A survey on the *Journal of EAHIL*: results and considerations

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Abstract
A survey addressed to Journal of EAHIL readers was carried out in December 2014 - January 2015. The aim was to gather opinions and ideas and, on the basis of the results, to further develop JEAHIL to better serve the needs of all EAHIL members. We got 109 answers with lots of ideas and feedback. It was a pleasure to see how appreciated the Journal is, both as a tool for sharing information and as a way to create sense of community. The critical comments were few, but equally valuable. So thank you all the respondents for your contribution!

Key words: Library associations; journalism; periodicals as topic; data collection; Europe

Introduction

The idea of launching a survey was discussed and approved by the Editorial Board of the *Journal of EAHIL (JEAHIL)* at a meeting held at the Central National Library in Rome this past June, during the annual EAHIL Conference. After Oliver Obst introduced the initiative to the Editorial Board, all members felt it was a wonderful idea and a necessary step to take prior to making any decisions for future improvements on the journal. The Editorial Board agreed on a set of simple yet fundamental questions elaborated by Oliver and Katri Larmo to supply to all *JEAHIL* members. A previous survey on *JEAHIL* was carried out by Arne Jakobsson, then President of EAHIL, in 2004, as part of his "Survey of European Health Information Professionals" (1). It has some points regarding the Journal (thence called Newsletter), which will be reported in the following chapter "Survey results".

Surveys are a wonderful tool not only to gather information, but also thoughts, opinions, feeling and suggestions; precisely the input we needed from our readers.

The results of the survey are described below. They are extremely useful to understand in which direction the journal should move, but they are also, on the whole, a warm expression of interest and of enthusiasm among EAHIL members.

We would really like to thank all the 109 respondents of the survey!

Survey results

1. Satisfaction with *JEAHIL* publication items

In the first question of the survey, the respondents were asked about their satisfaction with the different items of the journal: "Your opinion on the *JEAHIL* at the moment: How would you rate the following item?".

The response scale ranged from excellent, good, reasonable, poor, and very poor. If they were not familiar with the item they could choose the response "don't know – have not read".

Overall, the satisfaction rates to each and every item were overwhelmingly positive with no item scoring less than 92.9% of at least "reasonable". For discrimination purposes the items were ranked by summing up the responses to excellent and good (*Figure 1*), which gave a somewhat larger range of satisfaction.

JEAHIL as a whole was ranked first. 72.2% - or nearly ¾ - of the respondents stated that *JEAHIL* as a whole was excellent or good. Feature articles followed closely with 70.4%, and Memories from conferences and the Editorial got the third and fourth place respectively (67.6% resp. 66.4%). With a satisfaction rate of 61.2%, Publications and new products were ranked lower, as well as the Internet page (60.2%), Emerging challenges (57.0%), and News from EAHIL (53.8%). Reports from SIGs and News from MLA/IFLA got both 50.0% satisfaction rate, and Forthcoming events got the last rank with still a quite good value of 49.0%.

Readers' Opinion in JEAHIL Items

JEAHIL as a whole
Feature articles
Memories from conferences
Editorial
Publications and new products
Internet page
Emerging challenges
News from EAHIL
News from MLA/IFLA
Reports from SIGs
Forthcoming events

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%
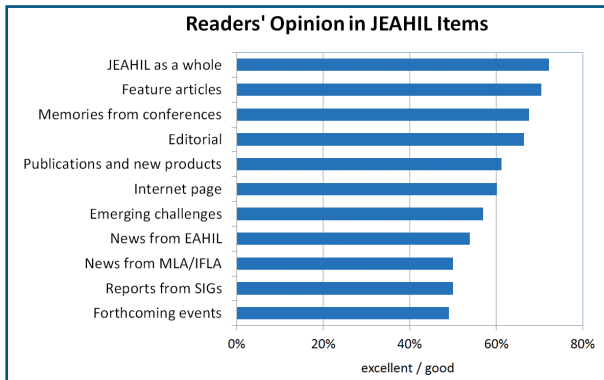
excellent / good

Fig. 1. *Satisfaction with JEAHIL publication items*

2. Interest in *JEAHIL* publication items

In the next question of the survey, the respondents were asked about their interest with the different items of the journal: "How interested are you in reading the following types of articles in the *Journal of EAHIL*?"

