Analysis on the New Role of Academic Libraries

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Abstract
This paper addresses the role of academic libraries in the digital age through case studies in UK universities. As technology develops, many dimensions of academic work have changed forms. For example, digital devices make it possible for people to communicate in new ways. These digital artifacts have effects on approaches to learning and teaching (i.e. flipped classrooms, MOOCs). Notions of ‘classroom’ or ‘lecture’ are therefore changing from their conventional meanings. Although these changes are significant, academic libraries remain critical in supporting students’ experiences of Higher Education (Kuh & Gonyea 2015). As newer approaches to learning are promoted (e.g. active learning, collaborative learning), students’ experiences take diverse forms in the complex and sociomaterial world (i.e. Gourlay et al. 2015). However, academic libraries have also developed, making new contributions of its own.
To explore this, I will draw on case studies of UK teaching-intensive and research-intensive universities’ academic libraries to identify the roles of libraries in supporting students’ experiences through comparing contrasting cases. In the UK, students’ outcomes are mostly based on written products. Students’ experience is the interplay between students’ knowledge and academic criteria.
To understand how academic libraries support learning, I will focus on the academic libraries in University A (teaching-intensive university) and University B (research-intensive university). I will examine spaces and collection, analyzing the pictures as data.
As a result, the academic libraries provide spaces for diverse purposes and arrange the collections to reflect this. Detailed analysis shows that each library works differently to respond to the universities’ mission.

Keywords: Academic libraries, knowledge practice, Student Engagement
Introduction

This paper examines the roles of academic libraries through the case studies in UK universities. The idea of learning has been changing toward learner-centered approach. Conventionally, teaching for students to gain certain knowledge is emphasized, but as ATC21s (2011) indicates, learning to work can be examined as a ‘skill’ has been regarded as significant and ‘collaboration’ is located as one of the significant learnings under this complex age. In addition, this has change the notion of the classroom with technology. ICT would, for example, swift the teacher-student relationship in the classroom through MOOCs. Students are encouraged to learn new knowledge outside the classroom via videos and discussion is expected in the classroom. This has been derived out of one-way knowledge transmission. In this sense, learning and classroom could be undertaken by the new forms of media.

However, although new technology would have massive impact on learning and classroom, traditional assessment method remains as one of the significant indicators. As UK’s Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has indicated, the criteria of learning assessment is almost entirely based on writing (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2015). In order to complete these written assignments, learners cannot do without academic resources. Surely, the Internet has been developed and digital devices can address the roles of academic resources, major academic resources are critically collected in the academic libraries. This means that, although we can access to various information, reliable academic resources are encouraged even in the writing assessment. Most of the peer-reviewed academic journals are distributed via academic libraries (sometimes collected by academic staff as well) and students are requested to work on these resourced for their assessment.

This paper aims at considering the role of academic libraries in terms of student support. Most institutions offer student support programs in order to encourage students’ involvement. However, academic libraries are not recognized as part of the infrastructure of learning. As will be shown, Student Engagement is expected to cover the quality of teaching and learning. Learning how to learn in the academy could contribute to this in an important way, but academic libraries are completely separated from the context of student’s support. This research, then, attempts to reconsider academic libraries with reference to Student Engagement.

To clarify this, I will focus on UK’s socially determined categories, teaching-intensive (Post1992) and research-intensive (Russell Group) universities. These categories are well-recognized ones to think about the roles of universities and this research employs these frameworks in order to consider the relationship between institutions and academic libraries. I will, first, reflect on the theoretical potentials and then, illustrate this through case studies.

Theoretical framework

This section explores the theoretical framework that could describe students’ experience in the academy. Two concepts are introduced and critically examined. One is about students’ dropout from the academy. The other is, in a broader sense, the kind
of Student Engagement that most of the institutions adopt in order to integrate academic libraries within student support.

Retention
As for students’ experience, one of the big problems is how to connect students and classroom. Education has purpose and support students’ success. However, as Higher Education expands and becomes diverse, they leave Higher Education because of difficulties with transition from secondary education. This is also related to institution’s assessment and reputation. This lies in students’ learning in the academy, or lacking of academic literacy. The dropout rate that academic institutions suffer from is described in terms of ‘retention’. Tinto (2006) argues that retention is improved when institutions encourage students to make ‘contact with students to establish personal bonds among and between students, faculty, and staff” (p.36). Tinto further notes the importance of creating an educational community among faculty and students. Tinto (1997) maintains that an important part of retention is to “promote shared, collaborative learning experiences within the classroom . . .” (p. 2). Achieving retention, therefore, involves collaborative endeavors to involve students.

