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Library training at the University of Lodz Library in the eyes of students: discussion of the results of the evaluation survey

Abstract: The article describes the basic methodological issues of the evaluation practices in public institutions. Supported with the results of the library training evaluation survey, the students' attitude to the course and their skills assessment of the library service knowledge was characterized. In conclusion, the demands for further students' opinion surveys and continuous adjustments of the training to the needs of the academic youths have been made.

Keywords: library training, e-learning, evaluation, survey research, Library University of Lodz

Introduction

In the 21st century, academic libraries faced a huge challenge which is competing with the global internet network. Especially in case of the largest group of users (students), it is crucial to adapt the services so that not only the quality but also the speed and availability of information fully satisfy the needs of the discussed group. As Anthony Giddens rightly noted: "The modern

world is 'runaway world': not only is the *pace* of social change much faster than in any prior system, so also is its *scope*, and the *profoundness* with which it affects pre-existing social practices and modes of behaviour" (2001, p. 23), which results in a constant need to check whether the solutions proposed by the institution are still valid.

In order to provide students with a fast access to knowledge and at the same time an opportunity to obtain credit[1] in this field in the most convenient way for them, libraries are increasingly putting aside the traditional form of training for e-learning (Jerzyk-Wojtecka, 2017, pp. 114–115). With many advantages of this form of education, such as permanent access or individualization of the process of knowledge acquisition, it has a disadvantage – it does not provide a direct emotional interaction between the lecturer and the student (Jerzyk-Wojtecka, 2017, pp. 111–113). As a result, the librarian is not able to check if the prepared curriculum meets all the expectations and needs of the learners. Therefore, it becomes necessary to run additional tools which can provide such information. One of them may be the evaluation survey thanks to which students have a chance to assess the course and their skills acquired through it. It is also a form of feedback for people who prepare the course.

Moreover, libraries must prepare the training in such a way that it becomes both a form of promoting the institution and an incentive to benefit from it. This is an extremely difficult task and, despite the efforts and commitment, it is not always successful.

Benefits of evaluation

According to the online version of the Polish Language Dictionary PWN [Słownik Języka Polskiego PWN], evaluation is an "estimation of the value of something" ["określenie wartości czegoś"] (*Słownik Języka Polskiego*); a broader definition is given by Peter H. Rossi, Mark W. Lipsey and Howard E. Freeman: "the role of evaluation is to provide answers to questions about a program that will be useful and will actually be used" (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 2004, p. 20). Currently the term is used as the name of a certain type of research, often used in promotion and marketing, which is supposed to improve the efficiency and quality of activities of a certain organization. However, when transferring commercial tools to public institutions, it is important to pay attention to the fact that the logic of their functioning and the logic of free market are different, which is why the application of strict competitive and economic rules is not quite effective in their case. A free market approach

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[1] It is obligatory to pass the training at the following faculties of the University of Lodz: Biology and Environmental Protection, Chemistry, Economics and Sociology, Philology, Philosophy and History, Physics and Applied Informatics, International and Political Studies.

to public benefit institutions causes frequent misunderstandings with supervisory authorities and errors in assessing their activities (Zalewski, 2009, p. 23).

During the preparations for a specific project, there is a risk that people working on it will be overcome by their work routine or a sense of omniscience. This situation in particular concerns public institutions, where there is no financial verification of services. Despite this, without taking into account the needs of the recipient of the service and without changes taking place in the external world, reaching the right number of users can be extremely difficult and may reduce the value of the image of the institution. Evaluation, which serves in "the search for new organisational forms for the public administration for a more effective and efficient task execution" (Zalewski, 2009, p. [13]) can help with such a situation. Peter Hernon, Joseph R. Matthews and Robert E. Dugan in their book *Getting Started with Evaluation* (Hernon, Dugan, & Matthews, 2014) emphasize the importance of looking at this process from the perspective of the user. As an auxiliary tool they provide a number of questions that can be addressed when building your own evaluation tool. A diagram of these questions is shown in Figure 1.

