

# Embedded Librarianship—New Horizon of Librarianship

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is an effort to understand meaning of embedded librarianship, and its implementation in academic libraries and how is it useful to the users. It attempts to understand the terminology and has included an expert opinion on the subject. It explores the core competency and skills and attributes an embedded librarian should possess. The paper is based on primary and secondary sources which also deal with brief discussion of the characteristics of embedded librarianship and is an attempt to empirically highlight the practices followed in Central Library, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). This study also tries to examine the pivotal role of embedded librarianship in the surroundings of Central library, JNU. Interview method was used.

**Keywords:** Embedded librarianship, Central Library, JNU, innovative library services

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The advent of the internet and related technologies has transformed the nature of library and information services. There is a paradigm shift from 'library as storehouse' to 'library as a knowledge power house'. There is significant transformation in the role of librarian from mere custodian of information sources and services to embedded librarian, who is redefining role of librarian by reactively answering research requests, developing a unique understanding of users need and delivering proactive results. Embedded librarianship is one step forward towards modern librarianship.

The Central Library, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) is an example of distinguishing characteristic of librarianship practice in India. The LIS professionals in Central Library, JNU have found that by embedding themselves into the centre and the schools they serve, make them a more visible and integrated part of the faculty they assist. This is an innovative approach in the sense that reverses the medium of teaching to the user and proactively fulfilling their needs. Librarianship is concerned with fulfilling need of the users coming to the library but embedded librarianship involves better catering to the needs of the user groups via outreach programmes and initiatives organised and hosts by them. The Central Library, JNU is such remarkable example.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research work are to:

- Examine the concept of embedded librarianship and its future prospects in academic institutions.
- Determine the scope of embedded librarianship.
- Identify the requirement of competencies into LIS professionals for their involvement in embedded librarianship practice.
- Examine the role played by LIS professionals in Central Library, JNU and how it comes under the purview of embedded librarianship.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

Since the basic purpose of this study is to examine the concept of embedded librarianship. Literature survey method was found suitable. It was followed by a case study on Central Library, JNU and used an interview method. This study elicits extensively and attempts to address the pivotal role of embedded librarians and their future prospects.

## 4. EMBEDDED LIBRARIANSHIP

According to Merriam Webster dictionary<sup>1</sup>, 'librarian' is a specialist in the care or management of library, 'Embed' means to make something an integral part of. Thus, the dictionary meaning of 'Embedded Librarian' can be considered as 'someone who is an integral part in effective practice of librarianship'. Also, the following library professionals have defined 'embedded librarianship' as:

David Shumaker<sup>2</sup> said that 'Embedded librarianship is 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 or team of people who need the librarian's information expertise. Davenport & Prusak advocated that "librarians, or rather information managers, must view themselves not as warehouse custodians, or even as providers of centralised expertise, but rather as overseers of a multi-media network." They concluded with an eight-point plan. The first two are foundations for the embedded model which are:

- (1) 'Get out of the library, and into the research and academic.'
- (2) 'Actively assess who needs information, and who has it—then help them to connect.'<sup>2</sup>

However, academic librarians focus on embedded instruction, contributing to the pedagogical mission of their institutions.

#### 4.1 Constituents of Embedded Librarianship

The concept of embedded librarianship includes the practice to move librarian out of the traditional library setting whether physically or virtually. It is analytical and integrated in its approach. It involves developing a new framework for providing library service. Embedded librarianship involves revamping and re-shaping the role of librarians. It is a distinctive innovation strategies that moves the librarians out of libraries and creates a new model of library and information work, which were absent in traditional practice of librarianship. It aims to create an environment in which research requests are answered uniquely by understanding users need in advance and providing effective results. These results are achieved in a shared contribution. This helps in building a relationship between the users and embedded librarians. As the relationship develops, the librarian's knowledge and understanding of the group's work and objectives grow which leads in turn to greater alertness to the information and knowledge needs of the group. The embedded librarian becomes just as engaged in the work of the team as any other team member. As a result, he/she develop highly focused, targeted, specialised and an indispensable member of the group. Concisely, the constituents of embedded librarianship are:

- (a) Developing relationship with the users
- (b) Understanding and catering to their information needs
- (c) Sharing their needs (i.e., goals)
- (d) Providing adequate information for achievements of those needs.

