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A Case Study on a Library Classification's Effect on Library Student Workers' Perception on Library Work



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ABSTRACT

While there are studies and resources about training and retaining student workers in an academic library, there is little research on whether the library's collection classification can have an effect on library student workers' perception on their work and job fulfillment. While employed at the West Coast Baptist College (WCBC) Library, library student workers developed opinions on library work in general as well as their perception on both the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and the Library of Congress Classification (LCC) while the library converted from the former to the latter. The case study found that seventy-five percent of the participating library student workers preferred LCC over DDC which minimally affected their enjoyment of working in the WCBC Library.

Introduction

While employed at the West Coast Baptist College (WCBC) Library, the library student workers participate in a work-study program which enables qualified students to work on campus and pay their school bills. Most WCBC work-study students average ten hours a week, giving them the freedom to find other employment off-campus if desired. Some students may work up to twenty hours a week under special circumstances (such as non-US citizens, etc.) while some students may work five or seven hours a week, depending on the circumstances on which they joined the work-study program. Most of the library student workers average ten hours per week.

Library student workers are primarily responsible for operating the library by helping patrons locate and check out books, shelving returned items, organizing items, and cleaning as needed. Some student workers were given special projects to oversee, such as developing library displays, creating graphics, creating an acquisitions list based on patrons' requests, mending books as needed, or in the student supervisor's case, managing workers' schedules to keep the library open. Each library student worker undergoes a hybrid training in which they complete a short library training

course specifically designed for library student workers in Canvas and they are given an opportunity to apply what they learn with hands-on training by a current, more experienced library student worker. This training course is designed specifically for new library student workers, but also contains valuable information to be used as a reference for experienced library student workers, such as “how to’s”, policy examples, etc..

While the WCBC Library was undergoing a classification conversion from Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) to Library of Congress Classification (LCC) during 2017-2020, library student workers were needed to help facilitate the conversion process as well as assist in library operations to keep the library open and available for student patrons during the school year. Student workers would help create and apply new labels for newly classified books, and then reshelve the books into their new location on a regular basis until the project was complete. This unique experience for the library student workers during the use of two classifications gave them special insight into library operations in general and close-up experience with both library classifications which enabled unique perceptions for each worker. A case study was designed to determine what the WCBC Library student workers perceived of library work and whether the classification affected their day-to-day tasks in a positive or negative light.

Literature Review

Many academic libraries utilize student workers as part of their library staffing solutions. Some libraries depend on student workers to keep the library running smoothly, not only during normal working hours, but especially when the full-time faculty and staff are not working in the evenings or weekends (Martin, 2008). Student staff, like permanent staff, take pride in their work and they want to feel that they are contributing to the success of the organization (Clark 1995). Working in the library as a student has the potential to do more than pay bills because as they work, they inevitably learn skills that could help them in their studies (McCoy, 2011).

Student workers also typically cost less than a qualified librarian with a master's degree. Some libraries prefer to use full-time staff members instead of student workers as students are costly in terms of time and training (and the fiscal resources involved is so doing) – and most often the output provided by student workers cannot justify the expense (Gerlich, 2002). Some student workers may have a low retention rate, they are often unreliable (for various reasons), they have a disinterest in library work, along with a tendency to socialize with classmates while on the clock. These can generate higher overhead costs per hour in hiring, training, and supervision. Gerlich (2002) admits that while there are some exceptional student workers, that libraries devote professional energies more wisely, emphasizing the value of professional staff

over student workers. Student library staff are not an easy, reliable pool for cheap labor but are rather individuals who need to be exhorted, encouraged, and built into (McGinnis & Michael, 2014). Training and personal investment into student workers can help curb the issues. Turnover happens every semester as students graduate or make academic schedule adjustments, or life changes. However, investment in student workers (and the result of rapid turnover) provides an opportunity for newer students to glean wisdom from experienced students, while allowing the library administrators to gain new ideas from a fresh perspective.

