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Reluctant Readers: An Analysis of Educational and LIS Literature from 1993-2013

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Introduction

Defining a reluctant reader and determining what makes someone a reluctant reader is difficult because there is not a single cause or behavior associated with it. According to the New Albany-Floyd County Educational Foundation (n.d), reluctant readers can often be categorized into three broad categories: dormant, uncommitted, and unmotivated. Dormant readers find reading enjoyable but either lack the time to read or do not make time to read. Uncommitted readers are those who do not currently like to read, but may be inspired to read in the future. Unmotivated readers do not enjoy reading and will be unlikely to ever find it enjoyable in the future (Albany-Floyd County Educational Foundation, n.d).

Often when considering reluctant readers, it is the unmotivated reader that comes to mind, and there may be a misconception that all reluctant readers have additional learning disabilities. While these characteristics are certainly true of some reluctant readers, these are not characteristics of all. In some instances, reluctant readers are more advanced intellectually than the material they are assigned to read and for others they are hesitant to read because the material is unstimulating. In other cases, what the reader selects (both titles and format) plays an integral role in their reading desire as their overall excitement about reading in general (Maynard, 2010).

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine the scholarly educational and library and information science (LIS) literature related to reluctant readers. It sought to determine the publication trend over time, core journals, and the age group that was the focus of the articles. The study also included other demographic characteristics such as gender or ethnicity, and resources or strategies to engage reluctant readers.

Research Questions

R1. How many scholarly library and information sciences (LIS) articles related to reluctant readers were published from 1993-2013?
R2. Which were the core journals publishing the articles?
R3. What age groups were the focus of the articles?
R4. What other demographics were included in the articles (i.e. gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geographic area)?
R5. What resources or strategies were noted to engage reluctant readers?

Definitions

Bradford's Law— "The bibliometric principle that a disproportionate share of the significant research results on a given subject are published in a relatively small number of the scholarly journals in the field, a pattern of exponentially diminishing returns first noted by Samuel C. Bradford in 1934, who proposed the formula $1:n:n^2$ to describe the phenomenon, based on his examination of a bibliography of geophysics. He found that a few core journals provide 1/3 of the articles on a given subject, a moderate number of less-than-core journals provide a further 1/3 of the articles on the subject, and a large number peripheral journals provide the remaining 1/3 of the articles. The pattern exists in the literature of the natural sciences but not in the humanities and social sciences" (Reitz, 2013).

Literature Circles—a literature circle is where "small groups of students gather together to discuss a piece of literature in depth" (Hill, Noe, & Johnson, 2001).

Reluctant Reader—Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines "reluctant" as "feeling or showing doubt about doing something : not willing or eager to do something" (Reluctant, n.d.) This does not mean that the person is unable to read; it simply means the person does not voluntarily read. Reluctant readers can be further placed into categories, such as

dormant, uncommitted, or unmotivated. The dormant reader enjoys reading, but just does not have enough time to devote to reading for pleasure. The uncommitted reader knows how to read and but only chooses to read when required or inspired. The unmotivated reader does not care to read at all (Brehm-Heeger & Creel, 2009).

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study
This study was limited to scholarly articles on the subject of reluctant readers found in *Education* Source, ERIC, *Library & Information Science Source* and *Library,* and *Information Science & Technology Abstracts* databases. Articles that were not scholarly in nature, such as reviews, columns, or other short items with few or no bibliographic references were excluded from this study.

Assumptions
It was assumed that the databases used in this study are indexed accurately and completely so that relevant items are retrieved. It was further assumed that the articles in this study are representative of the scholarly educational and LIS literature related to reluctant readers.

Importance of the Study
It is important to identify characteristics of reluctant readers in order to gain a better understanding of who they are and why they choose not to read. By studying past research and earlier publications, patterns may start to emerge that point to real solutions to the problem. This study added to scholarly LIS literature related to bibliometric research, the topic of reluctant readers, and the results of this study may be useful to librarians in making collection development decisions related to this topic.

