

Public Libraries for U.S. Immigrant Communities: An Integrative Review at the Intersection of Community Development

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Abstract

U.S. immigration policies marginalize and inferiorize non-Northern or Western European immigrants (Al-khersan & Shahshahani, 2022). This integrative literature review, framed through the lens of critical librarianship, examines the role of public libraries and librarians in serving and developing immigrant communities within the context of U.S. immigration policies. A qualitative content analysis of 38 articles reveals that while public libraries play crucial roles for immigrants upon entry into the United States, their services fall short of including the heterogeneity of immigrants and fostering lasting relationships with immigrant populations. The roots of this impediment can be traced to the deficit-based paradigm and need-orientedness of the public library's approach to immigrants, initiated by the Americanization movement (Ndumu & Ramnine, 2021). A gap was identified, indicating that empirical research is needed to interrogate the leadership roles of public libraries in community development alongside immigrant groups in the U.S.

Keywords: critical librarianship; immigrant communities; literature review; public libraries; United States

Publication Type: literature review

Introduction

The othering of a group of U.S. residents by labeling them as immigrants presents multifaceted challenges in immigrant communities. Such alienation subjects these communities to a host of issues at the intersection of adverse international politics, hostile nationalistic discourse, benevolent local community advocacy, and oppressed individual and collective identities. Public library values are underpinned in the knowledge-sharing ways of communities by their commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion and their work toward advancing social justice for marginalized groups (American Library Association [ALA], 2006, 2008; Public Library Association [PLA], 2017). Guided by professional organizations, public libraries respond to the institutional marginalization of immigrants through various initiatives (Jones, 2020).

Although U.S. public libraries largely operate with intentionality toward social justice (Irvin, 2022; Mills et al., 2021), it is essential to acknowledge the white supremacist legacies of U.S. libraries and the allure of vocational awe (Ettarh, 2018) that impact public libraries' relationship-building process in communities. Thus, public library leadership requires intense

self-reflection, introspection, and a system of checks and balances to ensure a critical approach to being an inclusive community anchor. Like any institution, local libraries and their leaders remain accountable to municipal authorities, often beyond the local community. Kretzmann and McKnight (1995) recommend increasing local accountability to increase the public library's presence as a community asset. This study reviews library and information science (LIS) scholarship to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of efforts in this domain.

To that end, this literature review adopts an integrative approach through the lens of critical librarianship that “acknowledges and then interrogates the structures that produce professional librarians, library spaces and patrons as they navigate the public sphere. All these interfaces within the sum of human knowledge [are] produced, in large part, by us” (Drabinski, 2019, p. 49) - human society. Despite their benevolent intentions, libraries have been complicit in the oppression of marginalized groups, including immigrants (Chu, 2021; Honma, 2005; Ndumu, 2021; Ndumu & Ramnine, 2021).

By employing the critical librarianship lens, this study remains cognizant of these nuances while answering a central research question: To what extent does existing LIS literature capture and conceptualize the engagement of public libraries and librarian services with immigrant communities—groups that have historically been and continue to be marginalized in U.S. society?

Theoretical Framework

Critical librarianship encourages us to examine and “disrupt the status quo” in our scholarship, profession, and the traditions and norms shaped by the interplay of power, knowledge, and legacies of white supremacy (Drabinski, 2019, p. 53). This approach allows LIS scholars and professionals to move beyond the notion of neutrality and strive to restore social justice in the field. Mehra (2022) calls on LIS stakeholders to interrogate and work towards changing the “problematic epistemological, ontological, and paradigmatic white-IST roots” (p. 2). Committed to social justice, critical librarianship seeks to elevate the voices of marginalized and oppressed librarians, patrons, and communities. Among the five principles of critical librarianship, this literature review is most directly guided by and contributes to the fourth principle: “critical librarianship articulates the infrastructures that enable some lines of inquiry and not others” (Drabinski, 2019, p. 53). How have we conceptualized these communities regarding public library services to immigrant communities? What questions have we asked, and what lines of inquiry have we pursued?

An array of critical works disrobed the oppressive systems perpetuated by the Euro-centric, white-IST (Mehra & Gray, 2020) and colonial legacies of the library service development paradigm that further marginalizes Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color (BIPOC) and immigrant groups (Chu, 2021; Espinal et al., 2021; Honma, 2005; Hudson, 2017; Ndumu & Ramnine, 2021; Pawley, 2006; Velez & Villa-Nicholas, 2017). Responding to these critiques, LIS scholars and practitioners increasingly advocate for reparative research and practices that enhance equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) within LIS. Public libraries' situatedness (Costello, 2014) as community anchors articulates a community-centered paradigm within which this critical approach and the social dynamics can be negotiated. Numerous theories define the concept of community (Cicognani, 2014; Delanty, 2003; Groff, 2023; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1995). Public libraries rely on the social construct of community, which not only defines the library's role within its communities but also contextualizes community development, especially concerning immigrant populations. Shearer and Chiewphasa's (2021) reflective autoethnography stands out in this

discourse. By challenging the deficit-based models and embracing an asset-based model, they envision an anti-racist library. Through this exercise, they demonstrated how asset-based perspectives can cultivate a sense of belonging, redistribute power dynamics, and contribute to advancing social justice in libraries.

