Embedded Librarian Services: An Information Marketing Strategy Applied at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study is necessitated by an increasing number of resources available in the virtual environment which is affecting patron's use of library physically to access information. The purpose of the study was to assess the information marketing strategy that an embedded librarian employed at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO). Specifically, the study aimed to identify the role of an embedded librarian at the institution; determine the channels through which embedded librarians reach out to the faculties and establish the challenges hindering embedded librarian services. Structured questionnaire was used to collect data from twenty (20) embedded librarians across ten (10) schools in FUTO. Eighteen (18) copies of the questionnaire designed for this study were duly filled and returned. The study applied inferential statistics using t-test to analyse the data obtained from the survey carried out on embedded library / librarians. Findings show social media, consultation, visits and orientation as some of the channels through which information was disseminated. The findings also showed that inadequate time of operation, lack of cooperation, lack of stated time for consultation, insufficient power supply as some of the challenges. The paper concludes that information marketing and advocacy of library services by librarians is a veritable tool required to deliver information to the domain of those who need it and also bring back library users.

Introduction

The rapid evolving technologies, online access to information from remote places and the changing information needs of students and faculty members have transformed library services outlook. Thus, librarians are required to meet the millennial patrons demand by moving the library to users via information marketing. Marketing of information services is not an easy task as marketing of tangible goods or products. Jestin and Parameswari (2002) explain that the idea of modern library services must be based on the modern concept of marketing to achieve library users' satisfaction and to nurture a culture of customer service in order to boost the library's image in the eyes of the users which bring about the term embedded librarianship.

Embedded librarian or embedded librarianship can have multiple meanings for variety of reasons. The term has become prominent in the library profession within the past five years. An embedded librarian service is a marketing strategy necessitated by increasing number of resources available in the virtual environment which is affecting patron's use of the library. It represents a process of service

outreach that provides information benefits through a systematic framework that brings library users and customers back to information business threshold (Njoku and Chukwu, 2019). Riccio (2012) defines embedded librarianship as to move librarians out of the traditional library setting, whether physically or virtually, into a new framework for providing library services. It shifts the emphasis from answering research requests in a vacuum to developing a unique understanding of what customers need and delivering proactive results. Embedded librarianship has emerged as a user-centered approach to academic library facilities that necessitates a thorough understanding of students' and staff's educational and research interests. Embedded librarian services in Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO) began in the year 2014 and have since enhanced information delivery services of the library for the benefit of its users. As the library opens from 8am to 6pm every weekday, so are embedded library services available to students, particularly the full-time category. In FUTO, embedded librarians are liaison officers for departmental and faculty libraries for resources organisation, availability and access during National Universities Commission accreditation and professional bodies resource verification exercises. In spite of numerous services rendered by academic libraries in physical and virtual environments, there exists low patronage on the use of information resources. Faculty members and students resort to finding information virtually undermining the importance of the library in teaching, learning and research. Thus, the need for academic libraries and librarians to meet the information seeking need of patrons/ university community outside the library building through marketing varied innovative information approaches to bring back library users or move the library to meet users in their domain. An embedded librarian service is a product of bridging the gap between the declining numbers of patrons and increasing access to scholarly information. The practice is faced with barriers such as lack of shared understanding of embedded services, inconsistent cooperation from faculty and inconsistent library embedded process. Hence, this study aims to succinctly identify the roles of the embedded librarians, the channels used to discharge their services, challenges and prospects for better library services.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

i.   identify the role of an embedded librarian at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO)

ii.   determine the channels through which embedded librarians reach out to the faculties

iii.   establish the challenges hindering embedded librarian services

Literature Review

Embedded librarians are integrated information experts that offer more direct research assistance to groups of faculty and students than the typical one-shot instruction session, often over the course of an entire semester. While librarians can embed in face-to-face classes, they are increasingly in demand within virtual environments in order to support online classes, hybrid classes, and face-to-face classes that include an online support component.

Embedded librarianship, according to Dewey (2004), is a term that "implies a more systematic integration of one group with another to the degree that the group attempting to integrate is experiencing and studying, as closely as possible, the primary group's everyday life." When compared to acting in tandem with another individual, party, or behaviour, embedding necessitates more direct and purposeful interaction. Embedded librarianship, according to Dewey, is a way for academic librarians to become more active in strategic campus creation and growth, such as through the faculty, senate, strategic planning committees, space/campus design participation, collaboration with faculty study, and so on. Shumaker (2012) defined embedded librarianship as a distinctive innovation that moves librarians out of libraries and creates a new model of library and information work. Embedded librarians are often compared to embedded journalists; librarians are embedded into an academic course and are in the trenches alongside the content faculty and students. Embedded librarians develop working relationships with content faculty and strive to understand students' needs.