Student Engagement
While retention has its focus on ‘dropping out’ from the academy, this idea has been discussed in student support, expanding its notion into ‘Student Engagement’. Student Engagement is widely discussed as an idea that describes the concrete aspect of students’ experience. (Trowler, 2010). Trowler defines Students Engagement as the:

Interaction between the time, effort, and other relevant resources investigated by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution. (Trowler, p.3)

This definition focuses on the collaborative perspective of students and institutions. It emphasizes the link between learning outcomes and the reputation of institution.

Coates (2007) develops this idea of student engagement, identifying categories of embodied practice that constitute it:

Active and collaborative learning
Participation in challenging academic activities
Formative communication with academic staff
Involvement in enriching educational experience
Feeling legitimated and supported by university learning communities

(Coates, 2007, p.122)

As these categories illuminate, Student Engagement tends to form part of teaching and learning. ‘Collaboration’ is emphasized in order to involve students. This is achieved through changes in pedagogy, but also by changing the design of classrooms.

However, a question follows from this definition. Although ‘collaborative’ learning is promoted and one-way knowledge transmission has been criticized, not all learning can be explained in this way; individual practices still remain an important part of learning. In addition, this collaboration can be fostered by technology. The ‘flipped classroom’ approach, for example, changes the conventional learning spaces through
implementing online materials. It is in relation to these kinds of exception – individual study, and the provision of resources – that the role of libraries is highlighted. The role of academic libraries needs to be reconsidered, since they provide the infrastructure for scholarly information.

**The scope of this research**

I will explore student culture by using the idea of ‘Student Engagement’. In the academy, disciplinary culture is recognized as the critical element (Becher & Trowler, 2001). However, since students’ experience is embedded in the academy, strongly influenced by the disciplinary convention. Furthermore, students’ experience has been discussed in terms of how to educate freshman. However, the focus is not on the academic library as an infrastructure of knowledge practice. I will, then, work on this issue.

As discussed above, Student Engagement has been conceptualized using the notion of collaboration in the context of teaching and learning. This paper attempts to rethink the role of academic libraries within this wider framing. Conventionally, academic libraries have contributed to information literacy education to support students’ learning. This paper, then, reconsiders this role in relation to students’ knowledge practices. This could include reading and writing using academic resources.

Because students’ knowledge practices are undertaken in the context of specific disciplines, a full account of this relationship would require a consideration of research cultures. However, this paper will focus on the theoretical groundwork for reconsidering the role of academic libraries; this will be developed by considering the influence of research cultures in another study.

Knowledge practice includes writing instruction (i.e. Freshman composition (i.e. (Brent, 2005; Hall, 2006) and Writing Across Curriculum (Condon & Rutz, 2012)). In this trend, writing is conducted in the disciplinary practice and program is launched in the freshman stage to develop their academic literacy. These have made significant contributions to academic writing and academic literacy practice. This paper relates knowledge practices with broader perceptions of literacy and pays attention to the infrastructure that would support these practices.

To illustrate the theoretical work of this paper, I will present case studies from UK academic libraries. These demonstrate the realities of academic life, and allow reflection on the theoretical account that has been offered.

**Methodology**

I conducted case studies and used several pictures taken by the researcher in 2015. I conducted case studies because, as Yin has pointed out (Yin, 2009), is has the strength in addressing to various evidence. In addition, I am interested in why academic libraries are taking current forms. Compared to ethnography, case studies can be for ‘contemporary set of events’ and my focus is to describe what they are without any control. In this sense, case study would be appropriate. In this research, I will mainly use pictures of academic libraries. One possibility is to use verbal data from the interview, but accounts do not necessarily tell the current condition of academic
libraries. Rather, I will interpret the pictures that clearly demonstrate what they are and use online information to complement these data.

The images show the different kinds of space used to support students’ activities and the different kinds of collections provided to support their knowledge practice.

Two types of universities are featured: Post-1992 (New) universities and the Russell Group. University A is a post-1992 university, re-designated from polytechnic status. University B is a Russell Group University, ranked in the top 30 of selective research-intensive institutions in the UK. (Bowl & Hughes, 2014). These are the categories that depict the UK’s universities. University A is a teaching-intensive university, not research intensive one. It is significant to teach and instruct students for their employment after graduation. University B, by contrast, is research-intensive and its mission is to publish research outcomes. These differences are socially determined and they attempt to stick to that mission, so academic libraries could reflect on these missions.

To take pictures, cooperation from academic libraries is gained. The aim this research is announced beforehand to them in each university.

