

---

# Cultural Diversity and the Role of Community Public Libraries For Newcomers to America

문화 다양성과 미국의 신이주민을 위한 지역 공공도서관의 역할

Han, Jinja(한진자)\*, Kim, Yong(김 용)\*\*

---

## 【Abstract】

With changes of global environment, a growing number of people has entered America in recent decades, including immigrants, refugees, exchange students, and visitors. The influx of newcomers has brought great challenges to American public libraries to meet the needs and desires of diverse groups in the community. This paper discusses how public libraries can improve their services and programs for the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversities of community members. Especially, this paper comprehensively discusses that the public library's atmosphere for newcomers, community need assessment, library services and programs, multicultural collections, multicultural staff, collaboration with other organizations and groups, information and communication technology, and future challenges for public libraries.

## 【Keywords】

Public Library, Multiculturalism, Cultural Diversity, Multicultural Services, Services for Immigrants

## 【초 록】

국제적인 환경변화와 함께, 지난 수 십 년 동안 이민자, 피난자, 유학생, 단순 방문자 등을 포함하여 다양한 사람들이 미국에 정착하고 있다. 미국에 정착하는 외국인들의 증가는 미국내의 지역사회에 있어서 문화적 다양성의 기회를 제공하고 있다. 한편 이와 같은 소수민의 증가에 따른

문화적 다양성은 지역사회에 대한 문화 및 공공서비스를 제공하고 있는 공공도서관에게 있어서 많은 분야에 있어서 다양한 영향을 미치고 있다. 본 연구에서는 이와 같은 미국내의 공공도서관을 둘러싼 환경적인 변화에 따라 인종적, 문화적 및 언어적 측면에서 다양성을 포함하고 있는 지역 주민들을 위하여 공공도서관에서 제공하고 있는 서비스 프로그램의 활성화 및 발전방안에 대하여 논의하고 있다. 특히, 본 연구에서는 미국에 새로이 정착하는 사람들을 위한 도서관 환경 조성, 지역사회에서 요구되는 요구사항, 도서관 서비스와 프로그램, 다문화 자료의 확보, 다양한 인종을 고려한 도서관 직원 고용, 다른 기관과의 협력, 정보기술, 그리고 공공도서관이 직면할 수 있는 문제점에 대하여 포괄적으로 논의하였다.

## 【키워드】

공공도서관, 다문화주의, 문화 다양성, 다문화 서비스, 이민자 서비스

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introducing the issue

According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) report G-1112, the immigrant population in the United States has grown to a record 33.5 million people, representing approximately 12% of the

---

\* Dallas Baptist University, Dallas, Texas, U.S.A., Government Document Supervisor(jinja@dbu.edu)

\*\* Corresponding Author: Dept. of Library and Information Science, Chonbuk National University, 664-14, Deokjin-Dong, Deokjin-Gu, Jeonju-city, Jueonbuk, Korea, Assistant Professor (yk9118@jbnu.ac.kr), 063-270-3206(phone)/063-270-3260(fax)

논문접수일자 : 2010년 1월 28일 논문심사일자 : 2010년 3월 2일 게재확정일자 : 2010년 3월 21일

U.S. population (USCIS 2007). The immigration rates in America have not only increased since 1990, but the demographic character of newcomers to this country has changed substantially as well. For example, whereas most immigrants were European one hundred years ago, today's immigrants are much more likely to be from Latin America and Asia. On the same topic, U.S. Census Bureau data (1992) predicted that the white population would shrink to 52.7% by 2050, Hispanics population would increase to 21% (80.7 million), and the Asian/Pacific Islander population would increase to 10.1% (38.8 million). The United States is a nation of immigrants. And a growing number of people are still entering America, which has become one of the top destination countries for immigrants. According to Mates (2004a), until recently the United States viewed itself as an English-speaking nation and neglected to embrace the multicultural aspects, but now, it is rapidly becoming a multilingual and multicultural society. This new wave of newcomers to America, including immigrants, refugees, exchange students, and visitors, will have a significant impact on U.S. institutions such as public libraries (Burke 2008), challenging library services to meet the needs and interests of the ethnic minority population nationwide.

