

A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF FACTORS INFLUENCING THE OUTCOME OF CHALLENGES TO LIBRARY MATERIALS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL SETTINGS¹

Dianne McAfee Hopkins²

This study addresses the research question, "What are the variables that influence the outcome of challenges to school library materials at the secondary level?" A conceptual model is provided that describes the outcome of challenges to materials in terms of retention, restriction, and removal. The model was derived from research findings in library and information science, educational administration, behavioral science, and communications and suggests that the path from the challenge to the outcome is complex. The model contains several classes of variables, including district materials selection policy; school environment; community environment; and initiator of challenge. Variable classes of special interest in the present study are the characteristics of the librarian, which emphasize the psychological factors of locus of control and dogmatism, and complaint background, which focuses on whether the complaint was oral or written and whether there was active support for the retention or the removal of materials. The validity of the model was tested using survey research methods with a national sample of school librarians reporting challenges to materials. The results were found generally to support the model.

Introduction, Definitions, and Conceptual Framework

The question of access to information for children and young adults, particularly from the standpoint of intellectual freedom, is one of broad and sustained interest. In spite of this interest, there has been surprisingly little systematic research that has moved the profession forward

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2. School of Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin—Madison, Helen C. White Hall, 600 N. Park Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53706.

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in its understanding of intellectual freedom questions or in its preparation for and response to challenges to materials in libraries.

Direct challenges to materials found in school libraries have been of particular concern to proponents of intellectual freedom. Yet aside from occasional studies and periodic status reports of challenge results, little is known about the challenge process. This article reports the results of the testing, on a national level, of a conceptual model that addressed the question, "What are the variables that are most likely to influence the outcome of challenges to school library materials at the secondary level?" For purposes of the present study, "challenge" is defined as an oral or written complaint about the appropriateness of school library material(s). "Outcome" is defined as the resolution of such a challenge and is viewed in terms of retention, restriction, or removal of challenged material. In retention, material that is thought to be appropriate for the school library remains on open shelves and is readily accessible to users of the library. In restriction, material that is thought to be suitable for some students in the school but questionable for others is given limited access, such as placement on a restricted shelf for access only through the librarian or other authority figure. In removal, material that is thought to be inappropriate for the school and its students is taken out of the school library altogether.

The conceptual model on which the study is based was developed and discussed by Dianne McAfee Hopkins [1]. The model was based on a review and analysis of intellectual freedom research in library and information science; educational administration research including formal and informal organizations, school climate, and supervisor/subordinate relationships; behavioral science research relating to personality, power, and authority; and communications research including local media (such as newspapers) and community interactions. In the model tested in the present study, outcome of a challenge to school library material was seen as affected by five major classes of variables: district materials selection policy, school environment, community environment, initiator of the challenge, and selected personal and professional characteristics of the librarian. The research review suggested that the primary variables influencing whether library materials in school settings are retained, restricted, or removed are very complex and may well center around the school librarian and the principal and around the leadership or lack thereof that either or both exert throughout the challenge process.

In the field of library and information science, the model was strongly influenced by the research and discussions of Marjorie Fiske [2], John J. Farley [3], Charles H. Busha [4], Claire St. Clere England [5], Michael J. Pope [6], and Judith Serebnick [7]. Farley's study focused specifically

on school libraries. Fiske's study included school and public libraries; Pope's study included school, public, and college libraries. Busha and England focused on public libraries. While the Busha and England research is not generalizable to school libraries, it is included because, when examined along with other research in intellectual freedom, the research offered background information or confirmed possible key variables for the research question.

The well-known Fiske study of book selection, challenges, and censorship focused on selected California school and public libraries in the 1950s [2]. It has been called the most influential research on intellectual freedom in U.S. libraries [7, p. 97]. Fiske's findings offered useful information to the model in many areas including materials selection policy; librarians' characteristics such as length of service, self-esteem, sense of pressure in selections, and level of formal education; school environment, including the influence of the school administrator on the librarian; community environment, including the influence of local media; and the initiator of the challenge.

