

Role of the University Librarian in the Knowledge Economy: where we are today and where we should move towards¹

Pradeepa Wijetunge PhD
Librarian
University of Peradeniya
PO Box 35, Peradeniya
Sri Lanka

Tele/Fax : +94-81-2388678
e-mail: librarianpdn@gmail.com
pradeepawijetunge@pdn.ac.lk

Introduction

Universities have been shifting the pedagogical paradigm from rote learning towards generating lifelong learning. This new pedagogic paradigm emphasises the empowerment of students and encourage them to take control of their own learning. The students become the learner and the teacher becomes the coach. The teacher centred university becomes a learner centred education environment. Teaching is transformed in to the design and management of learning experiences. (Duderstadt 1997-98).

The new paradigm is more concerned with the learner and the learning than the teacher and the teaching. Teaching is no more lecturing and leading tutorials, but directing the learners to develop their knowledge through providing rich learning experiences. These learning experiences will be provided through new teaching/learning methods like resource-based learning, problem-based learning and activity-based learning. The ability of the learner to learn by interacting with the learning resources is the key factor of this paradigm shift. Students will be responsible for their own learning and they will spend more and more time away from the formal classroom, attempting to engage in self directed learning activities. In this context many countries have re-defined the role of the university librarians to stress the teaching role.

Role of the University Librarian in current global context

“As the primary means through which students and faculty gain access to the storehouse of organized knowledge, the college and university library performs a unique and indispensable function in the educational process. This function will grow in importance as students assume greater responsibility for their own intellectual and social development. Indeed, all members of the academic community are likely to become increasingly dependent on skilled professional guidance in the acquisition and use of library resources as the forms and numbers of these resources multiply, scholarly materials appear in more languages, bibliographical systems become more complicated, and library technology grows increasingly sophisticated. “The librarian who provides such guidance plays a major role in the learning process” (ALA 2007).

ALA (American Library Association) further asserts that... Librarians perform a teaching and research role in as much as they instruct students formally and informally and advise and assist faculty in their scholarly pursuits. Librarians are also themselves involved in the research function; may conduct research in their own professional interests and in the discharge of their duties (ALA 2007).

¹ Paper written upon the request of the Standing Committee of Library and Information Studies (SCOLIS), UGC, Sri Lanka in 2012 to elucidate the role of the university librarians.

ALA *Guideline for the appointment, promotion and tenure of academic librarians* confirm that the appointment of librarians shall follow the same procedures that are established for appointing all institutional faculty members. The nomenclature used for the Library Faculty is *Instructor, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and Professor* (ALA 2010). In many major universities including Universities of Illinois, Mississippi, Nebraska the Librarian Post is considered as that of a Professor and in most American universities Library faculty is headed by the Library Dean. Some American universities also grant emeritus status to university librarians. Appendix 1 provides a part of the expected responsibilities of a University Librarians at University of Mississippi. In Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium also the Librarian is named as Professor.

Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) policy statement on *academic status and governance for librarians*, asserts that “Librarians’ terms and conditions of employment should be analogous to those of other academic staff including an equivalent system of ranks, and procedures for promotion and tenure. Librarians’ normal workload must include research and scholarship as well as academic and community service, and require, as a result, provisions such as sabbatical, research or study leaves. Librarians must be eligible for research funding, and paid and unpaid leaves of absence on the same basis as other academic staff” (CAUT 2010).

The most recent information comes from Uttar Pradesh, India; a professional colleague e-mailing the author informed that “I am glad to inform that in Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow High Court has directed the Government to change the nomenclature of Librarian to Lecturer in Lib & Information Science [acknowledging the teaching role of the librarians]. Uttar Pradesh Library association has submitted its representation to the Government to implement the court order.” This is a welcoming development in India in which the university librarians are holding academic status, following the American pattern in changing the names to illustrate the academic status directly.