Epstein (2010) provides an example of library student workers at Millikin University and how they used Blackboard for training the circulation staff. Through Blackboard, student workers at the Millikin University library are able to view tutorials that cover everything from the Library Code of Ethics to providing good customer service. Blackboard also allows for quizzes to be taken and posted, making it easy to see which areas need improvement. Blackboard is a promising tool for student employee training (Manley and Holley, 2014). Other Learning Management Systems (such as Canvas) can also be used. Handbooks or manuals can also be created to help facilitate training in library policies, procedures, and expectations as well as give information on employment procedures and evaluations, awards programs, and many other issues for student employees (Martin, 2008).

Retaining good student workers means ensuring that student workers feel cared for. Caring for students recognizes that they are not necessarily coming to the library as fully mature adults (McGinnis & Michael, 2014). Investing in student workers can help create working relationships which can empower them to help patrons more efficiently (Stevenson & Vanier, 2018). Training and developing refine and hone the worker's potential and skill which can then be assessed to find new areas of improvement (McGinnis & Michael, 2014).

Benefits of trained student workers

Trained student workers are vital to ensuring that an academic library runs smoothly. To ensure the best training, the library administration must enact best practices. Best practices can include training assessments, clear policies, in-person training sessions, and online training. These can help student worker retention, enabling them to be trained in specific roles and tasks. It can also minimize the time spent in training while also empowering student workers to provide excellent service to library patrons (McKenna, 2020).

One of the benefits that student library workers learn in addition to how to complete their library tasks and assignments is time management and professionalism (Benjamin and McDevitt, 2018). Completing their tasks in a timely manner can not only help the library to accomplish its goals of helping its patrons, but it also

gives experience to the student worker for future situations. Working in the library also brings awareness of new and underutilized resources for their own educational assignments and increases the potential for sharing these resources with their classmates.

Other personal benefits for student workers include convenience, development of relationships, and if permitted, opportunities to complete homework assignments. Flexible schedules are also a benefit the work for students working in the library. The only downside found in Benjamin and McDevitt's (2018) study was that student workers preferred to not spend their free time studying in the library as they associated the location with work.

Student library workers can help library administrators when library staff delegate tasks to student workers. This delegation allows library staff to complete more difficult tasks, such as resolving cataloging issues which require specialized training. For safety reasons, student workers should not be asked to do anything dangerous to their health or well-being. There is always something every worker at every level of ability can do, and accomplish well (Everhart, 1994).

Workers' tasks

Library student workers get a wide variety of tasks that may be assigned as needed. With library administration's limited physical availability, student workers can help fill the gap in library availability by keeping the library open beyond typical office hours. However, a library can be dysfunctional if the student workers in the evenings are not on the same page as the library administration during the day. Student workers can be trained to complete specific tasks by assigning them a specific role. This assigning of roles saves time because not every student worker needs to be trained on all tasks, which allows for individuals to specialize in an area, which increases accountability (Evanson, 2015). Unique roles also allow student workers to "own" their areas of responsibility which can affect their performance in a positive way (Evanson, 2015). This division of roles can be tailored to individual strengths (and possibly align with coursework) which can showcase the student's talent. A good example would be assigning an artistic student to create library book displays and allowing a student with exceptional detailed attention to shelf-read books (Sterling, 2015).

Student supervisors can help facilitate training by working with checklists during one-on-one training sessions (Stevenson & Vanier, 2018). Supervisors of student workers need to make their expectations clear and provide direct supervision as needed to prevent any testing of boundaries due to minimal job experience (Slagell & Langendorfer, 2003). Each student worker must realize that his or her role is crucial and is not overlooked (Hasty, 2000). Student workers who cannot answer

questions adequately or perform tasks well do not feel equipped and subsequently will not see themselves as valued contributors to the library (McGinnis & Michael, 2014). Student supervisors can spot these tendencies and help workers to grow in that area.

Students can take on additional library tasks that relate to their major which can help build their resume and later gain future employment (McKenna, 2020). A specific example would be allowing a student worker majoring in music the chance to maintain the music collection, with the intention of making it easier for patrons to access.

Some student workers may own responsibility for most tasks in the library. At Okayama University, library student workers fulfill many roles such as peer tutors, manning the front desk, and providing library support with catalog searches and locating items as needed (Fujishima, 2015).

