



The Effectiveness of Reference Service Training Program Customized for the Staff of Japanese Public Libraries Operated by a Private Company

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed at studying the effectiveness of the reference service training program customized for the Japanese public libraries operated by a private company in the year 2016/2017. The qualitative method was used. The population consisted of nine trainees and nine managers who acted as supervisors from public libraries operated by a private company in Japan. Data were collected using documentary form, pre-test, interview form for trainees and interview form for supervisors. Qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis and presented descriptively. Research findings showed that the trainees and the supervisors agreed that the training program was effective especially in terms of contents, methods and management. The training program was meaningful and there has been the improvement and changes of the trainees' attitude and behavior towards their works. Important strategies used included the design of the training program in terms of management, contents, and methods that suit the background and needs of the trainers and the supervisors, and the systematic organization of the training program which put the importance of the active participation of involved stakeholders. Recommendations were to use additional technologies and online training to reduce the limitations of time and working condition of the trainees and effective stakeholder communication.

Keywords : Librarians' Training Program / Public Libraries / Japan

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Statement of Problem

Reference service is one of the main works in Japanese public libraries, and is recognized as the service which required librarians' professional skills. Therefore, various training programs have been conducted nationwide Japan for the development of library works in general, on a national scale, on a local government scale, and on each library scale. Reference service is always the center of the skills to be picked up.¹ With the revision of the Local Government Act in 2003, the administration of public facilities established by local governments were delegated to persons and bodies which are designated by local governments. This system is called the designated administrator system. In public libraries, there are more cases in which private companies and NPOs operate and manage.²

The developed training program is the beginning level basically for staffs with a certificate of qualified public librarian, and with experience engaged in reference service around four years. It was composed of three parts: Part 1 theoretical basis of the reference services, Part 2 practical sessions on direct reference services and Part 3 practical session on indirect reference services. The first part overviewed the whole reference services system, as in Japan, when saying "reference service", people think of only question-answering service (ASK librarian activity), which is a direct service to users in theoretical explanation. Part 2 aimed to improve the search skills of materials and information so that services to users while Part 3 was to provide information search techniques.

As the training programs conventionally conducted are basically to library staffs hired by local governments, and it is not common that those staff hired by private companies joined such training programs. Some private companies provide their own training opportunities to their worker³, but the reference service training program for public library staffs operated by private company was not so popular. Therefore, the effective reference training program customized for the public library staffs operated by private company is strongly required. In collaboration with Maruzen Yushodo, Co. Ltd (the former name was Maruzen Co., Ltd.), the training program and the research project to study its effectiveness was conducted.

Objective

This research aimed at assessing the effectiveness reference service training program customized for staff of public libraries operated by a private company in Japan during the year 2016/2017.

Research Methodology

This is the qualitative research.

1) Population of this study

This consisted of nine public library staff / trainees and nine library managers who

acted as supervisors or mentors of the training program. Their roles are to motivate to continuing professional development provided and to support with appropriate instruction and suggestions. Initially there were twelve trainees, but nine had completed the training programs and three trainees dropped out due to working limitations.

2) Research instruments

Four research instruments including a documentary form, a trainee interviewing form and a supervisor interviewing form were used to collect data.

2.1) The documentary form which was called “comments sheet” was divided into four parts. The first part is the profile of the trainees; personal information, information on certificate of public librarianship, library work experience and reference service experience. The second part is the working conditions of the trainees, such as the number of working days and hours, and the hours to engage in reference services. The third part is the competencies of trainees which supervisors hope to improve through the training program. The fourth part is the present competencies of the trainees, and in particular, the reference service competencies and other related competencies needed for reference service.

2.2) The pretest was designed to assess the knowledge and competencies of trainees before attending the training program. The test contained twelve questions. The five multiple choice questions were used. Ten of these twelve questions were judged to be at the level of certification program in the university.

2.3) A semi-structured interviewing questions for trainees which composed of three questions about their opinions on the training programs in terms of structure and composition, the methods and the significance of training program.

2.4) A semi-structured interviewing questions for trainees which was comprised of three questions about their opinions on the training programs in terms of structure and composition, the methods and the significance of training program; the situation of trainees during the training program; and changes of trainees after the training program.

