

Significance and Efficiency of “Visiting-Instructor Training Programme”: Opportunities for Sharing Competence of Reference Staff

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Abstract: In this paper, discussed are significance and efficiencies of “Visiting-Instructor Training programme” which the National Diet Library of Japan launched in 2009. First of all, as hypothesis, the author defines possible value of this programme that it should offer precious opportunities for sharing competence of reference staff in the context of Japanese librarianship. Secondly, this is examined, using the data collected in non-participant observation at 8 training seminars, questionnaire survey toward 768 participants in 24 training seminars, and interview/discussion with 18 instructors. As a result, shown are the evidence and proofs that this training programme has a possibility of playing a role of competence exchange between instructors and trainees.

Keywords: visiting-instructor training programme, workplace training, training method, professional development, reference competency, competence sharing, reference staffs, National Diet Library of Japan

1. Introduction

Since 2009, the National Diet Library (NDL) of Japan has provided “Visiting-Instructor Training (VIT) Programme” as a new contribution toward nationwide libraries and library staffs in Japan. Staffs of reference services section of NDL are dispatched to the training seminars which are held in local area or each workplace, and they lecture and instruct their own knowledge and skills on reference and information services, focusing on how to search and retrieve information in unique databases constructed and managed by NDL.

There have been some training activities for staffs in charge of reference and information services in Japan, but most of them were independently planned and practiced by large-sized city or prefecture libraries, regional library associations, or nationwide library institutions. Among them, information about topics,

objectives, methods and so on is rarely exchanged nor shared. And level and quality of each programme are inconsistent. On the other hand, VIT has a merit that it is comparatively stable and sustainable, as the theme, style, and contents are common and depend on the ordinal works of NDL.

However, for NDL, to concern with this sort of training programme is almost first experience in its history. Therefore, in order to assess the programme and make it more excellent, NDL and the Research Centre for e-Learning Professional Competency (eLPCO) of Aoyama Gakuin University started a collaborative project in 2009/2010, gaining a grant funded by the Library Advancement Foundation in Japan. In this paper, the author, as a leader of this project, would discuss a few results confirmed.

2. Objective and Methodology

This paper has mainly two aims, that is, to define unique and important significance of VIT, and to clarify the efficiency of this significance in the training seminars to which this programme applied.

First purpose is related to a primary hypothesis of this research. It is found that VIT has a several characteristics. Among them, the most significant nature is that it should be a 'place' for knowledge and skills exchange between instructors and trainees. In other words, we might be able to set a hypothesis that VIT offers opportunities of competence sharing for reference staffs.

The approach for verifying the appropriateness of this hypothesis must be practical rather than theoretical, and qualitative research as well as quantitative one should be adopted. What to be analysed and discussed are all phenomena in the seminars including space and circumstances, process and transactions, atmosphere and comfort, instructional style and interaction, encouragement by instructors and reaction of participants, and so on. Moreover, candid opinions and concrete consciousness from those who are related to this programme should be recognized

In order for these, data and evidences with several aspects are collected and gathered by the following investigations.

(1) Non-Participant Observation

This method is thought to be useful for making clear the facts in the seminars. The author himself joined eight seminars and took notes about what were done there. Of course, This has one disadvantage that it is impossible to remove thoroughly observer's subjectivity. To avoid this bias as much as possible, 'prompt sheet' was prepared and used, in which points for taking note are enumerated.

(2) Questionnaire Survey

This method is applied for in order to obtain the data on the opinion and recognition of participants how they think about VIT. Questionnaire sheets consists of four parts; (I) nine closed questions to choose one single answer mainly asking the sufficiency and satisfaction to the programme, (II) one multiple choice question asking the topic which participants hope to join in near future, (III) one open-ended question for comments and opinions about

the role and significance of VIT programme, and (IV) non-mandatory five questions on attributes of participants. In this paper, descriptions as answers of (III) are important for confirming the efficiency of VIT, although other data can be supplementary.

(3) Interview/Discussion

In order to gather any evidence for reinforcing the appropriateness of the hypothesis, interview and discussion were planned and made. Primarily, the author interviewed and discussed with all instructors about their feeling and consciousness after finishing the seminars where he observed. Secondly, as the author was invited to join the meeting in the section of NDL, a variety of opinions were reported from library staffs in charge of this programme as instructors.

