〔研究ノート〕

Curriculum Support by Teacher-librarians: Suggestions for Job Improving Performance and Status

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The purpose of this study is to investigate school library utilization, focusing on how to effectively use a school library in curriculum management. The study methods employed are (1) literature search and (2) interviews. My analyses focus on the role of the teacher-librarian in curriculum design. Even though library staff may wish to be involved in development of the curriculum, their daily duties hinder their engagement in curriculum management. Therefore, the goal of this study is to clearly identify the extent to which they can carry out curriculum management and how librarians who become active in matters related to curricula are regarded by their colleagues. The investigation was made to determine the status and positioning of the teacher-librarian and where they fit into the interrelationship among the principal, teachers and students.

Key words: school library (学校図書館), teacher-librarian (司書教論), school management (学校経営), curriculum (カリキュラム), School Library Act (学校図書館法)

Introduction

In Japan, the School Library Act of 2003 brought about changes that included mandating the employment of teacher-librarians in all schools with classes of more than 12. In 2015, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) suggested that their involvement in curriculum planning and school management could open the way to the future enhancement of school libraries[1]: their vision is that school libraries should include curriculum management and various educational activities and in so doing should achieve higher status within their institutions. The importance of the school library in school education is well established. In 2016, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology released their School Library Guideline[2]; however, the status of teacher-librarians in Japan is still primarily a teacher of a subject, so there is not enough time for them to focus on school library management. This makes it difficult for teacher-librarians to cope with their curriculum management support work and other broader roles.

The term "the school library" in this study includes both the function of the school library and that of the teacher-librarian (and/or school library person). The School Library Act states that the teacher-librarian should oversee school library management.

Aims of the study

The purpose of this research is to determine the extent to which teacher-librarians are able to make use of their skills and training in curriculum development and management.

Literature review

The term "curricula" is defined as the full range of educational activities in schools, and it is understood that school library management should include curriculum support. Masaki Amano added his own understanding to this definition[3]: he posits that school curricula include not only the educational targets for each subject, but the whole range of educational activities both within and outside the class subjects. Regarding school management, he states, "It should have an integrating function that leads to successful education by planning various school activities and by reorganizing systems."[4]

Research methods

Study methods are a literature search and interviews.

Research data collection

There has been a great deal of discussion of the role and the function of teacher-librarians. Hideo Imamura, in his campaign for better school library education and curriculum management, says, "Teacher-librarians should be able to attend meetings such as staff meetings, school management conferences, and curriculum organization councils, give their views, and have the right to vote."[5]

He also mentioned the importance of librarians having clear goals. However, he has not discussed the current situation of teacher-librarians in the light of actual research results. Yuji Hirakue's careful investigation concludes by stating that it is very difficult for teacher-librarians to concentrate on their school library responsibilities. He indicates the current status of library work as being "just another assigned task" and not a full-time job. Hirakue also makes it clear that the learning support service that the school library offers is another increasingly important task of teacher-librarians.[6]

He suggests a course of action in which teacher-librarians can support school curriculum management; however, he does not propose how teacher-librarians could take a role in school library management. Michiko Matsumoto, too, has pointed out problems with securing time, as mentioned in the above study.[7] Matsumoto indicates that securing enough time has been a problem, and she suggests the need for cooperative links between school librarians and teacher-librarians.

However, the question is whether a teacher-librarian is expressly allowed to take the time to offer advice and to lead the teaching staff in new endeavors. According to a study record released by the JSLA (Japan School Library Association), in Fiscal Year 2014, teacher-librarians considered the time available for engaging in their duties to be sufficient at only 11.3% of elementary schools, 13.9% of junior high schools, and 6.2% of high schools.[8] The situation did not improve in fiscal 2015: elementary schools: 9.7%, junior high schools: 13.6%, and high schools: 8.3%.[9] In 2016, no great improvement was observed: elementary schools: 12.1%, junior high schools: 12.7%, and high schools: 10.8%.[10] These figures reveal that securing time for curriculum planning duties and other library activities remains problematic.

Interview data

A half-structured interview has been held with each teacher-librarian as the focus persons of the analyses. The following three questions were asked as an "interview guide" to bring out the process of change in teacher-librarian's perception of a school library, and to define factors that influenced the change. The first question is "Describe in detail what you do in your work." The second is "What kind of unique work defines a teacher-librarian?" The last question is "How do you take part in school management as a school library educator?"

In this paper I will present a plan which will make it possible for teacher-librarians and school library managers to offer curriculum support. I will identify important strategies for teacher-librarians to gain more time for engaging in curriculum support. Proposals will be based on a literature search and interviews.