3) Data gathering method

3.1) The library managers or supervisors where the trainees work were requested to fill the information and comments on trainees.

3.2) The pretest was conducted with trainees before attending the training program.

3.3) The semi-structured interview with nine trainees (T1 to T9) was conducted during 22nd to 29th March, 2017. The length of time for interview with each trainee was about thirty minutes. The information was recorded using an IC recorder and transcribed.

3.4) The semi-structured interview with nine supervisors (S1 to S9) was conducted during 22nd to 29th March, 2017. The length of time for interview with each supervisor was about twenty minutes. The information was recorded using an IC recorder and transcribed.

Findings and Discussion

Results of the pretest showed that five trainees passed 8 or more, while two trainees passed 6-7 and other two trainees passed less than 6. Therefore, about half of the trainees can be considered to have fully basic knowledge and skills. However, about the other half needed to have basic knowledge and skills.

Findings of interview were divided into two major parts: Part 1 Trainees' opinions and Part 2 Supervisors' opinions.

Part 1 Trainees' opinions

Findings of the interviews with nine trainees showed the followings issues and opinions.

1.1 Composition of training program

1.1.1 Importance of lecture

T2: Since time has passed after getting the certificate of public librarianship, it was good chance to reflect the basic knowledge. I found the need for daily learning.

T3: I think that basic knowledge is an important part among three components. I was able to confirm my own situation.

T7: It was good to be able to recognize the theoretical aspects.

T8: Learning from the lecture, I found that my understanding was not enough. Also, I knew that if theoretical aspects were weak, I could not exert my strength in dealing with the users. I understood that importance of the lecture.

T9: It was meaningful because I could confirm the outline of reference service, which is difficult to notice from my daily work.

1.1.2 Process

T1: It is good to follow the steps.

T4: A flow from "blueprint" of reference service to exercises is necessary. The lecture of basic knowledge shows of the entire "blueprint".

T6: The three-part configuration was good to go through the steps.

T7: As I do not have any chance to learn library studies after graduating the university, the lecture of basic knowledge was a good step to other workshops.

T8: Of the three parts, the contents of workshops was different from my expectation. But, as the session of lecture is directly connected to the second and third one, so it is considered to be meaningful.

T9: Step by step approach is good for me. As it was advanced at regular intervals, there was also time to digest.

1.1.3 Tool making (pathfinder)

- T1: I have been unfamiliar with pathfinder, so I was inspired.
- T2: There is no need to create tools in my library, but I felt that it is the first experience and it may be useful when it comes to other workplaces.
- T3: Although I understood that the tool making is important, but it is difficult to recognize the significance of focusing on the pathfinder.
- T4: Tool making is useful in practice, especially, as "the method of introducing materials" which is common with the shelf development of the library. It leads to the practice of active activities, that is, support to problem solving.
- T5: As I do the learning support to the primary school children in the library, I could recognize the usefulness of tool making. But, as there was no possibility to have opportunity to make any tool in my library.
- T7: It was exciting to make information tools. I noticed that creating a tool had The significance of conveying the "product / strength" of the library to users.
- T8: It was a new discovery for me that pathfinder connected with the use of reference books.

1.2 Training program methods

1.2.1 Experiential practice

- T1: This is my first experience in training at a library site. As a place of training, it is effective because we can browse and use the materials immediately after explanation.
- T2: It was very good. I was grateful as I had little chance to go to other libraries.
- T3: I was touched by different library collections which was so fresh. I was able to stand in the eyes of the users.
- T4: It leads to the improvement of motivation.
- T5: The first experience, it was. So good.
- T6: The training in other libraries was new to me. It was really fresh and fulfill the application to real situation.
- T7: It was very good. The fact that NDC is in common shows that we could use other libraries without any study. This was exciting. The trainees' co-consciousness also increases.

1.2.2 Assignments

- T2: Necessary. Without them, we do not learn in advance.
- T6: Although it took time, but it was possible to solve during working hours, so there was no problem.

T7: Not very hard. The amount of assignments might be appropriate even considering the time. In addition, the awareness of the problem was raised by treating assignments.

