A Study on the Cooperation between Public Libraries and Elementary Schools in Taiwan

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Abstract:

This study aims at investigating cooperation between public libraries and elementary-school libraries in Taiwan. This study employed qualitative research method. Fifteen public librarians and nine teachers of elementary schools were interviewed to understand cooperative activities, success factors for cooperation, encountered difficulties, benefits of cooperation, and expectations for future cooperation.

This study was conducted from February to November, 2011. The findings show that eight kinds of cooperation activities were carried out, among which library card campaigns, reading programs, and schools visits to public libraries are the most popular activities. Strong support from key individuals and decision makers, and enthusiastic librarians and teachers are the key success factors. The primary difficulties of cooperation are unstable and shortage of staff in public libraries and non-continued subsidies. The primary benefits to public libraries include an improved borrowing rate and reputation, and enabling cooperation with teachers. Besides, the primary benefits upon to and students of elementary schools lie in facilitating reading promotion and obtaining an in-depth understanding of the services provided by the public library. On the basis of the research findings, this study proposes suggestions for the central and local governments, as well as public libraries and elementary schools.

1. Introduction

Playing as the local gateway to knowledge, the public library is essential for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups. The public library aims a providing all kinds of knowledge, information and services readily and equally available to her patrons. Collections of the public library must cover broad subjects and be suitable for patrons of all age groups. The Public library should endeavor to reduce digital divide by offering Internet services for those who cannot access Internet at home (UNESCO, 1994).

Some missions of the public library are related to children. According to UNESCO (1994), the public library should foster reading habits, stimulate the imagination and creativity, and enhance information literacy of children.

On the other hand, serving as the resource center of schools, the school library plans with administrators and teacher for curriculum design, and teaches teachers and students how to use library and her resources. Collection development of the school library must be in line with the school's curriculum, and the school library has the responsibility of fostering students' information literacy and reading habit (Ziarnik, 2003).

In spite of different missions and focuses, both of the public library and the school library encourage children to read for pleasure and study, to develop information literacy skills, and to foster continuous, lifelong learning (Ziarnik, 2003).

Children are target patrons of the public library and school library. For public libraries in Taiwan, it is common to set up a children area, but it is rare to have children's or YA (young adult) librarians. Public librarians in Taiwan usually lack the knowledge on children's cognitive development and reading requirement; therefore, they can only provide limited services for children. On the other hand, the school library in Taiwan may be the weakest in all kinds of libraries. Short of librarians, resources, and funding, the school library cannot offer qualified collection and services for teachers and students. Most schools in Taiwan only have small libraries (or just reading rooms), and some even do not have libraries. The opening hours of school libraries in Taiwan are usually identical with school hours; as a result, students can only use their school libraries in a limited time such as class break. Because the Ministry of Education (MOE) of Taiwan Government has just initiated a project that subsidizes schools to employ teacher-librarians since 2009 (MOE, 2010), the school library in Taiwan is just in her infancy.

In view of the complementary missions of the public library and the school library with respect to children, the researchers consider the possibility of cooperation for the public library and the elementary-school library[1] in Taiwan. If the two kinds of libraries integrate their professionals, share their resources, it may be beneficial for the public library, children and teachers.

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[1] As the school library in Taiwan is just in her infancy, the cooperation between the public library and the school usually bypasses the school library; therefore, this article use the terms "school" and "school library" interchangeably.

This study aims at investigating the cooperation between public libraries and elementary schools in Taiwan. This article is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces the *Project for Reading Promotion and Collection Improvement of Public Libraries in Taiwan*; one of the goals of the Project lies in building the links between public libraries and schools. Section 3 describes the research methodology. Section 4 explicates the findings. Section 5 gives the conclusion.

2. Project for Reading Promotion and Collection Improvement of Public Libraries in Taiwan

In the period of 2009 to 2012, the Ministry of Education (MOE) of Taiwan Government conducts the *Project for Reading Promotion and Collection Improvement of Public Libraries in Taiwan* (hereafter "the Project"). The Project is coordinated by National Taiwan Library (NTL). The Project encourages the public library to develop collections suitable for local need and to organize various activities and cooperation to foster reading. The Project is composed of several programs, including *BookStart*, *One City One Book*, collection improvement, and organizing reading-promotion activities. In addition, strengthening cooperation between the public library and the school library is an important task of the Project (NTL, n.d.).