While immigration studies within LIS in the United States may be scant (compared to few salient studies on immigration topics in LIS beyond the U.S. (Caidi et al., 2010; Dali (2021b), Ndumu et al. (2023) exemplified practical steps toward improving BIPOC representation in LIS, particularly those with immigrant status. The research team initiated the Careers in Libraries for Immigrants program, which was tailored explicitly for skilled or degreed immigrants interested in the library and information professions. The program attracted individuals from Central American and Middle Eastern backgrounds to the LIS field. Ndumu et al. (2023) advocated fostering partnerships among community members, educators, professionals, and organizations. Such collaborations are instrumental in diversifying the LIS workforce while acknowledging and leveraging the assets of immigrant communities. The current review study aims to provide an overview of the concepts that have shaped the public library's approach to immigrant populations and theories related to community development.

Conceptual Grounds

This section presents evidence from various sources, including laws, policy documents, historical documents, book chapters, and articles, that expand the theoretical frame of this paper. In three subsections, this concise overview situates the current study at the intersection of U.S. immigration policies and public library services for immigrants, white supremacy and the racialization of certain immigrant groups, and the justice-oriented, asset-based approach to working with these communities.

The quagmire of immigration and U.S. public libraries

The foundation of the United States traces back to Western European immigrants who colonized the ancestral lands of numerous Indigenous nations and tribes (Blackhawk, 2023). The nation's immigration history is marked by positive attitudes toward white, Northern, and Western European immigrants and negative attitudes toward other immigrants (Al-khersan & Shahshahani, 2022). However, it was not until 1875, with the Supreme Court ruling of *Chy Lung v. Freeman*, that the federal government assumed the responsibility of regulating immigration.

The first pivotal piece of legislation that institutionalized anti-immigrant policies was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Although repealed in 1943 during World War II, this act set a precedent for subsequent xenophobic immigration policies and rhetoric that persist today (National Archives, 2023). The many legislative, legal, and executive actions that have ensued (from the Gentlemen's Agreement (Hamilton, 2023) to ongoing discourse of the U.S. southern border) continue to racialize 'other' immigrants based on their place of origin. This bias, particularly favoring Northern and Western European immigrants, is well documented in various legislations. For example, the Naturalization Act of 1790 (Enlarging the National Community, 1790) stipulated that only "free white person[s]" could obtain U.S. citizenship, and the Immigration Act of 1924 (Johnson-Reed Act, 1924) excluded the majority of Asian immigrants from the quota system.

Public libraries entered the immigration discourse during the Americanization movement. Wheaton's (1916) address at the American Library Association's (ALA) Asbury Park Conference

vividly captured the prevailing sentiments and overwhelming “uneasiness so noticeable in America” (p. 265). He emphasized the urgent need for libraries to counteract “foreign ideas ... injected into our thoughts and into our national psychology” (Wheaton, 1916, p. 265). His remedy was centered on offering English language classes and books designed to assimilate and Americanize “foreigners.”

The foundational efforts of public libraries in serving immigrant communities can be traced back to this pivotal era. Library thought leaders, such as John Foster Carr, played instrumental roles in shaping these initiatives. Although not a librarian, Carr gained prominence in the field through his *Little Green Book* or *Guida*, released by his publishing house, the *Immigrant Publication Society* (Ndumu, 2021). His influence increased as he became the head of the newly formed ALA *Committee on Work with the Foreign Born* (CWFB) in 1917 and the Chairman of the *ALA Librarians’ Council* in 1920 (Ndumu, 2021).

Carr’s influential perspective significantly shaped the paradigm of library services to immigrants, often stereotyping them as “lost,” “illiterate,” and “uncivilized” in need of “disciplining” for assimilation (Ndumu & Ramnine, 2021, pp. 20-21). In a critical examination of Carr’s impact on the librarianship profession, Ndumu and Ramnine (2021) argued that Carr influenced the profession more than immigrant communities themselves and that he contributed to depicting librarians as “saviors,” “heroes,” and “rescue workers,” leading defective immigrants toward “national salvation” - a concept we now recognize as vocational awe (Ettarh, 2018). Despite the deficit-oriented and adversity-centered teachings of thought leaders like Carr, in a historical evaluation, Jones (2020) found ALA’s initiatives in response to immigration legislation from 1876 to 2020 to be timely and supportive of immigrants and their rights.

U.S. immigration and white supremacy

U.S. anti-immigrant policies, rhetoric, and federal immigration laws are deeply entwined with white supremacy ideologies (Srikantiah & Sinnar, 2019). In the groundbreaking book, *The Racial Contract*, Charles W. Mills provides a philosophical lens that gives us insight into the role of the egalitarian American polity and social order as it impacts immigration (Jagmohan, 2015). From a global sociopolitical standpoint, Mills (2004) argues that the American social order validates and generalizes the experiences of the White, European-American population. Founded on “European sociopolitical theory,” this social order centers “class as the primary social division” (p. 236).

