Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Korean Immigrant Parents Are Validated in Their Perceptions of Deficits in Library Resources Supporting Korean Immigrants in Three Southeastern Suburban Counties

Kim, Y., Kim, H. C. L., & Kim, J. (2023). Korean immigrants' perceptions of library services and library multicultural programs for Asian communities before and during COVID-19. Frontiers in Education, 8, Article 1081143. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1081143

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Korean Immigrant Parents Are Validated in Their Perceptions of Deficits in Library Resources Supporting Korean Immigrants in Three Southeastern Suburban Counties

A Review of:

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Abstract

Objective – To explore Korean immigrant parents' use and perceptions of public libraries and to analyze the resources and programs offered by public libraries that specifically support multiculturalism and the needs of immigrants.

Design – Descriptive case study using a questionnaire for parents and additional analysis of library resources and programs.

Setting – Three public library systems within three counties in a metropolitan area of a southeastern U.S. state.

Subjects – 141 Korean immigrant parents, as well as library resources and 318 programs offered across the three public library systems.

Methods – Respondents were recruited among parents of children enrolled in nonprofit summer

camps at three local Korean American churches. The questionnaire included two open-ended questions and six closed questions and was completed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was analyzed with quantitative methods including Chi-square test and correlation and Spearman's rank order correlation. SPSS was used to conduct an inferential analysis of the responses. The analyzed library resources and programs were divided into two different time periods; phase 1 or the "before COVID-19" phase consisted of data collection from January to April 2018, and phase 2 or the "during COVID-19" phase consisted of data collection from January to April 2021. The number of books and digital media in Korean, as well as the number of multicultural programs offered, were counted, and qualitative methods were used to classify the programs into categories for analysis.

Main Results – Key results of the questionnaire include that 79% of the respondents resided in one of the three counties within the public library systems being analyzed, and 79% spent time at the library at least once per year. Reasons for visiting the library included children's books (97%), study spaces (18%), books for parents' needs (12%), and library programs (8%). Most respondents (82%) did not think or did not know if libraries offered programs for immigrants. Of parents who were aware of programs for immigrants, only 7% (n=1) were aware of being able to borrow books in Korean, and 53% (n=8) were aware of programs such as ESL classes. Correlation analysis showed that the more time a respondent spent at a library, the more they believed that the libraries offered programs for immigrants. Some respondents (43%, n=61) provided reasons for library dissatisfaction, which included language barriers (38%), lack of Korean resources (38%), lack of cultural events (25%), lack of knowledge about how to use the library (10%), and staff unkindness (7%). Respondents who listed future needs (23%, n=33) asked for academic support programs for their children (33%) and more services for adults (61%), including ESL classes (30%), cultural events (12%), adult classes (9%), and books in Korean (6%).

The analysis of library resources across library systems A, B, and C respectively showed 371 (0.27% of total collection), 636 (0.27%), and 1 (0.04%) books in Korean, and 16, 89, and 0 electronic resources in Korean, with less than 4% of the total resources in Korean being published since 2009.

The analysis of multicultural programs at library systems B and C was divided into analysis of programs for children and adults and included the number and frequency of programs within multiple categories. Multicultural programs were more likely to be offered to adults than to children, and the total adult multicultural programs increased during COVID-19 compared to before COVID-19. However, the percentage of specifically Asian American programming decreased during COVID-19 in System B (from 6.3% to zero) and increased in System C (from zero to 3%).

Conclusion – Amongst the respondents, libraries were especially valued for access to books for their children. The respondents' perceptions of the lack of availability of multicultural programming, as well as resources specifically for the Korean community, was reflected in the analysis of programs offered, which showed that there were few programs offered specifically in support or celebration of Asian or Asian American communities. The analysis of books and electronic resources documents a lack of Korean-language resources, especially recently published resources. The number of resources at the libraries does not adequately reflect the percentage of Korean Americans in the larger community.

Commentary

The authors observe a gap in the literature in understanding how immigrant communities use libraries. To emphasize the importance of filling this gap, they foreground their research with Bourdieu's (1986) theories of social capital and then discuss the role libraries can play in helping underrepresented communities build social and cultural capital. The authors cite Audunson's (2005) definitions of "high intensive" and "low intensive" meeting places to explain the importance of diverse and multicultural programming to make libraries "low intensive" places where people from many different backgrounds come together, as opposed to being places used only by hegemonic

groups. To fill the identified research gap, the authors seek perspectives from Korean American communities and triangulate these perspectives with analyses of resources and programming offered at public libraries.

This article was appraised using "The CAT: A generic critical appraisal tool" (Perryman & Rathbun-Grubb, 2014). Its strengths include the expertise of the authors, who work in and/or have done research in fields related to education and library science and also have experience using libraries as Korean American immigrants. The authors successfully identified a research gap, clearly outlined four research questions that guided the study, included the survey instrument used, provided a rich and multifaceted literature review, and explained in detail some of the limitations of their study to show awareness of the complexities involved.

The limitations noted by the authors include that the questionnaire was completed before the COVID-19 pandemic, which makes discussions of the COVID-19 context difficult to measure against the responses. Another limitation noted by the authors is that only 48 of the 141 respondents answered the open-ended questions, which asked about awareness of and desire for library resources and programs. A final limitation noted by the authors is that the data gathering periods for programs offered were January to April of 2018 and 2021, so an entire calendar year of offerings were not considered in the study.

In addition to the limitations offered by the authors, there are multiple methods and variable types in this study, which make the data difficult to parse. This difficulty is confounded by a conflation of terms and ideas. Although the authors include some definitions, there remain questions about inconsistent use of terms such as "minorities," "immigrants," "multicultural," "Korean," "Korean American," "Asian," and "Asian American." There is also no acknowledgement of the problematic nature of the term "minority." Although language in the title and research questions indicate that the study was on *immigrant* parent perspectives, there is sometimes a conflation of the terms "immigrant" and "minority." The authors indicate that they asked about immigration status in the demographic portion of their questionnaire, but this status is not reported in the article. The question as to what percentage of respondents identified as immigrants remains unaddressed throughout the study, as does the rationale for using Korean American churches as the only sites of recruitment.

One final question is whether statements in the abstract are directly reflected in the data presented. The results – both the respondents' perceptions and the actual counts – clearly indicate a lack of programs and resources for Asian American communities, and this is an important and nuanced finding of the study. However, the abstract says that the respondents use libraries "to enhance their families' social and cultural capital and adjust to the host country" and had "concerns about the lack of programs supporting their adjustment and fostering multicultural dialog." Since there were no survey questions about social or cultural capital or whether respondents felt their adjustment was supported, there is not a clear line between some of the statements in the abstract and the actual results.

Despite some lack of clarity and a conflation of terms and ideas, the study shines a much-needed light on the lack of immigrant persp   ectives in research studies examining library resources and services. The study informs library practice by highlighting the importance of assessing collections, resources, and programming to analyze and understand the extent to which they represent the diversity of communities served by their library. One possible direction for further research would be to analyze whether the percentage of resources in languages other than English actually reflects the percentage of other languages spoken based on a demographic analysis of the surrounding community.

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