- (e) Customised, active and high value contribution towards achievement of their needs.
- (f) Becoming an integral part of information seeker group.

#### 4.2 Characteristics

- (a) Embedded librarianship is a process which builds relationship so that they can gain deeper insights into what users are doing and how they would utilise the information provided by the library.
- (b) Embedded librarians are anticipatory and suggest ways of accomplishing tasks that others on the team wouldn't think of-ways that save the team's time and effort.
- (c) Embedded librarian works in group and collaborate with other members so as to achieve team's efforts instead of individual interests.
- (d) The embedded librarian uses the strong working relationship formed through participation in a team to understand the team's needs and address them in a customised way and it is tailor-made approach to fulfilling user's needs.
- (e) Embedded librarians are technocratic and build strong relationships and provide the value based services to the user concerned.
- (f) Embedded librarian's work is measured by impact of user learning outcomes and by way of the team success and evaluated by more and more involvement of students in their research work through proper fair and original means.
- (g) Embedded librarianship builds partnerships and is more focused on achieving the desired ends mutually.

#### 4.3 Pre-requisites

As the libraries are transforming into knowledge powerhouses and so the role of librarians is revamping and reshaping into embedded librarians. No embedded librarianship can work successfully unless it is based on a sound footing. Some pre-requisites<sup>3</sup> are:

##### 4.3.1 Ongoing Working Relationships

The focus should be on cooperative and coordinated working relationship within a team/group. Emphasis on building cohesive and collaborative relationships between teachers-librarians is must. So that trust could evolve out of this approach between teachers-librarians.

##### 4.3.2 Knowledge of and Commitment to Group's Goals

Embedded librarian must have a sound knowledge of the area/research is taking place and harmoniously work to achieve the desired group goals.

#### 4.3.3 *Highly Valuable and Customised Contribution to the Work*

Embedded librarian should be competent enough to provide tailored, intensive information services to a research group/team with he/she is integrated.

#### 4.3.4 *Attributes/Skills/Competencies*

One important pre-requisite is attributes/competencies/skills embedded librarians must possess. Success of embedded librarianship is dependent on these pre-requisites.

##### (a) *Attributes*

- To acquire tacit knowledge –which is subjective and experience based knowledge difficult to articulate or write down.<sup>1</sup>
- To be efficacious (effective in achieving results)
- To be technocratic (IT savvy)
- To possess information ethics-(focuses on the relationship between the creation, organisation, dissemination and use of information and the ethical standards and moral codes governing human conduct in society).
- To be circumspective (thinking carefully about possible risks before doing or saying something).
- To be prudent (careful and good judgment).

##### (b) *Skills*

- Generic skills

These are the ones which relate to communication and interpersonal skills. Generic skills refer to life skills such as communication and interpersonal skills, critical thinking, problem solving and teamwork which allow individuals to function not only in disciplinary or subject domains but also in employment and social situations. Generic skills Which is also referred to as 'transferable skills' or 'graduate attributes'<sup>4</sup>.

- Communication skills

Embedded librarian needs to be a sound communicator who could convey ideas and opinions with clarity.

- Interpersonal skills

One particular relevance to the modern academic library is the observation that the demand for interpersonal skills is a reflection of the "reality that team-based approaches are a common practice in digital projects and interpersonal skills are a key to success in team efforts"<sup>5</sup>.

- Managerial skills

These skills are associated with management encompassing cultural leadership, strategic, and restructuring skills. The embedded librarians must

be cost effective; sound decision makers; qualified in TQM, MBO and so on. They have to take proper strategies as per need and condition or situation.

- Technical skills

Embedded librarian must be equipped with ICT and computer technical skills.