Farley [3] explored precensorship in acquisitions, circulation, and use of books in the collections of forty-three senior high schools in Nassau County, New York. He sought to ascertain responsibility and rationales for restrictions. Farley's findings offered information useful to the model relating to librarians' characteristics, including length of professional service, and to school environment, including the influence of school administrators on the librarian.

Busha [4] studied midwestern public librarians to determine their attitudes toward intellectual freedom, censorship, and selected authoritarian beliefs. Busha's findings offered insights into librarians' personal characteristics such as age, level of formal education, and authoritarian beliefs; school environment, including the possible influence of administrators on the librarian; and community environment, including the relationship between community size and librarians' attitudes toward censorship.

England [5] studied public librarians in six cities in Ontario, Canada. She sought to discover attitudes and perceptual factors influencing what she termed the "censorship activity" of public librarians. England's findings provided information useful to the model in the areas of characteristics of the librarian, including age and sense of pressure in selections, and community environment.

Pope [6] analyzed the opinions of school, public, and college librarians on sexually oriented literature. Pope's findings offered useful information in the areas of characteristics of the librarian such as age and level of formal education and of school environment, including the relationship between school enrollment and restrictiveness.

Serebnick [7] provided a very useful review of research relating to censorship in libraries. She noted research patterns as well as relationships among variables. Serebnick also provided a conceptual framework for further research on selection and censorship in libraries.

Other reports, while less comprehensive and often status reports, when taken as a whole, offered support for suggested variables. Selected studies include those of Mary L. Woodworth [8], Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction [9, 10, 11], *Limiting What Children Shall Read* [12], Pauletta Brown Bracy [13], Fran McDonald [14], and David Jenkinson [15].

Review monographs were used to identify major theories and strands of thought outside library and information science. Insights from educational administration research were based on reviews by Wayne K. Hoy and Patrick B. Forsyth [16] and Paula Silver [17]. Behavioral science research relating to personality, power, and authority was usefully summarized by Leonard W. Doob [18]. Ideas from communications research including local media and community interactions were taken from Vincent Price and Donald F. Roberts [19], Donald F. Roberts [20], William L. Rivers et al. [21], and Wilbur Schramm [22]. Derivation of the model is fully described in [1]. The model was first tested in a state-based exploratory study of Wisconsin's public middle, junior, and senior high school libraries in the spring of 1988. The results generally supported the model, were useful in the design of the national study, and were reported in the research literature [23].

Following the exploratory study described in [23], the model was tested through a national study focusing on public secondary school libraries in the 1989-90 school year. Based on the results, a revised, but similar, model emerged. The revised model differs from the original in that the variable class, "complaint background," was added. This article focuses on the revised conceptual model, depicted in figure 1, and the research results on which the model is based. A fuller report of the research was provided to the U.S. Department of Education, which provided primary funding for the study [24].³

Research Design and Methodology

The national study, reported in the present article, was conducted in two phases. First, a sample was drawn from the population of all secondary public schools in the United States, with the expectation that a man-

3. Individual copies of the report are available for \$20.00 from School of Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin—Madison.