According to Agboola, Mamuna, and Aduku (2018), an embedded librarian plays a critical role in promoting library services by attending to users at

their desired location, especially in academic institutions. Abrizah, Inuwa and Afiqah-Izzati (2016) observed that embedded librarians' roles were established, particularly in the sense of service delivery, and all of them were reported to be applicable to academic libraries. Instruction in information literacy, research and other scholarly activities, distance and online learning, and classroom embedding were all listed as ways to ensure good embedding librarianship.

In order to help with information services, the librarian typically meets with lecturers in their offices and students in lecture halls, or on campus. Users' inquiries are made through access to a Facebook community, WhatsApp group, Email, phone number, as well as a seminar programmes.

These channels enable embedded librarians share information and solve problems of students and researchers on various studies, assignments, and projects. According to Wayne (2017), the embedded librarian tailors their information to users using the above methods, which requires reliable Internet access and a consistent power supply. Matthew and Schroeder (2006) describe several ways that a librarian can provide assistance within the classroom. One common way is to create an "Ask a Librarian" discussion board. This virtual space gives the students a single space in which they can ask research-related questions. In addition, the librarian can use the discussion board to provide instruction by addressing some of the issues students may encounter in their research. The increasingly important role of information has resulted in varieties of services rendered by the library in order to meet the ever-changing need of users.

Time factor is one of the major challenges affecting embedded library services, according to Thomas (2013) and Ralph (2012). For Thomas (2013), some lecturers complained that they did not have time to communicate with embedded librarians (EL), while Ralph (2012) observed that ELs took too long to respond to questions that came at an inconvenient time. At Lupane State University in Zimbabwe, Ndlovu (2017) claims that embedded librarians are suspected by faculty of interfering with their academic activities as academics. Agboola; Mamuna and Aduku, (2018). On the other hand, saw insufficient and qualified staff as likely challenges for embedded librarianship, as well as lack of a stable network and epileptic power supply, among other things.

Thomas, (2013) further listed bureaucratic bottleneck as a factor affecting embedded librarianship. As in an ideal situation, some of the duties of an EL's is to partner with the faculty in teaching and learning but due to these bureaucratic bottlenecks, some institutions do not allow it. He gave an instance with Vaal University of Technology, (VUT) South Africa where librarians were denied access to course management systems by the Information Technology (IT) department of the institution thus preventing them from embedding in some online services.

Materials and Methods

In this paper, we used structured questionnaire to collect data from respondents across schools in the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO). FUTO has a total of ten (10) schools to which two librarians are attached for embedded librarians' services. The questionnaire was administered to twenty (20) librarians and the duly completed copies of the questionnaire were collected from the respondents. The librarians were briefed and handed over the questionnaire after their regular daily house-keeping duties before retiring to their offices. Administration and retrieval of the instrument was carried out between October to December, 2021. The questionnaire is made up of four sections and all are measured on 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The following weights were assigned to the scales to convert it from ordinal to interval scale: strongly agree was assigned with the weight four (4); agree was assigned with the weight three (3); disagree was assigned with the weight two (2) and strongly disagree was assigned with the weight one (1). Section A contains statements on roles of an embedded librarian; Section B presents the channels used to disseminate information; Section C identifies challenges faced in embedded librarian services while Section D seeks solutions to the challenges. The data collected from the respondents were presented in Tables 1, 2, 4, 6 and 8; while the analysis of the respective data was presented in Tables 3, 5, 7 and 9 respectively. The data was analysed using one sample t-test. The reason for the

use of t-test is because we have a small sample size of 18 with 17 degrees of freedom. These sample size come from the number of respondents to the administered questionnaires.