Literature Review
Reluctant Readers
In McCullough's (2013) quantitative study, African American children were given materials to read to determine reading interest or preference. Three categories of materials were presented: materials containing subjects they previously had knowledge about, subjects they had shown previous interest in, and subjects with a cultural orientation. The children were given materials in all categories, and these

results indicated greater interest in subjects where they had prior knowledge. In this study, results were applicable for those seeking to help reluctant readers in finding materials that would appeal to them and entice them to read. One might assume that interest level or culture-oriented materials appeal more and choose materials based solely on these criteria.

Tomblinson (2004) investigated the influence of social interaction in developing a love of reading. The foundation of social reading in the home complimented or followed by forming literature circles can help readers develop. Tomblinson (2004) explains that students who choose their reading materials and participate in reading with friends instead of being isolated improve with reading and may no longer classify themselves as reluctant, but just as a reader.

Boys are often seen as more reluctant to read based off of test scores (Boltz, 2013). Boltz (2013) further asserts that often, required reading relates closely with subjects that interest girls instead of boys, and actually, many of the books that may appeal to boys traditionally are banned, such as *Captain Underpants*. Similar to Tomblinson's article, Boltz suggests that allowing students more time to read in class may actually help them to read more and develop a stronger desire for reading. Also, allowing the students to choose their own materials enhances their enjoyment.

In addition to Boltz, Senn (2012) published a study focused on reaching boys that were reluctant to read The author outlines several ways to influence boys to read and learn to love it (Senn, 2012). There are other methods mentioned in this article that appeal to males and help those working with reluctant readers. Senn (2012) agrees with Boltz on the theory that boys tend to want to read items often found on the banned books list.

Those who do not read well may also be reluctant readers. It is important to determine why someone does not love to read or read often on their own. If it is due to a learning disability or reading proficiency, there may be measures to overcome the issue. Ambe (2007) describes strategies, such as reading assessments, available to assist readers with their

deficiencies and become better readers. In another article, Erin (2009) agrees that those that have to overcome a disability need extra encouragement, but these readers can learn to love reading with the right strategies.

One study indicates that some students defined as reluctant readers actually do read (and enjoy reading) magazines (Gabriel, Allington, & Billen, 2012). Assessing what the students are reading in magazines, such as subject, grade level, and article length, help motivators to assist reluctant readers with identifying interesting reading topics and broaden their reading.

The studies referenced above relate to this research in that they focus on the reluctant reader and possible identifiers and strategies to help overcome this obstacle and develop the love of reading.

Bibliometric Analysis
Matthews (2010) published an article on publication trends of information literacy using bibliometric measures. In this study, Matthews (2010) established a range of years and searched in *Library Lit* and *LISTA* after determining the relevant research questions to complete this study. Matthews (2010) used 57 articles related to information literacy and critical thinking to answer the research questions.

Evans (2013) published a study focusing on men's issues. The purpose of this study was to analyze the literature of two health journals to determine trends in publication on counseling and training of those working with men's health. The methodology consisted of taking articles from the two chosen journals (picked because they were considered leaders with educating, training, and counseling professions) then analyzing the information for keywords that could lead to specific themes in the research (Evans, 2013). One noted result was a decrease over time in article publication on the counseling of men. This study does note that a possible limiter of keywords may have influenced the number of articles used and may have impacted the results (Evans, 2013).

In 2005, Wirkus conducted a study that built upon past research on school library media centers. This study determined which methods of research, topics, and grade levels were most prevalent in the literature (Wirkus, 2005). Wirkus (2005) narrowed the search to specific databases to gather the information then studied the results to answer specific research questions about school library media centers. This study will also seek answers using a particular methodology, with specific topics, in regards to demographic factors.

Zimmer (2013) studied how libraries embracing Web 2.0 tools affected their patrons' privacy. Zimmer gathered data by choosing articles from LIS databases from the years 2005-2011, then performed a content and text analysis searching for words associated with Library 2.0, then further narrowing the articles to include the word "privacy" or a similar form of the word. The results concluded a small number of the articles on Library 2.0 discussed privacy (Zimmer, 2013).