Bookstart is a bookgifting programme initiated by Booktrust in 1992. As much research reveals the significance of reading with very young children, Bookstart encourages reading from an early age through offering gifts of free books to families with babies (Booktrust, n.d.). The Project adheres to the idea of Bookstart by inviting public libraries to present parents of babies within 0-3 ages with free bookstart packs. Each pack contains two child books, a reading guidance for parents, and a recommendation book list. Up to 2012, approximately 500 Taiwan public libraries have participated in the BookStart program, and more than 110,000 free bookstart packs were sent out. In addition, many public libraries designed children areas and hosted activities for parents and babies. In 2009 and 2010, 7574 activities with 544,114 attendees were organized by public libraries.

Many public libraries in Taiwan do not have enough budgets for acquiring materials; therefore, patrons complain about quality and quantity of library collection. In view of this, the Project invests about US$7.2 million dollars in four years to improve the improvement of library collection. Three quarters of the total funding are invested in improving the collections of public libraries, and one quarter are for organizing diverse reading-promotion activities, including One Book One Community (Wikipedia, 2012), book exhibitions, book discussion groups, lectures, and film appreciations. Each public library is requested to form a task force for collection development, the members of which may comprise librarians, teachers, and venerable citizens in the community. A preliminary statistics show that after two years of implementation of the Project, the whole collections of Taiwan public libraries increase 0.45 million volumes, the book per capita increases from 1.29 to 1.49 volumes. Furthermore, 7,970 reading-promotion activities with 3,801,352 attendees were organized, and in consequence, loan per capita jumps from 2.02 to 2.33.

In order to strengthening the cooperation between public libraries and schools, the Project encourages the establishment of linking between public libraries and schools. 271 schools and 48 public libraries received the subsidies from MOE. 1242 related activities have been conducted with a total of 384,568 attendees. The achievements for realizing the linking of the public library and the school are explored in this study and presented in Section 4.

3. Research Methodology

This study aims at investigating cooperation between the public library and the elementary-school library (or just the elementary school) in Taiwan. This study employed a qualitative approach. Fifteen public librarians and nine teachers of elementary schools were interviewed between February and November, 2011. Public libraries of all the interviewed librarians have experiences in cooperation with elementary schools in their communities, and some of them have participated in the Project and established the linking with schools. The interviewed teachers were selected from partners of the fifteen public librarians. Three research questions were designed to elicit interviewees' view on the cooperation between the public library and the school (library):

1. What are the current cooperative activities?

2. What are the major causes for successful or failed cooperation?

3. What are the benefits of the cooperation to public libraries, school libraries, teachers, and students?

Each interview lasted about 30-60 minutes and was audio recorded. All responses were transcribed first, and then coded and grouped to analyze the results.

4. Findings

This section is divided into five parts, namely cooperative activities between the public library and the school, success factors for cooperation, difficulties in cooperation, benefits of cooperation, and expectations for future cooperation.

4.1. Cooperative activities

As indicated in Table 1, eight major kinds of cooperative activities were carried out by the interviewees, among which, library card campaigns, reading programs, and schools visits to public libraries are the most popular activities.

Table 1 Cooperative Activities between the Public Library and the School Library

Cooperative Activities	Libraries
Library card campaigns	15
Reading programs	15
School visits to public libraries	13
Lectures and courses	11
Collection sharing	8
Public libraries visits to schools	8
Extensive reading	6
Other cooperative activities	5

In the following subsections, the researchers will describe the various activities in each category.

4.1.1. Library Card Campaigns

Public libraries in Taiwan usually offer specific registration and loan services for teachers and students. For example, some public libraries and school libraries use unified library cards, even integrating with student cards. Group registration is another service. Some schools request their local public libraries to make library cards for their first grade students. Several

public libraries offer students an opportunity to receive a library card during a class visit to them.