Fig. 1. Questions to use during the evaluation research
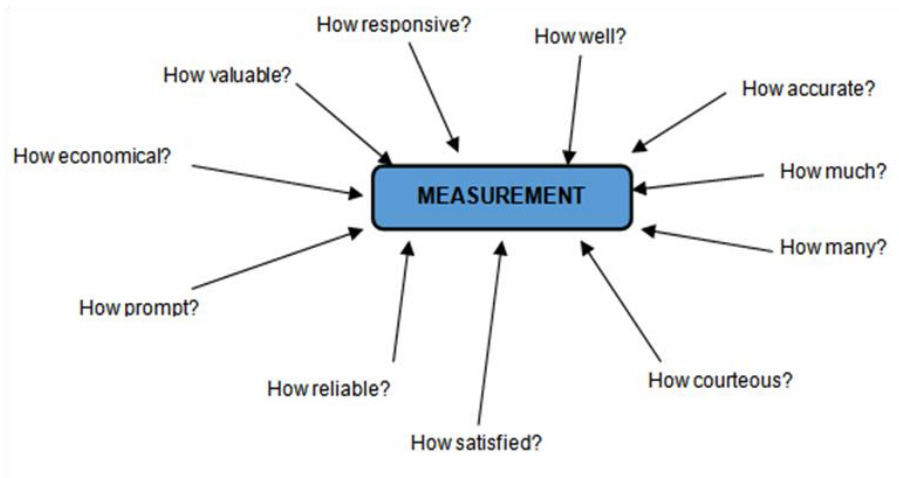
Source: Hernon & Matthews & Dugan, 2014

The aforementioned problems also apply to all types of libraries, and evaluation research can be the most effective tool to help them adapt to constant revolutions, increasing diversity of the sources or rapidly changing social needs (Penniman & Woodsworth, 2012, p. 4). Evaluation can be useful in the research of new organisational forms of the whole institution or the singular services which increase its effectiveness and efficiency (Zalewski, 2009, p. [13]).

Libraries belong to the public benefit organizations that are constantly struggling with financial problems. In this situation, it is difficult to imagine expensive outsourcing research, which is recommended for more affluent institutions. Often, however, a well-formulated short evaluation survey can produce meaningful results and lead to modification of implemented projects, provided that it takes into account the user's position. As Dariusz Zalewski emphasized [that] when it comes to evaluation research, it is crucial to set the criteria appropriately as the results of the research are dependent on them. This is why paying attention to the perspective of the author of the survey, as well as its participants, is important (Zalewski, 2009, p. [13]).

Finally, it is worth adding that both the evaluation process through the evaluation study and its results should be analyzed in accordance with the institution's profile, knowledge and practice of its employees, remembering that this tool "cannot replace common sense and experience gained in every-day" work, it may, however prevent the practices and decisions from becoming too conservative (Zalewski, 2009, p. [25]). Regular and properly performed evaluation of the service allows it to be optimally adapted to the needs of users.

Research methodology

1. Survey[2]

The purpose of the evaluation survey was to examine students' opinions on the following issues:

- materials included in training;
- own skills after training;
- exercises included in the course;
- rules for using the Library of the University of Lodz;
- the way the student used the course.

The survey consisted of 8 semi-open questions in total, for each of them students could provide their opinion, which they often did. These additional statements are a rich research material, and testify to the emotions that library training evokes in students.

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[2] The research methodology corresponds with the previous research which took place in the 2014/2015 academic year (Jerzyk-Wojtecka, 2017, pp. 115–117), during the preparation of the survey, apart from the resources regarding evaluation study, tips presented in studies describing that method have been used (Babbie, 2013; Sztabiński, Sztabiński, Sawiński, (Eds.), 2004).

