

## Research Roundup: Exploring eBook Use in High Schools

Feature

*April Dawkins and Karen Gavigan were recently awarded an AASL award for their paper, "E-Books in High School Libraries: Factors Influencing Circulation and Usage," which examined how much, or how little, high schoolers were using library eBooks.*

### Research Article Recap

In this study, we wanted to examine eBook usage in school libraries. Much of the previous research on eBook usage has taken place in academic or public libraries. We wanted to answer these questions: What does circulation data reveal about eBook collections in high school libraries? And, what experiences and perceptions do high school librarians report about their eBook collections and usage? To answer these questions, we decided to conduct a mixed methods study by examining circulation data for selected high schools' eBooks collections and then conducting an interview with the librarian at each high school.

### Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

We selected eight high schools from eight different school districts in two southeastern states with library collections that included Follett eBooks. The schools were also selected for their geographic diversity. They represented rural (three), urban (four), and suburban (one) school settings. We limited our analysis to Follett eBook collections for consistency and because of the ease with which the school librarians in those schools could access and report the circulation and usage data for those materials. The librarian at each high school provided us with collection and usage statistics for their entire collections and their Follett eBook collections for the 2016–2017 school year. After collecting this data, we interviewed the librarians at each of the eight schools.

### Data Analysis

Comparing the use of different parts of a library collection using only circulation data doesn't provide a truly accurate picture of usage. For example, if there are equal numbers of circulations of the graphic novel and short story collections, it would seem that the two collections are being equally used. However, if the graphic novel collection is twice the size of the short story collection, then there is a big difference in the usage of those two collections.

To allow for this differentiation between collection sizes and their circulation, a method called the Relative Use Factor (RUF) was developed (Bonn 1974). The RUF enables librarians to measure the intensity of the use of their entire collections or of a specific part of the collection.

After the quantitative data were collected from each school, we conducted individual interviews with each participating librarian to examine their experiences with eBooks in their high school libraries. The four major themes that emerged in the interviews were: accessibility, digital versus print preference, the role of the teacher in eBook usage, and nonfiction versus fiction preference. Here's a quick summary:

- The accessibility theme emerged around two areas: issues relating to availability of technology and desires for providing summer access to the collection. Students in the eight schools had a variety of levels of access to technology that enabled them to access the eBook collections.
- Seven of the eight librarians felt that students in their schools preferred print over eBooks when reading for pleasure.
- Most of the librarians in this study indicated a lack of teacher enthusiasm for eBook usage, and several of the librarians indicated that they also really didn't enjoy reading eBooks which might influence their attitudes.
- Usage of eBooks, as well as the decisions about which titles to purchase, was often tied to curricular needs which meant that most of the librarians purchased more nonfiction than fiction titles.

### Interview with Rebecca Morris

**Rebecca Morris:** Congratulations on this honor, Dr. Dawkins and Dr. Gavigan! We are excited to take a closer look at your research. As you talk about in your study, you pursued this study as a way to investigate some of the many challenges pertaining to eBook collections, from fiscal decisions, to reading comprehension, to student preferences. Can you first provide for us some background on your interest in building school librarians' understanding of issues pertaining to eBooks?

**Karen Gavigan:** After conducting some graphic novel studies, I wanted to learn more about what school librarians can do to facilitate the effective use of library resources by students and teachers. I became interested in conducting an eBook study after reading my students' Collection Mapping and Analysis assignments through the years. I



was shocked to see the size of some of the eBook collections in school libraries versus the number of circulations. There was consistently a large disparity in the numbers. It appeared that statewide, and on different grade levels, eBook collections were typically not circulating. I wanted to find out why and what, if anything, could be done to address the issue. Since I had used the Relative Use Factor (RUF) in a previous graphic novel study, I decided that would be an effective tool for this study, too. Fortunately, April was also interested in this topic and we were able to collaborate on the study using high schools from two states.

**RM:** Our readers might be curious to find out how their libraries' circulation and use of eBooks compares to the libraries in your study. Would you suggest a starting point or maybe some guiding questions for librarians to follow?

**Karen Gavigan and April Dawkins:** Because we only examined four high school libraries in North Carolina and four in South Carolina, we wouldn't advise librarians to compare their own libraries to these. However, it's a great idea to examine their own collections and marketing strategies.

To examine your own collection, you'll want to first gather some basic statistics:

1. How many books do you have in your collection including both print and digital?
2. How many eBooks do you have in your collection?
3. What is the total circulation of your collection over a period of time (half a year or a year is a good place to start)?
4. What is the circulation of just your eBook collection over that same period of time?

To examine your marketing strategies, you might think about these questions:

1. How are you promoting the titles in your eBook collection?
2. Do your students and teachers know how to access your eBooks and use the interface and features of the eBooks?
3. Does your website have good information about your digital resources and instructions (such as a tutorial) on how to access and use them?

