



Improving Library Use by Tsurumi University Students: A Collaborative effort among Educators, Librarians and Students

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Abstract:

The study concerns a new initiative to improve academic library use by students – it was during a collaborative effort among educators, librarians and students. Undergraduate students who registered for the advanced class of information services in the course program for librarians could get some hands-on practical experience of library services. The students carried out a survey by questionnaire among first and second year students with regard to the information service in the libraries. They also interviewed the librarians. This paper discusses the benefits and difficulties in the implementation of such practical experience in the course. Focus is also given to future directions of the collaboration among educators, librarians and students.

Keywords: *academic libraries, practical experience, librarian training course, collaboration, educator, librarian, undergraduate students*

Introduction

At present, academic libraries are undergoing a radical transformation deriving from changes in teaching and learning, new information technologies, and the new needs of students. The rapid evolution of digital technologies has caused many librarians to rethink their roles, facilities, and organizational structures. It is to meet these changes on the surrounding environments of academic libraries that students must be given a practical experience that is a true reflection of the professional environment.

There is no consensus about what to call the practical experience in Library and Information Science (LIS) programs. The terms of “practicum”, “internship”, “work-study”, “co-op”, “field experience”, and “service learning” have all been used to describe different forms, formats, lengths, and components of practical experience occurring as a part of LIS education (Berg, Hoffmann and Dawson, 2009).

As the jobs of librarians continue to change and evolve, and as what were once considered professional tasks are now designated para-professional jobs, so do the expectations of people who work in libraries change. Concurrently, the academic curriculum has been a matter of interest worldwide, as library schools have embraced information studies and have sought to determine the appropriate changes useful to the profession (Lynch, 2008). The popularity of offering practical experience as a part of library education has fluctuated over the years, largely due to differing opinions on the importance of such programs to LIS education (Berg, Hoffmann and Dawson, 2009).

In recent years, higher education institutions, which participate in service learning as a kind of practical experience, and which incorporate service-learning into the academic curriculum, have seen a sharp rise in the number of participating students. (Vogel, Seifer, and Gelmon, 2010).

It is thought that service learning activities provide practical learning opportunities for students – it is clear such experiences assist participants to properly conceptualize, learn and further inform their service abilities (Bharat, 2004).

Efforts to improve services and to support the mission of the university to enrich the student learning are always on-going, and can be tailored to both individual and group needs. The greater flexibility and coordination of individual and group activities in the community system bring in the greater service. An important part of service learning involves building relationships with community members to achieve goals that are meaningful to the community (Bharat, 2004).

The present study concerns a new initiative to improve academic library use by

students – it was a collaborative effort among educators, librarians and students in Tsurumi University in Japan. Undergraduate students in Tsurumi University who registered for the advanced class of information services in the course program for librarians could get some hands-on practical experience of library service.

The students carried out a survey by questionnaire among first and second year students on the department of library, archival and information studies with regard to the library service in the library of Tsurumi University (T.U. library). They also interviewed the librarians of Tsurumi University.

This paper discusses the benefits and difficulties in the implementation of such practical experience in the course. Focus is also given to future directions of the collaboration among educators, librarians and students.

Methods

Undergraduate students in Tsurumi University who registered for the advanced class of information services in the course program for librarians could get some hands-on practical experience of library service from the academic year 2010-11.

The numbers of students who registered for the course of “Advanced Studies in Information Services” were 21 in the academic year 2010-11 and 22 in the academic year 2011-12, respectively.

The percentage of female students per the total number of students was 74, more than two thirds of the total. The numbers and percentages of male and female students were more or less the same in each year.

Table 1. The number of students who registered for the course of “Advanced Studies in Information Services”.

Year	Registered Students(RS)	Male Students	(% for RS)	Female Students	(% for RS)
2010	21	6	29	15	71
2011	22	5	23	17	77
Total	43	11	26	32	74

The teaching process on the course of "Advanced Studies in Information Services" is shown in Table 2. As identified above, the process on the course of "Advanced Studies in Information Services" during two academic years, 2010-11 and 2011-12, worked out in much the same way.