Many people come to America because of the limited opportunities in their home countries. They are looking for more opportunities, meaningful life, decent job, quality education, and more freedom for themselves and their families. Even though each newcomer's story or situation varies and their age and ethnic origins are different, they all have one goal in common: they are here to seek a new life, a better life, and they all want to succeed in this new country. However, due to the differences in language, culture, customs, economy, personal belief systems, and legal and political infrastructures, it is undeniable that newcomers are having enormous difficulties dealing with many daily conflicts and trying to make sense of the differences. While they struggle to know and understand the differences and complexities of the new society, newcomers might often feel frustrated, insignificant, and insecure, and feel

self-doubt or even loss of control. In this stage, even though they need to obtain information that would help them address their needs, because of their inadequate language skills, poor literacy, or just simple lack of knowledge, they might not know what their real needs are, much less how to address them. In this situation, it is very likely for them to be isolated and left alone on the sideline and possibly shut out from essential services and information sources most of us take for granted.

Some of the newcomers might have never accessed libraries in their entire lives so the concept of a free public library is foreign to them (Larsen, Jacobs, and Vlimmeren 2003). To some, the libraries might be used in totally different ways in their home countries so they may be unaware of how an American library functions. To others, even the act of entering a library could be intimidating simply because of their unfamiliarity with public institutions. Although it is obvious that they are hungry for information and resources that would help them get through the difficult stages, they may not consider public libraries as a source of information. Unfortunately, however, the sad situation is that often the people who need information the most are likely to be the ones who are the least served at the library.

The public libraries can play an important role in the transition and integration process of newcomers into American life. Libraries can be a safe haven for their empowerment and an important place for learning a new culture and obtaining information. By satisfying their dire information needs, public libraries can help them overcome the feeling of alienation and the fear of insecurity and incompetency, guide them to achieve a sense of self-worth and belonging, and then finally help them join mainstream society. Public libraries in the United States, as part of their historic mission, have a long history of helping immigrants adapt to their new lives by providing resources and education. In fact, the American public libraries are one of a few "safe" institutions immigrants can turn to for support in their cultural and social adjustment. Public libraries should not underestimate the importance of services to the eth-

nic, cultural, and linguistic minorities because these people are not only vital participants in the local economy, but also as deserving of such services as anyone else in the community (Jensen 2002).

### 1.2 Importance and limitations of the paper

The recent growing influx of newcomers to America has brought great challenges to American public libraries. This paper will help readers understand the attempts of the American public libraries to meet the needs and desires of diverse groups in their community. The paper will suggest the ways in which the American public libraries can improve their services and programs for the ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse community members. The scope of this paper is limited to American public library system and its related issues. Therefore, without comparable research data, it will not be possible to determine the extent to which the following discussions can be generalized to systems in other countries. However, this paper assumes that some common conclusions or principles can be drawn from public libraries worldwide and that the issues discussed here can provide information basis for future research. This paper will give an opportunity to look at the cases of another country (U.S.A.) and acknowledge issues that public libraries face in changing communities. Based on the information presented in this paper, the readers will find the common guiding principles of public libraries, regardless of geographic boundaries.

## 2. Main Issues

### 2.1 Library Atmosphere

Many newly-arrived immigrants or refugees may be unfamiliar with how the American public library functions. Therefore, they may need to engage in more face-to-face conversations and may want to see friendlier faces when they first enter the library. Thus, as a cultural institution, the physical atmosphere of the library should

be welcoming, inviting, accepting, and accommodating of other cultures. The displays, fliers, signage, and arts in the library should be reflective of the multicultural people using it by accurately and sensitively representing diverse groups in the community. That kind of familiar atmosphere will make the newcomers feel more comfortable, related, and connected to the library. All library signs and directions also need to be easy to read and unambiguous so the newcomers can effortlessly and comfortably access and navigate the resources specific to their needs. Some of the people may need to find emotional support that would help them adjust to their new environments. In this context, the newcomers should feel safe and non-intimidated in the library, an atmosphere that is unfortunately too often absent in many institutions. Even though they may at first feel like isolated strangers because of unfamiliarity, they may start feeling significant, valued, and wanted at the library when treated with respect and courtesy. To some, it might be their first time experiencing free equal access to information, thus, they need to know that libraries are accommodating social centers open to everybody, regardless of their cultural origin or background. This would decrease their feelings of alienation, insecurity, and frustration and increase their feelings of belongingness to their communities.

