

Academic Librarian: The generalist in information delivery

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Abstract

This current dispensation is termed information age where information is esteemed above other factors in human and society development. In the library, especially Academic library, this new development has revolutionalised the nature of information resources: the way information is generated, processed and disseminated, making it compulsory that academic librarians must acquire new skills or diverse ways for information delivery. This paper on Academic Librarian: the generalist in information delivery aims to x-ray the myriad responsibilities academic librarian handles as it concerns service delivery in this information age. The paper discussed Flash Back to the Beginning of Libraries and Librarianship in Information Delivery; Librarians and their many hats as Generalist in Information delivery. The hats also include Academic Librarian in Information Literacy Delivery; Academic reference librarian in information delivery. To effectively operate through these hats, the Academic Librarian should possess the following skills: Optimism and Enthusiasm; Format or location.; Reference and creativity; courage; ability to communicate; Ability to Market Library Resources and Services; ability to be a team player; Confidence and sense of Humor and technological competence. The paper further discussed: Multi- Hats Challenge: One head Many Hats and how to handle the multi-hats challenges In conclusion the paper suggested that librarians in the information age must possess necessary information literacy skills, be proactive in information handling and skillful in research to enable them move beyond ordinary gate keepers of information to mediators and instructors in information use in library and information centres.

Keywords: Academic Librarian, Generalist, Information delivery

Introduction

A librarian is a professional trained in the care and management of a library, providing access to information, and sometimes involved in the social or technical programming, or instruction on user education. According to Betterteam (2021), a librarian is in charge of collecting, organizing and issuing library resources, such as books, films, and audio files. They work in a range of settings, including public, academic, school libraries and other information centres. Librarians are generally trained to provide library and information services to information seekers. Library services comprise the range of services and resources provided by libraries in satisfying the information needs of their patrons. These include circulation service, reference service, reservation of books, recommendation of library materials, current awareness service, inter-library loan service, photocopying and printing service, user education, selective dissemination of information, etc. (IGI-Global, 2020). Over the years, especially with the past century in particular, the role of the librarian has evolved as a result of technology.

The increasing role of technology in libraries has had significant impact on the changing role of libraries and librarians. New technologies are dramatically increasing the accessibility of information, and librarians are quickly adapting to the evolving needs of users that emerge from the adoption of these new technologies (Bertot, Jaeger, Langa & McClure, 2006). Technology has significantly changed the role of librarians in such areas as: changing from the traditional card catalogues to online public access catalogue (OPACs), development of library software and MARC standards for cataloguing records electronically, electronic databases, barcodes, etc. Career and employment obligations as well as current and projected demands of librarianship really amount to myriad responsibilities for an academic librarian. These can be likened to: a librarian wearing many caps. For the many hats, as one is removed another grows up. It is unending so for service delivery in librarianship is concerned. That is to say in the world of Kruger (2003) librarians not only wear many hats, but “grow” new ones as the need arises or more appropriately, as technology and other changes arise. Life is not static but dynamic likewise in librarianship or service delivery in library and information science.

Flash Back to the Beginning of Libraries and Librarianship in Information Delivery

From inception librarianship hence librarians and library service delivery has never remained the same from generation to generation. The word library is derived from the Latin word “liber”, meaning book. However, the library actually predates the book, as collection of clay tablets, papyrus, and scrolls were housed in libraries long before the concept of the book emerged. The history and origin of libraries is traced back to the invention of writing. Before the invention of writing, libraries were inconceivable. The invention of writing led to the keeping of records. As the number of records increased, the need arose for storage places, where they could be preserved and made available for use when needed. In this sense, libraries originally came into being for preservation of recorded knowledge, and therefore repository spaces to preserve the essentials of human civilization (Encyclopedia.com, 2020). At this time, there was no distinction between a record room (archive) and a library, and in this understanding, libraries can be said to have existed for almost as long as records have been kept (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020).