2. Research group

In the 2016/2017 academic year, the second evaluation study of the e-learning course "Library adaptation" was conducted, which aimed to determine the needs of the students and the degree of their satisfaction with the skills acquired during the training. Officially, the time to take the course is a period from October 15, 2016, to December 21, 2016, but students used the materials until the end of the academic year, and surveys arrived until that time (the last one was dated September 28, 2017). As in the previous study, students who participated in the course also took part in it, but it was available to all students of the University of Lodz, not only those for whom library training is compulsory. Because the survey was not obligatory, almost half of the students did not complete it – for 5355 people enrolled in the library adoption course 43.5% (2329 surveys) participated, of which 2298 were sent by students for whom the training was compulsory and 31 surveys came from students from other faculties. A detailed information about the distribution of the questionnaires sent by faculties is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Percentage of the students who took part in the survey by faculty, N=2329[3]

Students taking part in the research (%)							
Faculty of the University of Lodz							
Economics and Sociology	Philology	Philosophy and History	Biology	Chemistry	Physics	International and Political Studies	Others
39,5	28,2	4,6	8,4	3,4	4,8	9,8	1,3

Source: own research

Discussion of the survey results

In the first two questions of the survey, the students gave their degree of studies and indicated the faculty they were studying at. After the option "other", additional information concerning the faculty could be entered. This was intended for people whose faculties were not on the list, i.e. those for which training was not mandatory. However in the question "Which one? Or maybe you are studying at two faculties?", the name of the faculty or even the field of study was repeated, often incorrectly. At the same time, some respon-

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[3] Some mathematical inaccuracies which appear in the tables are caused by rounding the numbers and by the fact that a certain amount of students omitted some questions in the survey.

dents chose the "other" option, even though they were studying at the faculty present on the list.

The degree of study also influenced the course evaluation. The organisation of the course accepted by the Dean Offices' of the individual faculties is such that often people from the second degree must take the course again because it is not possible to rewrite the grade. Many of these people have negative opinion on the course, which is also noticeable in the students' descriptive opinions, for example: "For second degree studies this training is unnecessary", "These are my second studies and I find it pointless to take a test if I have already passed it once. All the more so, since I had an alumni card I could use it [the library – trans.] without a test"[4] and similar. Table 2 shows the percentage distribution of the first and second degree students who participated in the research.

Table 2. Percentage of the first and second degree students
who participated in the survey, N=2329

Faculty of the University of Lodz	Respondents studying at (%):		
	1st degree	2nd degree	other
Economics and Sociology	23,5	15,8	0,1
Philology	19,0	8,9	0,2
Philosophy and History	3,4	1,2	0
Biology	4,6	3,5	0,2
Chemistry	2,4	1,0	0
Physics	4,3	0,3	0,1
International and Political Studies	7,5	2,2	0
Departments not covered by the training	1,1	0,1	0,1
In total	66,0	33,0	0,7

Source: own research

One of the most important challenges that librarians face when preparing the training is the proper presentation of the knowledge they want to familiarize students with. The material must not be too boring and the information provided cannot be too detailed, however the course should fulfil its function, i.e. prepare the first-year students to use the University Library. The library staff working on the training presented the course materials in various forms (including presentations, comics and films) and also tried to use an accessible,

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[4] Source: own research.

light writing style. As the collected data clearly shows (Table 3), students are satisfied with the size of the provided materials: 61% rated their length as "just right", which is also confirmed by the positive opinions written in the survey: "The material contained all the necessary information to use the library", "The videos deserve an "A" – short and concise, even the resistant will remember the information they contain", "A good and concise explanation of how to browse the library's resources." Of course, not all the students praised the course. There were also critical voices such as: "Too much general information, too little practical information", "Boring and unnecessary, exactly the same information we get in the library when we set up an account" but such opinions were a minority.