### 2.2 Community Need Assessment

While newcomers are adapting to a new society, vast needs will arise as they encounter gaps in essential knowledge of their new surroundings. It might take time for them to learn about the library, understand its functions, and make their needs known to the librarians, especially when their native language is not English. In addition, it may be difficult for librarians to know or understand the exact needs of newcomers because most librarians are schooled and raised under different circumstances (Jensen 2002). Therefore, to satisfy their crucial information needs in the best ways possible, libraries need to conduct a community needs assessment. This would help libraries understand the newcomers better, espe-

cially their wants, needs, and expectations from the library, and identify appropriate or less appropriate library services as well as barriers that prevent access to the library. Accurate knowledge of different groups, their needs, demands, and interests would not only bridge the cultural gap between the library and the community but would also be an important factor in designing library services, programs, and activities for the newcomers.

When conducting a community needs assessment, libraries should listen to their members and their stories in order to understand the needs of community members and to determine the priorities of these needs. Many papers have addressed newcomers' information needs, ranging from initial, practical, and survival informational needs to more personal specific needs. Among the most frequently mentioned information needs are: obtaining employment information, finding a place to live, finding a school for children, getting a driver's license, understanding the banking system, finding a local health clinic, knowing about public transportation, information about immigration-related laws, and learning English and computer skills (Burke 2008; Cuban 2007; Fisher, Durrance, and Hinton 2004; Jensen 2002; Larsen, Jacobs, and Vlimmeren 2003). To some immigrants, these needs and difficulties are compounded by a language barrier, poor housing conditions, and low-income status. Through community needs assessment, public libraries can respond better to these people's everyday needs. Libraries can serve as intermediaries, facilitating the process of seeking assistance, linking them to community services and resources, and helping them gain access to the information they desperately need.

### 2.3 Services and Programs

Public libraries can play a vital role in the local community by offering information services and educational programs that would help various ethnic and cultural minorities through integration process. Libraries can provide adult English classes and literacy programs to attract and welcome ethnic minorities. These programs would strengthen the individuals' educational and linguistic

competencies that are desperately needed to adjust to their new society. According to the USCIS report (2007), after finding new cultural groups in the community, the next step is winning their trust. This is because some immigrants may be wary of public institutions because of personal experiences in their home countries or a lack of knowledge about government services in the United States (USCIS 2007). In this situation, one way to win their trust is by helping their children with schoolwork. Parents' lack of English proficiency often puts them in a helpless position when it comes to their children's school assignments. In addition, their inability to model readings in English can often devastate them as well. Even when they know what kind of help they need, they may not ask for it from the librarian because they lack language skills and knowledge of general library functions or just because of simple embarrassment. On the same subject, Gupta (2007) declared that immigrant parents who can't speak English well depend on librarians to help their children with schoolwork. Public libraries can attract immigrant families by offering various types of afterschool programs, homework help, and study skill instructions tailored to teens and younger children that other local agencies do not offer.

Cuban (2007) also stated that new immigrant groups want educational services from a public library and often perceive the public library system as enabling them to move up the socioeconomic ladder. Therefore, providing new immigrants and their children with learning opportunities that are often unavailable at other institutions would be a promising start to provide benefits and empower the newcomers and their families. Through these learning opportunities, libraries can let the newcomers know that libraries offer more than just books and that people should not be ashamed of the skills they lack.

Through learning programs, public libraries can help newcomers develop information literacy skills and independent learning abilities, which they can use to acquire the information that would fulfill their personal needs and interests. Such programs would help them pursue their own goals and lifelong learning and also help them access information more effectively and

efficiently. During their struggles to adjust to new culture, they may yearn for relatedness with the existing community, hoping to connect and integrate with mainstream society. The learning opportunities available in libraries would help them bridge new and different cultures, give them a sense of belonging, and promote their self-confidence and self-esteem.