The response scale ranged from extremely interested, very interested, somewhat interested, not that interested, and not at all interested.

Overall, the interest rates to each and every item were overwhelmingly positive again with no item scoring less than 88.1% of at least "somewhat interested". For discrimination purposes the items were ranked again by summing up the responses to extremely and very interested (*Figure 2*).

With 75.2%, Scientific articles got the highest interest, followed by Proceedings of conference (69.7%), Descriptive feature articles (65.1%), and Practical advice (61.5%). With an interest rate of 50.5%, Conference announcements were ranked
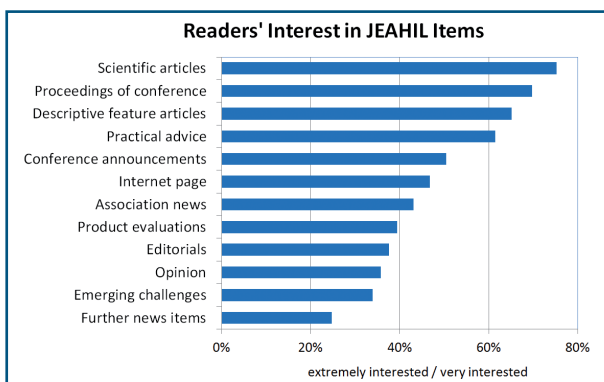
lower, as well as Internet page (46.8%), Association news (43.1%), Product evaluations (39.4%), Editorials (37.6%), Opinion pieces (35.8%), and Emerging challenges (33.9%). Further news items ranked lowest with only ¼ consent (24.8%).

Free comments covered a wide selection of suggestions for additional article types for JEAHIL. Ideas ranged from "picture galleries of medical libraries" to "more on biomedical librarianship, not just Cochrane and clinical stuff". Comments like "tips & tricks", "case reports"," job demonstrations", "guidelines", "best practices" and "tools" emphasized a down to earth, practical approach. That is not the whole picture though, since also research-oriented suggestions, like "evidence based research", "critical reviews of subjects in LIS literature" were given. Educational topics got also many comments: "courses in medical librarianship", "core skillsets for health librarians in different settings and establishing professional values and standards", "librarian education – after education". Also keeping up to date on current literature and developments was raised in comments like "book reviews", "ongoing projects".

3. Portfolio analysis of JEAHIL publication items

Figure 3 shows the satisfaction of the respondents with the journal items (from Fig.1) set against the interest in them (from Fig. 2) in a coordinated system. This so-called "action portfolio" is a kind of SWOT analysis which allows to distinguish the journal items into four different rectangles or groups. Each group has a specific action assigned: those items that have a high interest but low satisfaction rate (conference proceedings, bottom right square),
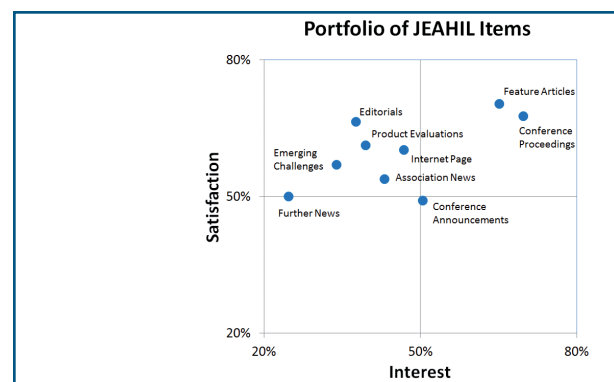
Readers' Interest in JEAHIL Items

Scientific articles
Proceedings of conference
Descriptive feature articles
Practical advice
Conference announcements
Internet page
Association news
Product evaluations
Editorials
Opinion
Emerging challenges
Further news items