(1) How teacher-librarians and/or school library managers view curriculum support by the school library and other staff. The following questions were posed to clarify the interaction among teachers.

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a) What roles do you think the principal expects you to perform?
　＊E3: "A principal told me to take part in library audiovisual education."
b) How do other teachers perceive your competence and qualifications as a teacher?
　＊A6: "I felt that I succeeded in bringing about the better understanding on the function of the library."
c) What kind of reaction is there from pupils/students to your being a teacher-librarian?
　＊E3: "They appreciate my work and expect that I should be the key person in a school library."
　＊B7: "I believe that students and teachers should make good use of a school library, and students are given chances to learn by themselves gaining information and knowledge in a school library. And they do!"

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(2) What process led to teacher-librarians becoming aware of the importance of curriculum support?:

The following questions were provided to clarify the process of how the school library managerial staff reached an understanding of the curriculum, and their role in curriculum development.

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d) How did you gain thorough understanding of the curricula in your school?
　＊D2: "Since 1988, my professional theme has been 'teaching and learning in a school library' and I am still improving."
e) What kind of support have you offered as a teacher-librarian to the faculty concerning the use of the library?
　＊G2: "I try very hard to learn the content of each subject in detail, and then I can propose appropriate and helpful program using our library."

　＊: interview data

Interview data were analyzed using the modified grounded theory approach (M-GTA)[11] as part of a qualitative study. M-GTA is a unique research method which enables to generate one theory from various figures and qualitative data. Therefore in this paper, teacher-librarians' curriculum recognition process has been analyzed using M-GTA.

Interviews were carried out with ten teacher-librarians in charge of curriculum support in a school library between December 2014 and March 2017. The data suggests the need to place the person in charge of curriculum support at the school library within the school management organization.

Results from the interview data

A literal interpretation of responses to the questionnaire revealed the following four concepts.

The first is made up of two ideas; respondents wrote "it is quite reasonable and appropriate to have been allotted the formal role of a teacher-librarian" and "it has given me professional self-confidence." In other words, the ten teacher-librarians who were interviewed enjoyed professional pride in their job performance. As a result, a category of "mutual respect and recognition of status" was generated.

The second concept that a literal interpretation revealed was "self-training" and "awareness as a leader." Respondents are willing to engage with new concepts of school library utilization by attending academic training sessions, finding ways to apply their new information and knowledge to their job performance, and most importantly, were willing to share them with faculty members: the "utilization process." This concept can be called "voluntary training and awareness as a leader."

The third category is "firmly-founded professional confidence." While they share their new information and knowledge, the staff members acknowledge their leadership, which again helps them become influential leaders. The pupils/students also help them gain self-confidence.

Lastly, they are willing to acknowledge the gap between "their ambitions and reality": they said they often feel anxiety about what they can and cannot achieve. This category can be termed "lack of self-confidence."

However, here are several remarks concerning their work performance from their colleague teachers. They say, "When there is a teacher-librarian the teaching content is clearly enriched." Teacher-librarians can trigger educational improvement, which leads to the idea that the school library has its own role in school education and management. The important thing is for ideas to be shared throughout the school.

Data analysis

The qualitative study M-GTA method[12] was applied for the investigation. The choice is based on the fact that the use of the M-GTA method can identify two phases as shown in the following figure.
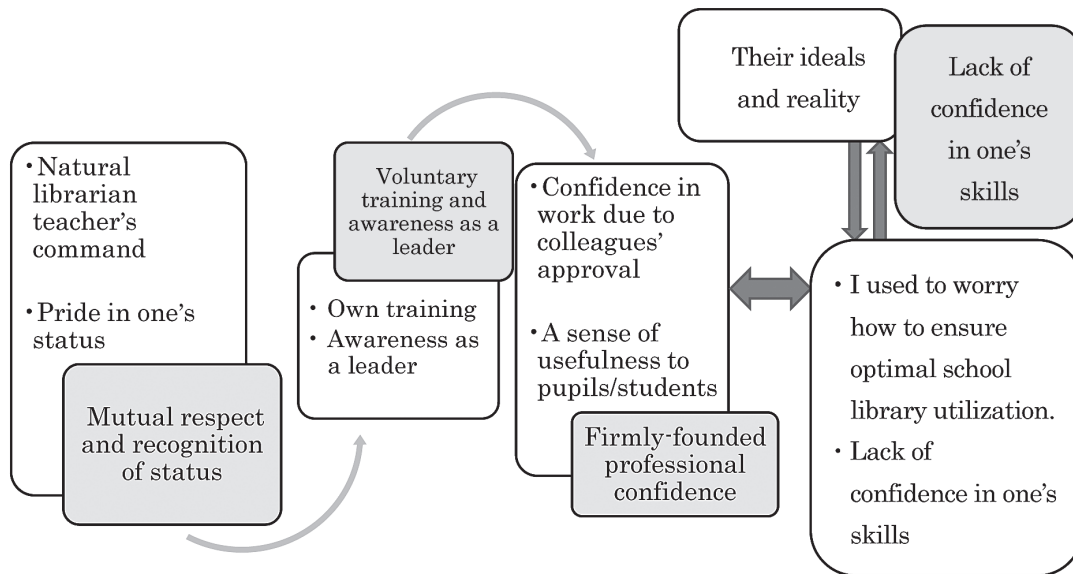
Result Figure: Curriculum support recognition process by the teacher-librarians