Table 3. Percentage of the assessment of the length of training materials, N=2329

Faculty of the University of Lodz	The training material was (%)			
	Too long	Just right	Too short	I have no opinion
Economics and Sociology	7,0	24,5	1,8	6,2
Philology	5,0	17,3	0,9	4,9
Philosophy and History	0,9	2,3	0,3	1,2
Biology	1,8	5,0	0,3	1,2
Chemistry	0,8	2,0	0,2	0,3
Physics	0,7	3,3	0	0,7
International and Political Studies	2,0	5,7	0,6	1,5
Departments not covered by the training	0,1	1,0	0	0,2
In total	18,3	61,0	4,1	16,3

Source: own research

A very important issue is the emotional attitude of the students to the training. Here, the task of librarians is both difficult and delicate: the training is mandatory and it has to meet university requirements, it has to prepare students well to use the collections and, at the same time, it cannot discourage them from using the library. On the other hand, the students' attitude influences the results they achieve in their own searches and thanks to the better acquired knowledge they can use the library's collections more widely in their scientific development. As the Table 4 illustrates, 74% of students described the training as important or fairly important. It can therefore be assumed that one in four students is reluctant to take the course. Here however, the results are inconclusive because as many as 12% of the participants were unable to

determine their attitude to the library training. The comments made by the students included positive assessments of the value of the training materials: "The material contained all the necessary information to use the library", "easy, pleasant training", "Everything presented legibly and in an accessible form" and critical: "The form of the 'comic book' depicting a part of the content was very unreadable and, in my opinion, does not encourage people to read the material, but rather the opposite. In the 'film' part, making it more lively would be useful, although because the materials were short, fortunately we somehow managed not to fall asleep", "Simple things are explained extensively, those less understandable could also be discussed a little more widely, such as the issue of PhD theses"[5].

Table 4. Percentage of students' opinions on training, N=2329

Faculty of the University of Lodz	For me, the training was (%)			
	Important	Quite important	A waste of time	I have no opinion
Economics and Sociology	6,3	23,0	4,9	5,3
Philology	5,4	16,0	3,5	3,0
Philosophy and History	1,3	2,0	0,7	0,6
Biology	1,2	4,6	1,5	1,1
Chemistry	0,6	2,0	0,4	0,3
Physics	0,9	2,5	0,7	0,5
International and Political Studies	1,9	5,2	1,5	1,1
Departments not covered by the training	0,4	0,7	0,8	0,1
In total	18,0	56,0	14,0	12,0

Source: own research

For every training course, an essential element of evaluation is the assessment of the qualifications acquired during the course. Therefore, students were asked how they perceived their skills in using the library services after they had read the training materials and passed the test (Table 5). Less than a half (more than 46%) of them said that they are better than before the course, while slightly fewer students (39.8%) did not see their qualifications improved. The latter may be due to two reasons: many students enter the training for the second time, starting the next degree or a different major and

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[5] Source: own research.

often come to study with already high skills in the use of science collections. At the same time, there is a relatively small number of people dissatisfied with the training: only 4.3% of students considered that their skills had deteriorated after the course.

As already mentioned above, the fact that the students complain about the need to re-enter the training can be learned from the comments, for example: "I didn't use the course because of this, and I was a former Economics and Sociology student and used the faculty library", "The same training was passed in the first degree, why the second time?", "I knew everything before, because I'm in the second degree of the same university". However, the positive ones prevail in the opinions of the course participants: "They allow me to search for books on a specific topic", "thanks to this I passed an exam", "The information about the book drop or the collections available within the IBUK [an online bookshop and renting platform – trans.] proved useful, for which I would like to thank you very much"[6].

