

Research on the Educational Role of University Libraries

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Abstract: As critical venues for academic research and knowledge dissemination, university libraries play a significant role in cultivating students' innovative thinking and practical skills. They serve as a subtle “immersive” learning platform. Therefore, exploring the educational role of university libraries is of significant practical importance. This paper aims to study the educational function of university libraries, clarify their role, analyze the connotations of education, and identify existing issues in fulfilling this role, thereby proposing corresponding solutions.

Keywords: University library; Education; Role; Research

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1. Introduction

There has been considerable research in recent years regarding the educational role of university libraries in student development. Analyzing the number of documents, a title search using “university library education” yielded 1,895 papers, while “educational role of university libraries” yielded only 58 papers. Looking at the publication years: 2 papers in 2023, 6 in 2022, 4 in 2021, 5 in 2019, 4 in 2018, none in 2017, 3 in 2016, 1 in 2015, 4 in 2014, 1 in 2013, 3 in 2012, 1 in 2011, 3 in 2010, none in 2009, 2 in 2008, 2 in 2007, 1 in 2006, 1 in 2005, 1 in 2004, none in 2003 and 2002, 2 in 2001, and 2 in 2000, with a total of 7 before 2000. This shows that research on the educational role of university libraries is still insufficient^[1]. Studies have found that while university libraries can provide learning resources, academic guidance, and networking opportunities, helping students develop good reading habits and independent thinking, there are still issues. For instance, the resources and services of some university libraries are underutilized, students do not fully utilize the library resources and facilities, librarians lack innovative educational awareness, libraries lack up-to-date immersive learning platforms, universities lack funding for smart libraries, and there is a lack of a positive educational atmosphere in society. Therefore, it is necessary to further study the educational role of university libraries to raise awareness, change perceptions, and thus increase investment to improve the quality of educational services.

2. Positioning of university libraries and establishment of educational goals system

2.1. Positioning of university libraries

The positioning should vary according to the different types of talent cultivation—applied talent training, research talent training, and combined talent training each have distinctly different educational goal systems.

2.2. Establishment of educational goals system

For universities focusing on applied talent training, the educational goals of their libraries should focus on fostering students' application skills, providing more practical positions, and organizing activities conducive to student participation. For research-oriented universities, more effort should be made in resource construction to create conditions necessary for training research talents. For universities training combined-type talents, the library's educational goals should accommodate both needs.

3. The connotations of educational role

As an essential component of the university's educational system, university libraries play a significant role in both ideological and political education for college students while disseminating knowledge. The educational role of the library includes cultivating moral integrity by providing literature resources, services, and immersive learning platforms. Through these resources and platforms, students deepen their understanding of China's ideological and political lines, guidelines, and policies, thereby subtly enhancing their ideological awareness. Additionally, the library's contribution to information literacy, talent training, academic research, and cultural heritage profoundly impacts the moral and ethical development of college students.

4. The significance of research on the educational role of university libraries

4.1. Perfecting the ideological and political education system in universities

The library serves as the center for documentary resources and a learning hub in universities. According to surveys, the library is the most favored learning environment for college students, underscoring its undeniable influence on education. Therefore, it is crucial to seriously study and analyze the issues in the educational role of university libraries and improve the educational process, which is a significant supplement to the ideological and political education system in universities.

4.2. Assisting and promoting the ideological and moral education of college students

Many college students generally face issues like weak life ideals, misaligned value systems, a lack of social ethics, and inappropriate behavior. Certain erroneous thoughts significantly influence contemporary college students' value orientations. By leveraging the educational role of university libraries, these prevailing cognitive perspectives can be subtly transformed.

4.3. Enhancing the quality of professional education

The improvement of teaching quality in higher education institutions is not solely reflected in classroom teaching, which is inherently limited in time. A considerable amount of time and effort must be spent on self-study outside of class. University libraries cater to specific majors and courses by supplementing necessary reference materials, which facilitates knowledge acquisition for students and significantly enhances the quality of professional education.

4.4. Improve the quality of talent cultivation

University libraries significantly impact the enhancement of talent cultivation quality. Elevating the caliber of high-quality talents requires immersion in knowledge across disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, literature, history, geography, aesthetics, and arts, areas where university library collections often accumulate extensive learning resources.

