

International Collaboration in School Library Education Programs: Needs and Requirements

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Keywords: *education for school librarianship, online education, international cooperation, education in Japan*

Abstract

This paper addresses the need for and the requirements of international collaboration as a means of improving school library education in Japan. In 2008, in an official report by the Central Council on Education, the learning process was defined as “acquirement, application, and inquiry.” Since then, Japanese teachers have become especially interested in “inquiry,” a word that used to be uncommon in the country’s educational system. This major trend in Japanese education and in the development of information technologies has increased the expectation that students should have a variety of learning resources available to them with help from professional school library staff. At the same time, however, Japanese school librarianship has a significant problem with its training. Most school library education programs are offered at the undergraduate level with the goal of training students who will receive the national certificate for shisho-kyoyu—literally, librarian-teachers. Universities seem to lack incentives to improve their curricula because the certificate is regulated by the School Library Law, and school librarianship in Japan largely remains locally/nationally determined. To explore the issue, a small group of volunteers, including the authors of this paper, planned the International School Librarians’ Forum of East Asia 2018, which held three workshops in English in Japan. After each workshop, an online survey was conducted among approximately 20 participants to evaluate the demand for advanced training such as the workshops they attended. Finally, ideas of how to improve education for school librarianship worldwide by connecting programs such as the one in Japan with leading exemplary programs in the world are discussed, with reference to the survey results.

Introduction

In this paper, the authors discuss the need for international collaboration among universities to improve education for school librarianship in Japan. The paper consists of two parts: by way of background, an assessment of the present status of school education and education for school librarianship in Japan; and an analysis of a survey using questionnaires that were distributed after three international workshops, held

in 2018, to examine the need for a higher level of school library education in Japan. The authors argue that international support or collaboration for improved training in school librarianship is needed, especially in Japan, for reasons that will be discussed later in this paper.

The modern school system is fundamentally local: all systems for the education of citizens are defined by laws at the local, state, and national levels, and schooling is regulated by governments. Perhaps for this reason international collaboration over educational issues can be difficult even though many international conversations take place for the purpose of sharing information and exchanging ideas.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, however, as schools have found themselves in need of preparing students to be global citizens, teacher education programs in different nations have started to collaborate over a range of practical issues. The need for international collaboration between schools for LIS education has also received attention lately, and some schools have already initiated the idea. Early examples of international collaborations include the 100% online LIS school (iSchool) at San José State University (SJSU) (Hirsh et al., 2015). Its faculty members engaged in a wide range of activities relating to curriculum and research, both for their students and for the global community of information professionals. Chancellor (2018) found that out of the 60 LIS school websites examined, 22 LIS schools in the United States and North America offered some kind of “global study course.” Bird, Chu, and Oguz (2015) searched the websites of ALA-accredited programs for references to international or virtual internships and found three out of 59 (5%) specifically noted that virtual or international experiences were available or encouraged. In the same research, much stronger support for international internships in LIS programs was found outside of North America.

International practicums are encouraged in the Librarian Course at Rikkyo University, a program for which one of the authors of this article is the director. The first students of this course were sent to Hong Kong in 2016 for the official library practicum for about two weeks (10 days of training). The course consists of two programs for Japanese national certifications for library professionals: *shisho*, mainly for librarians working in public libraries (in accordance with the Library Law), and *shisho-kyoyu*, for librarian-teachers (in accordance with the School Library Law). Students in both programs can choose to do their practicum abroad. Last year the Librarian Course sent students to Taiwan, and this year it will send students to Germany and Australia. The numbers of students from our university is one or two at each practicum site, and the language of communication is English, which is not any of the students’ mother tongue. This gives students the opportunity to be immersed in a different culture as well as to learn and gain experience in the library’s regular operational work. Prior to each of the library practicums, the course exchanges an MOU with the main practicum site. This is not a collaboration between LIS programs, but rather international cooperation between an academic library, a school library or an archive, and the Librarian Course at Rikkyo University.

Changes in School Education in Japan

The characteristics of Japanese education have remained unchanged for a long time. The Japanese educational system is very centralized and greatly influenced by its system of entrance examinations. School education, including special education, follows the Course of Study set by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The Courses of Study have generally been revised every 10 years since they were first issued just after World War II and serve as national policy that all teachers must follow. These guidelines are not really theoretical or scientific, although the ministry brings together scholars in the field of pedagogy to make suggestions. MEXT has been striving to value educational models that go beyond rote learning, but it has been largely unsuccessful because of

university entrance examinations, which mainly test knowledge and recall of information. Admission to elite national universities and good private universities is still very competitive, and people believe that long-term commitment and immense efforts on the part of both parents and students are required for success. But since Japan has seen a decline in its population and we have fewer children today, the system is less grueling.