Table 5. Percentage of the assessment of own skills after training, N=2329

Faculty of the University of Lodz	My skills after training I assess as (%)			
	Better	Same	Worse	I have no opinion
Economics and Sociology	18,0	16,5	1,2	3,6
Philology	12,5	11,7	1,1	2,7
Philosophy and History	2,1	2,0	0,2	0,2
Biology	3,4	3,2	0,6	1,1
Chemistry	2,0	1,1	0,1	0,2
Physics	2,5	1,6	0,1	0,5
International and Political Studies	5,1	3,2	0,7	0,7
Departments not covered by the training	0,7	0,5	0,1	0
In total	46,4	39,8	4,3	9,1

Source: own research

Unfortunately, the Library course proposed by the University of Lodz Library cannot be fully interactive for organisational and personal reasons. It is impossible, because more than 5000 students are under the supervision of only 4 people. That is why it has been constructed in such a way that the students can do it completely independently and check their newly acquired

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[6] Source: Own research.

knowledge by doing exercises. From many years of experience of the people taking care of the course participants, it is known that many students skip the theoretical part and take the test immediately, and many of them also skip the exercises. That is why the evaluation questionnaire asked about the usefulness of the exercises and whether they helped to organize the acquired skills (Table 6). It is encouraging that almost half of the surveyed students (48.5%) answered this question positively, assessing the exercises as useful and helpful. Slightly less than 30% admitted that they did not use them at all; at least some people who "had no opinion" can probably be added to them. It is also positive that only slightly more than 6% of the students described the exercises within the course as "pointless".

Table 6. Evaluation of exercises included in the training – percentage list, N=2329

Faculty of the University of Lodz	Exercises within the training were (%)			
	Helpful	I did not make them	Pointless	I have no opinion
Economics and Sociology	19,0	10,8	2,4	7,3
Philology	13,0	8,5	1,4	5,1
Philosophy and History	1,8	1,7	0,3	0,9
Biology	3,9	2,4	0,9	1,2
Chemistry	2,0	0,8	0,3	0,2
Physics	2,4	1,6	0,2	0,5
International and Political Studies	5,5	2,0	0,7	1,5
Departments not covered by the training	0,8	0,4	0	0,1
In total	48,5	28,1	6,3	16,7

Source: own research

The next question in the survey concerned the rules of using the library. The number of collections and different search methods may be a barrier for some first year students. Therefore it is important for them to make their own assessment of the rules of using the collections. For more than 80% of those surveyed, the rules of using BUŁ ["Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego", Library of the University of Lodz – trans.] were accessible and their opinion was also positive. They were assessed as complicated by slightly more than 8% (Table 7).

Table 7. Evaluation of the rules of using the Library of the University of Lodz
– percentage list, N=2329

Faculty of the University of Lodz	Rules for using BUŁ are (%)			
	Clear and understandable	All right	Complicated	I have no opinion
Economics and Sociology	12,4	21,0	3,4	2,6
Philology	8,7	15,3	2,3	1,9
Philosophy and History	2,1	1,8	0,5	0,2
Biology	2,1	4,8	0,9	0,5
Chemistry	1,2	1,8	0,2	0,1
Physics	2,3	2,0	0,2	0,2
International and Political Studies	3,2	5,2	0,9	0,5
Departments not covered by the training	0,8	0,5	0	0
In total	32,8	52,5	8,3	6,0

Source: own research

The library training ends with a test, and a passing grade is equivalent to completing the course. As mentioned above, some students do not read the course content at all (they often admit it themselves) and immediately take the test. This is especially understandable for people who need to get credit again (new studies, second or third degree studies). The previous edition of the evaluation survey (as well as the huge number of make-ups) showed that the test with a lot of information about the library is inaccessible and too difficult for students. Students complained that they must remember the Library's opening hours and other details that they can check on the website at any time. Therefore, the training preparers decided to completely change the rules of the test and focus its tasks only on the skills associated with the use of resources. In this manner, three tasks regarding the search for books, magazines and digital materials appeared in the test. To solve a test, each student must find a specific entry in the Main Catalogue or multi-search engine and answer a simple question. This formula proved to be much easier and more useful for students. As a result, ¾ of people completing the survey described the test as "fine" (Table 8). As for 10% of the students for whom the test is "difficult", it may be worth quoting two opinions of respondents: "It is good that the test was finally practical. The questions concerned those things that students use the most. "I believe that there is no need to ask for more complicated methods

of borrowing from libraries because the competent ladies who work on-site always offer help", "I think that someone who is not able to answer these questions without browsing materials, should not take up studies at all..."[7].