The course of "Advanced Studies in Information Services" consists of the first semester and the second semester. In the first semester (from April to August), a teacher explained purposes and methods of the course at the outset, and then lectured on types of information services, and users of libraries and information services. In May, the teacher then explained purposes and methods of the questionnaire study and brought the project planning into practice.

The students in each group administered the survey by questionnaire to the first and second-year students in June, and they made an analysis of results of the survey by questionnaire.

Table 2. The teaching process on the course of "Advanced Studies in Information Services" during two academic years, 2010-11 and 2011-12.

Year	School Term	Month	Items
2010-11 & 2011-12	First Semester	April	Introduction, Types of Information Services, Users of Libraries and Information Services
		May	Purposes and methods of questionnaire study, project planning, To administer the survey to the first and second-year students
		June	Analysis of the survey by questionnaire
		July	To prepare the presentation, Operate their recital, Self-mutual evaluation
	Second Semester	September	Evaluate the organizations for Information Services
		October	Information Services in the Libraries
		November	Purposes and methods of an interview research, Project planning, To prepare an interview research, To administer the interview research to librarians
		December	Analysis of the interview research, To prepare the presentation, Operate their recital, Self-mutual evaluation
		January	Proposal to the improvements and public relations on Information Services, Examination

In the second semester (from late September to March), the teacher explained methods for evaluating information services in each organization at the outlet, and then lectured on information services in the libraries in October. In November, the teacher explained purposes and methods of an interview research, and then brought the project planning into practice.

The students administered the interview research to librarians, and they made an analysis of results on the survey by questionnaire, and also prepared presentations using

PowerPoint for the attendees who consisted of students, those librarians who had been interviewed and the supervising teacher. These students then made presentations and also practiced peer evaluation in December at the end of the term.

On the basis of their practical experiences, the students proposed some improvements in regard to information services in the library, and general public relations. The teacher then gave them the term-end examination.

Results

We introduced a practical experience on the course of “Advanced Studies in Information Services” from the academic year 2010-11. Prior to that, the course of “Advanced Studies in Information Services” had been different in terms of both content and style. Previously, all classes in the course conducted in the classroom had not included any practical experience for students. Practical experience in the library as part of course studies began in the academic year 2010-11.