Library student workers can also assist in a library's classification conversion project. Carnegie Mellon University used library student workers to help facilitate their conversion from DDC to LCC (Bright, 2010). Their reasoning for including library student workers in a large project is because students would be familiar with the impacted libraries and appreciate the importance of the project. With the help of library student workers, the WCBC Library was able to convert from DDC to LCC within three years (Sultanik, 2022). My work suggests that student workers are more than capable of helping with large projects on this scale.

Limitations of Current Literature

While there are many articles on library student worker training and retention, there is minimal information on whether the library classification system can affect student perception of their work. Lund and Agbaji (2018) discovered in their study that academic library employees, in general, prefer LCC over DDC by a significant margin. There is little research in determining if the library classification has a part in affecting workers' enjoyment of working in the library.

Case Study Data Collection

A survey was designed with questions designed to collect quantitative data and qualitative data regarding student library worker perspectives on which classification they preferred using while employed at the WCBC Library. Lund and Agbaji (2018) discovered in their study that academic library employees, in general, prefer LCC over DDC by a significant margin. This case study will verify or disprove that to be true at the WCBC Library, and if the classification affected student perception of their work.

Research Questions

- Did the library classification system affect the library student workers' enjoyment of working in the library?
- How did the student workers feel about using Dewey Decimal Classification?
- How did the student workers feel about using the Library of Congress Classification?

Methodology

Participants

A total of thirty-four student library workers who helped with the classification conversion project in 2017-2020 were invited to participate, regardless of their current employment status. Twenty-four elected to participate in the study. These student library workers consisted of male and female college-aged students who were active WCBC students at the time of their employment during 2017-2020.

Research Design

A survey was crafted using Google Forms to collect qualitative and quantitative data for statistical analysis. Due to the small sample size, future studies on a larger scale are recommended.

Figure 1: Research Questions and corresponding data type

Research Questions	Quantitative Data	Qualitative Data
Did the library classification system affect the library student workers' enjoyment of working in the library?	Multiple Choice Question, Likert scale	Interview Question via survey
How did the library student workers feel about using Dewey Decimal Classification?	Multiple Choice Question, Likert scale	Interview Question via survey
How did the library student workers feel about using the Library of Congress Classification?	Multiple Choice Question, Likert scale	Interview Question via survey

Data Analysis

The data in this study was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings were analyzed to determine if library student workers found it easier to use a specific classification and whether it affected their enjoyment working in the library. Likert

scales were used to collect quantifiable data and open-ended questions were included to collect qualitative data in lieu of in-person interviews.

A deductive coding process was used to analyze the qualitative “interview” responses. Participants’ responses to the interview questions were examined for positive, neutral, or negative comments regarding student worker perception of each library classification. This coding was done after all the data was collected.

Validity of Research Instruments

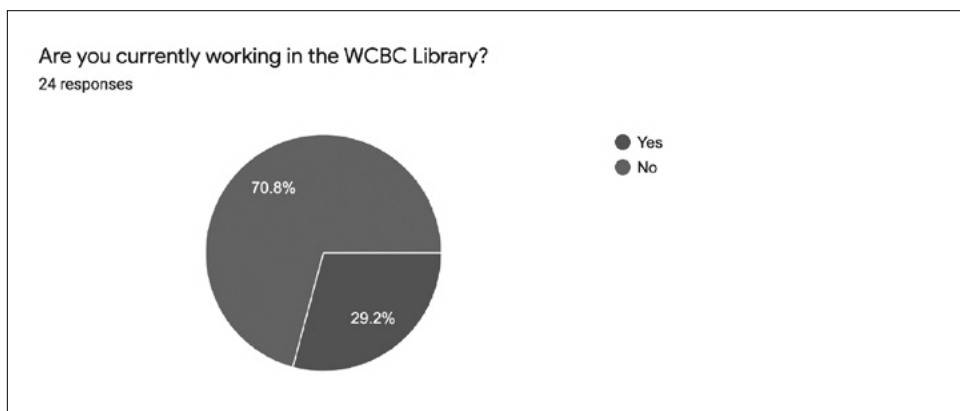
This study used several measures to ensure validity. First, consistency in instrumentation enabled validity. Keeping the survey questions consistent for each participant ensured that the information obtained was gathered by means of the same collection method for each individual student (Parsons and Brown, 2002). Also, this study used a mixed-method data collection design that included both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection, permitting a triangulation that gives additional credibility to this study (Mills, 2018). This method of triangulation was used to cross-check the information as seen in the various questions’ data collection instruments and validate the data.