Theoretical background for the emphasis on the teaching role of the librarian is not absent and a few examples can be provided here. As Peele (1984) comments *teachers* have specialized knowledge in *one discipline*, whereas *librarians* have general knowledge in a *variety of disciplines* in order to assist students with their research queries. Academic librarians are responding agents concerned with the structure of knowledge and not the actual content. Elmborg (2002) asserts that the librarians should adopt constructivist learning theory in their teaching role because according to the Dictionary of Education, constructivist learning can be described as “knowledge, meaning, and understanding that are actively constructed by learners by a process of development, which builds on what they already know, causing them to adapt and grow. “When teaching is delivered by a constructivist, their role is not to deliver facts, but to provide learners with the experience which allows them to pose their own questions, hypothesize, explore, predict, and investigate knowledge for themselves” (Wallace, 2009). Elmborg (2002) further comments that librarians teach a method rather than a particular subject and they help develop and construct knowledge. Since the nineteenth century, librarians were involved in classroom teaching according to Kemp (2006) but by the 1960s and 1970s, library instruction became a “systematic educational enterprise”. As Lawler (2002) asserted the culture of bibliographic instruction was moving more towards a “teaching culture” and the vast body of contemporary knowledge on “Information Literacy”, especially coming in from the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and in many other European countries is dealing increasingly with the content and structure of the evolved teaching role of the librarian.

Role of the Sri Lankan University Librarians

Librarians of the Sri Lankan university system has been more fortunate than the Indian counterparts since the far-sighted and knowledge-oriented academics who drafted the Universities Act of Sri Lanka perceived, as far back as in 1978, the university librarianship in its true spirit – librarians as teachers,

although the nomenclature does not use the terms lecturer, Associate Professor or Professors to identify the Librarians. Paragraph 79 of the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978 states that “Librarians”² are deemed to be “teachers”, and their recruitment and promotional criteria are similar to that of university teachers. Commission Circulars 165 and 653, Commission Circular 921 which spells out the marking scheme for the promotions to Librarian and Deputy Librarian grades provide ample evidence for this.. Further, Establishment Circular Letter No. 11/2011 on Research Allowances for Librarians endorses the requirement of research by the university librarians.

It is also encouraging to notice that Circular 921 stresses the professional, research and publication, national and international integration with the university community including teaching corresponding with Boyer’s³ (1990) model of Scholarship. The candidates for the post of “Librarian” (the topmost grade which is parallel to the Professor grade) has to satisfy the criteria of a scholar integrating the four elements of Boyer (scholarship of discovery, scholarship of integration, scholarship of application and the scholarship of teaching).

Librarian is a member of the Senate, Finance Committee, Planning and Development Committee (the name may vary according to university), Senate Library Committee, Academic Development and Planning Committee, Legislation Committee and many other committees. Participation at these statutory bodies is essential for the efficient functioning of the library. In addition to the Librarian, Senior Asst. Librarians and Asst. Librarians attend Faculty Board and Faculty Library Committee meetings, Curriculum Development Committees, Curriculum Co-ordination meetings, Students’ Academic meetings and Higher Degrees Committee meetings conducted at faculty level. They also serve in ad-hoc committees like inquiry boards, whenever necessary.

Librarians engage in formal teaching in three masters programs offered by NILIS, University of Colombo and University of Kelaniya. They design curricular, teach, conduct examinations, supervise theses and dissertations, serve in the Boards Of Managements, Higher Degrees Committees, Academic Committees, Examination Committees, Curriculum Development Committee and in various other committees related to these Masters programmes. Besides, Sri Lanka Library Association, NILIS and Dept. of LIS, University of Kelaniya collectively conduct over 15 Diploma and Certificate programs across the country and the academic staff of the university libraries, conduct examinations and serve in various committees related to these academic activities.

In addition to formal teaching in LIS courses, librarians engage in orientation programmes and academic skills development programmes for undergraduates and postgraduates. Further, sessions on e-resources usage, carrying out literary reviews etc. are offered by them for postgraduate students and faculty members by which they fulfil their teaching responsibilities to the library user community.

² The term “Librarians” in this paper embraces Assistant Librarians, Senior Asst. Librarians (Gr. II & I) and Deputy Librarians.

³ Ernest L. Boyer (1928-1995) is considered as one of the most articulate and well-resourced voices in the history of American education. Among his many scholarly works “*Scholarship reconsidered: priorities of the professoriate*” published by the Carnegie Foundation in 1990 is considered as a groundbreaking study the role of academics. This highly influential study sparked debate in faculty and administrative circles on campuses countrywide.