At the same time, MEXT and Japanese society—and Japanese universities along with them—are all gradually changing. In 2008, in an official report by the Central Council on Education, the learning process was characterized as “acquisition, application, and inquiry.” Since then, teachers from elementary school to high school have become familiar with the term “inquiry,” which was previously unknown in Japan. The new course of study for high schools set by MEXT, which will be introduced in 2022, identifies “inquiry” as the curricular focus. MEXT now identifies three major dispositions and competencies to cultivate in our students, signaling what may be a shift in national policy toward creative learning. These areas are as follows:

- How to be engaged in society and the world and how to live better (disposition toward learning)
- What students understand and what they are able to do (knowledge/skills)
- How to use the acquired knowledge and abilities (capacity for thinking/decision making/expression)

This trend in Japanese education and the development of information technologies has increased the expectation that a variety of learning resources should be made available to students with the help of professional school library staff.

School Librarianship in Japan

Japan has school libraries in every school thanks to the School Library Law, passed and enacted in 1953. But the background of the law is complicated. First, the importance of school libraries was an idea introduced by Americans during the occupation after World War II. The movement among Japanese teachers for enacting a School Library Law started during the occupation period and reached its peak in 1953, just after Japan recovered its independence. At that time, Japan was so poor that the law merely called for school libraries and *shisho-kyoyu* (librarian-teachers) in all schools. Some schools, especially small ones with fewer than 12 classes, continued to have no *shisho-kyoyu*. Eligibility for the national certificate for *shisho-kyoyu* requires at least one kind of teaching license, and the certificate program consists of at least 10 credits from a total of five courses, as shown in Table 1 below (Nakamura, 2012). Most *shisho-kyoyu* are in charge of their schools’ libraries and additionally teach subjects and act as homeroom monitors.

Table 1. Curriculum for *shisho-kyoyu* certification

Title in the School Library Law (can be changed by each university)	Smallest number of credits to be offered
School management and the school library	2
Organization of the school library media	2
Instruction and the school library	2
Reading for well-rounded individual	2

Utilization of information media	2
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To compensate for understaffing in school libraries, other people have started to work as full-time or part-time staff, or even as volunteers. They do almost all the work in the school libraries and call themselves *gakko-shisho* (literally, school librarians). Many of them are underpaid and are not treated as professional educational staff members, but *gakko-shisho* was enshrined in 2014 into School Library Law, where their function was described as focusing on improving the operation of school libraries or overseeing the use of school libraries by students and teachers. The model curriculum for training *gakko-shisho* foreseen by MEXT consists of 20 credits from a total of 10 courses, but it was never enacted.

The most significant problem with Japanese school librarianship probably has to do with this complicated system of library personnel and their training (Nakamura & Morita, 2018). Almost all the school library education programs are offered at the undergraduate level with the goal of giving students the national certificate for *shisho-kyoyu*, and this constraint has a detrimental effect on the program's quality. Thousands receive the certificate every year, but only a handful of certificate earners ever actually find jobs in school libraries. This means that universities seem to have no incentive to improve their curriculum, and school librarianship in Japan is likely to remain locally/nationally determined.

International School Librarians' Forum of East Asia 2018

To examine what is required to raise the level of education for school librarianship in Japan, a small group of volunteers, including the authors of this paper, planned the International School Librarians' Forum of East Asia 2018, which consisted of three workshops held in Japan and conducted in English (see Table 2). The themes of the workshops were chosen by the planning committee members based upon trends in school librarianship worldwide. Instructors appropriate for each theme were selected from the leading school library practitioners in East Asia. A webpage in English and Japanese was created to recruit up to about 20 attendees/cooperators for the survey as well as to share information about the research and workshops with the public (<https://sites.google.com/rikkyo.ac.jp/islf2018/>). The policies of the workshop and the research were described as follows.