Mills’s (2018, [1997] 2022) racial contract theory further enriched the discourse on social justice. He delineated six dimensions of racial injustice as “economic, juridico-political, cultural, cognitive-evaluative, somatic, and ontological” (Mills, 2018, p. 85). The last four principles elucidate “respect” in his corrective racial justice theory. These dimensions encapsulate how the dominant race (R1) marginalizes and deprecates the subordinate race’s (R2’s) culture (cultural), denies credibility to their epistemologies and hermeneutical proposals (cognitive-evaluative), denigrates the attractiveness of their bodies (somatic), and finally “stigmatizes the R2s as less than full persons” (ontological) (Mills, 2018, pp. 85-86).

Through Mills’s lens, the racist rhetoric of the Americanization movement in libraries, alongside Wheaton’s (1916) suggested informational practices for librarians working with new citizens, homogenizes immigrants into a singular R2 group. This portrayal, combined with Carr’s depiction of librarians as “saviors” (Ndumu & Ramnine, 2021) coupled with the whiteness of librarianship (Honma, 2005; Mehra & Gray, 2020), has perpetuated white supremacist approaches in working

with immigrant communities. Such legacies, compounded by vocational awe (Ettarh, 2018), have obstructed critical reform of the library's perceptions and engagements with immigrant populations.

Community development frameworks

Public librarians have a theoretical and practical responsibility for “community-building efforts that recognize cultural diversity, economic inequalities, and the urgent need for social solidarity” (Hudson, 2017, p. 147). Librarians collaborate and connect with volunteers and resident associations, such as the Friends of the Library. They can leverage their institutional, physical, financial, and human assets to lead as capacity finders. Kretzmann and McKnight (1995) consider public libraries as “natural community centers” and “community hubs” that “exist at the very heart of community life” with strong “potential community building power” (p. 191).

Various theories and frameworks can be borrowed from sociology, psychology, anthropology, and other disciplines to define the concept of community, its formation process, its purpose, and how this purpose is fulfilled. Table 1 summarizes eleven relevant theories and frameworks that introduce the domain and underlying concepts intended for each theory or framework.

Table 1. Theories and frameworks to define community

Theory/Framework	Domain	Underlying concepts	Outcome
Asset-Based Community Development (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1995)	Sociology	Participatory capacity building	Sustainable change / solutions for challenges, empowerment, belonging
Community of Practice (Groff, 2023)	Sociology	Interest-based networks	Learning, identity formation
Conflict Theory (Kretchmar, 2023)	Sociology	Power dynamics and social inequality	Change, distribution of benefits and burdens
Consensus Theory (Kretchmar, 2023)	Sociology	Society as systems of complementary parts	Social structures, meeting functional needs
Harwood Institute's Community Rhythm (Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, 2014)	Sociology, LIS	Library leadership in participatory capacity building	Sustainable change, empowerment, leadership development
Life in the Round (Chatman, 1999)	LIS	Small world/ community life, disconnect from outside world with an	Normative existence, worldviews, identity,

		acceptable degree of approximation	information satisfaction
Place attachment (Codington-Lacerte, 2023)	Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology	Individuals assign quality and symbolic value to a given location according to their lived experiences and sociocultural features	Belonging, satisfaction
Sense of Community (Cicognani, 2014)	Psychology	Sense of belonging, shared identity	Well-being, resilience
Social Bonding Theory (Chriss, 2007)	Psychology	Strength of attachment to a place and other humans present within that place determine the degree of deviation.	Belonging, socialization
Social Capital (Walsh, 2023)	Sociology	Network of social relationships	Prosperity, collective actions
Symbolic Interactionism (Vejar, 2023)	Social psychology	Shared meanings and symbolic interactions form and sustain communities	Effective community dynamics

For instance, the Place Attachment theory underscores the significance of location-based meanings and values in community formation concerning areas like neighborhoods or countries (Codington-Lacerte, 2023). In contrast, the Symbolic Interactionism theory (Vejar, 2023) centers on language and culture, while the Community of Practice (Groff, 2023) focuses on shared activities among members as the unifying elements of a community. These theories have different implications in LIS.

Chatman's (1999) 'life in the round' theory is critical because of its applications in studying the information experiences of immigrant communities (Shuva, 2023). Life in the round approaches community as a bounded concept (Chatman, 1999). Various parameters, such as location, language, practice, or religion, can demarcate these boundaries. These characteristics foster a shared identity among the members of that community, facilitating cohesion and engagement within the group.