5. Challenges in fulfilling the educational role

5.1. Librarians lack a proactive attitude toward innovative education

Librarians should be passionate about the library profession, possess a strong sense of professional dedication and cultural confidence, and have diverse capabilities that align with the modern development and innovative needs of libraries ^[1]. There is a noticeable difference in the educational outcomes between librarians who work passively and those who proactively create conditions and innovate service offerings.

5.2. Students lack initiative in utilizing resources

Despite significant annual investments in resource development by university libraries to meet teaching and research needs, surveys have found that many resources remain underutilized. Some students have never even entered the library. Thus, the lack of proactive spirit among students to utilize resources is a significant barrier to the effective educational role of university libraries.

5.3. Libraries lack updated “immersive” learning platforms

The push for libraries to serve as gentle, unobtrusive, and immersive learning environments for students has become a new challenge under current circumstances. Public institutions lead in this area, while private university libraries lag behind, with minimal research available on this topic. For instance, a search on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) with the keywords “private university libraries + spatial recreation” yielded no results. Furthermore, the physical space renovations in private university libraries are minimal, typically just sufficient to provide a place for self-study without significant efforts in creating unique, personalized spaces needed for immersive learning.

5.4. Universities lack an integrated collaborative educational system

The core of the educational goal system is ideological and moral values. Knowledge and skills are fundamental for societal engagement, and service to society is impossible without them. Practical activities are also a vital part of the educational goals in university libraries. However, the educational efforts in some universities remain relatively fragmented, yet to create a pervasive and robust collaborative educational force ^[2].

5.5. Society lacks a positive reading atmosphere

Educator Tao Xingzhi once said, “A vibrant, stable, harmonious, and uplifting environment inherently possesses a broad educational function.” As economies develop, university libraries are actively seeking ways to enhance their internal environments and renovate outdated spaces ^[3]. However, changes in the broader societal environment are not achieved overnight. Additionally, the emergence of new media and the phenomena of instant wealth through internet fame inevitably influence college students’ life values, as evidenced by the annual decline in physical book loans from libraries. The prevalence of people constantly looking down at their phones, the rarity of those reading physical books, and jokes like “If relatives and friends from Luoyang ask about me, tell them I’m looking down at my phone” all reflect the lack of a reading atmosphere in society.

6. Strategies for enhancing the educational role of university libraries

6.1. Fostering a culture of innovation and training librarians for continuous educational innovation

Firstly, it is crucial to persist and refine standards for innovation, exploring theoretical, institutional, cultural, and operational innovations. Theoretical innovation serves as the foundation for innovative development, emphasizing the need for theoretical reflection and anticipatory exploration. It is essential to clearly define the role and pathway of librarian development in the modern transformation of university libraries, while also providing comprehensive training to enhance theoretical consensus. Institutional innovation lays the groundwork by transforming results into systems, integrating party-building into operational development through a dual enhancement approach, and turning passive acceptance by librarians into proactive action. Cultural innovation is the soul, where university libraries, rich in literature, history, and art resources, provide platforms for cultural exchange and innovation. Operational innovation serves as a tool, making services more accessible to users.

Secondly, innovating educational models and establishing service-oriented educational brands cater to different needs. For instance, freshmen focus on knowledge related to their majors and interests, while seniors are more concerned with employment and further education^[4]. The Dalian Polytechnic University City College Library has harnessed World Book Day to host a Reading Month for nine consecutive years, creating a reading promotion brand and the “Bathed in Books—Delight in Reading” recommended book series.

Lastly, enhancing training to improve librarians’ capacity for educational innovation. Training is crucial for librarians, especially through short-term, intensive courses, conferences, and online webinars, particularly for those without a background in library and information science. For example, since 1998, Harbin Institute of Technology has sent librarians without a library science degree to Dalian Polytechnic University for further education, with new training programs introduced in 2007 for all librarians^[3].

6.2. Utilizing VR/AR technology to encourage proper use of library resources

First, emphasizing educational training for new library users is vital. Many libraries employ highly qualified instructors and utilize Virtual Reality/Augmented Reality (VR/AR) technology to create introductory videos that help new freshmen understand the library’s layout, books, various electronic resources, and equipment. This aids students in revisiting and absorbing the content explained in these introductory sessions. Dalian Polytechnic University City College Library incorporates ideological elements into its introductory courses, achieving significant training outcomes.

Second, enhancing resource promotion efforts. For students who are less inclined to study or unaware of how to utilize library resources, intensifying resource promotion is essential. The author’s library leverages Reading Month to promote resources both online and offline through partner-produced videos. It also hosts online and offline book clubs, essay contests, and new book launches to boost resource visibility. Wealthier university libraries could increase resource terminals to facilitate borrowing and enhance library utilization.