As a data, pictures are used. One reason for this is that the roles of academic libraries could be posited and the self-evident bodies in the academy, but since the circumstances around the academy are gradually changing and newer roles are pursued, it would be necessary to understand the current condition and critically examine what could be seen as a reality. As Wagner et al discusses, visual materials are eidetic and can contribute to inquiry (Wagner, Garner, & Kawulich, 2011). Pictures can allow multiple interpretations, which could contribute to put academic libraries into higher education in a relatively new way.

This work received institutional ethical approval, and followed the BERA guidelines (2011) The process involved permissions at two stages: pre-entry and post-entry. Prior to beginning the study, permission was secured from the head librarian at each institution, and confidentiality was agreed with library staff. Permission was granted to take pictures of artifacts, but not humans.

After the study, a member-checking process was implemented to ensure the validity of the accounts (Kirk & Miller, 1986). This also supported data cleaning, analysis and dissemination (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012).

Institutions were assured anonymity and given the right to opt out at any stage. All the data were stored securely and password protected.

**University A (Teaching-intensive University)**

University A was awarded university status in 1992, having previously been a polytechnic university. It is one of the biggest teaching-intensive universities and provides a large student support service. In 2014/2015, this university had awarded £16.9 million to innovate student support program.
In this university, ‘Student Engagement Policy’, a guide to Student Engagement in University A is published. As this guidebook shows, University A intensively works on Student Engagement as a support of students. The Support service is located in Student Life sector in the webpage. According to the webpage, support for Student Engagement is developed through:

- pre-entry and induction information, activities and processes that are designed to ensure that students are familiar with the requirements of their course and know how to access facilities, services and support
- high quality teaching and learning experiences
- high quality course-related learning resources and support materials within the Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle)
- a range of academic and welfare support services.

As these illustrates, ‘access to facilities’ and ‘high quality teaching and learning experiences’ are emphasized in order to realize Student Engagement. However, ‘facilities’ are not elaborated in this account. This may addresses how to gain skills for learning, but further explanation has not been identified. In this sense, University A seems to encourage knowledge practice as a key to Student Engagement.

**University B (Research-intensive University)**

Both different types of university have launched the project on Student Engagement, but they have innovated this based on their mission.

University B was founded in the 19th century and belongs to ‘Russell Group’, or top 30 university in the UK. This university is said to hold more than several million printed copies and prepare for another resources. This university honors their academic resources.

University B has a ‘Teaching and Learning Support Office’ (Figure 1) and attempts to provide ‘excellence in teaching and learning’. This office regards Student Engagement as a priority.
Student Engagement

Student Engagement is a term used in a variety of different ways and University B is working hard to define what it means for our students and staff. This page will provide a growing resource as a result of an Institution-wide project focusing on Student Engagement.

The project was keen to help students easily understand the different ways in which they can contribute to feedback about their curriculum and learning experience, so we've put this handy guide together for you about 'Student Engagement in the Quality Framework'.

The project has also started to pilot different ways in which students and staff can work and talk together to inform how the Institution develops new initiatives. There are a range of ways in which you can get involved at 'Approaches to Partnership and Engagement'.

Spaces

The provision of space is central to the role of academic libraries. I will analyze the spaces in these two institutions as ‘collaborative’ or ‘individual’ spaces. As for data representation, the pictures cannot be shown.

University A

In university A, individual spaces are provided (Figure2). Such spaces cover a whole floor in this building. Communication with others could not be allowed due to this segmentation.

In addition, University A has two types of collaboration spaces. One has no walls (Figure3). It is located separated from the library shelves, chiefly used for group
interaction. Another type of collaboration space has a small wall, separating it from those around. (Figure4)

![Figure 3: Collaboration space (1)](image1) ![Figure 4: Collaboration space (2)](image2)

This space is primarily for one person, but group talking would be possible. Three chairs are in the same line. This space covers half of the floors, next to shelves. This can be categorized as less-individual and an as less-collaborative space because walls are very low and flexible communication would be possible. If the concentration on work were necessary, however, it would be possible for people to work individually. Where small talk is needed, interaction with peers would be possible. Collaboration can, in this sense, take flexible forms in this space.

**University B**

In university B, space is systematically controlled. According to the poster in front of the gate, ‘individual study spaces can be booked online in the same way as our existing Group Study Room booking system, and can be accessed via online’ (from webpage). University B is a research-intensive university and demonstrate the importance of spaces in the academic library.

Individual study space is strictly defined (Figure5). This room is located in quiet zone. Users are not allowed to ‘eat food, use your mobile phone and use your devices which can be heard by others’ (from posters). ‘Silence’ is emphasized in order to keep individual space.