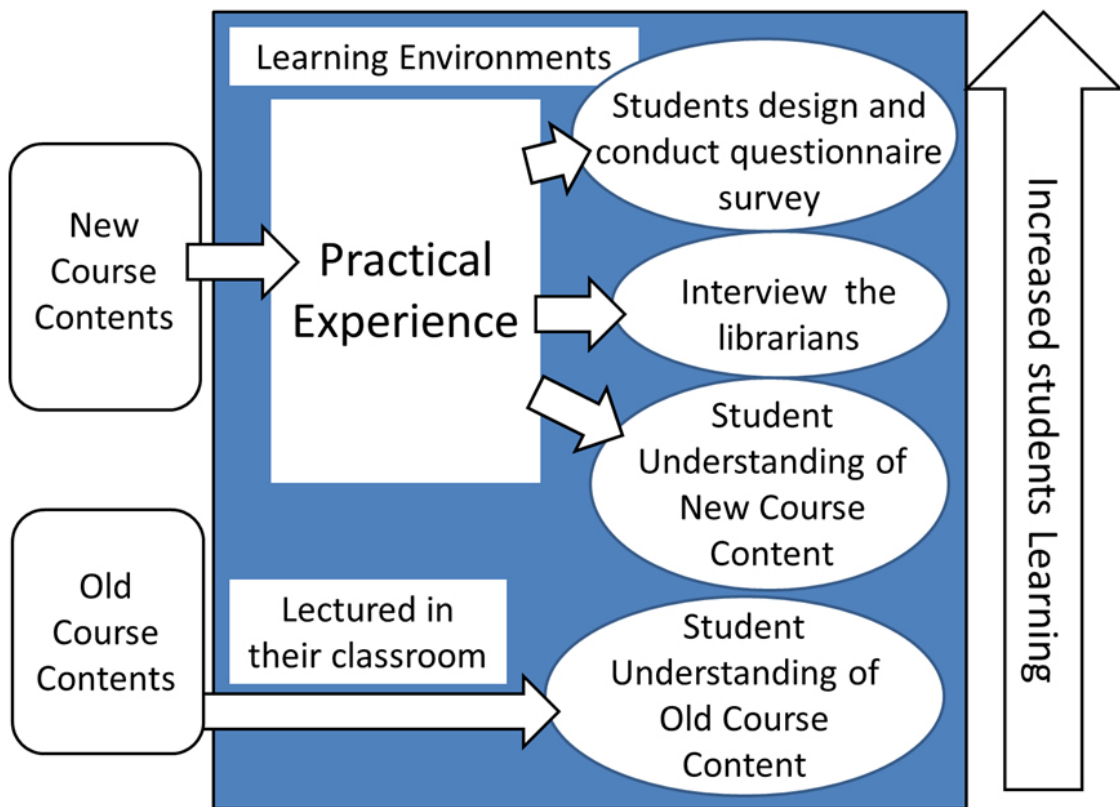


Fig. 1. Introduced a practical experience in the course of “Advanced Studies in Information Services” from the academic year 2010-11.

The practical experience in the course is composed of two larger parts, following the two semesters of designing and conducting a questionnaire survey, and interviewing the librarians. The new learning environments are expected to improve the student learning (Fig. 1).

The students were divided into four groups of about 5 to 6 members. The topics of the questionnaire survey concerning information services in the library which was administered to the first and second-year students are shown in Table 3.

The four topics were as follows; frequency of usage of information services in T.U. library, frequency of usage of information services between all universities and public libraries, general interest & use of information services in all libraries related to frequency of usage of information services.

In this particular study, we are really concerned with only 3 of the 8 groups – those three which focus on information services in T.U. library.

Table 3. Topics of the questionnaire among first and second-year students for information services in the libraries.

Year	Group	No. of students	Topics of the questionnaire
2010-11	A	5	Frequency of utilization and visibility of Information Services in Tsurumi University Library
	B	6	Frequency of utilization of Information Services in University and Public Libraries
	C	5	Information Services in Libraries
	D	6	Use of Information Services in Tsurumi University Library
2011-12	A	5	Information Services in Libraries
	B	6	Comparison of rate of utilization of Information Services between University and Public Libraries
	C	6	Comparison and relation between the distance from library and frequency of utilization
	D	5	Information Services in Tsurumi University Library

The students were requested to design and conduct a questionnaire survey, and to interview the librarians by themselves during the course of “Advanced Studies in Information Services” from the academic year 2010-11. It was helped that these activities would deepen their understanding of the information services in T.U. library.

After students took the course of “Advanced Studies in Information Services” from the

academic year 2010-11, they were expected to make greater use of information services in T.U. library.

This is the one of important purposes of the course. To carry out this purpose, it is considered essential to forge cooperative work between educators and librarians.

The presentation topics and catch-phrases by students after the interview to the librarians are shown in Table 4. The presentation topics were divided into six types as follows; (a) how to use information service and learn about the library, (b) audio-visual service, (c) student book selection at the bookstore, (d) reference service, (e) special displays, (f) book selections by librarians. As a result of ample group discussion, the topics of presentation by students in each group varied greatly.

Table 4. The presentation topics and catch-phrases by students after the interview of the librarians.

Year	Group	No. of students	Topics for presentation	Catch-phrases at presentation
2010-11	A	5	How to use and learn about the library	How to use and learn about the library
	B	6	Audio-visual room	Audio-visual room now! We need your input.
	C	5	Reporting of the interviews of librarians for the student book selection at the bookstore	Wander around looking for a book in your case ~ Introduction to the student book selection at the bookstore ~
	D	6	Reference service in Tsurumi University Library	The book one wants. Search for it together ! It's our Reference Service
2011-12	A	5	Special displays in Tsurumi University Library	Let's see, pick up and borrow some books
	B	6	Report on the book selection by librarian and the student book selection at the bookstore	The book selection forms a vital portion of Tsurumi University Library
	C	6	Reference service in Tsurumi University Library	What kind of service is the reference service in Tsurumi University Library? Do you make the most use of it?
	D	5	The interview of librarians for the rare book collection in Tsurumi University Library	Do you want to learn about rare books?

The catch-phrases shown at the presentation were decided through the discussion of

students in each group. As shown in Table 4, the catch-phrases varied greatly among groups.