Responsible for increasing students' information literacy and reading habit, teachers have the need to borrow a certain amount of materials from the public library. In view of this, several interviewed public libraries offer special library cards for teachers/educators. Teachers can use library cards for teachers to borrow more materials with extended loan periods. Some teachers use this opportunity to create a reading corner in their classrooms. A flexible alternative does not make specific library cards for teachers. Once public library staff verifies that a patron is a teacher, he/she can have the privilege of longer loan period and increasing the maximum number of items checked out. Teachers of kindergartens and daycare centers can apply for the library cards for teachers/educators as well. In addition, library cards for teachers/educators can be considered as a manner to realize collection sharing mentioned in 4.1.5.

4.1.2. Reading Programs

The interviewed public libraries and schools have developed many kinds of reading programs. Some libraries encourage students to write their reflections on books. When a student writes a few reflections, he/she can get a small gift from the public library. Book-reading contests are organized by several public libraries. Public libraries tally the number of books borrowed by students, and the top borrowers will get prizes or certificates of award.

Schools in remote areas may request the public library to offer the book mobile (or mobile library) service. Schedule of book mobiles may be once per two or three weeks, and time of book mobiles staying in schools may be 30-60 minutes or 4-6 hours, dependent on the negotiation between the public library and the school. If the book mobile stays in the school for just 30-60 minutes, only book check-in / check-out is provided. Various activities may be conducted if the book mobile stays longer, for example, the story-telling or book-talk activity can be arranged in conjunction with book mobiles. Some interviewees even mentioned that outdoor movies and popcorn parties are held when the book mobile visits the school.

Integrating with World Book and Copyright Day, One City One Book, holiday reading programs, appointments with authors, and so on, the public library organizes thematic reading programs. For those thematic reading programs appropriate for students, the public library will prepare thematic book buckets (see Section 4.1.5) for classroom reading, or invite teachers to lead their students for partaking in those programs.

Additional reading programs include children's book discussion groups and quiz-answering.

4.1.3. School Visits to the Public Library

Thirteen out of the fifteen public libraries/schools mentioned that they arrange school visits to the public library. As pointed out by one public librarian, one elementary school in the neighborhood schedules once per week to give a reading class in the public library, because the public library has ampler books than the school.

Story-telling, book-talk, quiz, and games are usually arranged in school visits to the public library. In addition, it is a good opportunity for the public library to introduce the basic knowledge of using libraries as well.

4.1.4. Lectures and Courses

The public library may arrange children's author visits to the school for making speeches and communicating with students. The writing topics of the invited authors are usually

interesting to the children and related to children's life. Before the author visits, the public library will prepare his/her books for reading by children, so that students can have warm interaction with the author.

Associating with thematic reading programs mentioned previously, the public library may arrange speakers to deliver speeches in elementary schools.

In addition, some public libraries may organize talent and skill courses like English reading and writing, computer literacy, picture-book design, and handicrafts making for attracting the general public to visit the public library. If such courses suit students, the public library may promote the courses through school teachers.

4.1.5. Collection Sharing

Some public libraries offer the buckets of book service. Each bucket contains 30-50 books appropriate to designated graded levels. In conjunction with community activities like children's author lectures and one city one book, the buckets of books will contain related books. Book buckets may be delivered to schools by libraries, teachers, or other official departments of local governments.

For increasing the borrowing rate of library materials, some public libraries allow school libraries to select a moderate number of books and place these books in school libraries or classrooms in a standing manner. The school library or teacher has to take responsibility of keeping these books safely.

4.1.6. Extensive Reading

In winter and summer vacations, schools usually assign students to read a few books. The school informs the public library of the book lists in advance, and the latter will set up a specific in-library-use region to display these books. Furthermore, for homework in summer and winter vacations, the public library arranges a specific region for reference books which will be used in students' homework. In this manner, students can write their homework in the public library and when they encounter problems they can also ask librarians for help.

4.1.7. Public Library Visits to Schools

In order for teachers to effectively use resources of the public library in their teaching, some public libraries provide training for teachers on using curriculum materials and electronic resources. The public library may visit the school in the computer literacy class to introduce library services and online resources to students.

