DLSU Libraries' Lesson Learned and Future Directions: Librarian Experiences and Challenges in Providing Information Literacy During Pandemic

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Abstract: The De La Salle University (DLSU) Libraries, spearheaded by the Information Literacy Committee, customized its classroom library instruction by offering different modules to address the information literacy needs of the DLSU community. DLSU libraries offered Library Research (LibRes) for Senior High School students under its Practical Research (PracRes) classes. On the other hand, libraries provided freshmen students with online library instruction via their GEPCOMM classes. The study concentrates on the shared experiences of DLSU Librarians in the development of the LibRes course in LibRes-GEPCOMM including the challenges, and opportunities they faced during the delivery of online library instruction in both asynchronous and synchronous classes through focus group discussion. The researchers use an open-ended question to stimulate the discussion and capture the raw response of the participants and document their shared experiences on the issues and challenges they have encountered in redesigning the course on information literacy specifically in the development of LIBRES for remote learning. The selected participants in this focus group discussion study are DLSU Librarians who happen to experience being the main facilitator and co-facilitator. This study will not capture LibRes under PracRes and LibRes General or IL Bucket. The study found out that even in a short time, many librarians were able to acquire the necessary skills to develop the modules, train fellow librarians, and efficiently deliver library instructions to the academic community. The findings of the study also shed light on the hesitations and fears of librarians that haunt them before and during online library instruction.
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Keywords: Information Literacy; Library Research; Online Library Instruction; De La Salle University Libraries; Focus Group Discussion

1. INTRODUCTION

The onset of covid 19 brought many educational institutions paralyzed as they continue to struggle in discovering ways to effectively deliver instructions to their students. In the same manner, academic libraries were not spared as they adapt persistently to the daunting task of keeping relevant in this era where many professionals try to be more agile and innovate their services. One of the library services that was greatly affected by this pandemic is the delivery of library instruction. From face-to-face instruction, libraries quickly explored various educational technology tools, planned online library instruction, and then eventually trained fellow librarians on how they can efficiently provide library instruction in an online setup. The De La Salle University (DLSU) Libraries, spearheaded by the Information Literacy Committee, customized its classroom library instruction by offering different modules to address the information literacy needs of the DLSU community. DLSU libraries offered Library Research (LibRes) for Senior High School students under its Practical Research (PracRes) classes. On the other hand, libraries provided freshmen students with online library instruction via their GEPCOMM classes. Other undergraduate and graduate students who seek library instruction may sign up in the Library Research (LibRes) General or register in the Information Literacy (IL) Bucket offered by the libraries. In PracRes, GEPCOMM, and LibRes general, the libraries

provide both asynchronous (module-type) and synchronous sessions for the students, while in the IL bucket students may register on their preferred topics and date that fits their schedule. Taking into consideration the time and preparation to learn and adjust to an online setup, DLSU librarians were able to manage to deliver instructions to the community based on the evaluation given by the students after each library session. However, even after almost two years of this online library instruction, many librarians still share anecdotes and experiences of the challenges and opportunities that they faced while teaching library instruction. It is in this light that this study wants to analyze the key issues and challenges that arose during the delivery of online library instruction, as well as the lessons learned during the process, and then eventually develop strategies for enhancing student learning and engagement. Documenting the experiences of the librarians handling online library instruction as well as they transitioned from face-to-face to online setup, will help in developing more strategic ways on how the information literacy program can be improved, increase student engagement, and then address the pressing concerns of the librarians as they deliver library instruction. The result of this study may also help other librarians from other institutions understand the basics of teaching online library instruction to better plan and develop their modules as it fits their institutions and the needs of their community.

The purpose of this focus group discussion is to collect information on the raw experience of DLSU Librarians. This study specifically aims:

- To analyze the key issues and challenges that arose in the development of the LIBRES course specifically in LIBRES-GEPCOMM during the pandemic.
- To explore strategies for enhancing student learning and engagement including collaboration with faculty in the transition to new normal class instructions.

The shared experiences of DLSU Librarians in this focus group discussion will help address the challenges in the sudden shift of giving library instruction including insights as to what will be the future directions of information literacy sessions in the new normal. Thus, this study will help to develop strategies or ways on how information literacy programs can improve student engagement as well as collaboration among faculty members. Furthermore, this study may be used as a model or guide for libraries in developing their modules for online library instruction which fits the needs of their institution.