Kalin and Fung (2013) conducted a study on childhood obesity. In their content analysis, they used keywords to establish publication trends in parenting magazines. Their research specifically observed the number of times childhood obesity appeared in an article within popular parenting magazines. Their focus was to determine if there was enough information for parents in these magazines to help in the fight against childhood obesity (Kalin & Fung, 2013). By studying keywords, the results indicated there were 73 articles published on the topic in a two-year timeframe (Kalin & Fung, 2013).

Importance of the Bibliometric Literature
This study is similar to the Matthews (2010) study in that it is restricted to particular databases and a set of articles fitting the criteria will be examined to answer pre-determined research questions. Like Kalin & Fung (2013), this research used keywords to determine which core journals in the LIS and educational databases publish the most information on reluctant readers. This study was also, like Zimmer (2013), a content analysis focusing only on the terms "reluctant" and "reader*" to seek articles on this topic. This study was limited due to keyword choice, similar to Evans (2013). If the wording chosen for searches was expanded, perhaps more results could yield different results. Like these reported studies,

this study was similar in that it examined publication trend over time of literature on a specific topic and it examined the content and focus of articles on a specific topic.

Methodology
This research was a publication pattern analysis to 1) determine trends in publication; 2) the focus of existing articles; and 3) to document strategies for the problems related to reluctant readers. The articles gathered for this research came from EBSCOhost's *Education Source, ERIC, Library and Information Science Source* and *Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts* databases using the search terms, "reluctant" AND "reader.*" These databases were selected because reluctant readers is a topic of relevance for both librarians and educators. After retrieving the results, each article was thoroughly read and data were compiled in an Excel spreadsheet and analyzed to answer each research question. Tables and figures are used to display the data. Data recorded for each article included publication year, journal title, article title, author, age group that were the focus of the article, other demographic focus such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geographic location, and strategies or resources to address the problem of reluctant readers.

Results
R1. How many scholarly library and information sciences (LIS) articles related to reluctant readers were published from 1993-2013?

There are 119 articles related to reluctant reader published in the databases selected for this research. (See Appendix A).

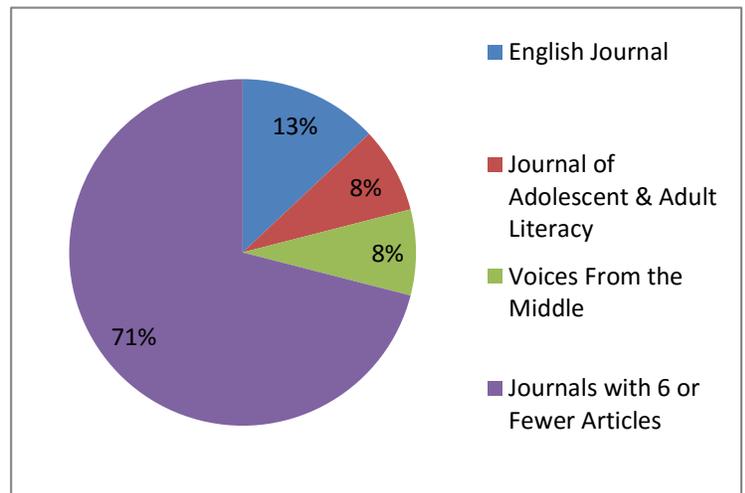*R2. Which were the core journals publishing the articles?*

Many of the journals contained only one article in the time frame. Very few of the journals contained multiple articles on the subject of reluctant readers during the years 1993-2013. *Table 1* is an alphabetical listing of the journal titles and the number of articles from this study published in each:

Table 1: Articles per journal

Name of Journal	No. of articles
Access	1
ALAN Review	6
Children & Libraries: The Journal Of The Association For Library Service To Children	1
Children's Literature in Education	1
CILIP Update	1
Clearing House	1
Collection Building	1
Contemporary Issues in Technology & Teacher Education	1
Education Citizenship & Social Justice	1
Educational Action Research	1
Educational Leadership	2
Educational Review	1
English in Australia	1
English Journal	16
English Leadership Quarterly	1
Exercise Exchange	1
Focus on International Library & Information Work	1
Gifted Education International	1
High School Journal	1
International Journal of Learning	1
International Journal of Social Sciences	1
Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy	9
Journal of Aesthetic Education	1
Journal of Educational Strategies	1
Journal of International Children's Literature	1
Journal of Librarianship & Information Science	1
Journal of Literacy Research	1
Journal of Reading	2
Journal of Reading Behavior	1
Journal of Vision Impairment & Blindness	2
Journal of Youth Services in Libraries	1
Kairaranga	1
Kappa Delta Pi Record	1
Knowledge Quest	3
Language Arts	2
Learning Assistance Review	1