In this transitional phase, the library can help them better manage daily conflicts and challenges so they can gain greater control over their ability in their new environments. The library's information literacy and life-long learning programs would provide the tools necessary to successfully integrate into the bigger society and effectively participate in American life. These programs would also benefit libraries by providing opportunities for connecting with underserved and underrepresented individuals on a personal level. This connection should be ongoing in order for the newcomers to make the habit of visiting the library on a regular basis.

## 2.4 Multicultural Collection

The American population is changing and the changing nature of the community should be reflected in library collections and acquisitions. Newly arrived people need different materials than traditional groups do. Therefore, libraries need to integrate multicultural guidelines into their collection and tailor resources to the needs and demands of the diverse community. Library materials should be useful, appropriate, and accommodating to multicultural groups in the community. In this context, Cuban (2007) declared that when people from other cultural backgrounds do not see their experiences and lives reflected in the library collection, they often feel excluded, as though they are outsiders. Therefore, to balance proper ethnic, cultural, and linguistic representation in the community, multicultural responsiveness and the unique community context should be reflected in the library's collection. For this to happen, Larsen, Jacobs, and Vlimmeren (2003) pointed out that a certain percentage for buying multicultural materials, including

materials assisting in learning English language as a second language, materials introducing immigrants to mainstream culture, and items to support citizenship, should be included in the library's acquisition budget.

Concerning multicultural collections, Cuban (2007) emphasized the need for pre-selection study that would determine who will be using the collection and what people need and want from library collections. Several articles discuss basic collections for immigrants and refugees, including English language instructional materials, citizenship and immigration resources, periodicals and newspapers in different languages, information on various ethnic groups and cultures, biographies representing different ethnic backgrounds, and picture books portraying ethnicities through characters (Carton 1993; Cuban 2007; USCIS 2007).

Several papers also discussed the ways to solicit advice about building a multicultural collection. Cuban (2007) recommended surveying the reading needs and interests of a new group and selecting collections that would reflect the results. Larsen, Jacobs, and Vlimmeren (2003) mentioned the usefulness of using staff from different backgrounds in the processes. USCIS (2007) also suggested consulting and holding focus groups with other libraries or community agencies that serve minorities. For a library to be a truly multicultural institution, its collection should be culturally competent, promoting educational, recreational, and civic purposes, building diversity and strong community relationships, and fostering the desire to return to the library. Building collection for minority groups is much more than just providing books or giving access to computers at the library. It means fostering literacy in the community, contributing to shared knowledge of differences, and bolstering well-balanced community development, all of which would support diversity.

## 2.5 Multicultural Staff

For a public library to serve multicultural communities well, diversifying library staff is an important issue. Libraries should hire and recruit people from different

backgrounds so the community's ethnic populations are well represented by library employees. Carton (1993) raised a question of how communities without a diverse staff can implement a program of raising cultural awareness among library employees. Similarly, Cuban (2007) pointed out that employing multi-ethnic staff increases the library's cultural competence as an institution that is attuned to diversity and offers equal access to all of its community members.

Regarding the relations between library personnel and patrons, librarians' special attention to cultural sensitivity and respect for other cultures is also an important concern. To increase cultural awareness among all library staff, library should educate their staff on how to work in a culturally diverse community and how to be respectful and polite across cultural boundaries (Burke 2008). Some newcomers may not be familiar with the library and may not even know how to ask questions. In this situation, if library staff spoke the same language as the patron, they would make newcomers feel more comfortable and create a nurturing and welcoming environment for them. The library's commitment to diversity through management decision-making is also an equally vital matter. The commitment of library management would make a difference in the lives of minorities because "a strong, committed, and well-trained staff with absolute commitment from library administration is core to successful provision of library services to multi-cultural communities" (Larsen, Jacobs, and Vlimmeren 2003 8).

Carton (1993) declared that, for the library staff to represent the community fully, the movement should start with the library school's recruiting of more minority students into the program. Recognizing the cultural underrepresentation among librarians, Carton suggested creating mentor programs linking minority library school students with minority librarians, because these programs would offer needed support to students entering the library profession. In order to encourage ethnic diversity in the profession, Carton also mentioned the importance of the library management's influence. The management decision makers can and should encourage minority librarians to successfully make the step into supervisory

positions, which will naturally lead to diversity within the profession.