Limitations

Due to the small sample size, future studies using larger sample sizes would be recommended.

Results

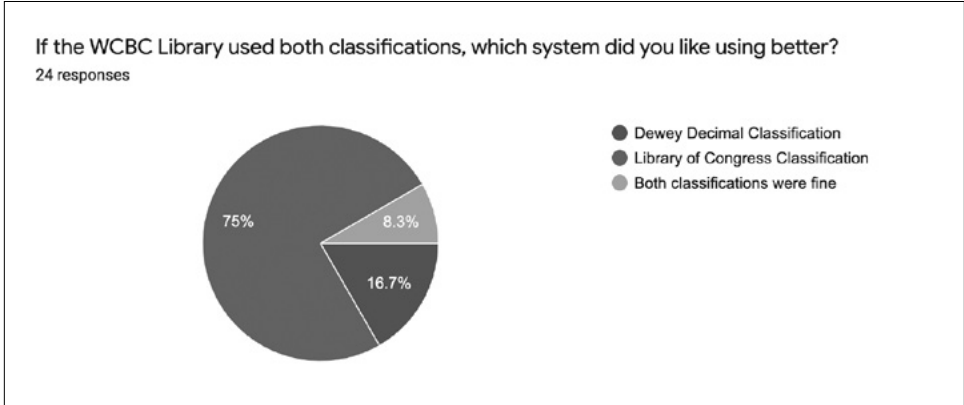
Figure 1: Participants’ employment status



Of the participating student library workers, over seventy percent were no longer employed at the WCBC Library for various reasons, including not being a currently employed student in the college’s work-study program, employed at another

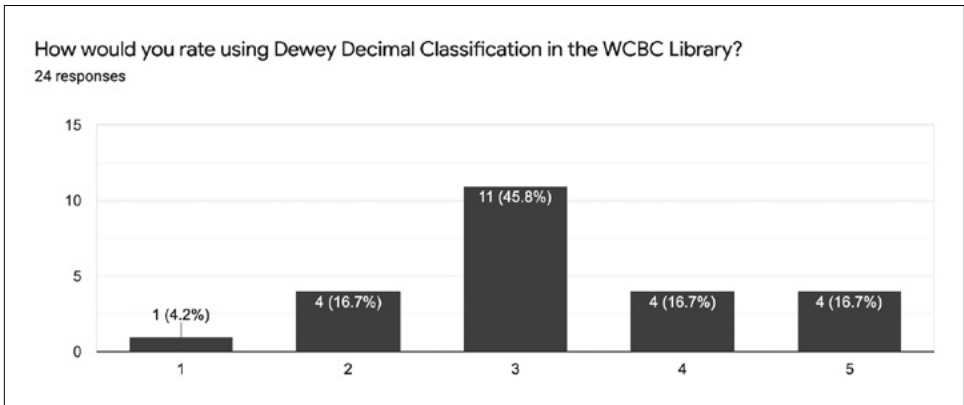
establishment, or had already graduated and had established their post-college careers. Nearly thirty percent were actively employed at the WCBC Library when anonymously completing the survey.

Figure 2: Classification Preference



When asked which classification system the student library workers liked used better, 75% of participants responded with preferring LCC, 16.7% reported preferring DDC and 8.3% stated both classifications were fine and had no strong preference. Some reasons for the overwhelming LCC support include ease of use (including locating books faster, easier navigation, and intuitive organization), and how the organization made more sense, provided clarity, and had room to grow for an expanding academic library. One strong comment from a participant was that (s) he was “always disappointed when I looked up a book and saw it was in the Dewey Decimal System rather than the Library of Congress system.”