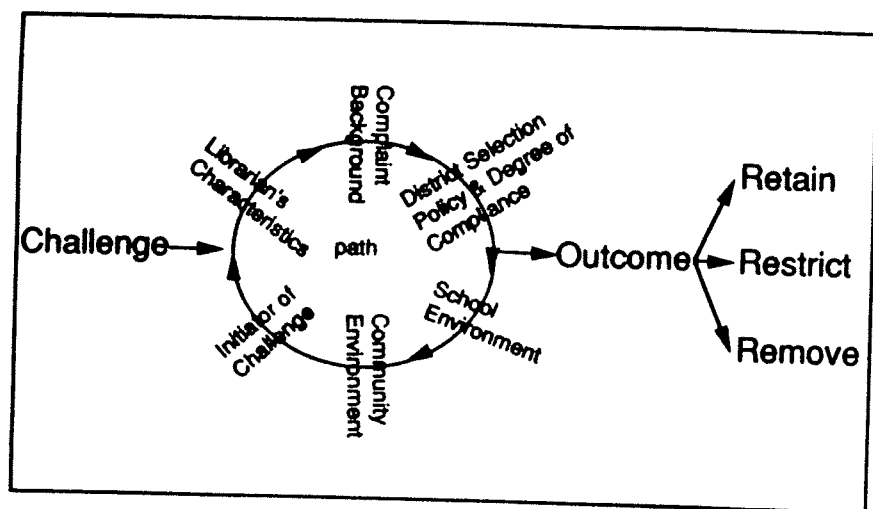


FIG. 1.—Conceptual model for challenge outcomes

ageable number of schools that had experienced challenges within a three-year period would be revealed. In the second phase, the secondary public schools that had experienced challenges were studied, with a focus on the most recent challenge occurring in a three-year period.

The population from which the sample was selected came from the "1987–88 Universe of Public Education Agencies," which lists the names and addresses of public schools at kindergarten through twelve levels throughout the United States. Of these, 34,644 schools fit the targeted population, that is, schools reporting grades seven and above. This listing was obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) [25]. A proportionate, stratified, random sample of schools with grades seven or higher was selected for the population. See table 1 for the regional breakdown.

For each state, samples were drawn representing seven community sizes as defined by the U.S. Bureau of the Census (see App. A for a list of the seven community sizes). The community sizes ranged from "large central city," with greater than or equal to six thousand persons per square mile, to "rural," with a population less than 2,500 and defined as rural by the U.S. Bureau of the Census (see table 2).

Of the 6,617 schools selected for the sample, 6,557 were used. The remainder of the surveys were undeliverable or duplicates or were sent to ineligible institutions (special schools, et cetera). A one-page questionnaire was directed to "school library media specialist" at each of the 6,557 schools in the sample and was mailed in November 1989. The

TABLE 1
POPULATION AND SAMPLE BY REGION

Region	Population ^a	Sample Size ^b	Sample % of Region Population
Northeast	5,299 (15.3)	1,013 (15.3)	19.1
South	11,548 (33.3)	2,205 (33.3)	19.1
North Central	10,999 (31.8)	2,101 (31.8)	19.1
West	6,798 (19.6)	1,298 (19.6)	19.1
Total	34,644 (100.1)	6,617 (100.1)	19.1

NOTE.—Numbers in parentheses are percentages. Percentages found in tables throughout the article have been rounded off to the nearest tenth and may not all equal 100.

^aPercentages are of total population.

^bPercentages are of total sample.

TABLE 2
POPULATION AND SAMPLE BY COMMUNITY

Stratum	Population ^a	Sample Size ^b	Sample % of Community Population
Large central city	2,730 (7.9)	524 (7.9)	19.2
Midsize central city	3,544 (10.2)	680 (10.3)	19.2
Urban fringe, large city	3,890 (11.2)	743 (11.2)	19.1
Urban fringe, midsize city	2,823 (8.1)	535 (8.1)	19.0
Large town	594 (1.7)	113 (1.7)	19.0
Small town	8,543 (24.7)	1,635 (24.7)	19.1
Rural	12,520 (36.1)	2,387 (36.1)	19.1
Total	34,644 (99.9)	6,617 (100)	19.1

NOTE.—Numbers in parentheses are percentages.

^aPercentages are of total population.

^bPercentages are of total sample.

purpose of this first questionnaire was to determine the number of librarians working in the school, whether a school board–approved materials selection policy existed, whether librarians felt under pressure in the selection of materials, and whether complaints about library materials occurred during the period 1986–89. The overall response rate was 72 percent; 4,736 of the 6,557 eligible addresses were completed and returned. Of these, 1,661 or 35.9 percent indicated that challenges had occurred. These results are reported in a separate article [26].

Libraries in which challenges to library materials occurred during the period 1986–89 became the focus of the second part of the study. A questionnaire was developed for the school librarian and was divided into four main parts. The first section focused on background information about the school, the district, and the librarian. The next section

focused on school library materials selection and on challenges occurring to school library materials since September 1987. The third section focused on the most recently resolved complaint about library materials occurring since September 1987. The last section focused on the librarian's perspectives including professional experience, psychological makeup, and views about challenges to library materials. See reference [24] for a copy of the full questionnaire.