1.2.3 Frequency of training sessions

T1: In general, it is not always easy to attend training sessions due to library situations and working schedule of other staffs. However, three times in half year is reasonable, not many or not few. If there are more than this, it is much difficult to join.

T3: An intensive program is better than three times a half year.

T4: Three times a half year was appropriate considering the assignments. If the work system allows, you may increase the number more.

T6: It was good to have a certain interval, and to avoid summer vacation. It was not difficult to attend in relation to my work.

T7: Personally it was nice to have three day consecutive sessions, but thinking the head office, such sessions might be struggled with coordination.

T8: During training sessions, it was difficult to have time to work on assignments, because I was busy.

T9: It was good that there was a fixed time of three times a half year. Between sessions, we can think and do various things.

1.2.4 Schedule / timetable

T1: The time to work on the assignments on information seeking was short.

T2: It is better to have at least two weeks to work on assignments.

T3: The assignments took longer than expected. There is also a level of assignments, but it would be appreciated if you gave us about one month.

T5: It was very difficult to work on the third assignment, because it was the beginning of a new year.

T6: As it was the beginning of the year, I was not able to have plenty of time. But, it was good as a flow.

T8: I made the time to work on the assignments by force. It is better for the time until the deadline for submission to be longer, and I would like to have more than two weeks.

1.3 Significance of the training program

1.3.1 Development and improvement

T1: In addition to answer reference questions from users, I was aware that to satisfy users' information needs should be crucial in reference service. I became conscious of using the tools I learned from the training program.

T2: Although I was conscious that the approach to information was not one and that it was important to provide any information as much as possible, I could keep in mind more than ever after joining the training program.

T3: I noticed that I lack basic knowledge, so I act consciously about this. For example, I promote the understanding of NDC and identifying the difference of dictionaries or encyclopedias, etc.

T8: It was good to understand the function and characteristics of "Encyclopedia Nipponica". In addition, I became conscious of the use of index and the search using NDC. My search process was changed.

1.3.2 Knowledge application

T4: At my library, I am working with staffs in charge of YA and children service in order to pathfinder.

T5: As I had strong impression with talks on the necessity for making the best Use of library's materials, so I'm trying to apply the display and exhibition of such materials.

T6: I try to understand deeply about the second division of NDC. Also, when I looked at the bookshelf, I came to the view carefully to find various things.

T7: I have been involved in the library for more than 12 years, but the motivation has declined in recent years. So, this time was a turning point to stimulate myself.

T8: I review the reference books collection in my library from the point of views on local area, the structure of the facilities, etc. I buy and add some. Also, I am now working on putting them in front so that users can easily take and browse.

1.3.3 Feedback

T3: In the library to which I belong, I give feedback to other staffs and share issues learned in the training program.

T4: We begin to do similar reference service training in my library.

T5: When I recommend other staffs to check one reference book a week, there appeared some practicing it.

T6: In the library to which I belong, I reported my experience every time when I returned from the training session.

T7: According to the situation of my library, I chewed quite a lot and explained to other staffs.

In Summary, the following findings were confirmed by trainees:

1) Composition of training program

All trainees mentioned positive comments on the training program, in particular, the structure of three parts. The trainees positively accepted the gradual development of three-parts in training program. Three trainees pointed out that lecture was useful for trainees to join the session of basic knowledge. The training session for making tools (pathfinder) has brought awareness about indirect services to many trainees. However, there are somewhat negative opinions on tool making (pathfinder).

2) Training program methods

There has been a wide range of opinions on the methods of training programs. Among them, all trainees highly valued the experiential practice in the real situation. The trainees recognized the necessity of assignments and the appropriateness of the number of the training sessions.

As to the frequency, this issue was pointed out in relation to the circumstances of the library to which they belong. The trainees felt that the burden on the schedule was large, especially in the third assignment.

3) Significance of the training program

Almost half of the trainees recognized their changes. They have deepened or improved their understanding about reference service after joining the training program. Two-thirds of the trainees tried to apply the knowledge and skills acquired in the training program to the practice of their libraries. It was also found that half of the trainees have an opportunity to share the knowledge and skills acquired from the training program with other library staffs.