The printed word, which is housed in libraries as information materials, have been packaged or documented on different formats as remarkable technological changes occur in the society. Though the format of the printed word has changed considerably over the centuries, the basic functions of the library have remained remarkably constant. These functions are: collection and preservation of information; organization of information; and classification of information, to make it accessible to readers.

Library services comprise the range of services and resources provided by libraries in satisfying the information needs of their patrons. These include circulation service, reference service, reservation of books, recommendation of library materials, current awareness service, inter-library loan service, photocopying and printing service, user education, selective dissemination of information, etc. (IGI-Global, 2020). Over the years, especially with the past century in particular, the role of the librarian has evolved as a result of technology. Currently, it is technology, Information and communication technology, electronic/ digital/ virtual that is trending. As new information its packaging format and updated system of delivery/dissemination come up so do hats of librarians change as well as grow to meet up with information/ knowledge need of humanity all over the globe. The librarian does not shy away or be frustrated or irrelevant due to new

information cum packaging format. They avail themselves the opportunity of knowledge upgrading as to render the necessary services to the information seekers.

Librarians and their many hats as Generalist in Information delivery

Librarianship training, prepares the professional to have capacity to constantly change, adapt and upgrade: wearing/growing new/current hats appropriately as information care givers to teeming populace that require relevant and current information to meet every day life need/challenges. Individual's or society's quest for knowledge are readily satisfied because librarians ever ready wearing, changing, growing hats fitted to serve humanity. The constant role of collection development and management, reader services, teaching commitments, and public service hours at the reference desk, are interwoven with new demands. Evidence of librarians growing hats observed by Kruger (2003) relates to "Positions created a few years ago through databases metamorphose to include web pages development, enhancement, administration and electronic reserves. An instruction position evolves into outreach and marketing position all find themselves scratching their heads for new ways to publicize and "sell" library services". The already existing and evolving responsibilities or hats of the librarian encompasses: computer technician, salesperson, politician, researcher, investigator, in To properly capture these multiple hats, currently the librarians and their services are known as embedded – hence the term embedded librarian/ embedded library service (LIT 2016). These hats/responsibilities/ embedded roles are discharged by librarians. All don their teaching hats when delivering instruction sessions requested by professors, implement programs to incorporate information competencies in curriculums, suggest materials for courses and assignment and by personally interacting with students as their research needs dictate throughout a course.

Reference librarians wear their technician hat when they required being, in varying degree, web page development for liaison areas solvers of printing, networking, and computer problems as well versed in computer applications involving emails, word processing, spreadsheets, databases, and statistical packages.

Academic librarians put on their sales chapeau when they struggle to find new ways to attract students to library resources and advertise all those expensive databases that expand the gold mine of information students think they can locate on the internet.

The politician hat is won when dealing with conflicting needs between students and faculty, between students, faculty and alumni and policy, and when negotiating for a place in a department's outcomes, goals or at least, a spot light on the syllabus. Lobbying and advocacy is very much employed by this librarian's hat thus:

Research attire is appreciated when designing new and creative survey and students that both resources and services for effectiveness and the student participation.

Academic librarians put on sales hat when they struggle to find new ways to attract students to library resources and advertise all those expensive databases that expand the gold mine of information students think they can locate on the Internet. Umeozor (2011) maintains that "ignorance about existence of a source of information causes non-use of the information."

According to Nofsinger (2003: 43) ability to market library resources and services is imperative in this 21st century. He points out that:

Academic Librarians are ideally situated to publicize library resources and services to university customers. Proactive reference Librarians must be involved in public relations and marketing if they are to survive in this competitive information age. Major corporations, Internet dot-coms, and other commercial competitors are already eagerly marketing their product in the higher education environment. If Librarians publicize value added services, such as electronic reserves, seamless access to electronic and print collections, assistance with integrating electronic resources into courses and course content, online tutorials, electronic notice of newly purchased materials and quick access to resources, they will enhance the relevance of library contributions to the university mission. (p.43)

Adekunmisi (2013) explains that:

Libraries and information centres have begun to realize that by using marketing principles and techniques, they can understand better their user's needs, justify findings, communicate more effectively with a variety of external audience and achieve greater efficiency and optimal result in delivering product and services that meet the identified needs of their clients. Four main factors namely information explosion, technology revolution, escalating library costs and increasing competition by information providers

and web -based commercial services providers are responsible for encouraging the library professionals to develop a marketing strategy for its operators and services. Libraries therefore need to continue to respond to enhance the use of their resources and services.