Kretzmann and McKnight's (1993) Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework and the Harwood Institute's (2014) Community Rhythm model are both well-suited for adoption by libraries. The ALA has officially adopted the latter through the Libraries Transforming Communities Initiative (2014). This model emphasizes the leadership role of libraries in community transformation, delineating a five-stage process. The ultimate goal of this approach

is to distribute power and cultivate community leaders capable of driving meaningful change (Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, 2014). Several studies and initiatives have substantiated the efficacy of this approach in developing more equitable and impactful library services (ALA, 2017; Kranich, 2021; Kranich et al., 2014; Ouligian, 2018; Seleb & Kolo, 2017).

The ABCD framework expands on the concept of identity. This framework accentuates collective and individual identities encompassing talents, values, feelings, goals, and ambitions through a neighborhood-centered approach (García, 2020). ABCD presents a strategy and methodology for intentional and systematic community development (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1995). Community development starts from the inside and grows outward toward local economic prosperity. This involves discovering and mobilizing six typically under-recognized asset categories: individuals, associations, institutions, physical assets, local economy, and cultural stories. By transitioning from “development driven by external agencies” to “community-driven development” (Collaborative For Neighborhood Transformation, n.d.), this strategy prioritized capacity over deficit (=need). Rather than viewing the community as a needy entity through a deficit lens, it empowers individuals, including all “kinds of labeled people” (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, p. 347), to mobilize their assets to address challenges. Kretzmann and McKnight (1995) argue that turning individuals into passive recipients of external agents fosters a savior-seeking mentality and undermines community empowerment.

Method

Grounded in an interpretive worldview (Budd, 1995), this research employed qualitative content analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to examine the related literature. At the center of its focus are scholarly publications on public libraries’ role in serving immigrants and community development alongside them.

To gather the literature, two search queries were formulated:

((public librar*) AND (immigra*)) AND LA English
((public librar*) AND (refugee*)) AND LA English

Searches were conducted in the *Library and Information Science Source* and *Library and Information Science and Technology Abstract (LISTA)* databases, along with Google Scholar and Semantic Scholar. Like Grossman et al. (2022), the results were refined to include full-text peer-reviewed journal articles published in English. A total of 90 items were consulted to conduct this study. Upon reviewing titles and abstracts, 52 articles did not meet the inclusion criteria. These articles were excluded because they focused on topics outside the study’s scope, such as academic libraries, archives, or governmental policymaking, or because of their format, such as book reviews, biographies, and other non-empirical papers.

Results and Analysis

The analysis of the remaining 38 peer-reviewed journal articles is presented in this review with five themes: (a) public libraries for immigrants, (b) immigrants’ library perceptions and experiences, (c) immigrants’ information needs and experiences, (d) social inclusion and integration, and (e) community development with immigrant communities. Several comprehensive literature reviews were found on library services to immigrants and refugees and their information experiences (Beretta et al., 2018; Grossman et al., 2022; Koscieljew, 2019).

Instead of replicating these works, the current study adopted a critical librarianship lens to review the selected works.

Public libraries for immigrants

A group of studies highlighted librarian's viewpoints and experiences in serving immigrant communities (Al-Qallaf & Mika, 2013; Dali, 2022; Serrano Pérez & Faba-Pérez, 2021). Their direct engagement and impact on immigrant communities signified the importance of the librarians' views. For example, Dali (2022) interviewed ten urban librarians from Canada and the US to identify their motivations in serving immigrant populations. Through an employee engagement lens, she identified the main motivators as the meaningfulness of the work, availability of resources, and safety in their practice. The librarians emphasized partnership building and need-based programming (e.g., English language learning courses) among services and viewed the library as a community hub. A noted challenge was a limited nuanced understanding of immigrant communities. Participants saw the library as "community glue," aiding immigrants intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, and socially in their acclimation journey.

A subset of studies in this category investigated the type and scope of library services to immigrants. Despite professional organizations advocating for a community-centric perspective (ALA, 2014; Public Library Association, 2023), some literature revealed traces of deficit-based approaches to library service and program development for immigrants. In a thorough review of 41 articles, Serrano Pérez & Faba-Pérez (2021) utilized the IFLA guidelines for libraries in multicultural communities as a framework. These themes are supported by the empirical findings from studies (e.g. Serrano Pérez & Faba-Pérez, 2021; Shuva, 2023).

Drawing from their research, Serrano Pérez and Faba-Pérez (2021) crafted ten guidelines for developing library services for immigrants. While these guidelines resonated with the deficit-based legacies of service provision for immigrants, the sixth guideline presented a nuance. By soliciting feedback from immigrants in collection development, this guideline stood as the only one acknowledging assets and vesting agency in immigrants. The multifaceted outcome of these guidelines was proposed as alignment of library services with immigrants' needs, improved library "reputation," enhanced image of the library as a safe space for immigrants, facilitated immigrant integration, and increased library use.

In another comprehensive literature review, Mabi (2018) identified a spectrum of integration strategies, including "policy and policy implementation, collection development, access, programming, community engagement, partnership building, literacy and instruction, staffing, welcoming library spaces, and strategic planning" (p. 201). She underscored the importance of community analysis and the strategic recruitment of community librarians who directly engage with immigrant populations. Furthermore, this study critiqued the inadequacy of staff training initiatives and the tendency to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach when crafting services for immigrant groups. Highlighting a gap, Mabi (2018) called for studies examining these strategies' effectiveness in engaging with immigrants.