Boyer in his classic moves away from the one-dimensional linear approach to scholarship that has often characterised the faculty members either as researchers or teachers and claims that people assume a linear cause and effect relationship between scholarship that moves from research, to publications to applications to teaching. According to him it is as though the latter are not considered part of scholarship but grow out of it. (Boyer 1990, p.15). However, he argues that scholarship has four elements; the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application and the scholarship of teaching and that these four aspects dynamically interact, forming an independent whole (Boyer 1990, p.25).

The duty of the librarians is to provide information to the university community as and whenever it is required. If a user needs information librarians keep constantly in touch with local or foreign bodies to obtain research material hence their duties are not restricted to 8.00 am– 4.00 pm, but it is more of a 24 hour job. Planning various development projects and research projects, writing proposals and various other duties have to be carried out, after the normal office hours to avoid disruptions that occur during the normal office hours. Hence the librarians do not perform just routine duties but play a knowledge intensive 24 hour role.

A gap in the expected and performed roles

Nevertheless a gap can be perceived between the *teaching role* of the university librarians as stipulated in the Universities Act and actual role played by *most* of the librarians. There are many instances in which the role was questioned and misinterpreted by the academics and administrators. However it is welcoming to note that there is a group of enthusiastic young librarians struggling in isolation to emerge in their new role as true “scholars” but this process is slow due to several reasons;

- 1) Lack of educational / professional development opportunities and exposure of librarians in general to the changes in the global higher education sector so that they can rapidly adapt to the evolving learning culture, which would have enabled them to quickly assume the role of “teachers” to underpin the university education towards a knowledge society. On one hand, due to absence of knowledge in the vital role the librarians can play in the education process, opportunities to compete for the scholarships to obtain good postgraduate qualifications are given rarely to librarians. On the other hand recruiting poor quality staff with inadequate English and other skills makes it difficult for them to compete with more qualified lecturers to secure such scholarships.
- 2) Absence of enthusiasm of many librarians who form the interface between the profession and the policy makers, to adapt to changes or to raise awareness among the policy makers, for urgent need to change. It is unfortunate that the senior academics who are responsible for policy making in university education will tend to take decisions with regard to the contributions of librarians and libraries based on their perceptions of this kind of passive librarians they interact with.
- 3) Absence of any legislative initiative (to motivate many who are not self motivated academics) to provide necessary motivational background to change. Until the implementation of Commission Circular 921 in May 2010, there were no detailed guidelines as to how a candidate would be evaluated for the posts of Deputy Librarian and Librarian. Though 921 could be improved further it now serves as a motivating factor for the young librarians to develop their role as scholars.
- 4) Lack of opportunities for librarians and lecturers to interact in a formal educational environment to appreciate the possible mutual contributions to the enhancement of university teaching/learning and to understand the role of librarians. This is vital because most of the policy decisions are taken by the teachers who serve in various sub committees and their lack of awareness of the librarians’ role leads to their ignoring the library in curriculum planning and teaching/learning processes.
- 5) Lack of awareness of the true role of the librarians in the new education paradigm, by many policy makers and administrators who makes decisions affecting the librarians. Sri Lankan university policy reforms were introduced in the mid 1990s with a similar emphasis to that of British, Australian and American perspectives on lifelong learning, relevance to world of work, globalisation and knowledge society. But it is a sad fact that libraries or librarians’ education and training did not receive any attention of the Sri Lankan policy makers therefore any national level or even institutional reforms in a similar manner to that of UK, Australia, USA or India did not take place in the university libraries. It is commendable that General Education policy reforms in

Sri Lanka placed the school library system in its due place and the GEP II and TETD projects contributed to a considerable development in the school library infrastructure and the librarians.