Patange (2013), points out that "marketing approach is mainly useful to academic libraries to improve their image and to attract more users. It helps the library staff to upgrade their innovative knowledge both within their organisations and as a profession within the society."

Haas (2003) maintains that as a Librarian, "learn to market yourself" you need to know how to sell yourself and your skills. This mean getting out and introducing yourself to faculty, staff and students, giving away pens or magnets with your name on it; and getting your home page placed prominently on a departmental page. In other words, make them aware of what you can offer them and be proactive in getting them what they need. For example, download a copy of a faculty member's syllabus and vita and send them alerts on articles that may help them with either their teaching or research needs.

Librarians undergo constant training as new tools emerge The usual responsibilities for collection development, management of the public service areas, teaching commitments and public service hours at the reference desk are interwoven with new demands. Positions created a few years ago for acquiring and maintaining electronic databases metamorphose to include web page development, enhancement, administration and electronic reserves. An instruction position evolves into an outreach and marketing position and all find themselves scratching their heads for new ways to publicize and "sell" library services

Academic librarians cannot withdraw to the comfort of their libraries but must be out selling themselves and their services to the campus. New technologies may be the hook that draws patrons to the library, but the research and information library skills imparted by academic librarians are what make the time spent worthwhile. Unless new librarians are willing to step out and sell themselves, their role as teachers will not be fully realized.

Embedded Librarianship as marketing strategy

The focus of embedded librarianship is forming strong cordial relationship between the librarian and a group or team of people who need the librarian's information expertise (Ukwuoma, 2016). The embedded librarian searches the web to get the information. He/she gets involved with the

user group or population he/she serves as to know their information needs. Getting involved with the group gets the librarian integrated into the group and focused on the group's specific need. Embedded library service is a personalised service rendered by the librarian to the group.

The embedded librarian integrates as part of the department/faculty. The ideology of embedded librarianship is like subject librarianship of undergraduate programme. In the undergraduate programme, the library and information science student has subject combination which aims at producing a librarian specialist in that discipline as to render service to that group on graduation. The embedded librarian canvases for users not waiting for them to come to use the materials. Embedded librarian works like a marketer.

Attributes of an embedded librarian: Creative and flexible, Committed to users, Excellent interpersonal skill (good relationship with users), Willingness to advocate for the interest of the user community, Showcasing the library as a service and not as a place, and Can thrive in both traditional and digital environment

According to Lovato-Gassman (2003) Librarians said:

today are finding it necessary to provide ever-increasing and varied services to patrons that they never see.. Virtual reference in all types of libraries and support of distance education in academic institutions creates a whole new type of library user: the faceless patron. Library foot traffic is declining, but the expectations of libraries and librarians are constantly increasing. With libraries making the move completely into virtual environment, librarians are forced to wear many more hats: data miner, researcher, Internet and computer expert, multimedia specialist and webmaster, to name a few (p.46)

Librarians undergo constant training as new tools emerge. The training enables them to effectively fit into any new hat for effective service delivery

The most prominent hat according to Kruger (2003) is that of investigator or private eye, this is won daily as databases are analyzed, classes are planned, new information resources are sought and examined, and when tackling reference question that do not fit into a predefined book or website, sleuthing through the sacks, virtual or otherwise is a high priority. In fact being a Librarian entails variety in service delivery or best described as generalist/ many things: Technical skill, Interpersonal ability, Subject area knowledge specialist etc. Bridges (2003) commenting further says “being a librarian represents adoption of a distinct philosophical position. It is, as the Book

of Common Prayer says so well, “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace”. This Librarians Grace stated in brief, values knowledge over ignorance, order over chaos and helpfulness over rudeness”.