Test Statistic

$$t_{cal} = \frac{\bar{x} - \bar{\bar{x}}}{s/\sqrt{n}}$$

where ($\bar{x}$) is the sample mean, (s) is the sample standard deviation, (n) is the sample size and

$$\bar{\bar{x}} = \frac{1}{N}\sum_{i=1}^{N} \bar{x}_i$$ is the population mean and level of

significance $\alpha = 0.05$

Hypothesis

H_0: Accept Ho: and reject H_1: if the t_{cal} is less than t_{tab}

H_1: Reject Ho: and accept H_1: if the t_{cal} is greater than t_{tab} significant

Interpretation

Since t_{cal} is less than t_{tab} (since t_{cal} is greater than t_{tab}) we accept H_0: (we reject H_0) and conclude that the test is significant (the test is not significant).

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Profile and status of respondents

Embedded Librarians	Qualification	Status	Experience	Subject Background
EL 1	PhD	Snr Lib.	20 yrs	LIS
EL 2	PhD	Lib. 1	20 yrs	LIS/ English
EL 3	MLS	Lib. 1	11 yrs	LIS
EL 4	MLS	Lib. 11	10 yrs	LIS
EL 5	MLS	AL	7 yrs	English/ LIS
EL 6	MLS	Lib. 1	20 yrs	LIS
EL 7	MLS	Lib. 1	9 yrs	LIS
EL 8	MLS	Lib. 11	10 yrs	LIS
EL 9	MLS	Lib. 11	10 yrs	English/ LIS
EL 10	MLS	Lib. 11	7 yrs	LIS
EL 11	BLS	AL	1 yr	LIS
EL 12	MLS	Lib. 1	27 yrs	Microbiology/ LIS
EL 13	PhD	Snr Lib.	12 yrs	LIS
EL 14	PhD	Snr Lib.	20 yrs	LIS
EL 15	PhD	Snr Lib.	20 yrs	French/ LIS
EL 16	PhD	DUL	20 yrs	Psychology/ LIS
EL 17	PhD	DUL	20 yrs	LIS
EL 18	PhD	Snr Lib.	20 yrs	LIS
EL 19	PhD	Snr Lib.	20 yrs	LIS
EL 20	PhD	Snr Lib.	11 yrs	LIS

Table 2: Responses on the Role of an embedded librarian

S/N	Role of Embedded Librarian	SA	A	D	SD
A	The embedded librarian climbs the ladder to meet users	7	8	2	1
B	Plays an advisory role on school library resources and facilities	10	7	-	-
C	Gives assistance to department during accreditation	13	5	-	-
D	Plays as a liaison between the library and the school	12	5	1	-
E	Help students narrow topics for research	3	10	4	1
F	Help students find resources and peer reviewed articles	4	12	2	-
G	Provides information about citations and references	5	10	2	1

Table 3: Analysis of Responses on the Role of an embedded librarian

S/N	Role of Embedded Librarian	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	t-cal	t-tab	Decision
A	The embedded librarian climbs the ladder to meet users	28	24	4	1	14.25	-0.95	1.74	Significant
B	Plays an advisory role on school library resources and facilities	40	21	-	-	30.5	1.03	1.75	Significant
C	Gives assistance to department during accreditation	52	15	-	-	33.5	0.69	1.74	Significant
D	Plays as a liaison between the library and the school	48	15	2	-	21.67	0.07	1.74	Significant
E	Help students narrow topics for research	12	30	8	1	12.75	-1.29	1.74	Significant
F	Help students find resources and peer reviewed articles	16	36	4	-	18.67	-0.22	1.74	Significant
G	Provides information about citations and references	20	30	4	1	13.73	-1.02	1.74	Significant
						$\bar{\bar{x}} = 20.75$			

As presented in Table 3, all the 7 items in the questionnaire of objective 1 on the roles of embedded librarians in the Federal University of Technology Owerri were significant. That means that each of the questions is relevant and defines the role of embedded librarians.

Table 4: Responses on the Channels through which embedded librarians disseminate information

S/N	Channels of Communication	SA	A	D	SD
A	Social media	11	7	-	-
B	Library website	9	7	1	-
C	Databases	8	9	-	-
D	Library instruction	7	9	2	-
E	Orientation	9	8	1	-
F	Workshops	6	10	1	1
G	Discussion forum	7	7	2	-
H	Visits	9	8	1	-
I	Handbooks/handouts	3	10	2	2
J	Consultation	5	12	1	-
K	Notice board	6	10	2	-
L	Discussion board	3	8	3-	4

Table 5: Analysis of the Responses on the Channels through which embedded librarians disseminate information