**RM:** In your study, you used a method called the Relative Use Factor (RUF) to account for differentiation between collection size and circulation statistics. Can you talk about why this was important to consider in your study? And is this a calculation that school librarians might try in their libraries to learn about how their collections are meeting their students' and teachers' needs?

**KG & AD:** RUF is a great way to examine how well librarians are matching collection development to patron needs. It can be used to look at any part of your collection, for example your graphic novel collection, local history collection, or your eBook collection. The nice thing about RUF, is that it doesn't require an advanced understanding of statistics to do. It's simple division. For this study, we were examining eBooks, so we first determined the percentage of eBook circulations as part of the entire circulation in each library. Then we figured out the percentage of eBooks as part of the entire collection. Then you divide the circulation by the holdings. Here's the equation:

$$\% \text{ of circulations of a particular collection} / \% \text{ of holdings the particular collection represents}$$

If the result is greater than 1, then it means that there is a high demand for that part of the collection (eBooks) and you might want to increase your eBook collection based on student interest or curriculum needs. If your result is less than 1, this indicates that this part of the collection is being under-used, which may be the result of several factors such as lack of appeal in the titles you have, lack of curriculum ties, or the need to market your titles more effectively. Once you have your RUF number for the part of the collection you are examining, you can adjust your collection development plan or your marketing strategies to better meet the needs of your students and teachers.

**RM:** A prominent theme in your data analysis was accessibility, including the ability to provide summer access to eBook collections. What were some of the experiences of librarians in your study on this topic?

**KG & AD:** Every librarian in our study discussed the increased access to resources because of the 24-7 access to eBooks. Several librarians discussed how eBook access had increased student usage of reading materials during their summer breaks. These librarians had specifically purchased books for Battle of the Books team members to read during summer or for summer reading lists. However, they also pointed out the disparity in access to technology to download eBooks. Some schools were 1:1 with each student having a school-issued device. Other schools had bring-your-own-device policies. Even in the schools with 1:1 access, students often didn't have access to those devices in the summer. Additionally, one librarian's school was located in an area that is pretty much an Internet desert. Many of her students didn't have access to the Internet even if they had a device because of a lack of broadband in their rural community. The librarian who experienced the greatest success using eBooks over the summer stated that it was largely due to the fact that the principal promoted it in robo-calls to parents promoting the summer reading program and encouraging the use of eBooks.

**RM:** I'm curious about some of the marketing strategies that librarians used to promote their eBook collections. What were some memorable ways that librarians shared their eBook collections with their school communities?

**KG & AD:** Librarians used a variety of marketing strategies to promote their eBook collections in addition to the standard library orientation for new students at the beginning of the year. One librarian held a "Read an eBook Day" celebration with a variety of promotional events during the day including freebies for students. Students always love give-aways! My favorite promotional tool that a librarian used was to create table-top mini posters each month highlighting new eBook titles which she displayed in the library and on the cafeteria tables.

**RM:** What are some questions you're going to be researching next in this area?

**AD:** I'd like to explore the issue of accessibility and eBook usage further in the future. I'm particularly interested in the impact of differing technology policies (1:1, BYOD, summer technology checkout) on eBook access.

**KG:** I think it would be interesting to conduct a pre- and post-circulation study of eBook collections to see if some of the marketing strategies we learned about in our first study have an impact on circulation once a school librarian implements them in his / her school.

**RM:** Can you share with us what else you're working on next?

**AD:** I'm wrapping up a study with my graduate assistant right now which examines district level selection policies across the United States.

**KG:** Thanks for asking! I'm conducting a study with Dr. Kasey Garrison from Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga, Australia. We are examining social justice issues in graphic novels for young adults. Our plans are to provide a website with an annotated bibliography and other educators' resources by Fall 2020, thanks to funding for the site provided through an ALA Carnegie Whitney Grant.

SLC congratulates Drs. Dawkins and Gavigan on their outstanding contributions and their research honor, and thanks them for sharing their work with us. Our readers can learn more about marketing strategies for eBook collections with the "[Promoting eBooks](#)" infographic, and seek out and read the full research study.

Dawkins, April M. and Karen W. Gavigan. "E-Book Collections in High School Libraries: Factors Influencing Circulation and Usage." *School Library Research* 22 (April 2019). [http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/pubs/slr/vol22/SLR\\_EBookCollections\\_V22.pdf](http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/pubs/slr/vol22/SLR_EBookCollections_V22.pdf)

#### **Work Cited**

Bonn, George S. Evaluation of the Collection." *Library Trends* 22, no. 3 (1974): 265–304.

#### MLA CITATION

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