A Study to Develop and Apply Evaluation Factors for Subject Guides in South Korea

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to develop the evaluation factors for the Subject Guide for Korean Modern Literature, which is provided by the National Library of Korea, to enhance the guides as an effective public service. In the study, the following final evaluation factors were identified: four evaluation domains (use, content, format, and collaboration), 23 evaluation components, and 67 evaluation items and questions. The results of the study showed that key evaluation components included the reliability of the website, user communication, accessibility to the subject guides, book search capability, provision of information in a consistent format, and the scope of the subject guides. When the subject-specific bibliography system of the National Library of Korea was examined by applying the developed evaluation factors, it was found that the system satisfied only 37 (55.2%) of 67 evaluation items: 8 (40%) of 20 items on use, 13 (66%) of 20 items on content, 15 (88%) of 17 items on format, and 1 (10%) of 10 items on collaboration. Accordingly, the entire subject-specific bibliography system that is currently in use needs to be reviewed, and changes and improvements need to be made utilizing the derived evaluation factors. In particular, it is imperative to develop a strategy to facilitate collaboration among users and librarians in charge, and a more effective subject guide system.

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INTRODUCTION

The subject guides are a library service for their users who are at an early stage of their research on a specific topic, which provides them with systematically organized information on all available forms of reference sources for items owned or accessed by the library. The concept of subject guides first appeared in 1972 when Marie Canfield referred to the printed materials that documented reference information, such as bibliographies, indexes, abstracts, and call numbers using the term, Pathfinders. The concept was elaborated more by Stevens et al. (1973) (Hong et al., 2014, 24).

Accommodating specialized and specific users' needs requires subject-specific specialized services. In particular, the subject guide service has become crucial in the current context in which the importance of literary materials has grown due to the increasing spurt of reading in humanities. Because of this, the National Library of Korea has attempted to advance Korean modern literature services through the development of materials on Korean modern literature and the systematization of bibliographic data, and to provide subject guides on literature through the Modern Literature Information Center. The National Library of

Korea prepared the foundation for the subject guide service by establishing meta-fields and creating a database for the subject guides for Korean modern literature. However, regarding evaluation factors of the subject guide service, the National Library of Korea only proposed that the subject guides must be developed with attention to accuracy, ease of use, being up to date, and based on a literature review, while providing no practical considerations and developing no specific evaluation factors.

Therefore, this study is conducted to provide the foundation for assessing the subject guide services, primarily based in college libraries, by determining the evaluation factors for the subject guides, and evaluating the subject guide service of the National Library of Korea that is currently in use, applying these factors. The evaluation factors for the subject guides for library materials including literature have been developed based on a review of a variety of previously proposed subject guide evaluation factors to consider when developing such guides, with a specific focus on college libraries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on evaluation factors for subject guides has been conducted with various foci, including development of subject guides,

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implementing subject guides, and application and analysis of evaluation factors for the currently used subject guides.

Kim (2015) developed evaluation factors for subject guides in the field of business management. In this study 38 preliminary evaluation factors were generated, and after two rounds of the Delphi survey, the finalized evaluation factors included three broad factors, including format, use, and content, and 25 lower-level factors: 5 items on format, 8 items on use, and 12 items on content. The top five items that a panel of experts identified as the most important among the 25 items included how up-to-date the guides were, the contained information sources, the inclusion of electronic journals, accessibility, and the status of links.

Hong et al. (2014) proposed accuracy, ease of use, and up-to-datedness as evaluation factors for Korean modern literature in the aspects of the content, system, and operation. For the component of accuracy, the study proposed looking at the precision of bibliographical information on printed materials provided by subject guides, the exactness of the URLs of bibliographical information on printed and electronic materials and the full texts, and the minimization of dead links. In terms of ease of use, the study proposed simplification of navigation routes to subject guides, active promotion of subject guides targeting library users, and facilitation of tools for communication between implementers and users of subject guides. The up-to-datedness is the final component of evaluation factors, and the study proposed an ongoing upgrade on the content and additional information, adding new materials that constantly become available on respective subjects, and indicating among the information, the update cycle, last update date, and the updated items, as evaluation factors for promoting the use of subject guides.

Kim (2012) developed criteria for analysis of subject guides, including two broad categories (use and content), and 10 items for analysis. The use portion was designed to analyze if the subject guides help users save time and use the library more easily, and the content part was designed to assess if the subject guides are directly relevant to users' learning. The use category included six evaluation factors and specific items (easy-to-understand and consistent terminologies, accessibility, format consistency, up-to-datedness, keyword search, and librarian information), and the content category included four evaluation factors and specific items (diversity of subjects, types of information resources, arrangement system, user education). The results of the analysis of the subject guides of 14 college libraries using the criteria suggested were that they performed well in the domains of accessibility, format consistency, and resource integration, while performing poorly in the domains of diversity of subjects, user education, and keyword search.