If a public library and a school have built a good relationship, the school may invite the public library to participate in school's large activities such as fairs, anniversary celebrations, and sports day. Parents, community members, and the general public may attend those activities. The public library can set up a booth to promote reading or introduce the her services. In this manner, numerous people can have idea about the public library services.

Many school libraries are not managed by professional librarians or teacher librarians; therefore, they may not have the knowledge and skills for managing a school library. Public library staff may visit schools to instruct knowledge on cataloging, circulation, space allocation, and library management.

4.1.8. Other Cooperative Activities

In addition to the above cooperative activities, numerous creative cooperative activities have been implemented. Elementary schools in Taiwan usually have little funding and less staff, but plenty of space and students available. In the interview, a few public libraries

mentioned that they invite performing arts groups to play in the community, but owing to the space constraints, they borrow the school's auditorium for the performance. In holidays like Halloween or Xmas Eve, public libraries, schools, community groups, and local stores may hang together to hold related activities. Writing and painting competitions are also co-organized often by the public library and the school.

4.2. Success Factors for Cooperation

Successful cooperation comes from many factors. Some feedbacks of the interviewees on success factors for cooperation are consistent with Cameron, Carruthers, Curbow, Dixon, Kenagy, & Langhorne (2006). For example, it is indispensable to seek the support from key individuals and decision makers such as library directors, school principals and local governors. Enough funding, capable and warmhearted staff, sincere cooperation, and plentiful library materials are necessary. From the viewpoint of the public library, clear and frequent communication with schools, suitable activities, enthusiastic teachers, and effective promotion are success factors as well. On the other hand, the school considers that active public librarians, support from teachers, and teachers' frequent visit to public libraries are keys to success.

Table 2 Success Factors for Cooperation

Benefits	Libraries
Capable and warmhearted staff	15
Strong support from key individuals and decision makers	15
Enough Funding	14
Sincere cooperation attitude	13
Appropriate activities	12
Plentiful library materials	5
Good relationship between two parties	4

4.3. Difficulties in Cooperation

Several difficulties in conducting the cooperative activities were pointed out. The top difficulty is that the Ministry of Education may not subsidize the cooperation in the long term. Insufficient and unstable manpower to implement the cooperative activities are the second difficulty. Public libraries care about the damage or loss of materials, the difficulty in finding responsible teachers to contact. Schools are concerned about unsuitable activities and the issue that the services provided by the public library cannot meet their requirement. Both parties worry that they cannot reach a consensus and that parents are not avid for bringing children to participate in reading activities.

4.4. Benefits of Cooperation

Table 3 shows the benefits of cooperation to the public library mentioned by the interviewees. Through the cooperation, the reputation of public libraries is improved, and the borrowing rate is increased. Furthermore, because public libraries plan activities with teachers, public libraries can organize activities that meet the requirements of schools and students. Other benefits include improving the participation of activities, extending the service scope of the public library, facilitating the familiarity between librarians and students, and enhancing the professional status of librarians.

Table 3 Benefits of Cooperation to the Public Library

Benefits	Libraries
Improve the reputation of the public library	9
Increase borrowing rate	7
Enable cooperation with teachers	7
Get familiar with patrons	4
Increase the participation of activities	3
Increase the professional status of librarians	2
Extend the service scope of the public library	2
Increase the number of patrons	2

Table 4 indicates the benefits of cooperation to the school (library), teachers, and students. All interviewees stressed that the cooperation facilitates the promotion of reading. A majority of interviewees agreed that through cooperation, teachers and students can understand the services provided by the public library in-depth. Additional benefits include helping students better understand the public library, improving the information literacy of students, supplementing the short opening hours of the school (library), and assisting teachers in teaching. Specifically, the benefits of the cooperation to teachers include:

1. Teachers can learn from library instruction courses that many materials supplementary to their teaching are available in the public library.

2. Through mobile libraries, the public library can provide for teachers and students with versatile and qualified books, and assist teachers in organizing reading activities.

3. Through participation in the activities co-organized with the public library, teachers can encourage students to visit the public library and attend activities hosted by the public library.