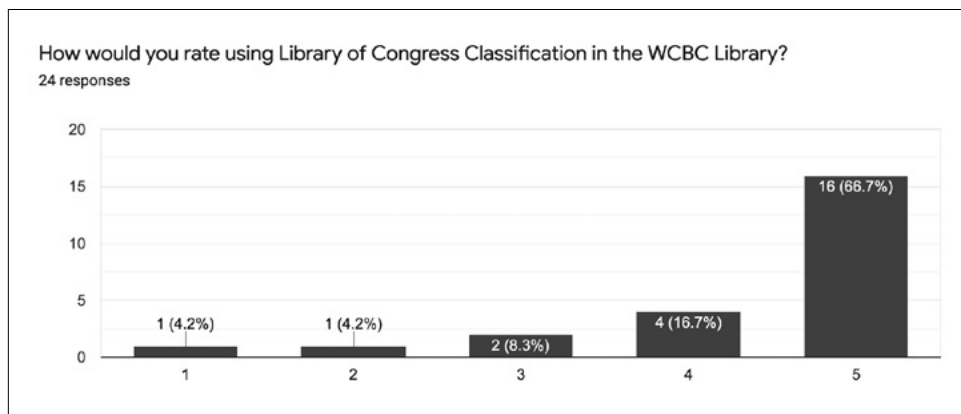
Figure 3: DDC Perception



Nearly half of the participants rated DDC a three out of five, with five being positive and one being a negative perception. One of the participants' DDC positive comments included "The Dewey Decimal system is easier to use as well as give to patrons. The letter-number combination of the Library of Congress classification seems tedious."

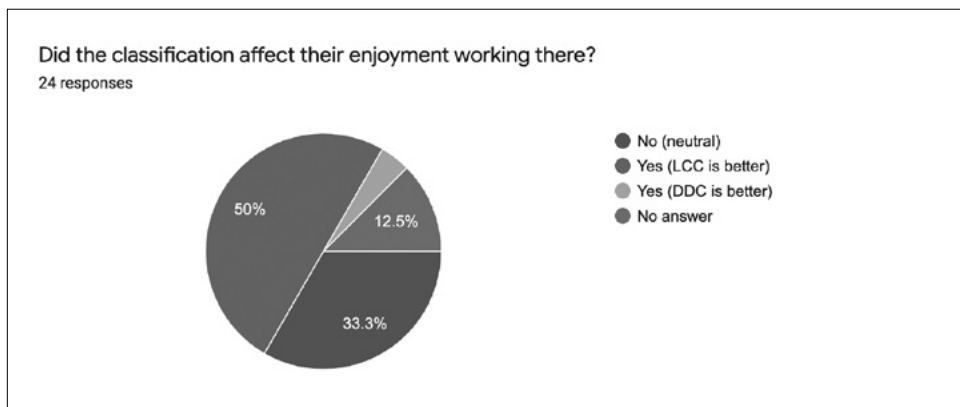
When asked which classification was preferred, over sixteen percent of the surveyed library workers preferred DDC (see Figure 1). Their reasons included ease of use, familiarity with the DDC, and it had less information on the library spine label than LCC. One participant commented that "one [of] the main reasons the [DDC] worked better was because there weren't as many letters and numbers as the Library of Congress. There were so many letters and numbers trying to find a book [that it] could get confusing."

Figure 4: LCC Perception



In contrast, 83.4% of the twenty-four participants rated LCC with a positive perception. One participant gave a practical example of their transition from DDC to LCC. "I actually began work prejudiced against the Library of Congress system. I had several years of experience utilizing the [DDC], so I initially preferred it and struggled to adapt to a new system. But after only a few weeks I began to pick up on the Library of Congress system and found it exceptionally intuitive."

There were a few negative thoughts about LCC. Another participant added that the "one frustration I have with [LCC] is that when there are several books with a very similar number with a different decimal number it gets a bit confusing." However, 75% of participants indicated that they preferred using LCC over DDC (see Figure 1).