- 6) There is also now a threat of young librarians who are enthusiastic in their academic status leaving the university system in search of higher professional recognition. There can be only 15 university librarians at any given time because we only have 15 universities. If the Librarian is young and expected to serve 15-20 years in that post (i.e. Universities of Peradeniya, Sri Jayawardenepura and Visual and Performing Arts) they can lose motivation as there is no other position to achieve. Other juniors who attain the Deputy Librarian grade early in their life also has no further promotions to gain in the library system if the Librarian is expected to serve a long time. This motivates them to move out of the university system leaving the university libraries with only the slow career-aspirants. This issue needs to be addressed to prevent the brain-drain from university libraries.

It is useful to note ALA's (2007) declaration that "the character and quality of an institution of higher learning are shaped in large measure by the nature of its library holdings and the ease and imagination with which those resources are made accessible to the members of the academic community.

What other countries have done to transform their university libraries

The British government initiated the higher education reforms by publishing the report widely known as the Dearing Report, (Dearing 1997), which made 93 recommendations on how the British higher education should develop during the next 20 years. Corresponding to these recommendations Follett Report (1997)⁴ in the UK placed great stress on the increasingly important role of the libraries in turning the use of networked information resources into an everyday part of teaching, learning and research. It emphasized that the libraries need to change their service paradigm from providing *information* to providing *access* to information and teaching and intermediary role that has to be played by the librarians. EduLib project (EduLib 1997), which is a recommendation of Follett Report, was expected to provide a national programme of educational development for library and information services staff. The EduLib Development Team sampled current opinion and practice concerning the teaching and learning role of library and support staff and used this to develop a national consensus regarding the nature of the information skills they were attempting to develop. EduLib is a collaborative effort between the University of Hull, the University of Abertay Dundee and SEDA¹ (The Staff and Educational Development Association).

Following the EduLib project of the UK, Australian universities have developed staff training programmes to enhance their teaching role. For instance Queensland University of Technology, Australia has designed a training programme, which consists of the following elements;

- Teaching skills – curriculum design, delivery of subject content and evaluation.
- Strategic skills – communication, conflict resolution, negotiation, organizational awareness and policy development.
- Professional competency – Information Content knowledge, technological competences and professionalism. (Peacock, 2001).

Sri Lankan University sector is not too late and the UGC can take examples from some developed countries as indicated below;

⁴ Joint Funding Council's Libraries Review Group: Report is popularly known as Follett Report

Some Recommendations

1. Provide equal opportunities for librarians to obtain postgraduate qualifications from developed countries without placing emphasis only on disciplines taught in the academic departments and to adopt a rigorous selection process to recruit the best librarians so that they can be academically on par with the lecturers.
2. UGC to instruct all the Vice chancellors to provide training at Staff Development Centres (SDCs) to all librarians in service to fill the gap in their knowledge in teaching, learning and curriculum development.
3. UGC to issue a circular in such a way to make it an essential requirement for the newly recruited Asst. Librarians to follow the CTHE (by University of Colombo) or similar induction programme **together** with the Probationary Lecturers (I stress together with Probationary Lecturers here because learning together will provide an opportunity for these two professions to understand the complementary roles they can play to enhance the learning experiences of the university students). At present those who have obtained these qualifications have done so through their personal interest and motivation but there is yet a large number to obtain such a qualification.
4. To conduct continuing professional development workshops for librarians and lecturers together to raise awareness of the contribution of the libraries and librarians that can enhance the learning experience of the students. At present such workshops are absent perhaps other than in Universities of Colombo and Kelaniya SDCs.
5. Planning and implementing a project similar to the UK and Australia for the development of university libraries with the support of World Bank or Asian Development Bank.
6. To avoid the future brain-drain from university libraries, and to retain the professional enthusiasm of the young university librarians it is recommended to provide a few more steps in the career ladder of the Librarians and Deputy Librarians following the American pattern. Entry requirements may be rigorous as stipulated in Circular No. 921 so that only the most persevering aspirants would reach the higher echelons of the profession.

Conclusion

Sri Lankan University Librarianship and the libraries need a greater attention from the librarians as well as the policy makers if our university education to be more relevant to the needs of the knowledge economy. Librarians have a greater responsibility in becoming more assertive of their role in the university education and being alert to the changes in the global professional environment so as to adopt to change rapidly. Policy makers have a responsibility to provide educational and professional development opportunities to both librarians as well as lecturers so that they develop a collaborative working culture in which the teaching role of the librarian is enhanced.

