIS from a program accredited by the American Library Association (ALA) is required for library professional

positions. Students enrolled in Master's LIS programs have diverse undergraduate backgrounds and typically don't hold a Bachelor's degree in LIS or information studies (Saunders, 2019).

This panel will compare curricular models and approaches to teaching research methods in professional preparation programs in the United States and select Latin American countries based on the findings from two studies. The studies used a similar mixed-methods design with questionnaires and qualitative interviews with LIS educators. The first study focused on research methods training in LIS Master's-level education in the United States. It included questionnaires and interviews with 15 teaching faculty in ALA-accredited programs (Matusiak & Bright, 2020). The data about professional preparation models in Latin American countries come from a large international study that examined educational models of teaching research methods in LIS programs worldwide. The project was sponsored by the IFLA Library Theory and Research (LTR) Section. The Latin American data subset included 10 interviews with LIS educators in Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay. The interviews with Latin American educators were conducted in Spanish and translated into English for data analysis.

The educational model of professional preparation influences the number and types of courses in research methods. In the United States, a single course in research methods is a dominant model in LIS Master's education. More than half of the US Master's programs (58%) require students to take a research methods course, while other programs offer it as an elective (Matusiak & Bright, 2020). These research methods courses are designed as introductory overview courses, where students survey different types of research strategies and data collection techniques within qualitative or quantitative designs. They develop skills to understand and evaluate research articles and to write a research proposal but have limited opportunities for applying specific research methods. A small number of the US LIS Master's programs have a more diversified research methods curriculum and offer students the option of selecting a course from a wider array of research methods courses (Luo, 2017).

In Latin American countries, with a model of undergraduate and graduate LIS education, students tend to receive more extensive training in research methods with multiple courses and advanced coursework in the graduate program. Most of the research methods courses are offered at the Bachelor's level. Undergraduate LIS students are required to take a sequence of research methods courses, for example, an introduction to research, and then additional courses in statistics and qualitative research. The courses prepare students to understand different types of research, evaluate research publications, and design a research project. The programs with more extensive and diverse coursework expect students to conduct empirical research studies. At the Master's level, training in research methods is embedded in other courses such as information behavior, information policy, or user experience. Some programs also have a tutorial system where graduate students work on research projects independently under a supervision of a faculty mentor.

The panelists will engage the audience in a discussion about the approaches to teaching research methods in LIS professional preparation programs, strategies for preparing competent researcher practitioners, and the role of research methods education in preparing library professionals for practice and advancing scholarship in the field. Audience members will be encouraged to reflect on the differences and similarities in professional preparation models between the United States

and Latin American countries and consider the implications of the studies for their own teaching practice.

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ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

education programs/schools; curriculum; research methods; pedagogy; teaching faculty.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

LIS education; research methodology; professional preparation models; comparative research; international studies.