Embedded Librarianship and Academic Setup:
Going beyond the library stockades

Pawan R. Agrawal* and Ashok Kumar**


*Assistant Librarian
Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Government College
Silvassa, UT of Dadra and Nagar Haveli

**Chief Librarian,
M.M. University,
Mullana

Corresponding Author
Pawan R. Agrawal
pawanagrawal4u4u@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The term embedded librarianship has been increasingly discussed in the last decade. It is a new dimension of librarianship which has been identified in practice for several years but developed theoretically in the 21st century only. This paper, which is mainly targeted to academic librarians, explores the multitudes of ways in which embedded librarianship can be implemented in Indian sphere. Librarianship is not developed in India as it has grown up in Western countries, hence, all the forms of embedded librarianship which are in applications seems difficult to implement in India presently. Still, there is extensive possibility to bring various services into action to provide a shape to embedded librarianship.

Key Terms: Embedded Librarianship, Librarianship, Library Stockades, Academic Setup.

INTRODUCTION

The academic space in the current scenario is passing through a drastic change. Every function of an academic institution, whether it is admission or examination has transformed significantly. The factor behind this transformation is certainly information and communication technology. Library services of any institution are highly influenced by it. The complete notion of libraries has undergone a cosmic revolution. The libraries have been converted into learning resource centres, e-libraries, digital libraries and virtual libraries while the people managing these centres revolved into information officers, information scientists etc. The beginning of 21st century noted quick changes in the academic atmosphere. The process of teaching upgraded into teaching-learning process, self-learning, e-learning and mobile learning. Online courses, such as MOOCs, have been taking shape and gaining the rapid popularity. Libraries took initiatives to make their presence online through websites, digital libraries, and through subscribing online databases.

Information and communication technology developed at lightning speed with the passage of time. The influence of information has been growing to a level that participated in the emergence of the concepts of information society and information economy. Production and dissemination of online information become so frequent that a number of online services initiated, which, several times measured as threats and challenges for libraries1. However, at the same time, technology was considered as a helping hand for the libraries and a great tool for disseminating the wide range of services to its clientele. Moreover, universities identified the need to upgrade the skills of library professionals and services provided in the libraries. Saunders states that “The Internet and Google have changed the information landscape. Libraries now compete for a share of the information market”2. Information technology is giving an edge to the users too. They are becoming efficient in identifying and locating information resources through the Web. A study in 2008 reveals that 46% of students believe they are “very skilled at using the Internet to effectively and efficiently search for information; 33% believe they are “expert” in this regard3. The statistics must have improved in last eight years.

The advancement of ICT and information needs of the user have made the task of libraries more challenging where even the e-libraries and digital libraries are proving insufficient to satisfy the users need. The people associated with the library and
information services always look to advance library services that meet the expectations of the users. The concept of embedded librarianship is one of such advancement.

**Embedded Librarianship**

The term embedded librarianship was coined in 2004 by Barbara Dewey, who was extremely impressed by the journalists who were escorted by the American armed forces while they invaded Iraq in 2003. The American army named them ‘Embedded Journalists’. Embedded journalists earned huge popularity in the country for their live journalism. However, in librarianship, this concept was traced earlier in practice in medical librarianship during the 1960s and 1970s, where librarians joined the medical practitioners and researchers to understand their information need⁴. Some of the library professionals were possessing equivalent knowledge in library services and medical sciences that empower them not only to retrieve information on a topic but also to analyse it⁵.

After the presentation of Barbara Dewey, embedded librarianship has been greatly discussed by and among library professionals and researchers. Embedded librarianship is all about collaboration as advocated by Dewey for the development of embedded librarian. She states that “The embedded librarian, who is truly integrated into the academic, administrative, athletic, cultural, research, and learning arenas of the university, provides quality and depth to the total campus experience”. Dewey & Riccio explained embedded librarianship as a service rather than space⁶. Shumaker takes it as “a distinctive innovation that moves the librarians out of libraries and creates a new model of library and information work. It emphasises the importance of forming a strong working relationship between the librarian and a group of people who need the librarian’s information expertise.”⁷ Embedded librarianship fundamentally is ‘to come out of the stereotype image of the librarian and start to become an integral part of the student’s group, faculties and of the institution’.

Embedded librarianship is virtually instructional librarianship where a library delivers various tools to access information and much more than just documents. Embedding itself suggests to experience, feel and fix with the surrounding mass. The libraries have to upgrade their working from pull information setup to push information setup. The scenario of the library in the information age is completely changed where a library professional really can’t wait for students to visit the library with a question. Library professionals need to develop the virtual reference desk, which is available on their fingertips. Embedded librarianship is a concept which enables the librarian to go out of the box and work with students and faculties.