Acknowledgement: Constructive comments of Dr. Chaminda Jayasundara, Deputy Librarian, University of Colombo is greatly appreciated.

References

ALA (2010). A Guideline for the Appointment, Promotion and Tenure of Academic Librarians. <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/promotiontenure>. Accessed on 28.12.2011

ALA (2007). Association of College and Research Libraries Joint Statement on Faculty Status of College and University Librarians <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/jointstatementfaculty>. Accessed on 25.12.2012

Boyer, Earnets L. (1990). *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. New York. John Wiley.

CAUT (2010). Policy Statement on Academic Status and Governance for Librarians at Canadian Universities and Colleges. <http://www.caut.ca/pages.asp?lang=1&page=249> Accessed on 13.01.2012.

Dearing, Ron (1997). Higher education in the learning society. Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education. <https://bei.leeds.ac.uk/Partners/NCIHE/>. Accessed on 13.01.2012.

Duderstadt, J.J. (1997-98). Transforming the university to serve the digital age. *Cause/Effect*, 20(4), pp.21-32.

EduLib: Educational Development for Higher Education Library Staff (1997). <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/elib/projects/edulib/> Accessed on 09.08.2004.

Elmborg, J.K. (2002). Teaching at the Desk: Toward a Reference Pedagogy. *Portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 2(3), 455-464.

Follett Report (1993). Joint Funding Council's Libraries Review Group: Report. <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/papers/follett/report/>. Accessed on 12.01.2012.

John Fielden Consultancy (1997). Supporting expansion. A Report on Human Resources Management in academic libraries, for the Joint Funding Councils Libraries Review Group. The Councils. Bristol.

Kemp, J. (2006). Isn't Being a Librarian Enough? Librarians as Classroom Teachers. *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 13(3), 3-23.

Peacock, Judith (2001). Teaching skills for teaching librarians: postcards from the edge of the educational paradigm. *Australian Academic & research Libraries*, 32(1). <http://alia.org.au/publishing/aar/32.1/full.text/jpeacock.html> Accessed 17.07.2004.

Peele, D. (1984). Librarians as Teachers: Some Reality Mostly Myth. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 10(5), 267-270.

University of Mississippi Libraries (2004). Tenure and Promotion Guidelines and Procedures <http://academic-librarian-status.wikispaces.com/University+of+Mississippi+Tenure+and+Promotion+Guidelines#> Accessed on 13.01.2012.

Wallace, S. (2009). Feminism. In *A Dictionary of Education*. http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t2_7.e210

Appendix 1

Guidelines on librarianship, University of Mississippi

In accordance with the University of Mississippi, USA focuses on librarianship, research and creativity and service in the tenure of a Librarian. The following guidelines on librarianship provide examples of the responsibilities.

Examples of leadership roles in Librarianship:

- creative problem solving that improves or enhances departmental performance;
- demonstrating initiative in the development of new projects and/or innovative programs;
- taking a leadership role in the provision or development of services;
- cooperating with other libraries and institutions to facilitate research and to develop regional and national library services;
- developing effective administrative skills necessary to provide leadership.

Examples of effectiveness in Librarianship:

- demonstrating subject knowledge and the professional expertise used to build, organize, and preserve collections;
- demonstrating subject knowledge and the professional expertise necessary to meet user needs and stimulate wider use of resources;
- implementing, developing, and maintaining automated systems designed to enhance access to library resources or to improve overall or departmental performance;
- translating knowledge of the curriculum and University policies into effective Library services and collections;
- assessing and monitoring changing research patterns and trends in order to anticipate user needs;
- developing expert skills in teaching and training techniques used in individual instruction sessions and in University credit courses;
- encouraging others to reach their highest potential by fostering an atmosphere of open communication and receptiveness to suggestions and criticism;
- establishing a record of sustained professional development through continuing education activities, reading and discussing professional literature, and monitoring and contributing to relevant electronic discussion lists;
- demonstrating expertise in analyzing, developing, and maintaining bibliographic controls or digital collection controls and their associated standards;
- having command of the knowledge essential for present position and awareness of current practices, developments, research and technology in assigned area(s) of responsibility.