Library & Information Update	1
Middle School Journal	2
NASSP Bulletin	1
New Advocate	1
New England Reading Association Journal	1
New Review of Children's Literature & Librarianship	1
Phi Delta Kappan	1
Publishing Research Quarterly	1
Reading & Writing Quarterly: Overcoming Learning Difficulties	1
Reading Horizons	2
Reading Improvement	1
Reading Psychology	1
Reading Research & Instruction	2
Reading Teacher	6
Reference & User Services Quarterly	1
Roeper Review	2
School Libraries Worldwide	1
School Talk	1
Science Scope	1
Teacher Librarian	1
Teaching Exceptional Children	1
Tennessee Libraries	1
Virginia English Bulletin	1
Voice of Youth Advocates	1
Voices From the Middle	9
Young Adult Library Services	6
Youth Theatre Journal	1

The core journals are *English Journal,* which contains 16 articles; *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy,* and *Voices From the Middle,* both with nine articles. *Figure 1* illustrates the percentages of article appearance. The core journals make up 29% of the article publications, while 71% of the articles came from journals featuring no more than six articles on reluctant readers.

Figure 1: Articles by core journals

R3. What age groups were the focus of the articles?

Few of the articles examined specified a particular age. Most of the articles grouped reluctant readers according to their school classification. For example, some articles focused on the reading levels of middle school readers while others focused on the habits of high school readers. Not specifying age does not indicate if the students are in their respective grade. The reader may be older than average students if they have failed grades or may be younger if the school allows for gifted students to skip levels. Additionally, there is not a national standard for school categories. Some states or school districts vary on what determines middle school or junior high and others may divide high school into senior high and separate out ninth grade or may break elementary school into primary or upper elementary. Many of the articles selected were vague in how they identified subjects as teenagers, adolescents, children, or students. The focus of the articles returned in the search is on youth as readers with only two of the articles referring specifically to adults. Other articles in the study did not indicate any age group at all, but discussed the subject of reluctant readers as a whole.

Table 2: Breakdown of the articles with their intended focus groups:

| Age Category	No. of Articles
Children (includes: early childhood, primary, elementary, & children categories)	11
Middle school (includes: tweens and middle school categories)	22
High School (includes: adolescents, teenagers, and high school categories)	34
Students	13
College	1
Adults	2
Uncategorized	36

R4. What other demographics were included in the articles (i.e. gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geographic area)?

A majority of the articles reviewed (66%) do not discuss any additional demographics beyond the age of the reluctant readers—reported above in R3. Eighteen percent of the articles identified a geographic location and 12% included gender. However, of the articles that were gender-specific, the gender of focus was male. The articles

mentioning geographic areas specifically were from foreign countries. In the 4% of articles including ethnicity, ethnicity was non-specific, and the articles only referred to ethnicities as minorities. Only one article mentioned a socioeconomic status (middle class). *Figure 2* illustrates the demographics other than age included in the articles.

R5. What resources or strategies to engage reluctant readers were noted?