1. The language of communication will be English. We welcome both Japanese and international participants.
2. No registration fee is required. The workshops are planned and run by volunteers and sponsored by a research grant from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. After each workshop all participants are asked to answer an online questionnaire related to the research on "Developing a curriculum for professional school librarians: Approaching a global standard."

Participants in the workshops were asked to sign up in advance and agree to the above policies.

One week before each workshop, prospective participants received a small "homework assignment" as a warm-up activity. In each workshop, the first part of the morning session consisted of introducing the instructor and her/his school library practices and career and sharing trends in practices in the areas where she/he has been working. In the afternoon, hands-on activities were planned. Workshop 1 was about writing a new programming plan for attendees' own school libraries, working in groups of about five people. Workshop 2 was about utilizing the K-12 reading practice software program "Accelerated Reader" for promoting extensive reading and improving English language abilities. Workshop 3 was about apps that can be used for educational practices, such as Kahoot!, Padlet, and Storyboard That.

Table 2. Overview of ISLF 2018

Date/Place	Theme	Instructor
Workshop 1 June 2, 2018 (Sat) 10:00-14:30/ Yokohama International School	“The library as a hub of the learning community”	Ms. Katy Jean Vance/ Librarian, Yokohama International School
Workshop 2 July 28, 2018 (Sat) 10:00-14:30/ Kwansei Gakuin Junior High School Library	“Strengthening students’ English skills through a reading program”	Ms. Annie Tam/ Head Librarian, The Independent Schools Foundation Academy
Workshop 3 September 22, 2018 (Sat) 10:00-14:30/ Ikeda Senior High School Attached to Osaka Kyoiku University Library	“Leading technologies in education”	Mr. Bingqing Zhao/ Teacher Librarian, Keystone Academy

Survey after the Forums

Conducting the survey

After each seminar, an online questionnaire was sent to the attendees using Google Forms to evaluate the demand for more advanced education that was comparable to the leading programs offered in English in schools such as those in North America. The survey was divided into three parts: Part I, “About you”; Part II, “About the workshop on [month, day]”; and Part III, “About future learning opportunities.” The questions in Part I and Part III are almost the same in the series of surveys, while some questions in Part II were changed by the instructor of each workshop to ask what the instructor wanted to know about attendees’ learning experiences.

Attendees were asked to answer within one week, but some failed to respond by the deadline, so e-mail reminders were sent out, and about three weeks later, the survey system was closed. The questionnaire was written in both English and Japanese. It was originally created by the authors of this paper, who are nonnative speakers of English, and translated from Japanese into English. As a result, the wording in the questionnaire may at times be somewhat awkward. Although each of the workshop instructors checked over and made changes and additions to the original questionnaire, some errors in English remained in the survey. However, only a few respondents appeared to be native speakers of English who could not read or write in Japanese, so if any miscommunication occurred, it was in all likelihood only in the case of those participants. Some registrations were received from outside of Japan, but none of these registrants wound up attending.

In the beginning, a message in English and Japanese informed participants, “If you feel more comfortable in Japanese, you may answer in Japanese.” The greater part of the answers was in Japanese, but some were in English, probably as a result of the expectation that the instructors would be reading them.

Survey results

Answers to some questions in Part III, “About future learning opportunities,” are examined below, along with the backgrounds of the respondents, that is, answers Part I, “About you.”

(1) Backgrounds of the respondents

Answer rates were not 100%, as shown in Table 3 below, even though answering the questionnaire was something all workshop attendees had agreed to. For Workshop I, the answer rate was about 95%; for Workshop II, it was about 81%; and for Workshop III, it was around 60%.

Table 3. The number of respondents and participants

	Answered the Questionnaire	Participants	Participated in Workshop 1	Participated in Workshop 2
Workshop 1	21	22	-	-
Workshop 2	13	16	7	-
Workshop 3	15	25	6	4
Total	49	63	-	-

The respondents’ job titles are shown below, but the answers are given in a mixture of Japanese and English, and at times Japanese titles rendered in English are hard to pin down precisely. Therefore, the answers were mingled into 4 categories (see Table 4). Some school library practitioners are teaching at universities as well, but they are categorized according to how they gave their titles in the questionnaire. The respondents’ ages are well distributed despite the fact that all the workshops were held on Saturdays, undoubtedly making it difficult for those with young children to attend.