##### (c) *Competencies*

- Personal competencies

Choi & Rasmussen<sup>5</sup> identify from the literature the following personal attributes as being important in the LIS work environment: capacity for continuous learning, flexibility, fostering change and the capacity to work independently. They highlighted adaptive skills to keep up with changes and challenges within library and information environments.

- People-centric competencies
  - Facilitation in identification of patron needs;
  - Mentoring and guiding patrons;
  - Consensus building in a group /team; and
  - Networking via development building of relationships.

## 5. EMBEDDED LIBRARIANSHIP AT CENTRAL LIBRARY, JNU

The Central Library, JNU is one of the premier resource centre of the academic research centre in India. The distinguishing feature of the Library is that it facilitates access to knowledge and information to all information seekers. It is well known for the services and amenities it provides, which is unique of its kind. It tries to build relationships with the schools/centre of the university and tries to integrate and embed with them. It tries to be substantive in its approach towards its information seekers.

Central Library organised display of JNU faculty and other University Publications in 21st New Delhi World Book Fair held from 3-10 February 2013 at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi. About 200+ recent publications of the JNU faculty who are currently on roll were displayed in is fair. The highlights of the event was that a computer with a presentation about JNU Library and a comprehensive list of Faculty and other publications was also placed for the information of the visitors at Stall. Thus, it is providing a medium to embrace and improve the relationship between the faculty and Central Library.

Likewise many attempts have been made so far to build partnerships between the faculty and central library and a couple of outreach programmes such as monthly lectures, book releases, seminar, conferences, workshops training workshops, and orientation programmes have been organised at

JNU. For example, training/orientation programme on Assistive Technologies for Visually Challenged Faculty/ Research Scholars and Students were organised on, 30th October 2013 and many events such as Book Release/Book Talk Programme have been organised by Central Library, JNU on regular basis.

Many events have also been organised under JNU Forum for Mutual Learning: for example A lecture on Globalisation of R&D: Trends of foreign ICT and biotechnology firms in India and China on 22 September 2012 which is ultimately going to facilitate mutual and generic partnerships between faculty and library. This all have become possible under embedded librarianship.

It has become evident that through embedded librarianship—they have been able to establish relationships that help the library to identify the user's unexpressed information needs.

It is imperative to view that user often have a tough time to articulate what exactly he/she need to know and many time they don't articulate at all and events such as User Education-cum-Orientation programme on Digital Resources available at Central Library, JNU organised by JNU twice on each year and which is major help to users and catering many of their problems and fulfilling their needs too.

These practices followed by Central Library, JNU is in a way teaching and reaching out to its user and developing strong community bond as well. Thus there is paradigmatic shift from librarianship to embedded librarianship who is reactively answering research requests, developing a unique understanding of users need and delivering proactive results also.

## 6. EXPERT OPINION ON EMBEDDED LIBRARIANSHIP

Dr R.C. Gaur, University Librarian, JNU, who is a pioneer in the field and is an embedded librarian was interviewed. This interview revealed the application and implementation of the embedded librarianship

