The Viewpoint of Library Directors on the Introduction of E-book Services in Japanese Public Libraries

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Abstract

In this paper, we aim to make clear what problems might occur when public libraries in Japan introduce e-books. We conducted semi-structured interviews with nine public library directors. These interviews revealed a wide range of opinions about e-book use in public libraries. Seven main factors emerged: a) necessity of e-book introduction, b) recognition of e-books, c) budget for e-books, d) management of e-books, e) difference between public library users and e-book users, f) accessibility of e-books, and g) digitalization of library resources. We also analyzed the differences in perspectives on e-books between two kinds of public library management styles.

Keywords: e-books, public libraries, interviews, library directors

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1   Introduction

Public libraries play a leading role in society as information service institutions. In this digital age, public libraries are required to provide access to digital content. In Japan, 2010 was called "the first year of electronic books" (hereafter "e-books") because of the sale in Japan of devices such as iPads and Kindles. In this paper, we focus on e-book services in public libraries.

In the United States of America (USA), 76% of public libraries have already introduced e-books [1]. In contrast, only 7.6% of public libraries in Japan have introduced e-books, based on a survey of 225 public libraries in municipalities with populations mainly over 100,000 [2]. This statistic shows that e-book services in the USA have advanced further than those in Japan. In this research, we will investigate the factors that affect this difference.

The introduction of e-books to public libraries has two aspects: the library side and the provider side. The provider side includes publishers, authors, and bookstores. Some provider side problems have gradually begun to be cleared up. These include author copyright [3], agreements on digitalization between authors and publishers [4], the unique distribution of publications in Japan [5], and lack of digital content [5].

As preliminary work, we focused on the public library side and identified the factors involved in introducing e-book services.

2   Methodology

We conducted interviews with nine public library directors. Their demographic information is shown in Table 1. Four of these libraries are managed by the local government (hereafter "LGM library"), while the other five have adopted the "Designated Administrator System" (hereafter "DAS library"). In a DAS library, the local government outsources library management to the private sector, including nonprofit organizations or stock companies. The local government can expect the enhancement of library services and

the cutting of government costs, making good use of the private sector's effective management style, originality, and ingenuity [6]. In 2012, this system was adopted in 10.5% of Japan's public libraries (332 of 3154) [7]. Most directors of DAS libraries were not originally local government employees or public librarians. In this research, four of the nine directors came from different fields, as shown in Table 1.

This research is a qualitative and exploratory study. We conducted semi-structured interviews with the nine directors from July to August 2013; the average length of each interview was approximately one hour. The interviews were recorded and important points were loosely transcribed. We addressed nine topics.

In this paper, we particularly analyze their opinions about e-books, which were obtained from the following two questions.

- Do you think that it is necessary to introduce e-books to the public library?
- What were the merits and demerits of e-book use when your library introduced them?

Director	Management Style	Career
A	Managed by local government	Local government employee with library experience
B	Managed by local government	Local government employee with library experience
C	Managed by local government	Local government employee without library experience
D	Managed by local government	Local government employee without library experience
E	Designed Administrator System	Part-time library staff
F	Designed Administrator System	Company employee without relevance to library
G	Designed Administrator System	Bookstore staff
H	Designed Administrator System	School teacher
I	Designed Administrator System	University librarian

Table 1: Demographic information on nine public library directors

3   Results

We only focus on problems with the library side in this paper. These interviews revealed a wide range of opinions about e-book use in public libraries, from which seven main factors emerged.

3.1   Necessity of e-book introduction

Eight of the nine directors (88.9%), excluding Director H, recognized that it will be necessary to introduce e-books in the future. Director H's library has already introduced e-books.

3.2   Recognition of e-books

E-books are gradually being recognized. However, Directors D, E, G, and H believed that e-books have not gained widespread public acceptance. For example, Director E conducted a trial of e-books. The results indicated that library users did not fully understand the merits of e-books or how to use them. Director H introduced e-books three years ago. However, users' e-books usage has not increased as significantly as the library estimated. They believe that this was affected by the lack of content and library users' lack of receptivity for e-books.

3.3   Budget for e-books

The budget system differs between LGM and DAS libraries. However, both types of libraries' directors believe that there is little possibility that they will be given enough of a budget for e-books.

An LGM library's budget is given to each expense item, such as labor costs, operating costs, or resource costs, by the local government. However, directors of LGM libraries recognize that it is difficult to

acquire an additional budget for e-books. Director D mentioned that they lacked the foundation to persuade the local government to acquire a budget for e-books.

A DAS library's budget is given in full to library management and then the director allocates a portion of the budget to each expense item. However, in general, most DAS libraries are given a minimum budget because the local government tries to decrease their budget as much as possible.

3.4   Management of e-books

Directors E and H had different perspectives about the management of e-books. Director E mentioned that paper resources are worn and damaged by graffiti and delinquency, and thought that these problems could be solved-and resources protected-if e-books were introduced. On the other hand, Director H was concerned that it may be difficult to maintain e-book devices because these devices are usually more expensive and delicate than other resources. Users are limited to the use of these devices only inside the library. We found that there were both the merit and demerits in terms of e-book management.

3.5   Difference between public library users and e-book users

Director C mentioned that there was a difference between public library users and e-book users. Public library users are mainly parents and children, seniors, and retired people. E-book users are mainly young people in their teens and twenties. Director C guessed that there would only be a minor effect, even if e-books were introduced immediately, but also guessed that the public library may be able to attract young people as potential users by introducing e-books.

3.6   Accessibility of e-books

Director A mentioned that e-books are more difficult to browse than paper books. Thus, as the use of e-books increases, it will be difficult for librarians to provide proper reading guides or reader advisory services. Director B mentioned that there is no guarantee that people will be able to access e-books permanently when the library cancels a subscription, and that companies that provide e-books will go bankrupt because e-books will not become public libraries' property.

3.7   Digitalization of library resources

Two directors were more interested in the digitalization of their own libraries' resources than commercial e-books. Director C stated that it is necessary to digitize the library's local collections, which contain rare antique documents. Director B mentioned that the digitalization of their own libraries' resources had higher priority than the introduction of commercial e-books. Director B argued for the importance of the digitalization of local administrative documents. Director B also mentioned that the local administrative documents are held in paper form in public libraries and that digitalized documents are made and held by each local government department. However, Director B pointed out that only the people who are familiar with the given government organization or institution are able to access the digitalized documents easily. It is important for public libraries to hold these documents in order to ensure equal access to documents for all people, regardless of whether they are familiar with the local government or not.

4   Discussion

The interviews revealed that all nine public library directors recognized the necessity of the introduction of e-books to the public library system. In addition, we found that perspectives differed between directors of LGM libraries and DAS libraries.

Directors of DAS libraries were more likely to intend to actively introduce e-books than directors of LGM libraries were, despite the fact that e-book use in public libraries is not common yet. They are expected to provide attractive and impressive services. They must achieve satisfactory results in order to renew their next contract. On the other hand, we recognized that directors of LGM libraries were more

interested in the digitalization of their own collections, especially local administrative documents, local materials, and local collections. They are members of the local government and therefore aim to create more community-based libraries.

Public libraries ought to introduce e-books in the near future. However, many of the directors we interviewed pointed out that there are also many problems outside of the library regarding e-books. Public libraries are required to work with other public libraries, publishing companies, national governments, and the Japanese national library (National Diet Library) in order to solve these problems.

The results of this study reveal these issues from the viewpoint of public library directors. We plan to solve these problems by referring to the good examples of e-book introduction in the USA.

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