Web-based Library Instruction for Promoting Information Skills

Lih-Juan ChanLin
Email: lins1005@mails.fju.edu.tw
Fu-Jen Catholic University, Department of Library & Information Science
510 Chung-Chen Road, Hsin-Chuang 24205, Taiwan

Abstract

This article addresses the issues with regards implementing web-based library instruction from cognitive and instructional aspects. With an aim to educate college students to become information literate, a web-based library instruction was developed, implemented and evaluated. Its implications for future implementation were also discussed. From the evaluation results, most students showed a positive attitude towards the WBI and found that it helped them to learn. Students’ responses also reflected high value and future expectation on the web-based learning experience. Students’ positive attitude toward LibTeach, included the organization of the content and the resources provided in the instruction. Students enjoyed learning with the instructional materials, and would continue learning from it. From the negative aspect of the responses, a need for improvement was revealed. Improvement on issues related to “on-line discussion” and “relating content to other courses”.

1. Introduction

As electronic learning has been integrated in various subject areas, the question how to help students to develop the necessary skills, gain experiences and have motivation to learn becomes an important issue. In the advent of World Wide Web (WWW), web-based instruction becomes not only a new way of learning information skills, but also a supplement to traditional mode of face-to-face classroom library instruction. Web-based instruction (WBI) is an appropriate application of the Internet to support the delivery of learning, skills and knowledge in a holistic approach not limited to any particular courses, technologies, or infrastructures [1]. The initiatives of using Internet as a tool for learning have played an increasingly important role in the goals of colleges and universities in recent years, and the trend seems likely to continue [2]. Likewise, information literacy course on the web becomes an emerging trend for providing a different mode in learning information skills. In the advent of World Wide Web (WWW), WBI becomes not only a new way of learning library skills, but also a supplement to traditional mode of face-to-face classroom library instruction.

The Internet has significantly increased the speed of library education activities. It also provides learners more interactive activities and greater exchange of information. Supported by the Internet, WBI allows the instructor or learners to have access at their own convenient times. Therefore, electronically mediated human communication can be achieved easily [3]. Several cases have been reported in employing different forms of web-based library instruction, such as offering fee-based and for-credit web-based courses [4] integrating a web-based library instruction into other courses [5] or using a MOO service for web-based instruction [6].

Web-based library instruction began with simple handouts marked up without any changes from the original text-based materials. It progressed to mini-workbooks and hypertext links to other sources, graphical interfaces including PowerPoint presentations, sound, and video, and finally interactive features [7]. However, to create a learner-centered environment that fosters autonomous learning, scaffold-learning model is widely suggested in integrating many course designs. Scaffold learning is based on a model of conceptual change that involves first expanding the repertoire of ideals held, and then encouraging students to distinguish among these ideas by reflecting and linking ideas into a coherent and cohesive perspective [8].

To transport good library instruction practices into the Web environment, Dewald analyzes several characteristics of good library instruction, including: course-related and assignment-related, facilitating active learning, fostering group interaction, offering information in more than one medium, clear instruction objectives, teaching concepts, and including the option of asking the librarian for help [9]. From these arguments, the elements that constitute good library instruction are not limited to the instruction itself, the strategies to encourage students’ involvement, and the opportunities to foster interaction and creative thinking are all essential to success.

Good web-based learning provides opportunity to develop learning-on-demand and learner-centered instruction and training. However, successful implementation of web-based learning requires a systematic understanding of various complex factors. Khan suggested a framework for web-based learning helps to identify and clarify critical issues and complexities of web-based learning. The framework
contains several dimensions: pedagogical, technological, interface design, evaluation, management, resources support, ethical, institutional aspects. Each dimension has several sub-dimensions each consisting of items focused on a specific aspect of a web-based learning. Thorough consideration of issues related to learning can help designers create a meaningful and distributed learning environment [10].

2. Development and Evaluation

With an aim to facilitate widespread adoption and foster effective learning of information skills, a web-based library instruction, LibTeach (http://libteach.lib.fju.edu.tw) was designed and implemented in Fu-Jen Catholic University, Taiwan to offer students fundamental information skills. Several attributes essential to learning, including the structure of the instruction, interactivity and feedback, media features, pace of learning, sharing and exchange of information, and flexible course design were considered. From the evaluation results, most students showed a positive attitude towards the WBI and found that it helped them to learn. Students’ responses also reflected high value and future expectation on the web-based learning experience. Students’ positive attitude toward LibTeach, included the organization of the content and the resources provided in the instruction. Students enjoyed learning with the instructional materials, and would continue learning from it. From the negative aspect of the responses, a need for improvement was revealed. Improvement on issues related to “on-line discussion” and “relating content to other courses”.

Students valued the use of Internet in conjunction with the library skills to solve specific academic tasks. However, providing instructional content relevant to students’ major courses is needed. To meet students’ academic needs, integrating information literacy across-curriculum that incorporates the process of seeking, evaluating, and using information into the curriculum might be a more efficient way of providing students with valuable experience.

In the use of communication tools for obtaining reference help, students expected to get responses from the web as soon as possible. The questions were often posted whenever there was a need from their assignment or project. Since most students prepare their assignment one or two day before the deadline for submission, quick responses to their problems are often required. However, this might be the limitation for the online inquiry. One might never know when his (or her) questions would be answered. And if the inquiry were not clear, or the answers did not satisfy the clients, more time would be spent on clarifying the problems, and identifying solutions.

As it can be observed from the case, even though the on-line reference desk and discussion was used to encourage a person-to-person interaction, students did not use it frequently. Prompt response to students’ queries might be needed to ensure that the reference desk is prominently on the web-site. To encourage knowledge sharing and experiencing, allowing students to elect topics or issues and have free discussion opportunities on the web-site is also suggested.

In addition to provide web-based tutorial that covers library instruction, across-curriculum integration of information skills is also important. To promote information literacy and to provide students with valuable learning experience, there is a need to prepare students in locating, managing, critically evaluating and using information, and solving problems. Through the integration of curriculum and information skills, the way of thinking and reasoning regarding varied aspects of subject matter can be facilitated.

3. References