Academic Librarian in Information Literacy Delivery

Twenty first century is known as Age of technology, variously referred to as the computer Age, Digital age, or new media Age, is a historical period that begun in the mid-20th century, characterized by a rapid shift from traditional industry established by the Industrial revolution to an economy primarily based upon information technology (IGI-Global, 2020).

Information services delivery, In fact retrieval and use can never take place except the user access the information material. Hence the chain is information access → information retrieval → information utilization. A competent user who learns the accessing skills is automatically an independent library user. That is the hallmark of library services. Train the user to be an independent library user. Library services comprise the range of services and resources provided by libraries in satisfying the information needs of their patrons. These include circulation service, reference service, reservation of books, recommendation of library materials, current awareness service, inter-library loan service, photocopying and printing service, user education, selective dissemination of information, etc. (IGI-Global, 2020). The academic librarian has the opportunity to actively engage and help facilitate both the immediate and the lifelong learning of library users.

Academic reference librarian in information delivery

The fourth law of Ranganathan says “save the time of the user”. The assured way of serving user’s time is to teach him/her to be literate in information accessibility→ retrieval and use. Where the patron is always having difficulty accessing his/her need and always calling for assistance, this will defeat the desire to come to the library to seek for information to meet his/ her need. Rather than just telling users, where to find answers or providing the needed information itself reference librarian should guide users to develop skills that will enable the user be a critical consumer of information with zest for lifelong learning. In taking such an active instructional role, librarians are aiding in the development of active and even reflective learners.

The 21st century reference librarian is the intermediary between the library user and the information resources. However reference librarians cannot sit back and wait for information seekers to come to them. Academic librarians everywhere must be proactive in helping users to

fulfill their information needs. Additionally, the academic reference librarian should play a positive role in collaborating with teaching faculty in designing assignment and even syllabi to facilitate the best learning possible for students. Whether library users are on campus or at a distance, they should receive the same consideration and service. Distance learners should be provided same services and resources as possible as on- campus library users. It is the challenge and the reward of academic libraries to extend their mission beyond the library walls.

The reference librarian has the opportunity to actively engage and help facilitate both the immediate and the lifelong learning of library users. While technological advancement allows easier and quicker access to information, they also serve to heighten the important role of librarians as educators. The issue of finding enough information has turned into an issue of sifting through too much information in order to find the most relevant while learning what resources are appropriate for which kinds of information as well as how to access the needed information. The 21st century reference librarian is the intermediary between the library user and the information resources. However reference librarians cannot sit back and wait for information seekers to come to them. Reference librarians everywhere must be proactive in helping users to fulfill their information needs. Enthusiastic and skillful research assistance will gratify library users, keep them coming and ensure their support of the institution and the library profession well into the future.

In hiring Academic Reference Librarians in the 21st Century, bearing in mind that Ranganathan said “save the time of the user”, in this information age with technology touch there is pressure to provide information faster, better, anywhere and anytime. According to Nofsinger (2003) the reference librarian’s attributes that will contribute to success are; enthusiasm, flexibility, empathy, a teamwork orientation patience and a sense of humour. As a result, these essential characteristics are vital for reference librarians.

Optimism and Enthusiasm

Librarians who expect positive outcomes, even in the face of difficulty, and who are highly motivated to provide personal, individual tailored reference assistance are assets in an academic environment. Those who are excited about working with both traditional and digital information

resources will have to resolve numerous challenges since change is accelerating. Proactive reference librarians with an enthusiastic service orientation will find it easier to approach customer to deliver high- quality reference and instructional services regardless of complexity, format or location.