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%

extremely interested / very interested

Fig. 2. *Interest in JEAHIL publication items*

Portfolio of JEAHIL Items

80%

Satisfaction

Emerging Challenges
Editorials
Product Evaluations
Feature Articles
Internet Page
Conference Proceedings
Association News
Further News
Conference Announcements

50%

20%

20%   50%   80%

Interest

Fig. 3. *Portfolio of JEAHIL items*

need to be improved immediately. Those with low interest and low satisfaction rate (further news, bottom left square) need to be improved in the medium term, while the items with high interest and high satisfaction (feature articles and conference proceedings, top right square) need to be improved in the long term. Items with low interest but high satisfaction (association news, product evaluations, conference announcements, editorials, internet page, emerging challenges, top left square) need to be consolidated.

4. Satisfaction rates: readers of the printed journal vs readers of the online version

In a second analysis the differences between respondents who read the journal in printed form (*Figure 4, dark blue bars*), and respondents who read it on the web (light blue bars), were examined. The various items were ranked according to the satisfaction rate of the online readers. Now the Feature articles (66.7% online vs 71.6% print) were ranked highest, followed by Internet page (61.5% vs 59.7%), and the journal as a whole (59.3% vs 76.5%). Most interesting is the fact that online readers were generally more critical than print readers (which is important for the editors if the journal should move to an online-only version).

5. Interest: readers of the printed journal vs readers of the online version

The differences between respondents who read the journal in printed form (dark blue bars), and respondents who read it on the web (light blue bars) were examined for the interest rates too (*Figure 5*). The various items were ranked according to the interest rate of the online readers. Now, the Feature articles (78.6% online vs 74.1% print) were ranked

highest, followed by Practical advice (60.7% vs 61.7%). Online readers were generally less interested than print readers, especially in Proceedings of conference (57.1% online vs 74.1% print), Descriptive feature articles (53.6% vs 69.1%), Conference announcements (35.7% vs 55.6%), Emerging challenges (25.0% vs 37.0%), and Further news items (14.3% vs 28.4%).

There were only two items in which online readers were more interested than print readers: Scientific articles (78.6% vs 74.1%) and Internet page (53.6% vs 44.4%).

6. Preferences of readers: online vs print

At the question "In what format do you prefer to read the *Journal of EAHIL*?" 57.8% of responders replied "online", against 42.2% who still prefer to read it in a printed form (paper copy). It is interesting to see that the gap between the two preferences among the readers of *JEAHIL* is not so large. The fight between online and print is still ongoing, even if the future winner is clear and (unfortunately for some reasons) round the corner. The 2004 survey had similiar results: two third supported ending the print version of EAHIL newsletter if it were available electronically in an easily printable format.

7. Interest in reading past issues online

81.7% of readers of *JEAHIL* showed to also be interested in reading past issues of the journal. In particular, issues published in the last 3 years (42.2%) and 10 years (15.6%). Moreover, 23.9% declared to be interested in looking up at issues published more then 10 years ago. Only 18.3% replied no.

The answers to this question are very important for the journal as they clearly show that the content of the past issues can still be useful for librarians and
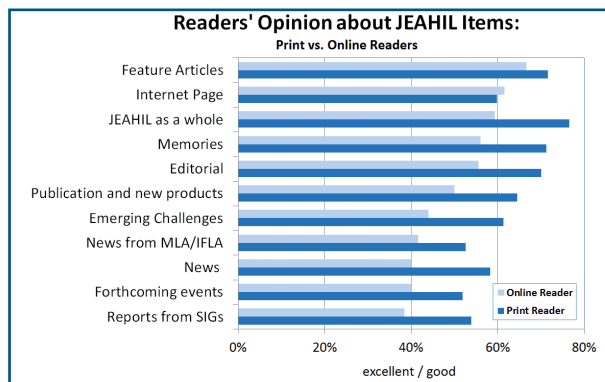