## 2.6 Collaboration

Historically, public libraries have offered many programs and opened their doors to cultural minorities in their community. However, it is insufficient to just widen a doorway. Libraries need to build new relations with minority groups in order to increase their awareness of the library resources, especially when the groups are less connected with the library or not well represented at the library. This collaboration is necessary because no matter how many well-designed programs the library offers, they will be of no use if the targeted group is not aware of them. For this reason, as Sumeford (2005) commented, "if learners cannot or will not come to the library, the program may need to come to them." Therefore, for libraries to meet the needs of a multi-cultural community, they should collaborate closely with other organizations and agencies that work particularly with immigrants, refugees, and other cultural groups in the community. Libraries can learn more about the needs of the minorities by collaborating with others. The collaborative relationship would enable librarians to be more interactive with other organizations, help integrate their knowledge into library services, and promote library services and programs more effectively and efficiently. According to Cuban (2007), immigrants and refugees often get initial information from their most familiar sources (often called "gatekeepers"). Therefore, as a first step to connect with an ethnic group, Cuban recommends libraries to contact the gatekeepers in the ethnic community as the library's vital friends for the group. Cuban also sees these gatekeepers as the glue that bonds new immigrants with the library because these leaders often are bilingual and bicultural, know the needs of the group, and can contribute to give feedback about what immigrants cannot say.

Connecting with other parties would allow libraries to institute better programs and services for multicultural groups. In addition to local ethnic leaders, many other

organizations and institutions could be good potential library partners. These organizations and institutions may include (1) community-based organizations that work with immigrant groups, (2) government agencies for public assistance, employment, health care, and immigration, such as U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, (3) adult education providers and English language instructional programs, (4) faith-based organizations, (5) local public schools, (6) social and human service organizations, (7) community health clinics, (8) political and legal advocacy organizations for immigrant rights, (9) ethnic and cultural associations, (10) refugee and resettlement organizations, among others (Burke 2008; Cuban 2007; USCIS 2007). Even if a library provides excellent programs for immigrants or refugees, sometimes it may encounter many barriers which might prevent immigrants' attendance in the program. In that case, libraries should participate in the ethnic group's cultural or social events and celebrate their culture with them. At these events, libraries could distribute outreach materials, introduce library services and programs, and present the library's image as a community center. Cuban (2007) claimed that this kind of reaching-out would be particularly beneficial to people who cannot come to the library during regular library hours, who are not familiar with library services, or who are simply too tired from all day work to come to evening library programs. Cuban also viewed this kind of cultural participation as one of the library's key marketing strategies to introduce the library to the new immigrants. Partnerships and collaborations are the most vital aspects of library's multi-cultural services. Through collaborative efforts, libraries can share information and referrals with other organizations, learn more about the behaviors and needs of different groups, and get more chance to bring in new potential users to the library. Furthermore, the collaboration would promote library services in a more connected manner, foster community building, and create a new level of enhanced quality of library services. By helping newcomers facilitate greater degree of assimilation and acculturation into the community, the library would then truly become

a new community center.

## 2.7 Technology

Today, as many organizations, government groups, and private businesses put more of their information or documents on web sites, the Internet has become a vital part of our daily living and a popular source of information throughout the world. In recent years, a notable shift has occurred in the computer and technology areas within society. In this global digital information age, the familiarity and knowledge of information and communication technologies are among the most essential skills that individuals need to acquire in order to participate fully in society. Nowadays, information and communication technology literacy has become like the ability to read and write in the old days, which is particularly true from a social inclusion point of view because the advances in, and rapid growth of, information technology has led to another form of social inequality. However, most newcomers to America do not have sufficient access to, and training in, computer and database use. For them, the computer language is another language they need to learn and get familiar with to be competent members of their new society.