The questionnaire was reviewed comprehensively by a consultant, a panel of experts, and others.⁴ In addition, it was field-tested with the following subjects: twenty graduate-level students in two classes in the School of Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin—Madison; ten students in the school library program at North Carolina Central University's School of Library and Information Sciences; twelve building-level public and private secondary-level school librarians in southern Wisconsin; fifty U.S. secondary school librarians randomly selected who had not been included in the phase I sample; and fifty school librarians and district-level supervisors in thirteen U.S. states recommended by state-level library media consultants. As a result of these reviews and field tests, the questionnaire was revised several times before it was finally distributed.

The overall response rate was 70 percent; 1,171 of the 1,661 questionnaires were completed and returned. Of the 1,171 respondents, 739 or 63.1 percent indicated that they experienced challenges during the period under investigation.

Data analyses included general frequency and percentage information, followed by χ^2 analyses or analyses of variance as appropriate. The value chosen to indicate statistical significance was $P < .05$. Standardized residuals were used in the χ^2 analyses to determine those cells contributing to overall significance.⁵ For analyses of variance that were found to be significant, Scheffé tests were conducted.⁶ Finally, a series of logistic

4. I express special appreciation to the study's research consultant, Douglas L. Zweigig, School of Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin—Madison. Appreciation is also expressed to Rebecca P. Butler, research assistant, and to the members of the study's panel of experts: Pauletta Brown Bracy (North Carolina Central University), Frances Beck McDonald (Mankato State University), Alvin Schrader (University of Alberta, Canada), and Judith Serebnick (Indiana University). I conferred with research consultant Zweigig throughout the study on, in addition to questionnaire design, areas including data analysis and overall research design.

5. Standardized residuals are a by-product of a χ^2 analysis. They are a measure of how well the actual number of responses agree with the expected number of the table cell in which they appear, based on the column and row totals, and are expressed in terms of standard deviations. A value greater than or equal to +2 or less than or equal to -2 can be considered significantly different than expected at the .05 level of significance.

6. Analysis of variance is used to test for statistical significance in the level of a response across several groups. The resulting P value will indicate if the differences are significant "taken as whole" (that is, across all of the several groups at once). Further, post

regressions were performed to identify the significance of factors and individual questions in explaining outcome.

Findings

The findings focus on the dependent variable, outcome to challenges. Of the 739 respondents reporting challenges, 606 indicated that the outcome to the challenge was retention, restriction, or removal. Three hundred seventeen respondents or 52.3 percent indicated that challenged material was retained. One hundred thirty-one or 21.6 percent indicated that the challenged material was restricted, and 158 or 26.1 percent indicated that the challenged material was removed. The remaining 112 respondents to this question selected "other," which included a variety of possibilities such as the transfer of titles to another school elsewhere in the district and multiple outcomes when more than one title was challenged.

Region and Type of Community

The data on challenge outcome were analyzed in terms of the four regions of the United States as defined by the U.S. Bureau of the Census (see App. B). The lowest rate of retention among the regions was reported in the South at 42.7 percent. A χ^2 test examined region and outcome. Differences were found to be significant at the $P < .05$ level (see table 3). Standardized residuals showed that challenges occurring in the South were less likely to result in retention and more likely to result in restriction when compared to other regions.

The data on outcomes were also analyzed in terms of types of communities. There was no significant difference in outcome according to type of community.

Material Selection Policy

The variables related to the materials selection policy focused on the existence of a policy, the level of formality of the policy, and the degree to which the policy was used with a given challenge. Having a policy was found to be significantly related to challenges to materials ($P < .05$), with board-approved written policies resulting most often in retention compared to no policy, informal policy, and written but not approved policy (see table 4).

When the policy was used, material had a greater likelihood of reten-

hoc testing is necessary to determine which of the specific groups are statistically different. Scheffé tests are one way of testing significance across groups pairwise while maintaining an overall significance level of $P < .05$.