Al-Qallaf & Mika (2013) surveyed administrators and adult services librarians representing 48 libraries across four counties to investigate library service to Arabic-speaking immigrants in the Michigan area. They found that two-thirds of the libraries incorporated serving diverse populations into their strategic plans or goals. Notably, scarce resources include dedicated funding, bilingual Arabic-speaking staff, programming, publicity, dedicated collection

development policy, and partnership with Arabic-speaking community organizations. The predominant form of service to this group was identified as access to print Arabic book collections. The representation of the Arab community on the advisory commission or board of trustees was limited to four libraries. The provision of exhibits, flyers, or publicity materials in Arabic was determined as extremely limited. This study uncovered the need for libraries to move beyond mere provision of books, and to learn and take meaningful actions to include marginalized communities.

Immigrants' library perceptions and experiences

A more significant body of literature put immigrant community members at the center of attention (Branyon, 2017; Dali, 2021a, 2021b; Kranich, 2021; Shuva, 2018, 2023; van der Linden et al., 2014). The analysis of these studies was critical in understanding how the intentions and efforts of librarians resonate with and impact lived experiences of their immigrant clientele. Ultimately, the research of this community could determine whether libraries function as community hubs or aspire to roles as community development agents. Most of the studies employed qualitative or mixed-method designs with in-depth interviews to accomplish this goal. These studies involved immigrants from various origins, from Bangladesh, Iran, Somalia, and Mexico.

The participants exhibited varied educational backgrounds and reading habits, with many possessing some secondary education. Furthermore, their duration of residence in their respective new countries spanned from a few months (newcomers) to several decades (settled) (Adkins et al., 2017; Dali, 2021a, 2021b; Finnegan, 2023; Grossman et al., 2022; Johnston, 2019; Quirke, 2012; Serrano Pérez & Faba-Pérez, 2021; Shuva, 2023; Ulvik, 2010; van der Linden et al., 2014). These themes emerged from the review of this literature:

- Immigrants predominantly sought information within their own personal network before turning to the public libraries. Their initial use of public libraries was prompted by this network (Adkins et al., 2017; Dali, 2021b; Kranich, 2021; Ndumu, 2020; Quirke, 2012; Shuva, 2023; van der Linden et al., 2014).
- Trust in the library establishment impacted immigrants' use of the library (Finnegan, 2023; Johnston, 2019; Shuva, 2023).
- Essential library offerings for immigrant integration were meeting new people, making friends, and learning a new language (Johnston, 2019; Shuva, 2023; Ulvik, 2010; van der Linden et al., 2014).
- Immigrants' engagement with public libraries often remained confined to the silos of immigrant services/programs and did not always extend beyond those boundaries to encompass all library services (Shuva, 2023; van der Linden et al., 2014).
- The limited availability of materials in their native languages discouraged some immigrants (Al-Qallaf & Mika, 2013; Shuva, 2023).
- Factors such as age, length of residence, and familiarity with public libraries in the country of origin impacted immigrants' perceptions of the library and use patterns (Johnston, 2019; Serrano Pérez & Faba-Pérez, 2021; Shuva, 2023; van der Linden et al., 2014).
- For immigrant parents, library visits often revolved around facilitating their children's language acquisition and social development rather than their individual educational or recreational purposes (Shuva, 2023).

- The immigrants' use of public libraries declined over time as they settled down (Ndumu, 2020; Shuva, 2023; van der Linden et al., 2014).
- In certain studies, immigrants maintained a "somewhat romanticized" image of the library (Dali, 2021b; Johnston, 2019; Ulvik, 2010).

Immigrants' information needs and experiences

Understanding the information needs and behaviors of immigrant groups was a recurring theme in the literature (Allard, 2021; Danso, 2002; Finnegan, 2023; Ndumu, 2020; Shoham & Strauss, 2008; Shuva, 2018, 2020, 2023). Though a distinct domain, information behavior studies overlapped with public library scholarship, especially regarding immigrants. The shared objective at this intersection was to identify strategies for libraries and information centers to effectively meet immigrant groups' information needs.

The research participants in this group of studies, too, were heterogeneous. Although individual studies faced inherent limitations regarding generalization due to their qualitative nature, the wide compositional diversity among participants - be it place of origin, race, gender, educational background, or length of residence - as well as the thematic proximity of their results form a holistic picture across literature. Motivations and barriers for the selection of information sources stood out prominently. Depending on family and friends as primary information sources was rooted in trust and oral culture for immigrants from Haiti (Finnegan, 2023), Bangladesh (Shuva, 2018, 2020), Philippines (Allard, 2021), Croatia (Krtalic, 2021), Ghana (Atiso et al., 2018), Afghanistan (Quirke, 2012), Arab countries (Al-Qallaf & Mika, 2009), Central America (Adkins et al., 2017), Ethiopia and Somalia (Danso, 2002) as well as the African, Afro-Latino, and Afro-Caribbean immigrants (Ndumu, 2020).

