

## EDITORIAL

# Bridging Stronger Connections Between LIS Research and Practice

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Research, in general, is conducted to disentangle problems and address theoretical and/or empirical gaps in a particular issue or subject matter. According to Creswell (2012), research is a “process of steps used to collect and analyze information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue”, and these important steps are the following: “1. Pose a question, 2. Collect data to answer the question, and 3. Present an answer to the question” (p. 3). In library and information science (LIS), our research activities could be as pragmatic as evaluating and recommending strategies on how to improve reader services to attract more library patrons, or as conceptual as finding and exploring the underpinning philosophy of Philippine librarianship in connection to its post-colonial origin. Whether a research inquiry is methodically designed to be answered through quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods, the main goal of research is to come up with sound explanations to help people understand a certain phenomenon and offer reliable solutions or logical predictions to resolve problems.

As we want to find answers to our everyday problems in our work setting through developmental and action research, there has already been an ongoing call to establish or develop a body of theory on which to base our practices and to make us understand why we are doing these practices. For the longest time, performing library services and information work has become the core of our profession that is highly practical and service oriented. In one of the first discourses on librarianship as a profession, Pierce Butler (1951) asserted that “the modern library, then, has come into existence, spontaneously and almost inadvertently, by a cumulation of immediate empirical procedures, without anyone planning or foreseeing very far ahead” (p. 236). While grounding ourselves to practice is nothing but natural in a developing profession, Butler argued that along the way, “the intellectual content of librarianship has gradually emerged” and this is an essential part of the formation of the library system especially that “the librarians were

becoming ever more aware of the larger significance of their office” (p. 236). Realizing the profession’s evolving *raison d’être* forges the link between our acts as librarians and the underlying motivation and meaning of our past, current, and future undertakings.

Textbooks on research methods always illustrate the dichotomy as well as the harmony between theory and practice. They go hand in hand. A theory explains or attempts to explain relationships and occurrences of phenomena that drive our practice. With the multidisciplinary nature of LIS and its researchers, most of the studies done in our field are borrowing theories from the humanities and social sciences. While borrowing theories from other fields has been a common practice in LIS and in other disciplines, there have been observations from a number of LIS scholars that there is only a minimal talk about theory. Based on the study done on the use of theory in LIS research by Kumasi et al. (2013), most of our research are focused on *theory application* or employing a theory throughout the study to inform research design and data analysis, and *theory testing* where researchers empirically examine or validate an existing theory. Many researchers also have a habit of doing *theory dropping* wherein the discussion of theory is dropped after literature review and then it is not revisited or used later in the presentation or even in the analysis of findings. Some also do *theory repositioning*, where a theory is introduced either at the beginning or end of a study without proper citation or acknowledgement. Lastly, which is the most common practice being done by students, is *theory diversification*, where multiple theories are introduced but their relevance to the study and research problem are unclearly stated. With this minimal engagement in theory, research topics from the humanities, especially those dealing with information policy and history employ the most number of theories, and these are followed by social science papers that tackle information behavior and information and/or library management, and science papers that go into bibliometrics, information systems and

retrieval, and systems analysis and design (McKechnie & Pettigrew, 2002). The close link between theory and practice is being established through critical and reflective inquiries brought about by research, albeit nominally done or gradually executed. As stated earlier, we are participating in the continuous development of our professional practice, intellectual grounding and ethos. Part of this participation is realizing our purpose and recognizing that the implications of research are far-reaching. For example, we try to better understand our users and potential users before we design and implement new programs and standards in the library. In line with the usual survey of what they actually need and want, we are also trying to come to terms with the fundamental factors that affect how they conceive ideas, search, choose, use and share information—or their information behavior. Knowing this is also vital in evaluating information, identifying personal and collective biases and avoiding the dangers of misinformation and disinformation, which address other issues that are largely social and political.

In equipping the students and practitioners with the necessary research skills and appreciation, LIS education appears to have the most significant responsibility in doing so. LIS programs can help solve problems pertaining to research by imparting and enhancing research skills, and shaping the students' attitudes towards research (Connaway & Radford, 2017). In the Philippines, our LIS schools are trying to equip their students with substantial amount of research experience. As stipulated in CHED Memorandum Order No. 24, series of 2015 (Commission on Higher Education, 2015), graduates of LIS must know how to conduct research, and a thesis or research project should be a requirement for graduation. At the University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Studies (UP SLIS), our undergraduate and graduate students are required to do and finish their thesis or special projects (for graduate students). At present, there are already about 1,600 individual theses done both in the undergraduate and graduate levels. We have courses on research methods such as *Quantitative Research Methods in LIS*, and by 2020, we will start to offer *Qualitative Research Methods in LIS*. We also engage our students in research through mentorship and activities such as holding student research colloquia and encouraging them to write articles and participate in local and international conferences. Aside from requiring our students to do their research projects so that they could eventually graduate, the UP SLIS has been actively participating in conferences and international technical committees and academic organizations for further networking and collaboration. The UP SLIS is also the home of the oldest peer-reviewed academic journal in LIS in the Philippines, the *Journal of Philippine Librarianship (JPL)* that has become an open-access journal since 2007. It is also indexed in EBSCO and ProQuest since 2013. After 50 years, the JPL has

turned over a new leaf this year, with a fresh new name and scope, the *Philippine Journal of Librarianship and Information Studies (PhJLIS)*. The efforts done by the UP SLIS may still not be as aggressive as our regional counterparts when it comes to research activities, but we are constantly doing our best for our students and for the entire LIS community.

The challenge now is to strengthen our culture and capabilities to do research, especially in LIS schools. We can start to focus on theory-building and explore the use of more varied research approaches and topics that are both conceptual and practical. While the responsibility should be equally shared with professional organizations for support, funding and incentives, the strong link between research and practice should start with LIS education. Research culture is not developed overnight, and it is more difficult to force it on the practitioners in their workplace if they only see it as an added burden to their day-to-day work. This may be a long and demanding process—but again, *we* are all participating in the development of our profession.

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