3. Overview of Visiting-Instructor Training Programme

Proposal

The preparation of VIT programme is divided into two stages; the process of proposal and advertisement of the programme by NDL, and the planning of seminars by applicants, that is, libraries, regional bodies, etc.

First of all, NDL made proposal to dispatch their professional staffs to training seminars which should be held on site of libraries, or in any regional venues. At the time of this, NDL showed the following common topics which are related to the practices of reference and information services.

- (Topic 1) Reference tools available on the web
- (Topic 2) Reference tools for business information service
- (Topic 3) Introduction to information tools on legislation and NDL
- (Topic 4) How to search information and materials on Asian countries

The libraries and bodies wishing to hold training seminars on these topics applied this programme. In the application, they advised to NDL the topic(s) which they chose, the date and time they hoped, the place and circumstance, the number and attributes of predicted applicants, and some options about practice of enquiry handling, and so on. This means that VIT programme is a mixture of 'tailored (bespoke)' and 'off the peg' style.

The fee of VIT paid by applicant is just actual expenses of transportation and accommodation for instructors. However, it was certainly estimated that most libraries and bodies had little money to use for training activities because of budget cut by the influence of economic depression in Japan. So, the project made a decision of facilitating to cover these expenses for them by using the grant on the condition that the applicants cooperate with the research activity. In fact, the fund was used for 24 seminars among 31 applications which were accepted by NDL.

As next stage, the libraries and bodies whose applications were accepted began to complete their plans in detail. This includes the announcements toward expected participants and delegates, booking of venues and facilities, final

approval and decision-making by directors and councils, and so on. Also they prepared to treat any option if they selected. For example, when they chose an option of practice of enquiry handling, a few search questions to solve in advance were given by instructors of NDL. The applicants managed this 'homework', that is, they delivered/collected it to/from participants before seminars.

Topics and Participants

As mentioned above, 31 VIT training seminars were hold in 2009/2010. A total of 66 library staffs of NDL were dispatched there as instructors, and the total number of participants was 1,191. Among these seminars, 26 applicants agreed to cooperate with the research.

Finally, in this research, the data of questionnaire survey of 24 seminars shown in Table 1 were gained. The number of valid questionnaires is 768 in total. And non-participant observation could be done in 8 places among them.

Table 1: List of Seminars

Name of applicants	Topics				research	
	1	2	3	4	QS	NP O
East Region Public Libraries of Saitama Prefecture	×				×	
Sophia University Library	×				×	
Ibaraki Prefecture Library Association	×				×	×
Hachinohe City and Misawa City Libraries (Joint)	×		×		×	×
Saga Prefecture Library	×				×	×
Ymagata Prefecture Library	×				×	
Yamaguchi Prefecture Library	×	×			×	
Doshisha University Library	×		×	×	×	
Doshisha University Learned Memorial Library	×	×	×		×	
Miyazaki Prefecture Public Library Association	×	×			×	×
Okinawa Academic Library Association	×				×	×
Sasebo City Library	×				×	×
Kyoto Prefecture Library	×				×	
Oita Prefecture Public Library Association	×				×	×
Ishikawa Prefecture Public Library Association	×				×	
Iwate Prefecture Library	×				×	
Yokosuka City Library	×				×	
Chiba Prefecture Library Association		×			×	
Akita Prefecture Library	×				×	

Shimane Prefecture Library	×				×	
Joint Body of Tochigi and Saitama Public Libraries	×				×	
Kyoto University Library				×	×	
Nagaoka City Library	×				×	
Toyama Library Association	×				×	×

The places of seminars were scattered nationwide in Japan. All but two applicants chose Topic 1 (Reference tools available on the web) and just five libraries and bodies applied more than two topics. This means that the data of questionnaire survey reflects the recognitions related to this topic.

According to the answer to the part IV in questionnaire, the attributes of participants vary, although some tendencies could be found. There are 571 answers as to Libraries to which participants belong: prefecture library 113 (19.8%), city or town library 322 (56.4%), academic library 99 (17.3%), school library 19 (3.3%), and others 18 (3.1%).