Conversely, several barriers consistently emerged in the information experiences of immigrant groups: English language proficiency, information overload, accuracy of information, lack of time, lifestyle, information overload, limited availability of resources in their mother tongue, racism, communication and learning modes and traditions that did not align with library traditions, and cultural impediments were noted commonly for various immigrant groups (Beretta et al., 2018; Bjarnadottir et al., 2016; Danso, 2002; Finnegan, 2023; Ndumu, 2020). This testified to the intersectional impact of systems of oppression on immigrants' information experiences that perpetuated their marginalization.

Moreover, several consistent themes emerged from the recommendations of these studies. To facilitate immigrants' information experiences, they recommended an increase in the number of information sources in languages other than English, outreach, programming geared toward the specific characteristics of the group, improving cultural competency among library and information professionals, hiring library workers from immigrant groups, and above all, *seeing* immigrants as *heterogeneous* groups. The call for more research on this topic was unanimous (Allard, 2021; Beretta et al., 2018; Dali, 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Danso, 2002; Finnegan, 2023; Grossman et al., 2022; Krtalic, 2021; Mabi, 2018; Ndumu, 2020; Serrano Pérez & Faba-Pérez, 2021; Shoham & Strauss, 2008; Shuva, 2018, 2020, 2023).

The study of immigrants' health information behavior in the context of public libraries constituted a specialized segment in literature (Bjarnadottir et al., 2016; Grossman et al., 2022; Kranich, 2021; Michel et al., 2011). Through a community-based participatory research methodology, the Queens Library's HealthLink initiative documented enhanced cancer

information literacy among immigrant communities. Consequently, the project advanced access to health and cancer-related services for and with these low-income, immigrant communities (Michel et al., 2011). Similarly, Kranich (2021) employed a community-driven approach to health information literacy. Her findings highlighted the role of libraries in advancing health information equity among Latino immigrants. She suggested that libraries could accomplish this goal by stepping beyond the “availability of services,” learning about their diverse communities, and finding their place within the “complex network of local health and wellness” systems (Kranich, 2021, p. 744).

Several models were identified in the literature that explain immigrants' information practices and experiences (Allard, 2021; Beretta et al., 2018; Shuva, 2018; Srikantiah & Sinnar, 2019). Among these, Shuva's (2018) “Everyday Life Information Behaviour Model of Immigrants” encapsulated the information needs and practices of Bangladeshi immigrants, the characteristics of their small worlds and information grounds, and the outcome as the success rate of social integration and settlement. Ndumu's (2020) Information Overload Scale identified the behavioral, quantitative, and qualitative indicators of information overload among Black immigrants, shedding light on the intermediary's role in mitigating this phenomenon. The Informed Social Inclusion Framework (Beretta et al., 2018) introduced a model supplemented by two matrices, delineating the nuclear role of information, information needs, and barriers in the immigrant settlement process. This study constructed its models based on a literature analysis.

Social inclusion and integration

The United Nations defines social inclusion as

[T]he process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights. (U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016, p. 20)

The U.N. expands the concept of inclusion to social integration where “every individual ... has an active role to play” (U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016, p. 21). The outcome will be a cohesive society where trust thrives, exclusion is mitigated, and a sense of belonging is fostered.

The discourse on library services for immigrants frequently revolved around the themes of social inclusion and integration. Notably, Bronstein (2017), Johnston (2019), and Serrano Pérez and Faba-Pérez (2021) distinguished integration from mere assimilation. In this approach, the library served as a place for reciprocal learning where immigrants learn the language, culture, and traditions of the host group and could share their own cultural heritage with members of the receiving communities, such as the volunteers who facilitated language learning programs in public libraries.

Johnston (2019) and Ulvik (2010) conducted participatory research on library programs impact on assuaging prejudices and addressing the divide between immigrants and Norwegian natives. Their results showed notions of mutual learning, gradual shifts in attitudes, deepened self-reflection, and improved sense of trust and belonging among participants. Johnston (2019) reported a high probability of friendship-making through these library-based language cafés. Her study supported the applicability of the Contact Theory in library programming, emphasizing its

contributions to “social cohesion in diverse societies” (Johnston, 2019, p. 681). Both studies support the notion of public libraries as cultural mediators.

The convergence between the perspectives of librarians and immigrants on the library's role in social integration was evident in studies conducted by Serra and Revez (2023) and Branyon (2017). Through qualitative interviews by Serra and Revez (2023), the 16 participating librarians underscored critical limitations in services to immigrants, like lack of training or community partnerships. However, they positioned the library as an agent of “social inclusion, integration, and social capital” (Serra & Revez, 2023, p. 12) and expressed a need to improve the status quo. On a parallel note, the three immigrant women from Kurdistan, Mexico, and Indonesia who joined Branyon (2017) in a phenomenological study spanning six months characterized the library as a place to read, acquire English language skills, and assimilate into American culture. Notably, one of the participants was satisfied with the library's role in enabling her to maintain her son's Mexican identity amidst cultural assimilation.