Figure 5: Classification Affect

When asked if the classification affected their job enjoyment, or day-to-day tasks, fifty percent of the twenty-four respondents indicated that using LCC improved their enjoyment of working in the WCBC Library. Eight participants did not indicate a difference, three did not answer, and one enjoyed using DDC above LCC during their employment. Over forty-five percent of participants replied that the classification did not affect their work enjoyment.

Implications

As more books were converted into the new classification system, it became easier to locate books in LCC as the ratio of LCC to DDC grew more drastic. In some cases, certain books could get more visibility in LCC than they did in DDC. One participant noted “I always would keep an eye out for the books I relabeled while I was working and I found that many books would be checked out more or even for the first time after being relabeled. I enjoyed seeing the books being put to good use and knowing I had a hand in helping further other people’s knowledge and education.”

Depending on the collection, some books’ call numbers may need to be adjusted to increase their visibility to searching patrons. One participant commented that using the DDC was challenging in larger sections of the WCBC Library, such as multiple DDC Bible commentaries which had the same call number of 220 COM, making it challenging to find certain titles quickly when there are dozens of commentaries using the same call number. The participant appreciated how the specialized LCC arrangement would help save time locating books. However, DDC may be more intuitive for some patrons. A practical example is the introductory missions’ class that requires a paper using a missionary biography. Students tended to only visit the BV 3000s where the majority of the missionary biographies were cataloged instead of exploring other faculty approved options such as David Livingstone in the history

(D) section or George Müller in the social studies (H) section. A copy of these individuals' biographies in the missions' subsection had better visibility than their counterparts in the non-religion sections for those searching for that specific topic.

If the library is open to patrons during the conversion process, a split collection between DDC and LCC can cause frustration to library users and workers. (Shorten et al, 2005). One participant commented that "It was very difficult to have your collection cut in half with classification systems. When helping students, you could end up taking them to at least two different locations for the items they needed. In essence, it created more work."

There can be difficulties that come up as library workers learn the new organizational structure. One participant commented that (s)he struggled to grasp the LCC system at first, but eventually began to understand and thrive using both systems during the conversion process. It took time to learn LCC which could affect speed of service for patrons.

Conclusion

WCBC Library student workers enjoyed their work experience and the case study findings showed that the classification system did somewhat affect enjoyment with seventy-five percent of participants preferring using LCC over DDC, and fifty percent saw that classification system positively affect their work. However, forty-five percent saw no effect of either classification system on their work enjoyment. The main areas of frustration proved to be working with two separate organizations and difficulties in learning both organizational systems. However, most participants indicated that they enjoyed their time of employment, and gave ideas for improving future training sessions to help future student workers. †

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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***APPENDIX A (Survey Questions)**

When did you begin work in the WCBC Library?

Between 2015 (or earlier) - 2017

Between 2017 - 2020

Are you currently working in the WCBC Library?

Yes

No

Do you remember how the library was organized when you were a student worker?

The library used ***only*** Dewey Decimal (organized by numbers)

The library had ***both*** Dewey Decimal (organized by numbers) and Library of Congress (organized by letters)

Was it easy to find books in the Dewey Decimal section? (organized by numbers, such as 220 SUL)

Yes

No

I could find what a patron needed, but I remember it being difficult

Was it easy to find books in the Library of Congress section? (organized by letters, such as BV 4501.2 .S85)

Yes

No

I could find what a patron needed, but I remember it being difficult

How would you rate using Dewey Decimal Classification in the WCBC Library?

Likert scale 1-5

How would you rate using the Library of Congress Classification in the WCBC Library?

Likert scale 1-5

If the WCBC Library used both classifications, which system did you like using better?

Dewey Decimal Classification

Library of Congress Classification

Both classifications were fine

In regards to the previous question, why do you like that classification better?

Is there a reason that you're willing to share?

Long answer text

While employed at the library, did using any of these classifications affect how you enjoy(ed) working in the library?

Long answer text

Did using a specific classification cause frustration? If so, which one? How come?

Long answer text

Any comments?

Long answer text