S/N	Channels of Communication	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	t-cal	t-tab	Decision
A	Social media	44	21	-	-	32.5	1.11	1.74	Significant
B	Library website	36	21	2	-	19.67	-0.01	1.74	Significant
C	Databases	32	27	-	-	29.5	3.91	1.74	Not significant
D	Library instruction	28	27	4	-	19.67	-0.01	1.74	Significant
E	Orientation	36	24	2	-	20.67	0.09	1.74	Significant
F	Workshops	24	30	2	1	14.25	-0.73	1.74	Significant
G	Discussion forum	28	21	4	-	17.67	-0.29	1.74	Significant
H	Visits	36	24	2	-	20.67	0.09	1.74	Significant
I	Handbooks/handouts	12	30	4	2	12	-1.21	1.74	Significant
J	Consultation	20	36	2	-	19.33	-0.04	1.74	Significant
K	Notice board	24	30	4	-	19.33	-0.05	1.74	Significant
L	Discussion board	12	24	6	4	11.5	-1.83	1.74	Significant
						$\bar{\bar{x}} = 19.73$			

With the exception of item with serial number C (Databases) which is not significant, the rest are all significant. This means that with the exception of databases, every other channel is relevant sources through which embedded librarians' disseminate information.

Table 6: Responses on the challenges faced by embedded librarians in the course of their duties

S/N	Challenges	SA	A	D	SD
A	Passive librarians	4	7	5	1
B	Lack of sustainability	2	10	4	2
C	Low internet service	8	8	2	-
D	System not working due to administrative bottleneck	7	10	1	-
E	Inadequate time of operation	7	11	-	-
F	Lack of operational base and facilities in school	8	10	-	-
G	Departments not providing enabling environment/space	13	5	-	-
H	Lack of stated time for consultation	5	10	2	-
I	Inadequate cooperation and collaboration from departments	8	10	-	-
J	Difficulty in covering all the departments in physical space.	4	13	2	-
K	Inadequate power supply	10	7	1	-

Table 7: Responses on the challenges faced by embedded librarians in the course of their duties

S/N	Challenges	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	t-cal	t-tab	Decision
A	Passive librarians	16	21	10	1	12	-2.47	1.74	Significant
B	Lack of sustainability	8	30	8	2	12	-1.72	1.74	Significant
C	Low internet service	32	24	4	-	20	-0.31	1.74	Significant
D	System not working due to administrative bottleneck	28	30	2	-	20	-0.29	1.74	Significant
E	Inadequate time of operation	28	33	-	-	30.5	3.16	1.74	Not Significant
F	Lack of operational base and facilities in school	32	30	-	-	31	8.39	1.74	Not Significant
G	Departments not providing enabling environment/space	52	15	-	-	33.5	0.59	1.74	Significant
H	Lack of stated time for consultation	20	30	4	-	18	-0.61	1.74	Significant
I	Inadequate cooperation and collaboration from departments	32	30	-	-	31	8.39	1.74	Not Significant
J	Difficulty in covering all the departments in physical space	16	39	4	-	19.7	-0.29	1.74	Significant
K	Inadequate power supply	40	21	2	-	21	-0.15	1.74	Significant
						$\bar{\bar{x}} = 22.61$			

In the analysis of data in Table 7 on the challenges faced by embedded librarians in the course of their duties, we observed that with the exception of serial number E, F and I that were not significant, the rest are significant. This means that the questions with serial numbers E, F and I do not pose challenges to embedded librarians in performing their duties while the rest pose challenges to the embedded librarians in the performance of their duties.

Table 8: Responses on the Suggestions for Improving embedded librarian services

S/N	Suggestions for Improving Services	SA	A	D	SD
A	Librarians need orientation and reorientation on public interpersonal/customer relations skills and competency	9	8	1	-
B	Improve work ethics	11	6	1	-
C	Rebrand administrative procedures	5	11	1	-
D	Develop new service and approach	7	12	-	-
E	Discovering new source of information	5	13	-	-
F	Widening opportunities for new market	5	12	-	-
G	Repackaging information products to suit savvy students	7	11	-	-
H	Finding new ways to make library accessible	12	6	-	-
I	Rebranding of old products/creating new products	6	11	-	-
J	Transforming old process	5	12	-	-
K	Incorporate new sources that promote patronage.	9	9	-	-

Table 9: Analysis of responses on the Suggestions for Improving embedded librarian services