Community development with immigrant communities

As established earlier, both ABCD and Community Rhythm encourage and enable libraries, as community “institutions,” to actively engage in community development. However, the current study did not find much empirical research in this domain. Among the few papers identified in this category, Edwards' (2018) was of great significance. She utilized the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) Lyon Declaration to situate public libraries in the discourse of community development. She posited that ABCD, as a theoretical and practical model, could empower libraries to reimagine their values within their communities and contribute to the broader goals of sustainable development (Edwards, 2018).

The Halifax Public Library (Nova Scotia, Canada) pioneered the systematic application of Asset Mapping, a critical component of ABCD, in engaging with immigrant communities. The Working Together project (2004-2008) declared asset mapping as “an outreach approach” aimed at discovering “what the immigrant community wanted from the library” (Williment & Jones-Grant, 2012, p. 4). What distinguished Halifax's approach was its deliberate effort to disrupt the conventional need-based service development paradigm. Instead of prescribing programs, the Halifax Public Library prioritized “ask[ing] questions, listen[ing] and learn[ing] from members of the community” (Williment & Jones-Grant, 2012, p. 5). The goal was to overhaul the service planning process to yield “more relevant” services, “known and utilized” by immigrant communities (Williment & Jones-Grant, 2012, p. 5). To accomplish this goal, Halifax Library partnered with an institution that served nearly 25% of immigrants who entered the library's service area.

Both Oak Park Public Library (Illinois, United States) and the Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County (Ohio, United States) embraced the ALA-endorsed Community Rhythm for community development initiatives (Ouligian, 2018; Seleb & Kolo, 2017). Grounding their strategic plans in this framework, these libraries experienced transformative outcomes in turning outward, shifting the organizational culture, becoming leaders, serving as stewards, enhancing meaningful engagement with their communities, and being better appreciated by their constituencies.

The HealthLink initiative at Queens Public Library (New York, United States) successfully illustrated the public library's leadership role in community development, especially alongside low-income immigrants (Michel et al., 2011). The initiative expanded to encompass nearly 30% of the library system's branches, reached 12,000 individuals, and made 600 referrals to a partner local hospital for cancer screening. This project effectively mobilized community assets to create cancer information campaigns and resources and enhance cancer information literacy among new immigrants and English learners.

Utilizing the Community Rhythm tools, Kranich (2021) engaged with three communities in the New Jersey (United States) area to understand how public libraries can strengthen their health and wellness services. The findings revealed that upper-middle-class residents relied more on the library as a health information resource. However, African and Latino immigrant communities relied on their personal networks for such information. Through an academic-public library partnership, her research team discovered the necessity for public libraries to cultivate deeper connections with marginalized communities toward understanding their unique aspirations and concerns and community-based health information literacy initiatives.

Discussion

U.S. public libraries' modes of information delivery play a pivotal role in fostering social inclusion and a sense of belonging among immigrants (Beretta et al., 2018; Johnston, 2019; Shoham & Strauss, 2008). In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, social inclusion became a more pressing societal issue, as U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy declared loneliness and social isolation a dangerous epidemic (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023). Various models explained the role of information in the immigrant integration experience (Beretta et al., 2018; Shuva, 2023; Srinivasan & Pyati, 2007). The prospect of meeting immigrants' information needs and establishing inclusive, lasting relationships between public libraries and immigrant communities dominated the recommendations of several works reviewed in this study (Al-Qallaf & Mika, 2009; Dali, 2022; Grossman et al., 2022; Johnston, 2019; Quirke, 2012; Serrano Pérez & Faba-Pérez, 2021; Ulvik, 2010).

These prospects resonated with the egalitarian claims of LIS (Honma, 2005) and the UN's vision for cohesive societies (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016). Muddiman et al. (2001) cautioned that simply modernizing public libraries does not ensure social inclusion. Libraries founded on white, middle-class values diverge from the "core rationale" of universal access central to the public library ethos. The need-based approach to service development for immigrants reflects these legacies within the context of public libraries. Both van der Linden et al. (2014) and Shuva (2023) reported declining library usage among immigrants after settlement. This reduced engagement was attributed to a diminishing need for language classes, access to technology, settlement assistance, job-seeking support, or the "aging out" of their children from library programs and resources (e.g., story times, crafts, and collections).

The literature underscores the immigrants' reliance on their family, friends, and networks as information sources over libraries (Adkins et al., 2017; Dali, 2021b; Kranich, 2021; Ndumu, 2020; Quirke, 2012; Shoham & Strauss, 2008; Shuva, 2023; van der Linden et al., 2014). The role of trust in these negotiations is well-documented. Even when such sources provided inaccurate or misleading information, Shuva (2020) found that participants seldom viewed libraries as a secondary or complementary source of validation.