**Features of Embedded Librarianship**

Shumaker & Talley have listed following features that identify embedded librarianship⁸.

- **Customer-centric not Library-centric**

The first characteristic of embedded librarianship is to shift the attention from library-centric services to user-centric services. The innovation in information technology has completely changed the attributes of library services. This suggests that the library services should not be limited in four walls rather they should be available round the clock for the user even when the library is physically closed. Many libraries have already implemented this concept by hosting their own website, giving access to a wide range of databases, etc. However, this also needs to be upgraded through more innovative technologies. The librarians need to find a way to implement the concept of ‘user care’ on the line of ‘customer care’ service in the corporate world. Option to chat with the library staff through library website may add value to the library services. Many libraries of western countries have implemented this concept, however, in India, it is yet to see.

- **Located in their Workplace not our Workplace**

With the customer-centric services, embedded librarianship is not restricted to his workplace, i.e. physical boundaries of the library but moves beyond the walls of the library. As embedded librarianship is all about collaboration with users, the librarian needs to understand the places of their likeness. Some of these places may be social networking sites or applications, and their personal study rooms. The library services should be available in the study room of the user and social networking application of maximum user’s choice. Using websites and online databases, the libraries have already reached on the fingertips of the user whereas social networking collaboration brings the embedded librarian in the direct contact of the users. Through social networking tools, a librarian becomes one member of the group of users and acting as a member of the group is the process of embedding. In short, the librarian needs to move outside the traditional library setup physically or virtually to upgrade as an embedded librarian.

- **Focused on Small Group rather than Large Populations**

An academic library is a place where the whole population of the institute are the users of the library. However, the librarian needs to focus small groups of the population rather than the population as a whole. When a librarian is focused on a specific user or group of users at the personal level, then he would be able to understand their objectives, and need for information. He can work in collaboration with the group to satisfy the core of the embedded librarianship i.e. to work as an integral part of a whole. Such collaboration is not possible when a librarian emphasises the population as a whole. The librarian can deliver the information to the whole population following through embedded librarianship.

- **Composed of Specialists not Generalists**

Another characteristic of an embedded librarian is to serve users as specialists of a subject rather than generalists. An embedded librarian just not deliver the information in the form of documents but also deliver the idea to the user how to proceed with his or her objective. The librarian’s reply to the query of the user or user’s group should be like an expert advice rather that a layman’s suggestion.

- **Dependent on Domain Knowledge not only Library Skills**

An embedded librarian is one who possess domain knowledge of the subject and understanding of the information needs of the group of his or her collaboration. Domain knowledge of subject of the clientele is necessary for librarian to revert back with most relevant suggestions one any reference query posed by the users. The librarian, in order to achieve expertise in the subject of the
user, needs constant learning of the subjects. By continuous study, it does not mean that the librarian should acquire qualification of each subject to the level of a professor of that subject but the understanding of the basic concepts and genealogy of the same. It is always suggested to go through to preface and table of content of books available in the library. These practices will develop the understanding of the subject in the librarian that will be helpful to help the users.

- **Aiming for Analysis and Synthesis not Simply Delivery**

  Expertise in analysis and synthesis of information is another characteristic of an embedded librarian. A librarian can implement this by providing various reports and resources specifically designed for the specific groups of user. Providing bibliographic services, suggestive reading lists on various subjects, abstracts services etc. are some of the very prominent examples of customized services. Library professionals of commercial manufacturing organisations, research centres, are more exposed to such services. The key role of librarians of such organisation is the synthesis, i.e. extracting information from diverse sources into an intelligible summary of the report. Library professionals of the academic library also need to have the skill of information analysis, consolidation and repackaging.

- **In Context not Out of Context**

  The librarian must be an integral part of the whole. They must be rightly embedded in the context of the area of their organisation or work. For example, a librarian working in a research-based institution must work directly with the faculty and researcher as a collaborator by becoming an integral part of their research team. Similarly, a librarian working in an institution offering undergraduate should work to offer resources which are of the level of the students of the institution. Literature or the services of research standard may not be helpful for the undergraduate students.

- **Built on Trusted Advice not Service Delivery**

  An embedded librarian works as a counsellor for the users. His instructions to the users must be like most trusted advice for them. To develop the touch of trust in users the librarian strongly needs to develop the relationship. Librarianship is a profession where the librarian need to remain updated all the time. Like lawyers, doctors, CAs and other professionals he needs to be in learning mode. He learns through various training, programmes, workshops, conferences, interaction with users, self-reading, communication with other professionals etc. that makes him very busy. However, with the technical knowledge of librarianship, domain knowledge of the subject of the user, the empathy with the user is also required. Philosophy of library and information science also insists on the personal relation with the users so that users develop a trust over advices of the librarian.