S/N	Suggestions for Improving Services	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean (x)	t-cal	t-tab	Decision
A	Librarians need orientation and reorientation on public interpersonal/customer relations skills and competency	36	24	2	-	20.67	-0.68	1.74	Significant
B	Improve work ethics	44	18	2	-	21.33	-0.49	1.74	Significant
C	Rebrand administrative procedures	20	33	2	-	18.33	-1.01	1.74	Significant
D	Develop new service and approach	28	36	-	-	32	1.15	1.74	Significant
E	Discovering new source of information	20	39	-	-	29.5	0.22	1.74	Significant
F	Widening opportunities for new market	20	36	-	-	28	0.08	1.74	Significant
G	Repackaging information products to suit savvy students	28	33	-	-	30.5	1.24	1.74	Significant
H	Finding new ways to make library accessible	48	18	-	-	33	0.37	1.74	Significant
I	Rebranding of old products/creating new products	24	33	-	-	28.5	0.25	1.74	Significant
J	Transforming old process	20	36	-	-	28	0.08	1.74	Significant
K	Incorporate new sources that promote patronage.	36	27	-	-	31.5	0.91	1.74	Significant
						27.39			

From the analysis in Table 9, all the suggestions on improving embedded librarian services are relevant and should be adopted.

Discussion

The study shows that the embedded librarians play critical roles in the academic activities of both students and faculty members of the Federal University of Technology Owerri. This study applied inferential statistics using t-test; stated hypothesis and tested them. From the results, majority of the questions were significant to the effective functioning of embedded librarians, while very few were not significant to the effective functioning of embedded librarians (see Tables 3, 5, 7 and 9 respectively). This is in line with the views of Agboola, Mamuna, and Aduku (2018) that embedded librarian plays a critical role in promoting library services by attending to users at their desired location, especially in academic institutions.

The study discovered various channels through which embedded librarians disseminate information and communicate with the students and faculty members. Social media, orientation, visits and consultation were discovered to be some of the channels through which they disseminate information. This is in tandem with the opinion of Wayne (2017), that to help with information services, the librarian typically meets with lecturers and students in their offices, lecture halls, or on campus.

The study also discovered various challenges faced by embedded librarians in the course of discharging their duties. The study revealed that system not working due to administrative bottleneck, inadequate time of operation, lack of operational base and facilities in school, departments not providing enabling environment/space, lack of stated time for consultation, inadequate cooperation and collaboration from departments and inadequate power supply as some of the challenges faced by embedded librarians. This corroborates the views of Ndlovu (2017) who claims that embedded librarians are suspected by faculty of interfering with their academic activities as academics while Agboola et al. (2018) saw insufficient and qualified staff as likely challenges for embedded librarianship, as well as a lack of a stable network and epileptic power supply, among other things.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Embedded librarianship is a way for academic librarians to become more active in strategic campus creation and growth, such as through the faculty, senate, strategic planning committees, space/campus design participation, collaboration with faculty study, and so on. Embedded librarians' roles were established, particularly in the sense of service delivery and these services were provided: discovering user's areas of need, building on community capacity, fostering interaction, partnership, cooperation and collaboration. In the face of all these they are faced with some challenges which hinders their progress and for them to achieve maximally, there should be librarians' orientation and reorientation on public interpersonal/customer relations skills and competency, provision of steady power supply, functional internet services and so on.

Suggestions on the way forward in combating these challenges are: Librarians need orientation and reorientation on public interpersonal/customer relations skills, competency in discovering new sources of information, widening opportunities for new market, repackaging information products to suit savvy students and finding new ways to make library accessible. Therefore it behooves on the management of the library to find ways to implement these suggestions as it will bring users back to library information services.

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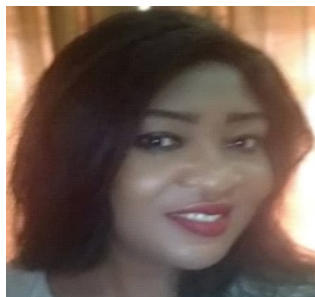
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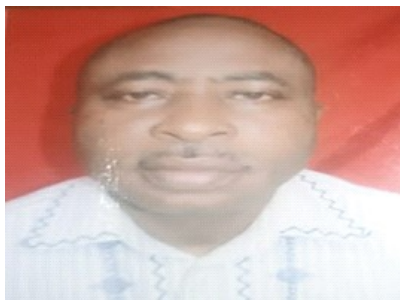
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