To achieve constant positive outcome, the following qualities/ characteristics reference librarians must possess include:

Creativity

Reference librarians who embrace change and adapt to new realities as they appear will thrive in the 21st century. Library patrons come from varying background of racial, ethnic and cultural make up reference librarians who are flexible will develop an understanding and appreciation for cultural differences in order to successfully meet the needs of diverse customers and co- workers. Academic reference librarians will also need to become more sensitive to issues related to customers learning style. Furthermore, librarians must be creative as their roles shift, as digital collections expand and as physical access and delivery methods expand the flow of information to independent learning on and off campus. Digital reference interviews and collaborations 24/7 reference services will demand flexible and creative response as well as strong thinking and problem- solving skills.

Courage

To be successful in the 21st century, reference librarians will need to take risks, be assertive, and experiment with new approaches- embracing approaches from outside the library world. The traditional librarianship values and priorities are being challenged by the new technology hence the reference librarian would know how to marry the old and the new as to achieve excellent result in serving library patrons librarians also have to deal with sensitive political and social issues, including censorship, the digital divide, pornography, copyright, privacy, and confidentially concerns, intellectual freedom and electronic archiving of resources.

Ability to communicate

Reference librarians who are articulate, persuasive and use active librarians will be most successful in querying customer to determine needs, particularly if they are friendly and non judgmental, ask open ended question, and then follow up for customers satisfaction. Active listening allows a reference librarian soliciting feedback to better understand the speaker's frame of reference. Reference librarian should understand the nature of problems before offering assistance, listening skill help in achieving it is. Articulate librarians also make effective presentations to teaching faculty and classes- teaching information retrieval and electronic manipulation skills essential in a digital world. Students who learn these skills will be competitive in the workplace and able to engage in lifelong learning. These teaching activities contribute to the research and institution agendas of the campus.

Ability to Market Library Resources and Services

Academic librarians are ideally situated to publicize library resources and services to university customers. Proactive reference librarians will embrace library services by marketing their expertise and helping customers make effective use of these resources indeed, librarians MUST be involves in public relations and marketing if they are to survive in this competitive information age, Major corporations, internet dot. coms, and other commercial competitors are already eagerly marketing their products in the higher education's environment. If librarians publicize value- added services such as electronic reserves, seamless access to electronic and print collections, assistance with integrating electronic resources into courses and course content, online tutorials, electronic notice of newly purchased materials and quick guides to resources, they will enhance the relevance of library contribution to the university mission.

Ability to be a Team Player

Reference librarians should not work independent of each other, they need to develop collaborative partnership with others to advance library goals, serving and programs. With colleagues, librarians need to share their knowledge and skills, and work as team members to analyze strategic goals, develop new initiative, and set priorities. With faculty librarians need to work cooperatively to

provide assistance in the classroom and expertise with projects with publishers, librarians need to negotiate consortia agreement to save money and to centralize service for customers, conveniences. With computing professionals, librarians need to develop joint teaching programs and expend seamless access to electronic resources new partnership also extend the library's influence within the state and contribute to enhanced fund- raising efforts. Within the campus community collaboration ensure that the mission of the library will remain viable in the 21st century.

Confidence and sense of Humor

As the nature of library work changes, self confidence and a sense of humor help relieve stress and anxiety. A relaxed demeanor allows a librarian to focus more on customer needs encourage productivity and enhance the achievement of goals with less effort. These characteristics also encourage self- relating active Learning, and professional activity. Self motivated learners are highly valued in any workplace.