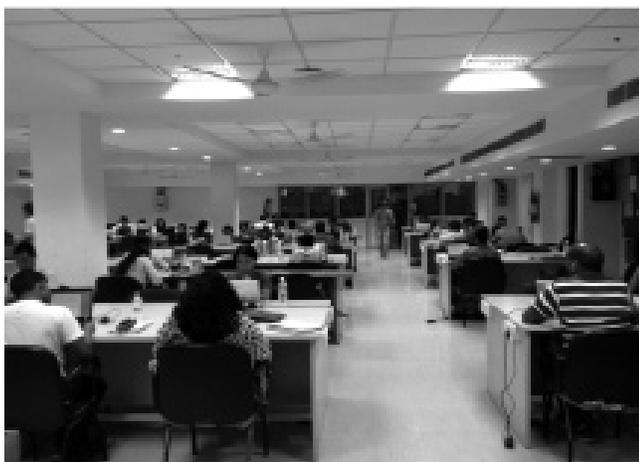


Figure 1. Central Library, Jawaharlal Nehru University

practice. Dr. Ramesh C. Gaur is the Project Coordinator for a project 'Development of Digital Repository of Indian Cultural Heritage' under the project 'Centre for Excellence on Digital Preservation' of NDPP. Other past assignments includes; IGNC, TIFR Mumbai, CRR, MDI, IMT and RIS. A Fulbright Scholar (VT, USA). Dr. Gaur has visited USA, Russia, Germany, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong and the Netherlands in relation to various assignments related to Digital Library and allied areas. He has been conferred with various honours & awards: IASLIC-S.M. Ganguly Best Librarian award for year 2007; Satkal Young Librarian award for year 2009 and SRFLIS India Professional Excellence Award 2013. He is the member of many national and international professional bodies such IFLA, SLA, NDLTD, etc.

While in conversation with Dr. Gaur, certain set of questions were asked to elicit how Central Library, JNU sets an example of embedded librarianship?

Q-1. *What was your thought behind embedded librarianship?*

A-1. Embedded Librarian ship encourage libraries to design strategies to develop partnership with its users. It is more prevalent in academic libraries, where it deals with a strong partnership of libraries with faculty and students.

Q-2. *How do you relate the embedded librarianship- as an art or a science of librarianship?*

A-2. Embedded librarianship involves a systematic strategic partnership among libraries and its users. This partnership requires a scientific approach in dealing with issues concerning users. Libraries also need to design a course curriculum for information literacy and various kinds of user workshops on issues such as plagiarism, reference management tools, research writings and data analytical tools.

Q-3. *Don't you feel that embedded librarianship is rather excessively dependent on technological development?*

A-3. We are in electronic age, where librarianship is already 80 % technology and 20 % traditional tools. 80 % contents are already available in digital form. So we are already having the required IT infrastructure. But embedded librarianship is not just about technology. It mainly deals with a dialogue between libraries and its users.

Q-4. *What are the cost factors involved in the embedded librarianship?*

A-4. As such there are no additional cost factors involved in embedded librarianship. It just needs more human efforts, further engagement and involvement of library staff with users, understanding

their need initially and later designing strategies and implementing policies accordingly.

*Q-5. Don't you think this form of librarianship will increase the work load for LIS professionals?*

*A-5.* Certainly, libraries need to devote extra time to implement policies and programmes concerning this form of librarianship. However, we are already saving time of both the users as well as of the staff by making them aware of library resources and problems of each other. With the help of such programmes, we can reduce the time consumed in unwanted queries of the users. Through orientation and workshops, users can be trained enough to find out the most relevant resources in their area of interest. These programmes are conducted in groups so, many individual queries regarding a certain topic may be reduced to a larger extent.

*Q-6. Could you talk about JNU Central Library's engagement in embedded librarianship?*

*A-6.* Immediately after my joining, I realised that there is lack of connectivity between library and users. To improve this, I started following library outreach programmes with faculty and students. The Central Library, JNU is one of the most modern and well equipped university libraries holding the place of pride in the country. It is a nine-story tower building and has a carpet area of about one lakh sq. ft. It is situated in the midst of the academic complex of the University and is the hub of all the academic activities. All the Reading Halls are air-conditioned. Entire library is connected through LAN & Wi-Fi. All the schools, centres and offices of the University are connected to Library through intranet. To meet the needs of the visually impaired students of the university, a special unit named after Helen Keller has been established. Twenty four computers have been installed exclusively for visually challenged students to access OPAC and online resources. Laptops have been provided to all visually challenged MPhil/PhD students. The Cyber library is located at the ground floor with 200 computers for the students and research scholars to access online resources. The faculty publications have also been showcased at the ground floor. Central Library has undergone total re-engineering. Renovation, reorganisation, redesigning, regrouping and reviewing were 5Rs implemented at the Library.