Results: Interrelation and flow of the whole process

A school library can operate as an important factor in curriculum management when a teacher-librarian's educational guidance skill is adopted. That will lead to common recognition among all the members of school education. As a result, the interaction between the school library utilization and the school management begins to work effectively. The school library utilization can be specified in principal's school management items. The following three factors can be extracted.

1. Acquisition of unique expertise

    The teacher-librarians who took part in this study are fully aware of the importance of school library management within the framework of school curricula. They have the skill and ability to be valuable members of their academic communities.

2. Promotion of cooperation and collaboration

    The teacher-librarians who took part in this study valued the process of building a network of cooperation and collaboration both within and outside their libraries. As those teacher-librarians serve concurrently as subject teachers, their main problem is lack of time to dedicate to library management. They try to solve their problem by obtaining support from other teachers and even from other staff members.

3. Participation in school management

    The personnel interviewed were head teachers or library commissioners who were in leading positions in the school management as well as in the school library: this had given them thorough knowledge of the implementation process of their curriculum, and sufficient experience for enhancing their school management.

Discussion

All the subjects interviewed have been using the school library to introduce books, and they all said that "books" are their motivation for becoming teacher-librarians. An analysis of their interviews reveals that professional courses and workshops helped them improve their leadership in proposing new phases of school library utilization. As a principal in a relevant school and a vice principal (head teacher) recognized, the important role of a teacher-librarian, they willingly adopt the idea of using school libraries in school education, and so teacher-librarians are encouraged to gain further professional training. Through such support, teacher-librarians can build more professional confidence and gain leadership skills for a better educational management. One unique case was seen in an interview: his fellow teachers' support and approval became a great help. On the other hand, confidence of being helpful to children and students is also useful to gain confidence. But some teacher-librarians struggle to find the right answer —"What is really helpful for the learners?" As a teacher-librarians also teach classes as a subject teacher, he or she can understand difficulties that teachers face. That is, just by taking the class to the library once in a while does not help the children. Both teachers and children should know how to use their library. By sharing specific ways to use libraries, a teacher-librarian certainly can help both teachers and children in learning. Including school libraries in school management certainly helps build up the professional confidence of teacher-librarians, which can be handed over to the next generation — new young teacher-librarians, who will probably have a chance to improve library utilization in the future.

Therefore, a school library supports all educational activities which happen in school, and of course the school needs to help to achieve all educational goals. A teacher-librarian is also expected to give appropriate help to students so that they can achieve their goals. In addition, a teacher-librarian can contribute in improving the school's whole educational curriculum.

Conclusion

Teacher-librarians, principals, and colleagues recognize that school library utilization can bring about improvement in students'classwork. On the other hand, voluntary training in developing capable leaders: will help teacher-librarians understand that and anticipate the whole educational plan of the school. Teacher-librarians are becoming more confident, but the more they recognize their responsibility and capability, the more anxiety they will have concerning what is really needed in classwork.

During this process, teacher-librarians can use what they gain through professional training programs in their everyday work experiences. This aspect turned out to be key to development of the mindset of making school libraries a part of educational plans.

A teacher-librarian and/or a school library managerial staff member who supports a range of activities in school libraries and takes part in curriculum management can improve learners' literacy, as well as contribute to school management.

To conclude my research, I suggest that teacher-librarians should take part in school

management in a leading capacity. A teacher-librarian should also oversee improvements in learners' literacy. This will lead to various forms of planning that will result in improved school management.

Acknowledgement

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The School Library Act, Article 5, paragraph 2: "A teacher-librarians, as mentioned in the preceding paragraph, shall be appointed from among senior teachers (excluding Nursing teachers and Diet and Nutrition teachers), advanced skills teachers and teachers (hereinafter referred to as senior teachers, etc., in this section). In this case, the senior teacher must have completed a Teacher-librarians course."

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