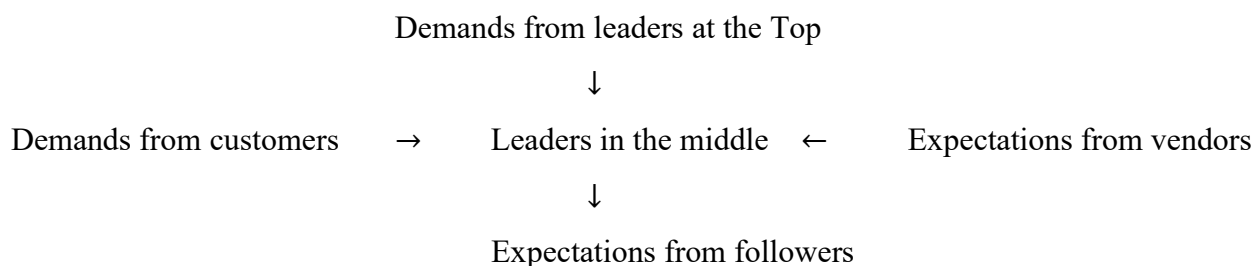
Technological Competence

Librarians with a strong technological background will be essential in creating 21st century library corrections and services. It is clear that full text article database, electronic books, chat-based interactive technologies, video conferencing, voice- over- IP application and streaming media have already impacted the service and roles of reference librarians. Understand these varied technologies, including imaging technologies web markup languages, metadata, user interface design; internet searching and multimedia will be essential. As this paradigm shift occurs reference librarians will be involved- developing seamless interfaces, help system delivering information to a variety of computing platforms, and coordinating this activity with computing and other personnel outside the library.

Academic librarian the generalist in information delivery by implication having myriad responsibilities which are equated as wearing multi-hats is not without challenges. Such challenges include the following:

The Multi- Hats Challenge: One head Many Hats

Academic Librarian is a leader in information acquisition, processing and dissemination to library patrons. Leadership requires the ability to do many things well. Leaders in performing varying tasks usually experience the multi-hats challenge on a daily basis. They must perform tasks and have knowledge beyond their experience. And they often are forced to deal with multiple shifting priorities often with limited time and resources. Douglas Randlett in Maxwell (2005) calls this the “handyman syndrome.” The multi-hat responsibility shows a picture like this



In- fact, dealing with the multi-hat challenge is one of the things that keep people from moving up in an organization Many workers decide they would rather not have all the headaches of leadership and stay where they are, doing just a few things not wearing a lot of hats

. How to handle the multi-hats challenge

Billy Hornsby in Maxwell (2005) said that “these leaders have to learn to get along with everybody around them and survive the various organization dynamics- following, leading, cajoling, appeasing and partnering as needed. It is not an easy task” (pp44-49). Hence leaders in an organization of course has one head but required to wear many hats should do the following:

- Remember that the hat sets the context when interacting with others. Every role or “hat” you are asked to wear has its own responsibilities and objectives. If you change hats. Keep in mind that the context changes. The goal often determines the role and the approach to take.
- Don’t use one hat to accomplish a task required for another hat. Know what hat to wear in any given situation and also know when to change hats in an instant. By your position, never use one hat to accomplish tasks that may be required for another capacity. Take time to cultivate each working relationship on its own terms, and act accordingly. It is often a balancing act. Try to do it exceptionally well.

- When you change hat, don't change your personality. Don't change your personality according to who you are with. Your attitude and behavior should be consistent and predictable with everyone. Otherwise you won't be trust worthy in the eyes of anyone you work with.
- Don't neglect any hat you are responsible to wear. If you neglect the duties of any hat for a day, you fall behind.
- Remain flexible. The key to taking on the multi-hat challenge is knowing what hat to put on at anytime and enjoying the challenge it offers. How does one do this? The secret is to remain flexible. As a leader you cannot afford to be rigid because there are so many demands on you. The leader has to be able to turn a dime or change hats at a moment's notice.

Conclusion

Today successful librarian and tomorrow future librarian must remain open to investigating new end products, new search engines, new websites, new ways of handling and storing information, new ways of communicating and new ways of delivering reference services. Librarians have come a long way in redefining their profession and raising it to a prominent position and will reach its pinnacle as long as the field develops, new conduct is created to find organize and deliver information. Academic librarian should love new challenges and thrive on rapidly changing demands. In your leadership roles learn to navigate if you want to be successful and influence others from whatever they are in the organisation. The library patrons will ever remember that there is a competent, dynamic, versatile leader who is there to meet their needs. Of course they will constantly be attracted to come to enjoy your unique service delivery in meeting their peculiar needs. It is more enjoyable if it is perceived less as a challenge and more like a dance with technology a generalist per excellence.

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