Part 2 Supervisors' opinions

Findings of the interviews with nine supervisors showed the following issues and opinions.

2.1 Composition and methods of training program

2.1.1 Composition

S1: The trainee said that the three-part composition is easy to understand.

I recognized that the gradual development from the basic understanding led to the ease of understanding. In addition, experiential practice in the library is meaningful.

S2: I think that it is an orthodox session. In terms of digging in knowledge and skills or making it recurrent, it may be meaning of reviewing daily work.

S3: Assignments are effective as a kind of "pre-study". Also, our trainee can be mindful.

S4: Assignments are good, trainees can think about the contents to be tackled in the day of training session.

S6: The three sessions are many, I think. But, I accepted this because it was the decision of our company.

S7: Up until now, the company has planned only one-day training session. As this program held on three times, it was very difficult to prepare, but it was rich and fulfilled.

S8: I think the composition of the training program was not difficult. Assignment was meaningful as a stage for participation. It leads to raising trainee's awareness.

S9: Step approach was very good. I feel that trainee could not understand well if it was one-day session. In the preparation for experiential practice, the trainee himself was little confused.

2.1.2 Schedule / timetable

S1: It should be so busy, if the session is held once in a month. So, three times in six months was moderate. However, it would be appreciated if the time of submission of third assignment was not overlapped the day just after a new year.

S2: All sessions were held in a weekday, so the trainee can afford the time. As for the number of sessions, it was considered that the burden on the trainees themselves is greater if sessions become more than three.

S3: Intensive session programs become severe due to staff rotation.

S6: It might be difficult to participate there times in six months depending on who the participant is.

S8: It was better to avoid the end of the year and the beginning of the year for assignments.

S9: It was much difficult for library staff to participate due to the operation of the library. In addition, the trainees seem to have been upset because the third assignment took place at the end of the year.

2.1.3 Comments description

S1: Comments description is not a burden.

S4: At the time of description, it became an opportunity to confirm the situation of the trainee, and it was also an opportunity to think how to utilize it in the future.

S5: There is nothing difficult to write. Trainee will be informed about what the library is asking for.

S6: I wrote the comments half a year ago, so I cannot remember any. However, there is no sense of incongruity about what was asked.

S7: I was confused at first, but I asked the administration department for advice + and wrote down.

S9: To be honest, I was confused. However, it is not unreasonable to describe itself. If this method becomes general, it would be appreciated if the items to fill in were a little smaller in number. Although I knew about the staff themselves, I could understand that I did not grasp enough. Therefore, it makes sense to know the staff.

2.2 Situation of trainees in action

2.2.1 Trainees situation

S1: I adjusted the trainee's working time including the shifts and rotations of staffs.

S2: I did not do anything special because there were few qualified people in the library and the trainees themselves responded properly. "

S3: We adjusted the working condition in consideration of the time taken by the trainees.

S4: The assignments were reasonable in time. As the trainee had plenty of experience, but opportunities of training have become less. So, it was precious for him.

S5: There was no particular consideration as to working condition. I would respond if the trainee asked me. But I did not do it this time.

S6: The trainees' ability was high, so no special adjustment was necessary.

S7: Because the trainee themselves adjusted working hours, I did not do any special consideration.

S8: As the trainee was deputy manager, so I think that she was so busy. But I know that it was possible.

S9: There were no particular problems with the adjustment of working conditions with other staff members.

2.3 Change of trainees after the training program

2.3.1 Behavioral change

S1: The trainees were originally gentle, but seemed to gain more confidence. I hear from other staff that he gave advice to other staffs who was not good at reference service.

S2: Since I am not observing the trainee directly, I cannot say which, but it seems that he got a lot from the outcome of his work.

- S3: The trainee is connected to the exhibition of materials in relation to pathfinder.
- S4: The trainee got a new perspective and became so active that I was asked to conduct the training opportunity in our library.
- S5: Though the consciousness seems to be changing inside the trainee, it has not yet reached other staffs.
- S6: The trainee himself was originally in charge of training work in the library, but he was not the character that came out so much. He became more active than before in terms of leadership.
- S7: The trainee was given the training opportunity for library staff every three training session. At that time, he explained that various things such as the display would be related to reference service, and other staffs also thought that it was true. The trainee was originally positive, but it seems that he has been further improved and broadened their horizons.
- S8: At the reference desk, the trainee positively played a role of "helper," when other staffs faced difficulties to deal with reference questions. In addition, she is working on making pathfinder on job-gaining support, using knowledge and skills learned in the training program.