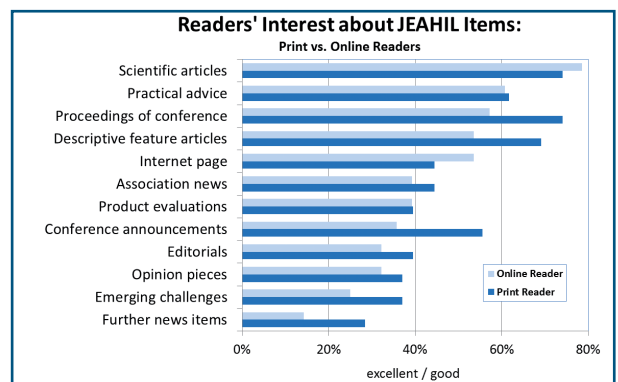**Fig. 4.** *Satisfaction with JEAHIL items, comparison*

Fig. 5. *Interest with JEAHIL items, comparison*

information professionals for many reasons; not only as a useful reference tool, but also as a place where the history and memory of the Association is kept alive for everyone to relive.

The *Journal of EAHIL* was first published as a *Newsletter* in 1987 (with the Editorial and Content written in two languages: English and French), until 2004 when it changed its name in *Journal of EAHIL*. Many members of the Association look back in the past issues – available online – that are clearly a precious archive that needs to be maintained.

8. Scientific journal vs association journal

The responses to the question whether *JEAHIL* should be more like a scientific or an association journal were nicely in line with the earlier question about article types the respondents were interested in reading: 44% wanted *JEAHIL* to be a bit of both, 31% more like a scientific journal and 24.8% an association journal.

The free comments emphasized the importance of both article types as well: "LIS is interesting but often boring to read; association news and discussions contribute to the feeling of being a member of EAHIL". "We are librarians and this is our journal! But we are also a scientific librarians and we work every day in scientific context."

In comparison, in the 2004 survey, 44.9% of the respondents agreed that the EAHIL Newsletter should be more oriented towards scientific aspects of medical librarianship, and 22.6% disagreed.

9. Writing for the journal: preferences

"What kind of article would you like to write for the Journal? Choose any of the above mentioned ones or one of your own".

Regarding this question, the respondents themselves would most preferably write scientific articles or descriptive feature articles. Practical advice, method-articles, emerging challenges, internet page and book reviews also inspire for contributing. Articles covering the motivation and human side of our profession were suggested as well: "How to rebuild confidence and motivate health librarians who have seen their staff, services or department decimated and under-valued especially in times of recession", "Discuss how to get contact with our students and researchers, the human side of being a librarian".

10. What would make it easier for you to contribute to the Journal?

The absolutely biggest barrier to write for *JEAHIL* seems to be the lack of time, and in some cases even the lack of support from the "boss". There were also language barriers for non-English natives, and a wish to be able to write in Spanish. One respondent mentioned it is not always easy to find own initiatives to write, but when directly asked she/he will be happy to contribute. Being able to submit manuscripts and short notices through a password restricted blog or submission system would also lower the threshold to publish in *JEAHIL*.

11. Anything else you would like to say about the Journal. Free comments

Most of the free comments were delightful to read:
- "I always read the journal, so you are for me on the right track"
- "Good job!"
- "I enjoy the journal"
- "An essential information tool to link members. It had also developed from a newsletter into a journal with scientific articles and interesting features and reports, which is great."

Greatest part of the negative comments considered the layout and format of the journal. This quote summarizes the main critique: "I find the journal interesting however the format needs to change [...]". Feedback on the content was mostly positive, tough one respondent considered the journal "a little bit boring" and "a more personal touch" would be appreciated. On the other hand some comments suggested there is a nice touch to the readers: "I like the journal, its attitude to its readers. It's also promoting our profession and you feel even more interested in your work after reading it :)!", "The Journal is overall useful both for professional updating and sense of belonging/connection."

REFERENCE

1. Jakobsson A. EAHIL Survey of European Health Information Professionals. EAHIL Newsletter. May 2004;67:3-5.
   Available from: http://www.eahil.eu/journal/67.pdf