Hahm (2008) conducted an analytic study on the implementation of subject guides in Chinese college libraries, and identified evaluation factors in five areas (transparency, consistency, selectivity, accessibility, and use) to analyze the implementation of subject guides in 38 college libraries, which won Honorary Mention in the 985 projects among 701 four-year college libraries in China.

Jackson and Stacy-Bates (2016) and Jackson and Pellack (2004) analyzed the online subject guides of college libraries. Jackson and colleagues conducted longitudinal studies on subject guides in college libraries to investigate the changes in them. In their 2004 study, they developed a questionnaire that contained 10 items for analysis of subject guides, selected 121 college libraries that joined the American Library Association (ALA), and analyzed them as they related to four academic fields (philosophy, journalism, astronomy, and chemistry). In their 2016 study, using a questionnaire that was slightly modified, they analyzed subject guides for chemistry, journalism, and philosophy in use in 32 college libraries that joined ALA. The results of the 2016 study were mostly similar to the results of the 2004 study, except that the proportion of the libraries using a link checker increased from 54% to 94%, and the libraries that utilized user behavior statistics increased from 67% to 88%. The same evaluation factors were used in 2004 and 2016 to evaluate the development of subject guides, status of links, up-to-datedness, value, statistics, and evaluation, while slightly modified evaluation factors were used in 2016 in the aspects of format, content, and operation, reflecting the current context.

Wakeham, Roberts, Shelley, and Wells (2012) developed the criteria for analysis of subject guides based on a literature review on subject guides in college libraries in the U.K. The criteria for analysis were developed separately for the subject guides of the libraries of the authors' institution (Anglia Ruskin University), and other institutional libraries. They analyzed the subject guides for libraries of Anglia Ruskin University on 10 factors, and the libraries of other institutions on 17 criteria.

Ouellette (2011) conducted a qualitative study using in-depth interviews with 11 college students to investigate the students' use of and preferences regarding subject guides in their college libraries. Based on the interview on user perception of subject guides, three key factors were identified: clutter, use of unclear language, and unfamiliar design. Users indicated that the currently available subject guides provided novices too much information, and suggested that simple and clear information needs to be provided. It was also found that names of items, which included unclear headings, jargon and abbreviations, and the subject guide interface that was different from the design of commercial search engines, caused confusion in novice users.

Yang (2009) proposed subject guides 2.0 by applying the web 2.0 technology to them. The study identified the following as the feature of the web 2.0: provision of multimedia and multi-format, collaboration between subject guide users and librarians, ease of use of subject guides, accessibility through data conversion, keyword searches and category searches that emphasize ease of use, link checker for searching dead links, integrated social bookmarking features, RSS, interactivity like tagging, user data input, use of blogs and wiki, and statistics on subject guides. The developed criteria for analysis were applied to commercial subject guides and open source subject guides. It was found that most subject guides still provided information based on web 1.0 and HTML. This study included the criteria for analysis of subject guides based on web 2.0 proposed by Yang (2009) in the preliminary evaluation factors for subject guides for literature.

Dunsmore (2002) identified key components of subject guides using a qualitative study on web-based Pathfinders. The study investigated the purpose, concepts, and principles of web-based Pathfinders and subject guides of 20 libraries of business schools (10 in each of the U.S. and Canada), and the components of the subject guides including Company Guide, Industry Guide, and Marketing Guide. Regarding the components of web-based Pathfinders, the study emphasized the importance of four features: the clarity of the purpose, concepts, and principles of Pathfinders' transparency that refers to being easy to understand and read; the consistency that refers to the unity in choice of the name of subject guides and the style of presentation; accessibility that represents the pathways from the library's homepage to the respective subject guides; the selectivity that refers to informing users of the range of resources provided in the subject guides.

Dahl (2001) analyzed the content and the format of the e-Pathfinders of college libraries. Specifically, the study established the evaluation criteria of consistency, scope, readability, and use for 45 subject guides of nine college libraries in Canada, and conducted an analysis. Consistency included the type of information provided and the form of presentation, and the scope included the scope of the subjects included in Pathfinders and the scope of the resources provided. Readability included the easy accessibility such as the description of the terminologies and the absence of jargon, the systematic accessibility through subject headings, and the direct accessibility through hypertext links. Use included the provision of subject headings that focused on whether additional information can be obtained from other information sources using tools such as subject headings and call numbers. The results of analysis indicated that Pathfinders were not maintained consistently according to the four criteria, suggesting the need for an overhaul of the guidelines.

These findings on evaluation factors from previous studies show that most evaluations of subject guides were focused on those implemented