Table 8. The assessment of the final test difficulty – percentage list, N=2329

Faculty of the University of Lodz	The final test was (%)			
	Easy	Fine	Difficult	I have no opinion
Economics and Sociology	0,9	30,0	3,9	4,6
Philology	0,9	20,7	2,9	3,6
Philosophy and History	0,3	3,3	0,5	0,5
Biology	0,2	6,2	0,9	1,0
Chemistry	0,1	2,7	0,3	0,3
Physics	0,3	3,8	0,3	0,4
International and Political Studies	0,4	7,1	1,2	1,1
Departments not covered by the training	0,1	1,1	0	0,1
In total	3,2	75,0	10,0	11,5

Source: own research

The last question was to indicate whether students in some way try to take advantage of the available help during the course and test solving. Unfortunately, it turns out that the vast majority (over 92%) take the training on their own. Despite the fact that they have difficulties with solving the test, they not only do not think about solving it together with their friends but neither to come to the library and ask for help. It still often happens that three attempts to pass, which are standard for everyone taking the course, is not enough, but rarely (as you can see in Table 9) students will think about any support.

[7] Source: Own research.

Table 9. The chosen strategy of the test passing – percentage list, N=2339

Faculty of the University of Lodz	I was solving the test (%)			
	By my own	With friends	In the library	I have no opinion
Economics and Sociology	36,5	1,4	0,3	1,2
Philology	26,3	1,2	0,1	0,6
Philosophy and History	4,3	0,1	0	0,2
Biology	7,8	0,4	0	0,1
Chemistry	3,0	0,2	0	0,1
Physics	4,3	0,2	0	0,2
International and Political Studies	9,0	0,3	0,1	0,4
Departments not covered by the training	1,3	0	0	0
In total	92,5	3,8	0,6	2,7

Source: own research

Conclusions

The results of the second evaluation survey of the library training show that librarians work over the accessibility of the course and the final test positively affected their overall reception. Compared to the survey from 2014––2015 academic year (Jerzyk-Wojtecka, 2017) both, the percentage of answers and the opinions of students, have changed a lot in favour of the training.

The results of the previous survey had mobilised the team to prepare the training for introducing changes that were intended to help students learn the materials and pass the test. The presentations have been slightly shorted, the most important issues have been left (from the point of view of those starting studies). Previous questions, based on the information remembered from the course, were replaced by the three tasks whose purpose was to check the skills of searching in the Main Catalogue and multi-search engine.

These changes influenced the students' reception of the training, which is clearly depicted by the results of both surveys (2016/2017 and 2014/2015), for example in the questions about the training material length and the level of test difficulty. In the first case in the survey from 2014–2015 there were 52% negative ratings (too long), in the discussed one only 18.3%. The 37.4% of the students in the first study identified the test as too difficult, only 10% in the second one (Jerzyk-Wojtecka, 2017). Also in the case of the second survey, the emotional attitude of the students to the training changed – there are less negative opinions added to the questions.

The results of the study discussed above give the key information to the librarians working on the e-learning training about which elements of the course should be further refined. At the present time, work on the new film guides in the library in underway, we are also thinking about moving away from the comic book formula, which a large part of the students is critical of. The problem that appeared in both studies is the repetition of the training at the first and the second (and sometimes the third) degree studies. It is worth to work with the dean offices' of each faculty and consider whether it is possible to give students an opportunity to attempt on taking the course credit test only once. At the time of writing of this paper, the University of Lodz is in the tender process for a new searching electronic collections (multi-search engine) tool which will also affect the next year course formula.

The above remarks lead to the final conclusion that the continually changing library system and scope of services of the University of Lodz Library on the one hand, and the information needs of the students on the other, make that the effort put into the preparation of the course lasts almost entire academic year. At the same time, the librarians who prepare the training try to take care of its substantive quality and adaptation to the needs of the students.

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