At the presentation by students, the librarians who were interviewed by students attended. The librarians attended the presentation gave some suggestions and comments to students.

At the presentations, each presentation by students was evaluated by the students, the librarians and the supervising educator who attended at that time. The evaluation clarified of both the slides' content and the quality of the presentation in terms of expression for each attendee, and was rated on a scale of one to ten (where one is the lowest).

The supervising educator gave feedback to students about the results of the evaluation in the following week's class. The supervising educator requested students that they submit middle and end-term papers about the problems and proposals they had concerning the practical experience in the library.

Table 5. Summary of key experiences during the practical experience among students, librarians and the educator.

Key experiences during the practical experience
Students
● To learn the whole process of the library duties from setting the topics for interviewing the librarians themselves
● Students understood the library duties
● Students learned the library duties from the librarian's viewpoint
● Students reinforced their attention to library use with the experience of their interviews with librarians
Librarians
● Librarians learned from explaining their duties to students
● Librarians learned from the interview by students
● Librarians learned from the proposals by students
Educator
● Educator recognized the importance of the self-initiative activities of students through the practical experience
● Educator discovered that a collaborative work among educators, librarians and students is still at an early and undeveloped stage
● Educator became conscious of exercising ingenuity in the practical experience

Summarized in Table 5 are the key experiences acquired during the practical

experience in the course of “Advanced Studies in Information Services” among students, librarians and the supervising educator.

The students who registered for the course gained valuable experiences during the practical experience, such as learning about the whole process of the library activities, setting the topics for interviewing the librarians themselves, understanding the library duties, learning about the librarians jobs from the librarian’s viewpoint, and reinforcing their attention to library use.

The librarians gained valuable experiences during the practical experience of students, such as learning from explaining their duties to students, from the interview by students, and from the proposals by students.

As shown in Table 5, the supervising educator gained valuable experiences during the practical experience of students, such as recognizing the importance of the self-initiative activities of students through the practical experience. However, the educator also found out the importance of a collaborative work among educators, librarians and students, the collaborative work is still at an early and undeveloped stage. On the basis of past achievements, the educator became conscious of exercising ingenuity in the practical experience.

Discussion

Many academic libraries are adapting to the new environment in teaching and learning to the new information technologies, and to the evolving needs of students. As a result, the idea of “information commons” or “learning commons”, was founded in academic libraries in Japan (Donkai, 2011). It is now that students who are studying in the course programs for librarians in Japan must be given a practical experience that is a true reflection of the professional environment. It is the only way to meet the challenges of the change in the academic environment.

As mentioned before, there is no consensus about what to call the practical experience in LIS programs in the US and also in the course programs for librarians in Japan. The terms of “practicum”, “internship”, “work-study”, “co-op”, “field experience”, and “service learning” have all been used to describe different forms, formats, lengths, and components of practical experience occurring as a part of LIS education (Berg, Hoffmann and Dawson, 2009).

The new initiative introducing the practical experience into the course, in which the students carried out a survey by questionnaire among first and second year students with regard to information service in the libraries, and also in which they interviewed the librarians of T.U. library, is defined as a practical experience in the course programs for

librarians of T.U. in Japan.

Through setting the topics, understanding the purpose of the survey by questionnaire and interviewing the librarians, the supervising educator requested to the students to understand the whole process of information service in T.U. library. As mentioned before, the practical experience introduced into the course programs for librarians of T.U. had effects on the improvements of academic library use by students and also the implementation of the collaborative relation among the supervising educator, librarians and students.

Through the experience of the practical experience introduced into the course, the students not only understood the library duties and also learned the library duties from the librarian's viewpoint. Namely, the students became to understand an actual condition of the information service in the library from both viewpoints of user and librarian. It is concluded that the collaborative works among educators, librarians and students are very important for the students understanding the duties of academic libraries.

The improvement in the quality of the course on "Advanced Studies in Information Services" is explained as a result of an introduction of the practical experience into the course. The librarians and faculty staffs should cooperate to build a new relationship through the practical experience introducing into the course programs for librarians in Japan.

As a matter of course, it is not so easy to implement the practical experience into the course, but we believe the experience in Tsurumi University will be of great assistance in developing the collaborative relation among students, librarians and educators in academic libraries.

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