![Figure 5: Individual space in University B](image3)

The poster mentioned above also identifies a collaboration space called the ‘Group Study Room’, used chiefly for interaction among peers. In the library, most of the spaces have low partitions, which could allow flexible use as an open-space (Figure6). This spaces can therefore be available both for reading (individual) and communication (collaboration).
Summary

Thus, I can point out that spaces have four functions: 1) individual space is separated from those around, for the students to concentrate on individual knowledge practice; 2) collaboration can take place in spaces that support activities with or without resources; 3) ‘walls’ can denote whether a space is intended for individual or collaborative work; and 4) individual space is a priority for the academic library.

Collections

This section explores the collections in each university. Collections can be understood as a significant representation of the socially constructed mission of each university. This paper refers to collections in terms of ‘textbooks’ and ‘periodicals’, investigating the relationship between these aspects and academic libraries roles. These resources are close to students and they regularly access during their study.

University A

Periodicals are well organized for practical use. Most of them are filed and placed chronologically(Figure7). Newly published periodicals are displayed to help students be aware of new information (Figure8). Major periodicals are arranged serially to see through whole issues. Same textbooks are placed in the shelves (Figure9). These are frequently used by the students, making it possible for multiple students to use them at the same time.
Figure 9: Textbooks

University B

In this library, plenty of books are ordered and placed in shelves, not separated for educational use. The quantity of books is much greater than that of University A. Periodicals are collected the same as University A, but the chief difference is that periodicals are arranged based on the discipline. This makes it easier for the users to identify the periodicals in their specific research area (Figure 10). While same copies are placed for students’ use in the different shelves, major textbooks in University B are put in the shelves without any boundaries (Figure 11).

Summary

From the above, I can refer to collection as these. 1) Major and heavily used textbooks and periodicals are organized for learning (University A); 2) Plenty of resources are randomly gathered in the shelves. Textbooks are, furthermore, embedded there with the books. In research context, the quantity seems to be important (University B); and collections could be undertaken as a representation of students’ and institutions’ mission.
Discussion

In this section, I will discuss student Engagement, space and the collections seen in the two cases.

Student Engagement has been promoted in each institution in order to develop the quality of teaching and learning. This issue is raised at an institutional level and approached through collaboration. This ‘collaboration’ differs from institutions. In University A, collaboration is for developing their knowledge, leading to learning assessment. Academic libraries, as shown above, have provided two types of collaboration spaces. In University B, however, collaboration may be tied to individual work and research. Compared to University A, collaboration is not so emphasized. The background literature suggests that academic libraries are a significant part of the infrastructure needed to support knowledge practice. However, as seen above, academic libraries are not mentioned in material on Student Engagement, which implies that they have developed their services in parallel. Rather, they have their own context, which is separate from discipline. Student Engagement would encourage students to actively be engaged in academy. In turn, knowledge practice has been influenced by the disciplinary values. As Hordern indicates (Hordern, 2016), discipline is shaped by the HE curriculum and this culture is different from pure disciplines and occupationally / professionally oriented ones. Students’ experience is shaped under these differences. Further work would be needed in order to explore fully how disciplinary culture integrates academic library provision with Student Engagement.

I have confirmed that space illustrates the mission of the institutions. As shown, academic libraries not only provide collaboration spaces to support group study but also flexible spaces separated from academic resources. This raises the question of why these spaces are necessary in the library. Space is an important concern for academic libraries, but when it comes to collaboration, other places could be used. By contrast, individual space is specific to academic libraries in that students can concentrate on their knowledge practice in the academy. In the UK, students’ outcome is assessed mainly in written forms, so they need to use academic resources distributed via academic library. To investigate students’ actual information behavior, further empirical research would be needed that pays careful attention to institutional cultures.

As for collections, this research attempts to describe and interpret what has been seen in the academic libraries. In the University A, textbooks and periodicals are prepared for students’ use. This may derive from syllabus and teaching (i.e. Boss & Drabinski, 2014) In University B, by contrast, textbooks are embedded in the same shelves as another resources. Further exploration could be undertaken that includes a detailed analysis of the relationship between teaching, syllabus and collection development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, academic libraries can contribute to Student Engagement, but in the cases presented here these were not located in Student Engagement. Both universities promote Student Engagement, but neither mentions the role of academic libraries. Thus, academic libraries are not recognized as a part of student support. Rather, academic libraries are regarded as the institutions that stock resources and provide
spaces for students. However, as this research shows, academic libraries have the strong potential of supporting students’ experience especially by encouraging their knowledge practice. In this sense, this research can contribute clues about how to incorporate academic libraries within student support.

As the evidence in the case studies presented here has shown, academic libraries can be indicators of institutions’ missions and purposes. Academic libraries create the environment and infrastructure needed to support knowledge practice, and this mirrors institutional needs.
References


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