This focus group discussion concentrates on the shared experiences of DLSU Librarians in the development of the LibRes course in LibRes-GEPCOMM including the challenges, and opportunities they faced during the delivery of online library instruction in both asynchronous and synchronous classes. The selected participants in this focus group discussion study are DLSU Librarians who happen to experience being the main facilitator and co-facilitator. This study will not capture LibRes under PracRes and LibRes General or IL Bucket.

2. METHODOLOGY

Focus group discussion (focus group discussion) was used to do this study. focus group discussion "is a method for collecting qualitative data that gathers community individuals together to discuss a specific topic" (UNICEF, 2020). For this paper, open-ended questions were prepared to stimulate the discussion and capture the raw response of the participants and document their shared experiences on the issues and challenges they have encountered in redesigning the course on information literacy specifically in the development of LIBRES fitted for remote learning due to pandemic.

Identified subjects included in the focus group discussion were six DLSU Librarians facilitating Information Literacy (IL) sessions, all of the participants have experienced being *main facilitators* and *co-facilitators*. The participants were diverse (like age, confidence in terms of new technology orientation, and confidence in handling IL sessions) composed of seasoned librarians and new librarians. Participants were sent an *informed consent* email which served as confirmation of their participation in the focus group discussion. Participants are ASF Librarians who regularly provide IL sessions every term, one ASF Librarian is 2 years in service, two ASF Librarians, are 3 years in service, one ASF Librarian, is 7 years in service, one ASF Librarian, is 10 years in service, one ASF Librarian, is 25 years in service, and 3 years in being an ASF. In the actual focus group discussion, one participant is not included in the original listing, a last-minute change was made due to an uncontrolled event to complete the six subjects.

All six participants were present during the focus group discussion conducted on March 15, 2022. Eight open-ended questions were prepared and asked divided into three parts: initial questions or introductory, challenges experienced, and strategies on how to further improve IL sessions during the transition to the new normal. To cautiously secure the safety of all participating in the focus group

discussion, the session was made off-site using Zoom as a space to meet the participants. The moderator explains the purpose, objectives, and whole mechanics of the session. Though all participants agreed to have the session on recording via zoom, a note-taker is still present to take notes during the session and document significant responses of participants using Google sheets. While time-keepers make sure to monitor that the session will end appropriately.

The moderator explains the objectives, guidelines, and mechanics of the session and then introduces and lets each participant briefly say about themselves. The video recording of Zoom was enabled after each participant agrees to the informed consent sent through email and accomplished by feedback response (see Appendix II - Focus Group Discussion: Informed Consent). After opening the session, the moderator then started asking questions to participants about the initial reaction to the abrupt changes made by Covid-19 in teaching IL, thoughts, challenges going online, and the strategies to further improve student engagement and collaboration among DLSU faculty. The facilitator reads per question out loud and queues participants if they can start giving their answers - anyone from the six participants will be given time and can answer the questions. If the question is not applicable participants may waive a question and may add in support of other participants' answers. After asking questions, the moderator sums up the answers. The focus group discussion lasted an hour and thirty minutes, the moderator thanked and assured participants that all documentation is purely for research and strictly confidential.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the start of the pandemic and the lockdowns were being imposed, people in the academe were anxious not only for their safety and health but also for the future course of instruction. To exemplify, the respondents were asked to describe their thoughts when the library administrators express the need to develop a module specifically for online learning during the pandemic and when they heard that library instruction will be delivered online. The majority of the respondents answered that they almost anticipated that online learning will more likely occur and they need to adapt to what is happening. One participant even mentioned, "*Online learning is no longer new to me since I am enrolled in distance learning in my graduate studies. So, when the pandemic strikes, I anticipate that I need to set up video conferencing apps like google meet and IL will*