Nearly every article introduced a method for handling reluctant readers. Ninety percent of the articles in this study offered at least one suggestion on how to help reluctant readers overcome their hesitance. Ideas for handling reluctant readers depended greatly on why the readers weres reluctant. Many articles mentioned the use of media other than printed books to pique reading interests. In these studies, reluctant readers responded well to uses of e-Reader devices and computers. Readers who did not do well with printed words were encouraged to read through alternate methods that explored their creativity, such as picture books or dramatic interpretations. Teachers and parents are encouraged to use methods to entice the imagination in order to guide the children or young adults into the love of reading.
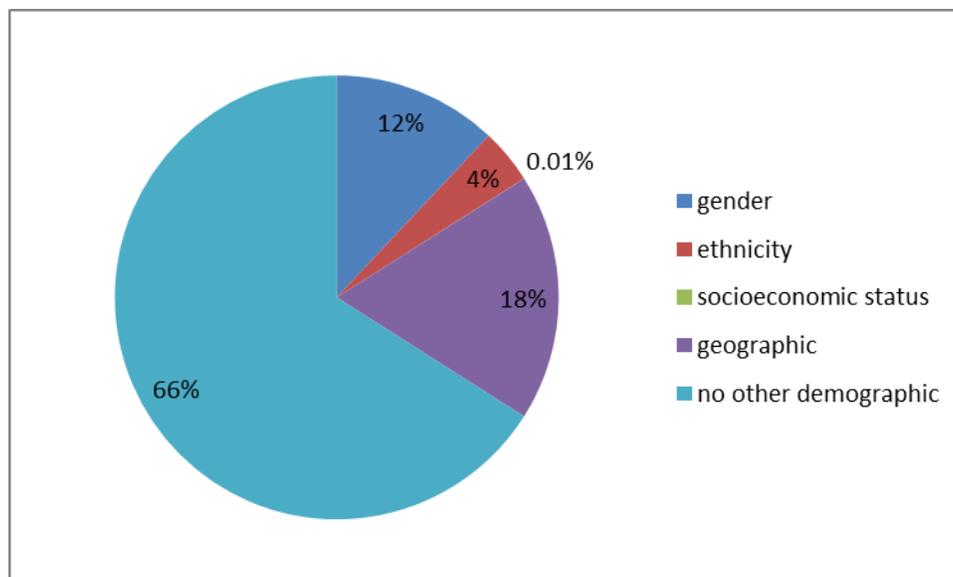
Figure 2: Non-age demographics included in articles.

Readers who were not creative or imaginative, but preferred particular realistic topics are encouraged to try nonfiction titles. Sometimes, the reader is only reluctant because they do not enjoy the material. Providing the reader with a wider choice range can help. The one common thread in each article is that there is no one reason that a reader is reluctant. The most important strategy is to start with a conversation to understand why the reader is hesitant to read, then offer suggestions on an individual basis.

Discussion:

It is challenging to establish what makes a reluctant reader. Reluctant readers are not characterized only by gender, age, or ethnicity. There is not a single one reason someone chooses not to read for pleasure or enjoyment. Those who work with reluctant readers need to discuss the issue on an individual basis to reverse their stance on reading. Understanding the reason of a reluctant reader helps determine how to provide appropriate assistance. This study revealed that more emphasis is placed on younger readers or simply readers in general. Perhaps these authors are more familiar with adolescent habits or they were attempting to encourage reading interest while they are young, in hopes of developing a passion for reading that will continue through adulthood. Successful methods reported with reluctant readers found in the literature of this study include literature circles, book sharing, and book talking. These methods are all activities comprised of small groups that make reading a more social experience and may help readers build a deeper understanding or different viewpoint on the material. Per the articles discussed, those that may enjoy reading but cannot or hesitate to read due to a disability could greatly benefit from a proper diagnosis and appropriate reading aids as discussed in the literature. For example, those with vision impairment would enhance their reading with large print books. Those with reading disabilities may need a teacher that is proficient with handling their particular disability to improve their skills. Unmotivated readers need guidance to the right materials and right format to spark their interest.

Helping reluctant readers gain a love of reading can be a lengthy process. It is important that the motivators embrace the challenge with understanding, dedication, and commitment and try to reach the individual's particular needs. While it surprising to find few articles published on reluctant readers, one must remember that this study is limited to the peer-reviewed articles found only in four databases in a selected timeframe. Perhaps under different limitations—more databases used, expanded time frame, or the inclusion of non-peer reviewed articles—the results would differ. Future research, could consist of a study which expands the criteria to determine if the results are similar or if an entirely different picture of reluctant readers emerges.

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