Mates (2004b) views cultural minorities as the underserved of the information revolution because they lack access to usable technology and sufficient instruction in the use of technology. On the same topic, Cuban (2007) also pointed out that although more people have computers, societal disparities still exist and the "information have-nots" are among low-income minorities, including new immigrants. These minorities are more likely to be at risk of segregation and exclusion from properly participating in global digital information society. For this reason, in order to enable all people to participate in the electronic information society equally, Mates declared that libraries need to work with their communities to provide access to appropriate hardware, meaningful instructions, and accessible websites. This is because the unconnected populations stand a greater chance of not receiving needed information. Mates also

advocated for everyone's right to have free and equal access to information and the library's offering of technology, so that people can use basic electronic resources at the library because everyone has the right to information. Several literatures discuss the importance of the library offering computer classes to minorities, suggesting classes such as: learning computer basics and skills; utilizing the Internet and search engines to answer questions regarding their needs; searching library catalogs and other databases; using e-mails and word processing software, etc. Minority groups can benefit from other technological services and lessons at the library, such as computer training programs, online tutorials, or English learning programs via library computers. Mates (2004a) suggested that libraries could emulate many ideas on their web sites, which would also be an equally important way to serve the multicultural community. For example, on their web sites, libraries could put a welcoming message in several languages with pictures of multicultural people or other cultural artifacts, provide useful links to community resources (schools, utilities, housing, public safety department, social services, and free public programs), provide practice tests for driver's licenses or citizenship, provide links to magazines and newspapers in people's native languages or links to their cultural groups, and many others. In addition, the library's web site should be culturally-directed and reflective of the diverse communities it serves. The library's cultural awareness should be displayed on the web site through photos or graphics of friendly staff and patrons whose appearances are similar to diverse community groups. This kind of public recognition of multicultural awareness and respect would make the minority people feel more at home and welcomed at the library.

Cultural diversity is growing rapidly in American communities. Libraries, especially community public libraries, need to reflect this trend in their programs and services and assure everybody's equal and free access to information. Since a digital gap often leaves immigrants out of the loop, public libraries can attract ethnic and cultural minorities by offering them computer and

technology access at the library. These services would help especially populations with low levels of formal education because low-income people or less educated people are more likely to rely on public libraries for this service. Undoubtedly, with ongoing computer and technological revolution, public libraries are one of the most reliable, respected, and non-intimidating public institutions where people can go to use computers and get access to the Internet free of charge. Therefore, public libraries should not only offer appropriate instruction on the usage of tools but also become the friendly neighbor who lets community members without home Internet connection use an accessible computer at the library.

## 2.8 Future Challenges

For a public library to be a competent multicultural institution in a culturally diverse community, the library's intent to reach out and serve different cultural groups should be included in its vision and mission statement. Its commitment should be linked to clear and measurable goals directed towards objectives, and the objective will lead to activities around a particular issue. Appropriate policies should also be in place when putting these activities into practice because policies are not only the heart of an institution's culture, organization, and management, but also a practical strategy for advocating for new immigrant groups that need major accommodations (Cuban 2007). Thus, for a public library to truly meet the needs and desires of newcomers in the community, its policies should be restructured to support the activities and events for the minorities. The newly structured policies will create new norms and a new culture within the library that invite new immigrants to participate in a learning community, and that will contribute to augmentation of the whole community development (Cuban 2007).

Equally important is commitment from all library personnel. From top management to entry-level positions, all library employees should examine their own beliefs, learn to be aware of other cultures, and see



the need for making library services available to the entire community, especially those who have been traditionally underserved (Carton 1993). Library directors and decision makers should not underestimate the importance of serving cultural minorities in their community. Larsen, Jacobs, and Vlimmeren (2003) proclaimed that in too many libraries, working with the different groups in the community is the work of one or two devoted staff-members; if they leave, the work they are doing might simply cease. Therefore, without all library personnel's ongoing commitment to the service, all good intentions and efforts might be at risk of disappearing without visible influence. For this reason, the library's commitment should be reflected in budgetary decisions. The library should allocate its money in the budget in order to facilitate a practical start for the services to ethnic minorities because "long-term work ... will only become integral if the money becomes permanent and ongoing" (Larsen, Jacobs, and Vlimmeren 2003 3).