be delivered online." This notes in Martzoukou's (2020) paper that "even predating the COVID-19 situation, there was already a high adoption of technology and online tools usage in teaching, scholarship and research collaborative activities across universities". The same with DLSU Libraries even pre-pandemic executing digital literacy is already evident on its services "which had already been developing significant pockets of expertise on the use of diverse online technologies and the provision of a range of online resources and activities (e.g., digitised learning material, lecture capture content, synchronous and asynchronous online teaching and communication sessions, "how-to" video tutorials and overview sessions, flipped classrooms, e-tutoring opportunities, audio and video feedback, screen capture demonstrations, online quizzes, multimedia demos and virtual reality simulations)" (Martzoukou, 2020). Though most of them agreed that they need to prepare for online learning "although offering online access to resources is common in many universities, the full-time online provision of courses has been less prominent, with only a small proportion of universities having embraced online learning pre-COVID-19" (Martzoukou, 2020), and, one respondent was more concerned if the librarians can handle all the information literacy sessions. She cited some considerations to take such as, would all the librarians can, able, and have the willingness to teach library instruction online? Are they ready technologically-wise? And would there be enough training before indulging the librarians in online teaching? This response from the participants showed that the advent of the pandemic caught many librarians by surprise, especially in managing library instructions online. The sudden change in the landscape of teaching brought anxiety to many librarians as they need to adapt quickly to the needs of the time and Martzoukou (2020) explains that "from the learner's point of view, the sudden shift to this online learning reality could be described as a "forced migration" to online learning design and pedagogy". Meaning, "whereas before, on-campus provision of learning and teaching experiences would be, in most cases, just enhanced or supplemented by off-site online provision, with the effects of COVID-19, there has been a complete and involuntary shift, reversing priorities and the positioning of online provision in universities" (Martzoukou, 2020). "Hence, educators need to design their lessons in the form of challenges that enables students to use and improvise skills allowing them to advance" (Ahmed et al., 2021). Furthermore, "acquiring an education online is increasing in popularity" (Ahmed et al., 2021). However, "the reality is that teachers and students are poorly trained to effectively deliver or learn from

online content" (Ahmed et al., 2021). This supports Chigwada's (2021) stand that working from home presented its challenges for librarians who were not equipped with technological skills. Since librarians need to learn new collaborative technologies, there is a need for training and preparedness to fully equipped the librarians with the necessary skills to deliver library instructions online, and "this new "forced" online teaching and learning reality has opened the door to multiple challenges which are complex and ongoing" (Martzoukou, 2020).

In addition to this, respondents were also asked how they prepared themselves before and during online instruction. In terms of how they prepared mentally and emotionally, most of the respondents usually get ready a few more hours before their scheduled class. They mentioned that they do not usually set other meetings before and after their class. They plan and get familiarized with the script so that they won't be rattled in the middle of their sessions. However, one respondent mentioned that he had a hard time preparing because aside from the fact that he only has one year of teaching library instruction during face-to-face classes, teaching is not one of his fortes as he is in charge of the technical services side of the library. When it comes to the available equipment at home and internet connection, many of the respondents need to upgrade their gadgets as well as the bandwidth of their internet connection to meet the required specification to deliver good and quality online instruction. Still, the majority of the respondents admitted that one of their fears during their library instruction is to get cut or have internet connectivity lost. It is indeed that "librarians have been encountering all the above challenges and opportunities experienced in the changing online education environment, as they are called to work remotely, deliver access to resources solely electronically and teach almost exclusively to an online audience" (Martzoukou, 2020). Respondents were also asked about their office space at home and their acceptance of the new technology. All of the respondents agreed that drawing the line between personal and professional work may not come in handy in work from home setup. Many things must be considered before they start their classes such as a place where the least background noise can be heard, distractions from other family members that are also working and studying remotely, and even taking care of their family and other household chores. In terms of their acceptance of new technology, two of the respondents were able to attend a training workshop about learning management systems which somehow introduced them to online learning. However, the majority of the respondents resonated that this is not

the case with their fellow librarians, especially the seasoned ones who were not adept at various technologies. One respondent even mentioned, "*We also need to consider the readiness of other librarians. A big adjustment is needed especially on the use of online platforms such as Google meet, zoom, and Zeetings.*" This is congruent with the findings of the study by Martin, Budhrani, and Wang, faculty with little to no online teaching experience, have lower perceptions of their ability to teach online. Most of these faculties have no formal education training and they only rely on their experience as a student and face-to-face instructor. When asked about their hesitations or fears about going online, the majority of the respondents mentioned the following: acceptance of the students to the new mode of teaching, student engagement- as they are not aware of the students are listening to them, online disconnection, connection with the student and the language they use, classroom management, and getting negative feedback from the students. The following responses allowed the authors to gauge the level of anxiety and level of readiness of the respondents. In as much as the librarians are trying to deal with abrupt changes brought by the pandemic, they accepted the fact that learning must continue and takes place. Interestingly, the librarians faced many challenges and tried to bring home the necessary equipment and skills that they needed to provide library instruction to the students. The findings of the study reinforce the proposition of Guo & Huang, (2021) that even though we are under different circumstances, the importance of online teaching must be highlighted which challenges the libraries to change their approach from passive adaptation to active exploration to teach online more effectively and innovatively.