- **Embedded Librarianship in Academics in Indian Sphere**

  There are various strategies to start embedded librarianship in an academic institution. In Western countries, libraries provide state-of-the-art services to their clientele. However, in Indian educational setup, we may start following practices towards embedded librarianship.

- **Library Orientation and Library Training**

  Library orientation is one of the best ways to start with embedded librarianship. If library orientation can be done through various classes, or a conference, or workshop then it will be more effective. The librarian will come in direct touch with the students to make them aware of library resources and their use. At the same time, through these program the conventional notion of library services in the mind of users may be improved.

- **Research Assistance**

  Library of an academic institute, which provides education at the research level, may provide assistance to the users at the individual level or group level to those who are working on a project. Librarians have specialised knowledge in citation and reference management where researcher badly needs help. He can guide the needy to use reference management tools. Moreover, a librarian can help the researchers by suggesting lists of concerned reading. Hence, the librarian will establish as a collaborator and as an integral part of the whole.

- **Collaborate**

  Collaboration is the most important characteristic of embedded librarianship. The librarian of an academic institute should use various strategies to collaborate with students and faculties. It can be done through constant communication with users to share and gather information, engaging in social interaction with users, acknowledging and reviewing the academic performance of the users etc. Organization of various workshops for students and faculties can also be a good way to collaborate for the librarian.

- **Social Networking**

  Social networking helps the librarian to embed and connect with the users virtually. In the IT influenced era most of the students have an online presence and they spend considerable time on social networking sites and tools through the computer and smartphones. At the same time, faculties also use these tools to connect with other professionals and students. Applications such as Facebook and Twitter can be used to provide the virtual reference and information services to the user regardless the working hour of the library. Social networking tools are helpful to connect one to one and one to the group.

- **Information Literacy (IL)**

  Spending time with users (faculties and students) to discuss the information literacy is an important aspect for embedded librarians. If possible the librarian should spend the time in the classrooms with students to converse on IL. Information literacy is a known issue for modern clientele who are very much depending upon the online information.

- **Discussion Forums**

  Another way of virtual collaboration is the discussion forum. If the librarian could develop an online forum where teachers are also embedded to help the students would be a smart way to embed. Through the discussion forum, the embedded librarian can share the content designed for the specific group of users. Information literacy tips and reminders for the classes can also be shared through the forum. Through discussion forum, tutorials and quiz can also be shared that will develop the librarian in a guest lecturer.

- **LMS instead of LMS**

  It is the high time when the shift is required from LMS (Library Management System) to an integrated platform.
Management System) to LMS (Learning Management System). Most of the library special in Indian scenario are still working around implementation or migration of library management system while most of the libraries in western countries are talking about learning management system. For growing as an embedded librarian it is highly required to come out of the fascination of library management system. The attention should be diverted towards learning management system that has revolutionised learning, instructions, and librarianship. Librarians can share learning resources, information literacy resource with a large number of students at a single click that supports research, learning, and critical thinking.

- Competitive Exams and Employment Services

Another good way to embed with the students is to support them in their carrier perspectives. A section in the library and on library website that is totally dedicated to readings for competitive examinations will draw the attention of students towards the library. A librarian should provide services to prepare students for jobs in their specialised area through suggested reading and competitive exams. Covone & Lamm have asserted in their research that student viewed the librarian as more approachable and understanding of the particular needs of culinary-focused students\(^1\). The core objective of students to obtain higher education is to acquire a suitable job directly or through competitive exams. At the same time, one of the objectives of the education institute also is to prepare students so that they can get the better employment. The embedded librarian works as a core resource to obtain the objectives of student and of the institution by informing them employment opportunity and preparing them for the same.

**CONCLUSION**

The role of academic librarians will continue to advance with time as it is nature of education system. Information literacy is becoming more and more required and the same is being considered by the non-library professionals too. All library professional need to do is to start building relations with the users at the individual level by understanding their individual need of information and instructions. Through integration, the librarian will be able to deliver the idea of librarianship to the mind of users. As on today, most of the users are not able to differentiate the library professional who have a bachelor degree, master degree and who are doctorate of the subject. This is all because they are not integrated with the library professional at a level on which they are integrated with their subject teachers. Embedded librarianship will be able to modify this notion and will enable them to become an integral part of the whole.

**REFERENCES**