When designing their services to accommodate cultural differences, it is important for libraries to work out a careful plan that is achievable. For this purpose, the library should customize its plan to fit local needs based on community assessments. When working with culturally diverse populations, the library's initial plan might change, so plans need to be flexible with room for changing methods and approaches (Allen, Matthew, and Boland 2004). Therefore, in serving newcomers in the community, librarians should not only be enthusiastic, passionate, and dedicated, but also flexible, sensitive, and creative.

Another challenging issue is the library's recognition of the need for bilingual staff. According to Cuban, libraries have generally failed to attract minorities into the profession because the immigrants are rarely trained as library professionals and thus they are considered "unqualified" for most library staff positions. This highlights the dire need for the library school to undertake more practical recruiting program of ethnic and linguistic minorities into the profession. Moreover, multicultural awareness courses offered at library schools would prepare future librarians to be more open to the diversity

issue and educate them to handle situations better. This education would also train future librarians to be more involved and concerned with serving ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse members in their community. Even though it is an undeniable truth that newcomers to America have substantial information needs while adjusting to their new life, the picture that library professionals have of immigrants' use of public libraries is incomplete (Burke 2008). Because of the differences in language, culture, and other factors such as access, new immigrants are a difficult population to study (Fisher, Durrance, and Hinton 2004). As a result, other fields of studies such as sociology, education, or health sciences have done substantial research on ethnic minorities in the past, but little research has examined immigrants' predilections from an information science, specifically from information behavior perspective (Fisher, Durrance, and Hinton 2004). Therefore, to enrich the knowledge base about ethnic minorities, more qualitative research about the group is necessary because qualitative studies would give the underrepresented newcomers a voice to articulate for themselves the difficulties they encounter, their dire information needs and wants, and their perceptions of the public library.

### 3. Conclusion

#### 3.1 Concluding the issue

In America, multiculturalism is growing rapidly and the number of foreign-born individuals continues to grow. A few decades ago, this trend was true only in major cities, but now it seems that the trend affects every community in the United States. Accordingly, community public libraries should recognize the realities of multiculturalism they are facing and deal with the subject head-on. Creating and enhancing library services to an ever growing, ever changing, culturally diverse society can pose a great challenge for American public libraries. Their attitude toward multiculturalism also is likely to influence the leadership in librarianship around

the world. The topic of cultural diversity is a fundamental issue because public libraries have a commitment to serve all people in their community and reach out to all diverse groups equally.

Many newcomers to America suffer from information poverty caused by differences in language, culture, customs, educational backgrounds, and personal belief systems. Libraries are an extremely valuable resource for the information-impovertised community members and serve as an important community-based support facility. In America, a community public library has always been a service organization and a culturally responsive community center. Therefore, public libraries should be not only model institutions, accepting and embracing differences in culture, but also diverse institutions, just as the people in the community they serve. To meet the needs of a culturally diverse community, libraries need to know the residents of the community and their needs in order to be able to provide the best possible services for them. To do that, a library needs to think beyond a library's boundary because public libraries are not islands but integrated parts of local societies (Larsen, Jacobs, and Vlimmeren 2003). Public libraries have played, and hopefully always will play, an important role in welcoming newly-arrived people into their communities by helping them to adjust. Public libraries can improve the quality of ethnic minorities' lives in many ways by acting as an effective and efficient helper and practical communicator. Larsen, Jacobs, and Vlimmeren (2003) claimed that with a good functioning library-system the individual benefits and society benefits as well. Library resources should reflect, accept, and accommodate diverse cultures and languages in order to empower different cultural groups by enabling them to enjoy their cultural heritage, and motivate the community to learn more about other cultures. A library's cultural diversity and multicultural awareness would make the community knowledgeable about different cultures, increase community's acceptance of differences in the neighborhood, and educate the community on the rights, equality, and interests of different groups. This education would help reduce prejudices and segre-

gations in society, develop tolerance among community members, and promote a better understanding of people from different backgrounds.