Building trust-based relationships with immigrant communities emerged as a recurring theme in the literature (Dali, 2022; Grossman et al., 2022; Johnston, 2019; Kranich, 2021; Serra & Revez, 2023; Serrano Pérez & Faba-Pérez, 2021; Shuva, 2018, 2023; van der Linden et al., 2014). Partnering with community organizations was highlighted as an effective strategy for trust-building and engagement (Adkins et al., 2017; ALA, 2014; Kranich, 2021; van der Linden et al., 2014; Williment & Jones-Grant, 2012). Additionally, the literature called for acknowledging the heterogeneity of immigrants (Allard, 2021; Allard & Caidi, 2018; Dali, 2021a; Ndumu, 2020), which would enable libraries to approach them as full persons (Mills, 2018) and avoid reducing them to stereotypes. These recommendations underscored the failure of the need-centric, deficit-based approach to library services for immigrants. Muddiman et al. (2001) challenged libraries to shift their approach from passively granting “access” to adopting a “proactive and interventionist” stance for social inclusion. The evolution of this critical commitment was evident in the emerging LIS research agenda reflected in the works of Ndumu et al. (2023), Ndumu & Ramnine (2021), Shuva (2023), and Kranich (2021).

Identified Gaps in LIS Research

These specific gaps and shortcomings were identified through this literature review:

- *Ambiguities in library use pre-immigration*: There was inconsistent and sometimes contradictory elucidation of immigrants’ use of public libraries in their countries of origin (Dali, 2021a; Grossman et al., 2022; Shuva, 2023). This gap made adopting a more global library approach challenging when working with these communities.
- *Limited representative samples*: The prevalence of non-probability sampling, in many cases snowballing, limited the generalizability of the findings (Allard, 2021; Dali, 2021a, 2021b; Johnston, 2019; Ndumu, 2020; Shuva, 2023).
- *Sampling biases*: Methodologically, there was a tendency in the literature to rely on convenience sampling, notably from English language classes within libraries (Bronstein, 2017; Johnston, 2019; Ulvik, 2010). This approach perpetuated the portrayal of immigrants as illiterates (Wheaton, 1916) and failed to include those with high English language proficiency.
- *Shortage of asset-based model evaluations*: Studies that measured the impact of asset-based models on immigrant communities in the context of public libraries were scarce.
- *Epistemological impairment of emancipatory inquiries*: The predominant discourse revolved around integration, social inclusion, and acculturation in library and information services for immigrants (Beretta et al., 2018; Branyon, 2017; Bronstein, 2017; Grossman et al., 2022; Johnston, 2019; Muddiman et al., 2001; Ndumu, 2020; Shoham & Strauss, 2008; Ulvik, 2010). Such a focus reflected the legacies of the Americanization movement (Ndumu & Ramnine, 2021; Wheaton, 1916), sidelining the assets of immigrants and their ways of knowing. These traditions in public library scholarship have epistemologically impaired our ability to envision and formulate inquiries within immigrant communities beyond the boundaries of *needs*.

Limitations

The methodology of this study faced some limitations. Firstly, the focus was on the intersection of immigrants, public libraries, and community development. This review encapsulated immigrants’ perceptions and use of public libraries, public libraries and librarians’ perceptions of immigrant communities and efforts to serve them, and community development efforts of public

libraries within immigrant communities. While this study captured notable works in the domain of immigrant information needs and experiences, it did not aim to fully encompass the broader domain of immigrant information behavior or its overlaps with public library scholarship. The topical intersections of information behaviors or social inclusion with community development beyond the context of public libraries also remained outside the scope of this review. Although some studies from this domain were consulted, a comprehensive exploration was beyond this review's scope.

Secondly, due to practical constraints, this review could only encompass some publications. While the selected works offer an insight into the state of the literature on public libraries' role in community development among immigrant groups, a more exhaustive analysis, incorporating dissertations, opinion pieces, book chapters, and other grey literature, could have painted a richer, more nuanced picture.

Conclusion

Critical librarianship has illuminated the legacies of the library establishment, inviting scholars and practitioners to reevaluate its established paradigms and practices. Guided by this approach, this study reviewed literature on public library services for immigrants, with particular attention to community development.

The ABCD framework (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1995; McKnight & Block, 2012) and the Community Rhythm approach (ALA, 2014) underscore an asset-based community engagement approach that can contribute to shifting the long-established need-based paradigm of public library services to immigrants. This movement was captured by some libraries' successful adoption of these models (Edwards, 2018; Ouligian, 2018; Seleb & Kolo, 2017). However, the empirical research on public libraries and immigrant communities stood as predominantly tethered to the deficit-based paradigm rooted in the legacies of the Americanization movement (Ndumu & Ramnine, 2021). The emerging asset-based scholarship on public libraries' community development efforts (Kranich, 2021; Michel et al., 2011; Ndumu et al., 2023) called for a more systematic shift of approach in the field. A noticeable gap in research on libraries' leadership role in asset-based community development alongside immigrant groups was identified.

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