The benefits of the cooperation to students include:

1. Students cultivate their habit of reading after taking part in story-telling and other reading activities.

2. Students understand that the public library has valuable materials to access and is a good partner for their lifelong learning.

3. Through mobile libraries, they have the opportunity to understand the circulation process, and have more new books to borrow.

4. After attending courses on digital resources, they know how to use access free and valuable digital resources and databases.

5. Because students are more interested in the public library after attending reading activities, they will actively ask their parents to take them to the public library.

Table 4 Benefits of Cooperation to the School (Library), Teachers, and Students

Benefits	Libraries
Facilitate reading promotion	15
Understand the services provided by the public library in-depth	12
Supplement the school library	5
Enhance the information literacy of students	4
Enhance librarians' impression on teachers and students	4
Assist teachers in teaching	3
Get familiar with librarians	2
Facilitate the design of suitable activities	2

Some interviewees mentioned that the cooperation creates good relationship between the two parties, which is beneficial for their long-term cooperation. Once they have better understanding of each other, they will ask the other party's help if necessary. For example, when the public library would like to organize an activity for children, librarians will discuss with teachers because the latter know children better. Some teachers may even propose new service ideas to the public library.

4.5. Expectations for Future Cooperation

In Taiwan, the public library and the school library usually do not have adequate funding and staff, and their cooperation can lead to improved collection, better services, and better use of funds (Haycock, 2001). The cooperation between the two kinds of libraries in the past few years has laid a good foundation for their future cooperation. The interviewees highly appreciated the cooperation, and anticipated that the public library can have more full-time and professional librarians, and that the concept of teacher-librarians should be institutionalized and implemented widely in schools. Furthermore, the interviewees expressed their strong demands for long-term and stable support from the central and local governments; otherwise, the cooperation may be discontinued due to insufficient funding.

The researchers asked the interviewees about the necessity to create an experience-sharing Web site like the clearinghouse of school/public library cooperative activities maintained by the Association for Library Service Children (ALSC)(ALSC, n.d.). The responses were discordant. Some thought it is essential to communicate and share experience with other public libraries and schools. On the contrary, the others mentioned in such an Internet era, if they really need any information, they can just search it on the Internet.

A further question is about their willingness to contribute information to the Web site if it is created. About three quarters of the interviewees were willing to do so, but the others responded that under a heavy work load, they do not have time to contribute information.

Regarding the content in the Web site, most interviewees spoke of cooperation models, overall planning, and project management. Some even pointed out that the users of this Web site should include teachers, students, and parents who have experiences in attending the cooperative activities; in this manner, the public library and the school can receive constructive feedbacks from them.

5. Conclusion

Viewing that the missions of the public library and the school library with regard to students are complementary, it is believed that the cooperation between the two kinds of libraries can bring students, as well as teachers and libraries, many benefits. Because the school library in Taiwan is just in her infancy, this study attempts to explore the cooperation possibility between Taiwan's public libraries and schools. This study interviewed fifteen public librarians and nine teachers who have experiences in cooperation. Through the analysis of the interview, cooperative activities, key success factors for cooperation, difficulties in cooperation, benefits of cooperation, and expectations for future cooperation are discovered.

According to the research findings, the following suggestions are given. For the central government, because the public library and the school library are the most disadvantaged kinds of libraries in Taiwan, it is suggested that the central government should give them long-term support, such as funding and more full-time and professionals librarians; furthermore, the concept of teacher-librarians should be institutionalized and implemented widely in schools.

As public libraries and area schools are under the jurisdiction of the local government, comparing with the central government, the local government should take more responsibility to invest in the development of public libraries and school libraries. With respect to the public library, the public library should build good relationship to community groups, in addition to the school. Integrating the public library with community groups and the school can attract more resources, broadly promote library activities, and as a result, increase the attendances at activities. For those public libraries and school libraries which would like to cooperate in the future, it is suggested that the cooperation should start from a small scale; after the mutual understanding is firm, the cooperation can then be extended. Finally, although the development of the school library in Taiwan is far from mature, by leveraging her niche in the understanding of teachers and students, the school library will definitely play an essential role in teachers' and students' reading and life-long learning.

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