Table 4. The number of respondents by job title categories

	Workshop 1	Workshop 2	Workshop 3	Total
Student (high school, undergraduate, graduate)	6	4	3	13
School library personnel (librarian, school librarian, librarian-teachers)	8	7	5	20
University Faculty (including adjunct)	4	2	0	6
Other (ICT specialist, public servant, etc.)	3	0	7	10
Total	21	13	15	49

Most attendees answered that they felt either “fairly comfortable” using English as the official language at the workshops or that using English was “OK (not a big issue).” English is the mother tongue of the

instructor of Workshop 1. The instructor of Workshop 2 grew up in Hong Kong but had extensive exposure to English while studying and working in Australia. The instructor of Workshop 3 grew up in China, but he studied in English in Hong Kong and has been working in international schools. One respondent wrote that it was easier to understand the second and third workshop instructors than the first workshop instructor, and another respondent found the speaking more challenging than the listening. When given the choice, respondents reported, the workshop participants mostly preferred to have the discussions in Japanese.

- (2) The answers from school library personnel about future learning opportunities
The answers to the following 4 questions in Part III (see Table 5) are examined in this paper.

Table 5. Answers to the questions examined in the paper

Questions	Answering Styles
Are you interested in learning together with other school librarians and students in the world IN ENGLISH to improve your knowledge and skills on school librarianship?	Choose one out of the following: - Yes, always. - Yes, but [only] occasionally. - No more.
Why did you select your answer above in Q?	Describe.
If you are positive about the future learning opportunities described in Q above, which ways do you like? Please select as many options as you think good.	Choose more than one: - Face to face, in one day (e.g., month/date, 2018) - Face to face, in a series (e.g., a university semester course) - Online, simultaneous, over one day - Online, asynchronous, over one day (=more than a few hours) - Another way (=if you have a different idea)
If you chose “Another way” in Q above, please tell us, what’s your idea?	Describe.

Out of all 49 answers to the first question, five suggested that holding the workshop in English was an issue for them and responded “Yes, [but] only occasionally.” These were the respondents who identified themselves as *gakko-shisho*, adjunct instructor, undergraduate student, other, or N/A. Among all the practicing school library personnel (20 respondents), only four chose “Yes, but [only] occasionally,” and all others answered “Yes, always.” The respondents’ attitudes toward future learning opportunities in English are overwhelmingly positive.

Among the descriptive answers to the first question, there were notable differences depending on the category of the respondent's job title. School library personnel (i.e., librarians, school librarians, and librarian-teachers) typically answered that the workshops were inspiring or a good opportunity for learning practices in other cultures or encountering new ideas. Another type of answer among this group was a statement such as "I found that the level of my knowledge and skills relating to school librarianship was far behind the international one" (in Japanese), or "Japanese librarianship is in danger of being isolated or left behind the trends in the information technology areas" (in Japanese). In other words, library personnel tended to compare the trends of school library practices in Japan with good or leading practices presented by the workshop instructors. Answers from college students, on the other hand, are almost all about how interesting it was for them to learn about school libraries in English. They show sheer curiosity and excitement about learning in English and learning about practices in other cultures.

Regarding the respondents' preferences for future learning opportunities, the results of the survey appear in Table 6 below. Twenty-seven respondents out of 49 chose the "Face to face" option(s) only, meaning that they either preferred workshops to take place "Face to face, [over] one day" or "Face to face, [in] a series," or both. About the half of them, 13 respondents, are from the "school library personnel" category: five are *gakko-shisho*, six are *shisho-kyoyu*, and two identified themselves as simply *shisho* (literally, "librarian"). Regarding online learning opportunities, simultaneous sessions were preferred over asynchronous ones. One respondent suggested having workshops that are "Face to face, but people are allowed to join online."

Table 6. Answers to the questions that are examined

Preferred Learning Methods	The Numbers (%)
Face to face, [over] one day	36 (42)
Face to face, [in] a series	21 (24)
Online, simultaneous, [over] one day	14 (16)
Online, asynchronous, [over] one day (=more than a few hours)	11 (13)
Another way (=if you have a new idea)	4 (5)
Total	86 (100)

Discussion: How can we improve education for school librarianship?

Most of the participants in the survey demonstrated a positive attitude toward further learning opportunities in English, and a certain number signaled their willingness to study in English with other school librarians and students to improve their knowledge and skills relating to school librarianship. However, these positive results may reflect the conditions of the workshops without indicating a general willingness among Japanese school library personnel to take advantage of such opportunities.