About total years of working in libraries, there are 638 answers: less than 3 years 207 (32.4%), between 3 and 6 years 164 (25.7%), between 6 and 11 years 133 (20.8%), and more than 11 years 136 (21.3%). Average is 7.4 years. As to total years in charge of reference services, there are 529 answers; no experience 44 (8.3%), less than 3 years 183 (34.6%), between 3 and 6 years 144 (27.2%), between 6 and 11 years 95 (18.0%), and more than 11 years 53 (10.0%). Average is 4.8 years.

694 participants answered to the question how they get their professional qualification. The number of participants are this; four-year higher educational institution 194 (28.0%), junior college 130 (18.7%), correspondence education 69 (9.9%), intensive seminar programme 121 (17.4%), no qualification 178 (25.6%), and others 2 (0.3%).

4. Significance and Role of VIT

It is found that VIT has a few characteristics, comparing other practices of professional development in the context of Japanese librarianship. Among them, most unique and crucial one is that the competences of reference staffs of NDL are transferred directly to the participants of the seminars. Indeed NDL have held some training sessions for libraries nationwide before launching VIT, though, in addition that they are what is called ‘assembly style’, the instructors in those sessions are mainly academic researchers or teachers of librarianship. On the other hand, all instructors of VIT are the staffs of NDL. This means that, in the seminars, practical competence on knowledge of information resources, skills for searching information and materials, attitude to access information media critically, etc. are talked and mentioned. In another term, NDL started to offer this as one of their services. This means that NDL newly increase and widen its role in order for contributing to the society in Japan.

For NDL staff as instructors, it is thought that this programme could offer opportunities of competence sharing. Most of reference staffs have not had an

experience of instructing or teaching in this sort of training seminars. To become an instructor of VIT is a precious opportunity for them to realise their daily works reflectively. Especially, it should be much important to grasp and understand the situations and levels about the competences of the participants, because the libraries and their staffs nationwide are the core clients for NDL itself. To know such users' condition is significantly useful for developing and improving their services.

According to a framework used frequently in knowledge management or marketing information transfer, there could be knowledge/information 'about' others, knowledge/information 'for' others, and knowledge/information 'from' others. In VIT, participants are able to understand two types of knowledge of NDL and their staffs; techniques and tips on searching information and materials as 'knowledge from NDL', and how to use databases and contents on the web as 'knowledge about NDL'. It is thought that most of participants have already had the former by browsing the Library web, whereas VIT should be the almost first chance for them to touch the latter.

Before participating VIT, NDL reference staffs have also insisted on providing 'knowledge/information for their core users'. However, in this programme, it is thought that instructors are able to know the diversity of competence and their conditions and levels about participants and to hear the variety of opinions and matters from them.

After all, both instructors and participants can understand competences each other. Therefore, VIT should be a 'place' for exchange of professional knowledge, skills, and attitude, which is to say that it could offer opportunities of competence sharing for reference staffs.

5. Outcomes

Non-Participant Observation

The author attended 8 seminars as observer in order to grasp the contents and types of knowledge and skills which participants were strongly concerned about. In this observation, one of important targets was reactions which were shown verbally and/or non-verbally by participants. This approach is based on the premise of interpersonal communication and human behaviour studies that, for example, people nod and express faint voice as signs that they agree and accept others.

As results, the following behaviours were conspicuously confirmed:

#participants keep still hearing and show little gesture when instructors talk and explain the overview of NDL and its database.

#more than half participants nod, when instructors talk about practical cases of enquiry handling and they present examples of techniques processes on 'how to' search and find answers.

#most participants frequently nod, sometimes shake their fist, and often express such voices as ‘ah’ ‘hum’ and ‘ho’ which are positive short phrases in Japanese, when instructors mention their own experience of answering difficult enquiries and some knacks or tips usually used in NDL.

These show that participants are interested in not general knowledge about resources of NDL but practical competence which instructors applies in their daily works in NDL.

Questionnaire Survey

Toward the open-ended question about the significance of VIT programme, 420 (54.7%) of 768 participants filled any description. Using text and conceptual analysis, it was found that these descriptions consist of six types of contents. The number of each description are the following;

- (a) significance of VIT; 174
- (b) sharing professional competence; 78
- (c) content and methods; 122
- (d) change of their own consciousness to professional development; 83
- (e) expressions of appreciation and satisfaction; 188
- (f) claims and critical opinions; 177

The figure of (b) is not so high, as it is 18.6% of descriptions and 10.2% of all participants. However, it must be difficult for participants to write clearly this type of opinion just after finishing seminars, because these recognitions are thought to be gradually sprung out from the bottom of consciousness. In other words, it might be possible to say these opinions are proofs of strong feeling of participants in spite that the quantity is small. In fact, many of written sentences are much impressive and positive as examples below:

#We can know how web database of NDL are useful in enquiry handling.