In Summary, the following findings were confirmed by supervisors:

1) Composition and Methods of Training Program

The supervisors have shown positive opinions on the composition of the training program. However, for some reasons it was believed that the comments were based on the content of the reports from the trainees, and also include those that are not only their own opinions. The supervisor positively recognized the three-part composition and assignments that are the features of the training program. The training program was appropriate in terms of number and frequency but inappropriate in terms of schedule and timetable.

2) Situation of trainees in action

Opinions on the adjustment of working condition of the trainees varied. It was found that one-third of supervisors adjusted working conditions of trainees, and two-thirds did not make any special adjustment regarding working conditions because the trainees had high abilities.

About changes of trainees after the training program, It should be noted that the answer to this question is just two months after finishing the training program. However, although the supervisors' opinions included the case based on the impression, there were not few cases that trainees' changes in attitude and behavior could be seen after joining the training program. Most supervisors felt improvement and changes of the attitude and behavior of trainees towards their work.

Conclusions

Both trainees and supervisors consider that the training program has been significant and meaningful to them and effective due to the effective strategies used as follows.

1. The design of the training program

The management, contents and methods of training program were well designed to suit the background and needs of the trainees and the supervisors. Findings from the study of the profiles and backgrounds of the trainees, including working condition, and results of the pretest of knowledge and skills on reference services as well as the trainees' and supervisors' needs were used to design the training program. The contents, the composition and the schedule were adjusted to focus both theoretical background and experiential practice in the library by OJT (On the Job Training) and Off-JT. From these findings, trainees' awareness and behaviors have deepened or improved after joining the training program. This can be summarized that the training program was effective.

2. The systematic organization of the training program

The training program was planned and organized systematically, putting the importance of the participation of stakeholders including four parties: the administrative workers in charge of the Maurzen Yushodo Co. Ltd. who operated the public libraries; the trainees who are library staff of public libraries; managers of each library who acted as supervisors of trainees and a training instructor or mentor of the training program. The roles of each party was informed. The cooperation and collaboration were found since the first step with the administration department of the company in selecting trainees with the criteria jointly performed and other administrative works, as well as with the library managers who acted as supervisors.

Recommendations

Even though the training program were found to be effective, but due to many limitations of the trainees and the requirement of the training program, important problems that limited the trainees' participation were found. They were due to the working library conditions of each trainee as well as limited number of staff which could not find others to replace even though it is the 2-3 days intensive program. In addition, the training program composition and methods of effective training required additional extra time of trainees to do assignments before the participation of each session as well as to participate on the lecture and workshop during working hours.

Some gaps on the schedule / timetable were found due to varied needs and conditions of trainees as well as communication gap that some trainees and supervisors were not clearly aware of their roles. There was also a gap between the trainees' consciousness and the supervisors' awareness on the experiential practice in the training program. There are

various factors behind this. The recommendations are the application of new technologies, e.g. online training as well as the improvement of the communication so that the trainees and supervisors are clearly understand the whole picture of the training program and their roles in detail. The workshop on the management of the training program participated by all involved stakeholders is strongly recommended.

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Notes

¹ As the cases of training program for professional librarians annually conducted on a national scale, there are that of the National Institute of Education Policy and that of Japan Library Association. In these two, the reference service is always taken up. In addition, reference service training conducted on a local government scale, according to the lists in the *Library Yearbook* (The Japan Library Association), are 424 from 2007 to 2016.

² According to a survey by Kuwabara, as of November 2017, 245 local governments (638 libraries including branch libraries) are operated under the designated administrator system.

³ For example, Toshokan Ryutsu Center, Co. Ltd. supports an organization named “the library academy”, which provides a few training program.

⁴ There are various library management system: the designated administrator system, PFI (Private Finance Initiative) system, contracting and so on.

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