*Q-7. What challenges have you faced during the past years in practicing and creating the environment of embedded librarianship in the institution?*

*A-7.* When I joined Central Library, JNU in 2011, 'I realised that there is lack of trust between faculty and students in the library. Library was

facing problems at almost all levels starting from the resources to the services. Also, the Central Library was not even visible from outside JNU. The first challenge was to bring people back to library, to develop a trust in the library and to make library a most sought after place. Another biggest challenge was to create a good ambience and make library a comfortable and sorted place. Grouping of collections according to convenience of user, regrouping of subject journals and thesis, and putting them together at one place, were some of the initial tasks which saves a lot of time of users. Revisiting the procurement policies, what libraries are purchasing and how to develop a cordial engagement of faculty and students were added concerns. Schemes such as earn while you learn were introduced for better engagement of students.'

*Q-8. Apart from JNU users, how can other libraries and professionals of LIS can benefit from it?*

*A-8.* This concept of 'embedded librarianship' may be linked with Ranganathan's following statement 'library is a trinity of users, staff and resources/collections'. Now in changing role of libraries and librarians, librarians need to play a vital role in acting as a knowledge navigator. With advent of internet, libraries are not limited to boundary walls and ample material is available all across the globe.

It is extremely difficult for a user to find out most relevant material in his/her area of interests as so much information is available both in print and online. Here comes, the role of librarians to help them, to guide them in finding out relevant information in right time. Librarian needs to be creative and innovative. They are required to reach out the users wherever they are, and need to provide resources in most preferable option to them. Now a days, it is not important that how many users are coming to library, more important is to how many are you reaching; wherever they are and providing them right information in a right manner at right time".

## 7. FINDINGS

The study reveals the pivotal role of embedded librarian as a great visionary and emphasises the need to transform the liaison role into strategically engaging and integrating ourselves into all operations of the centre/school as JNU central library performs so. The librarianship should be taken outside the walls of library.

- Under the paradigm of embedded librarianship professionals should perform as key role of

co-teachers and co-researchers, and achieve the trustworthiness between faculty and library.

- The embedded librarian proves to be an asset to any organisation and has become the nerve centre of an intellectual development of a nation.
- Embedded librarian would indeed help and make user aware by way of organising symposium, seminars, workshops.
- It would inform the user that information on the internet is copyrighted and not for their personal use.
- Information users must be taught and learnt from wrong to right in exploring the depth and breadth of information use.
- In light of shifting technology, it focuses on new digital initiatives and projects.
- This study highlights that practice of embedded librarianship is attainable and achievable.

The mantra behind the successful embedded librarianship in Central Library, JNU, according to Dr Ramesh C. Gaur is that "in this new world, it is not important that how many users are coming to library, more important is to how many we are reaching out, wherever they are and providing them right information in a right manner at right time".

The successful embedded librarian has an improved version in librarian's role. His role is just not limited to providing academic research or managing information but its role has emerged into anticipatory, technocratic and someone who provides the value based services to the user concerned by the most appropriate means available. That means that embedded librarians are constantly trying to work themselves out of a job. It also means that they are change leaders, not change followers. It means that they are in a position to experience sustained success. Embedded librarianship tries to get deeper and integral engagement between the faculty and library and helps in finding and catering their respective information needs.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS/SUGGESTIONS

- Embedded librarianship is an evolved version of librarianship. It is greatly specialised and 'User Centric' in approach. It focuses on reaching to the users and catering them according to their needs. It has wider scope in near future for those academic institutions which are already practicing librarianship. JNU's central library has adopted such form of librarianship and sets an example of such kind.
- An LIS professional does require any specialised

knowledge but sound command on soft skills, thorough knowledge about area of interest. they are considered as the wizards of modern librarianship practice. They are the ones who are considered to be the managers of information power houses.

Thus, in a changing scenario, there has been a transformation in the designation of LIS professionals not merely from librarian, deputy librarian, or assistant librarian as to knowledge navigator, knowledge disseminator or cybrarian. Embedded librarian is a skill blended manager who plays a proactive role and tries to build strategic collaborative relationships with its users. Embedded librarianship would encourage cohesive engagement between teachers-librarians and help them to develop strong partnership in learning environment. With the help of embedded librarianship practice, trustworthiness could be achieved and developed among the library and the faculty. Central Library, JNU by way of outreach programmes and initiatives have been able to attain and sustain strong-integrated relationships between teachers-librarians.

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