#This programme is an irreplaceable chance to know practical knowledge of those who engage high quality of reference and information service.

#As far as local library staffs are concerned, we have thought that NDL librarians live in a different world. But, today, I felt strongly close to them, as I learned their significant skills and attitudes.

#I was involved and encouraged. I can know a wide range of professional abilities of reference librarians. I now feel the necessity of continuing to make my own competence much higher.

A few opinions show that they could realise the importance of attitude for managing enquiry service, as well as knowledge and skills on information handling and data retrieval.

Apart from this question, in the result of the questionnaire survey, there can be found mostly affirmative and positive evidences about the efficiency of VIT and sufficiency of the seminars. Figure 1 shows that VIT is accepted by most of participants.

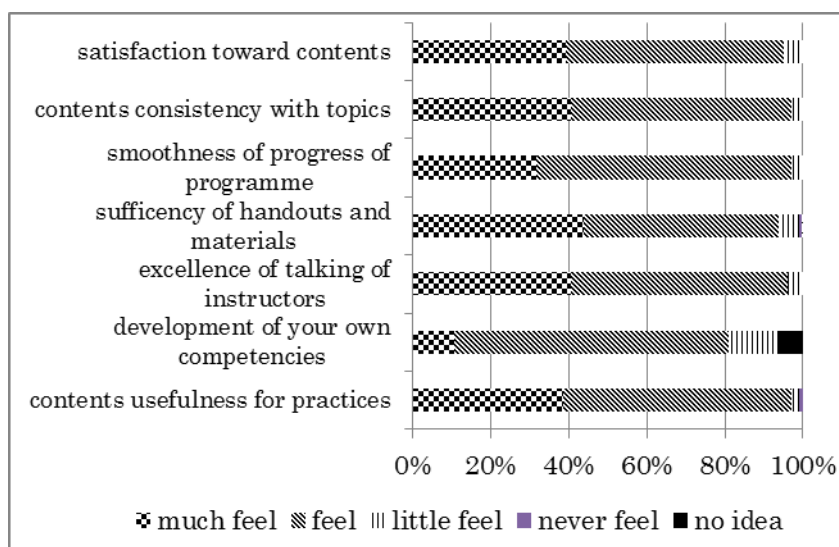


Figure 1: Efficiency and Satisfaction of VIT

Interview/Discussion

In the interview and discussion at the time of seminars and the internal meeting of NDL, a wide range of opinions from totally 18 instructors were collected. They include various aspects of the matter on VIT programme; philosophy and sustainability, system and organisation, theme and topics, training methods and circumstances, possibility of e-training instruction and platform-making, trainees and their abilities, and so on. Among these, there are not a few opinions relating to competence sharing and exchange. Typical examples are the following:

#I heard an impressive opinion that participants could feel more familiar with NDL. This is the same for me. We have to try to exchange more information and products each other.

#For NDL staff, I strongly feel that most significant and effective outcome is the chance of informal communication with trainees in or after the seminars, as well as training itself. From participants, I could gain a variety of frank views of the 'spot'.

#In my job, I often talk with staffs of public and academic libraries. And I see those staffs at training workshops and conference. But, most of them are full-time/regular employees and qualified librarians. I scarcely discuss with part-time/temporary staffs and library assistants. One of merits of this training programme is that it lets us know the existence of a variety of library staffs and their different situations and needs.

These positive opinions show that VIT programme could become a ‘place’ for sharing knowledge between instructors and participants.

5. Conclusions

As shown above outcomes, there are applicants and instructors who approve the unique value of VIT and recognise this programme as good opportunities for competence sharing and exchange. The number and figure is not so large indeed, but considering its qualitative strength, it is thought that evidence obtained in this research could be certainly sufficient to second the appropriateness of the hypothesis.

Further investigation in accordance with the results of this research project is to make clear whether the competence shared in VIT is useful and effective for practices in both libraries of participants and NDL. And the issues for long-term research should be to gain clear and definite proofs on the sufficiency and sustainability of this programme

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