One condition for participating in the workshops was that they would be conducted in English. It may be that this condition was a deterrent for the majority of Japanese school library personnel, who might have hesitated to participate in a workshop that was not held in their mother tongue. The survey yielded no

clear results as to how positive Japanese school library personnel are about professional learning opportunities in English with other school librarians and students in the world.

Because the workshops were held as part of a research project, the participants were not required to pay a fee. This means that the main cost of participation was only transportation and the participants' own time. Future research should include questions on fees since the cost of providing these learning opportunities is high. Most of the participants of each workshop were from nearby areas, and informal communication with the people whom the authors contacted suggests that financial support for travel would be needed to attract participants from farther away. Travel expenses for these workshops were provided to high school students and college students only, but not to adults. The only exception was a *shisho-kyoyu* who was chaperoning high school students as well as participating in the workshop. The money and time required for travel to these workshops might prove a considerable challenge, even for adults.

The survey respondents preferred a face-to-face environment over e-learning opportunities. In answer to the questionnaire after the first workshop, one respondent expressed great frustration over using Google Forms. This implies that some school library staff might still have difficulty using computers, as pointed out in a study with students in Hong Kong about 15 years ago (Henri et al., 2003).

In this study, a series of online learning opportunities was not included as a specified option, but perhaps it should have been included. The perceptions and viability of launching LIS e-learning programs in developing countries have been explored already, for example, in research with the people of Vietnam National University (Hirsh et al., 2014). The authors have identified the following four steps to be taken in order to ensure success in offering e-learning: Invest in Technology Infrastructure; Implement Training Programs; Improve Stakeholder Perception; and Pilot E-Learning Programs. In the case of Japan, technology infrastructure may not be an issue now, but the three other steps just identified need to be taken care of. In addition to those issues, copyright and the availability of textbooks, books, and articles online present challenges to providing online courses in Japan, given Japanese copyright law governing the act of converting printed materials into digital format (Nakamura, 2016).

Needs and requirements for international collaboration

As reported in many studies, LIS education is changing rapidly worldwide. The change in Europe is described as follows: "As librarian training shifts from the requirements for running a physical library to the study of information as an academic subject, the graduates are becoming more like the graduates of other academic disciplines with an intellectual preparation that can and often does lead to a wide variety of jobs" (Seadle, Chu, Stöckel, & Crumpton, 2016). In Spain, there has been huge growth in the library and information profession over the last decade of the 20th century, and most of the first decade of the 21st century has seen the rapid growth of distance education in LIS at the undergraduate level (Cobarsí-Morales, López-Borrull, Ortoll, Sanz Martos, & Roig Telo, 2014). Cossham, Wellstead, and Welland (2014) have described the unique history of LIS in New Zealand at the undergraduate level and the current issues around the courses, including the difficulty of keeping the content of programs up-to-date and competitive with overseas programs. Similar changes are also taking place in Japanese LIS, but they have had little impact so far on the education for school librarianship in Japan.

International collaboration in the field of education for school librarianship is needed in the near future to explore possible changes in the profession. One important topic to explore has to do with the relationship between pedagogy and library science in the field of school librarianship. According to research conducted over 84 school librarian master's degree programs in the US, 19 units (22.6%) are named

Library and Information Science or Sciences (LIS), but the same number of units have names beginning with “Education” or “Educational” (Yi & Turner, 2014). Understanding which theoretical aspects of each kind of program influence US librarianship could have implications for changes in librarianship in other countries.

Another topic to be explored is the differences worldwide in levels of education for school librarianship and LIS despite the similar need throughout the world for professional assistance and instruction in information use and conducting searches. LIS education takes place at the undergraduate level or in nonprofessional programs in many parts of the world. This creates difficulties for real, practical collaboration with exemplary professional programs that take place at the graduate level, such as those in North America. In many programs such as those in Japan, the limited availability of good instructors is another potential barrier to providing extended learning opportunities comparable to programs such as those offered in ALA-accredited schools and maybe even in iSchools. Online education and tools might provide a key to finding ways to collaborate, but other options also show promise, such as the Service-Learning Study Abroad program at the University of North Texas for pre-service librarians (Schultz-Jones, 2018). Chancellor (2018) has also pointed out the need for developing study abroad opportunities for students in LIS education. Programs such as these are examples of new strategies and roles that instructors can potentially adopt in international education programs.

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