It is difficult to cope with differences, whether they are cultural or not. Even though it is impossible to satisfy every need of newcomers, it is apparent that the more their needs are satisfied, the easier it would be for them to adapt to the new culture, and the more chances they would have for successful blending and absorption into the mainstream society. Therefore, public libraries should continue to embrace multicultural aspects in society and keep striving to meet equitably the needs of all people from diverse cultural backgrounds that make up their communities. The value of library services to multicultural groups may not be easy to prove but should not be underestimated or dismissed. Libraries can not only foster a better understanding of differences in the community, but also increase harmony, integration, and coherence within society.

### 3.2 Future Suggestion

This paper has discussed the issues that American public libraries have to face, current services that libraries provide to the newcomers to America, and suggested areas for improvement. In recent years, Korea has also started to face a similar trend as in America, although not to such large extent. These days, many newcomers (foreign worker, ethnic minorities, or refugees) are coming to Korea to seek work, safe place, or a better life. Even though this paper presents only the issues limited to American system, and the issues discussed here reflect situations in another country, these issues should not be easily dismissed, disregarded, or underestimated. Understanding issues that others have to deal with can help one acknowledge one's situation better and can provide an opportunity to look at oneself from different perspectives and angles. Based on the information presented in this paper, it is hoped that in the future, other papers will also address this issue and compare the library systems in America and Korea, describing the differences and similarities in public library's principles.

The American public library's recognition of the newcomers is presented in this paper. It is sometimes necessary and required to assess the circumstances of others in order to learn about oneself better because looking at others motivates and gives a chance to see oneself more objectively and truly from afar. Lastly, this paper suggests that the Korean public library's awareness and recognition of newcomers (foreign worker, ethnic minorities, or refugees) needs to be explored in the next paper.

## 【 References 】

- Allen, M. P., S. Matthew, and M. J. Boland. 2004. Working with immigrant and refugee populations: Issues and Hmong case study. *Library Trends*, 53(2): 301-328.
- Burke, S. K. 2008. Use of public libraries by immigrants. *Reference and User Services Quarterly*, 48(2): 164-174.
- Carton, D. Y. 1993. Public libraries and cultural diversity. ERIC Digest, ERIC (ED 358871). [online]. [cited 2009.11.1]. <[http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/13/e/70.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/13/e/70.pdf)>.
- Champion, S. 1993. The adolescent quest for meaning through multicultural readings: A case study. *Library Trends*, 41(3): 462-493.
- Coatney, S. 2008. What is the international flavor of your library? *Teacher Librarian*, 36(1): 59.
- Cuban, S. 2007. *Serving New Immigrant Communities in the Library*. Westport: Libraries Unlimited.
- Fisher, K. E., J. C. Durance, and M. B. Hinton. 2004. Information grounds and the use of need-based services by immigrants in Queens, New York: A context-based, outcome evaluation approach. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 55(8): 754-766.
- Gupta, D. 2007. Elmhurst library serves immigrant community in untraditional ways. [online]. [cited 2009.10.28]. <[http://divonews.com/PDF%20files/Beat/immigration\\_elmhurst.pdf](http://divonews.com/PDF%20files/Beat/immigration_elmhurst.pdf)>.
- Hanes, J. 2008. Libraries for immigrants. *Library Journal*, 133(10): 10.
- Jensen, B. 2002. Service to day laborers: A job libraries have left undone. *Reference and User Services Quarterly*, 41(3): 228-233.
- Larsen, J. I, D. L. Jacobs, and T. V. Vlimmeren. 2003. Cultural diversity: How public libraries can serve the diversity in the community. International Network of Public Libraries, Betelsmann Foundation. [online]. [cited 2009.11.1]. <<http://conferences.alia.org.au/alia2004/pdfs/vlimmeren.t.paper.pdf>>.
- Mason, M. K. 2009. Libraries are centers of social consciousness and community involvement. [online]. [cited 2009.11.2]. <<http://www.moyak.com/papers/libraries-community-involvement.html>>.
- Mates, B. T. 2004a. Computer technology and non-English speaking patrons. *Library Technology Reports*, 40(3): 41-49.
- Mates, B. T. 2004b. Who aren't you serving digitally? *Library Technology Reports*, 40(3): 6-9.
- U.S. Bureau of Census. 1992. *Population*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). 2007. *Library Services for Immigrants: a Report on Current Practices*. Washington, DC: Homeland Security Dept, USCIS.