Third, creating resource videos. University libraries can capitalize on current trends by using VR/AR technology to produce short, engaging resource utilization videos. These can be promoted through various channels like the library’s WeChat official account, WeChat groups, QQ groups, social circles, TikTok, and other video platforms. Engaging students through interactive quizzes and rewards can also increase their interest in reading and encourage them to utilize library resources more effectively.

6.3. Committing investments to create immersive learning platforms in libraries

It is crucial to base efforts on the need to develop distinctive educational spaces within libraries. Shenyang Normal University Library has made beneficial explorations, undergoing six space renovations since 2011, and has

established 22 distinctive spaces categorized into five major types. These efforts have become a classic example of library space transformation in domestic university libraries^[5]. The renovated library has achieved breakthroughs in space reconfiguration, functional enhancement, and cultural development, reinvigorating its vitality^[6].

Furthermore, service innovation aims to create an immersive learning platform. Determining how to innovate services and create an immersive, interactive, and conceptual learning platform is a pertinent issue for university libraries. Libraries are communal spaces for information exchange, supporting learning, research, and practical activities, and facilitating interactive, experiential, and autonomous learning.

6.4. Establishing a unified and integrated collaborative educational system

Firstly, top-level planning is required. The primary functions of university libraries are educational and information services, with service-oriented education being a crucial aspect. However, education is a systemic project. Addressing fundamental questions such as “What to cultivate, how to cultivate, and for whom” requires focusing on the fundamental mission of moral and intellectual education and excellent top-level design at the school level^[7].

Secondly, improving regulations and systems. Departments should clearly define their roles and responsibilities within the entire educational process, forming a comprehensive educational pattern. For example, Capital Normal University Library plays a significant role in multi-faceted education by leveraging the capabilities of the Academic Affairs Office, Student Affairs Office, Graduate School, and College of Teacher Education, as well as external potential partners, to host various thematic activities like art cultivation, literary appreciation, and mental health, thus enhancing participants’ overall qualities and meeting diverse student development needs^[8].

Lastly, building a collaborative educational platform in libraries. According to the top-level design at the school level, university libraries can establish a collaborative educational platform, planning various library activities annually. Libraries can also leverage their resource advantages to collaborate with departments, providing literature support for teaching and learning, extracting ideological and political elements for high-quality courseware and cases, and integrating various activities with ideological education to explore paths for cultural, curricular, research, resource, environmental, network, practical, service, management, and collaborative education.

6.5. Leveraging strengths to foster a reading culture in educational venues

Firstly, implementing educational venue activities. The promotion of “venue-based education” has received national attention, and university libraries should capitalize on this policy and their strengths to host a series of activities to foster a reading culture in educational venues.

Secondly, enhancing the micro-environment inside the library. Each reading table should be equipped with power outlets and quiet signs should be posted. The lighting should meet reading needs, and there should be designated quiet rest areas and smoking areas. Noise reduction measures should be applied to floors and walls. The environment should be a blend of dynamic and static elements, featuring decorative paintings with classic quotes as well as modern intelligent technologies like waterfall screens and point-reading machines that silently convey various library information, making visitors feel as though they are entering a sacred reading hall.

Thirdly, introducing smart devices. With the advancement of technology, smart devices have become indispensable. University libraries should keep pace with digital technologies, setting up facilities like reading booths, smart touch reading machines, Artificial Intelligence (AI) service robots, AI light and shadow interactive digital reading areas, independent leisure audio-visual zones, and bar-style reading areas to create a modern library atmosphere, facilitating easy access to books, newspapers, magazines, audio, and video resources in a comfortable environment.

Finally, regularly hosting reading promotion activities. University libraries can utilize World Book Day and

other significant dates to host reading promotion activities. For example, the library where the author works has been conducting reading promotion activities during Reading Month for ten years, achieving significant effects. They can also use traditional festivals, anniversaries, campus cultural festivals, and other important dates to organize a variety of cultural activities, responding to calls from library associations to foster a broader societal reading culture.

7. Conclusion

In summary, university libraries have substantial potential to play a transformative role in education, requiring a strategic approach that leverages modern technology from multiple perspectives—librarians, readers, libraries, universities, and society—to innovate and develop unique educational styles and cultivate talents suited for modern development.

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