Furthermore, the study wants to find out with regards to the support given by the library administrators and their initiatives during the adjustment stage in preparation for online teaching. All of the respondents affirmed that the library administrators are very supportive in providing the needs and requests of the librarians that will handle online instruction. The respondents mentioned that they appreciated the efforts of the information literacy committee tasked by the library administrators to create a module and train the librarians before they set sail in teaching. The respondents enumerated the support given to them such as the presentation deck and script of the lesson, series of training on how to navigate the technological tools to be used, allowing to borrow gadgets and units to bring home, conscientious scheduling of classes, reducing work schedule and other library duties, opportunity to attend seminars about teaching, and even words of

affirmation. This finding of the study provides insights on how important to the librarians who do the legwork the support they get from their library administrators. The librarians felt that they were not just being sent to battles without giving them the proper and enough preparations and tools that they need to use before facing the students online. The positive remarks from the respondents also showed that despite the short-notice preparations, the library administrators exhausted all the means and support that they can give to their fellow librarians. This is also in line with Schijf et al., (2021) study that through the help of the information literacy committee and the leadership team, they were able to address the challenges of delivering library instructions online by developing strategies such as planning, implementation, review, and evaluation. After receiving this support, the librarians are more confident with their teaching and instructional skills.

In terms of the strategies that they deemed important to further improve student engagement as well as the way the librarians facilitate learning, the majority of the respondents stated that the librarians need to consider the language being used by the students, make the instruction more interesting, close coordination with the class officers to highlight the objectives of the lesson and make their classmates participate, games with prizes, continue the good collaboration with the faculty, and give more training on classroom management for the librarians. The findings of this study indicate that though librarians were able to adjust to the current setup and were able to deliver online instruction, they still feel the need to upskill themselves, evaluate the modules being used, and improve the collaboration with the faculty and students so that a real learning experience takes place. Innovation and being updated on the tools and language used by the students is also an integral part of having effective online library instruction. This is also parallel to the Ropero-Padilla et al., (2021) study that to increase interest, enthusiasm, and adherence to the subjects incorporating games and other activities in blended-learning lessons is a must despite the difficulties like exposure to the computer screen for a long time, lack of attention, being demotivated due to the transition to online instruction. Furthermore, it also supports Lobo and Dhuri (2021) who promote webinars about online teaching, and workshops on managing information literacy sessions online are indispensable. It is beneficial to the education sector and should be continued even after recuperating from the pandemic to train other librarians to possess adequate digital literacy skills and embrace web-based techniques to ensure the continuity of the process of teaching and learning.

4. CONCLUSION

As librarians scale the steep precipice of the pandemic while balancing the need to quickly learn how they can teach online and the goal to still deliver effective library instruction, the growing anxiety and stress among librarians are very evident. From thinking about their safety and loved ones to adapting to a work from home set up, up to the ability to acquire swiftly the new mode of delivery of instruction, librarians tend to be more flexible to remain relevant and still be able to contribute to educational institutions in general and the learning of the student in particular. The responses from the participants echoed the lack of preparation of many educational institutions in distant learning and the lack of readiness of the librarians when faced with this kind of situation. However, it was also resonated that academic librarians are more adaptable and agile when needed. The study found out that even in a short time, many librarians were able to acquire the necessary skills to develop the modules, train fellow librarians, and efficiently deliver library instructions to the academic community. The findings of the study also shed light on the hesitations and fears of librarians that haunt them before and during online library instruction.

Resiliency and adaptiveness to change of librarians are key factors in how participants overcome challenges in online teaching. Despite hesitation at first due to changes brought by the pandemic, being gritty to try new things with the support system coming from the administrators, including colleagues is a big leap to survive and still be relevant in the field. Relevancy connects to continuous learning while learning new things requires grit and openness. The mode of teaching may change but still, you cannot change learning, it is an infinite process.

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