

“THE LIBRARIAN AS CO-PILOT: TRANSFORMING ACADEMIC LIBRARIES THROUGH RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS AND EMERGING SCHOLARLY SERVICES”

Dr. Shraddha Anilkumar

Former Principal/Librarian,

D. A. K. Mahavidyalaya Jaripatka

Nagpur

Crossref DOI -

Abstract :

Academic librarianship is undergoing a significant transformation from a traditional collection-centred service model towards a research-oriented and partnership-based model. The rapid growth of digital scholarship, research data management, artificial intelligence, open access, digital humanities and new forms of scholarly communication has expanded the responsibilities of academic librarians. In this changing environment, the librarian can be viewed as a “co-pilot” who works alongside researchers throughout the research journey rather than merely providing information on request. This paper examines the emerging role of academic librarians through six interconnected dimensions: embedded librarianship, research data stewardship, digital scholarship, research support, scholarly communication and librarian–researcher partnerships. It highlights how librarians can contribute at different stages of the research lifecycle, including literature discovery, information evaluation, data organization, publication, dissemination and assessment of research impact. The paper also discusses the competencies required for this changing professional role and considers its relevance to Indian higher education institutions. It argues that the future academic library should move from a predominantly transactional model towards a collaborative research ecosystem in which librarians participate actively in knowledge creation, dissemination and scholarly impact.

Keywords : Academic Libraries; Librarian as Co-Pilot; Embedded Librarianship; Research Support; Research Data Management; Digital Scholarship; Scholarly Communication; Open Access; Research Partnership.

Introduction :

Academic libraries have traditionally served as centres for acquiring, organizing, preserving and providing access to information resources. For many decades, the primary interaction between researchers and librarians was based on information requests, reference services, bibliographic assistance and access to print and electronic resources. The rapid development of digital technologies, online scholarly databases, open-access publishing and



data-intensive research has, however, transformed this environment.

Researchers today operate within an increasingly complex scholarly ecosystem. They must identify reliable sources, manage large volumes of information, organize research data, select appropriate publication channels, establish scholarly identities and demonstrate the visibility and impact of their research. Consequently, academic librarians are increasingly expected to contribute expertise beyond traditional reference and collection-management activities.

The concept of embedded librarianship represents an important stage in this transformation. Rather than waiting for researchers to approach the library, librarians work more closely with academic departments, research groups and individual researchers. Abrizah, Inuwa and Afiqah-Izzati (2016) highlighted the development of embedded librarianship and its implications for Library and Information Science professionals. Subsequent research has also emphasized librarians' contribution to research partnerships and the competencies necessary for such collaboration (Rabasa & Abrizah, 2022).

In this context, the metaphor of the librarian as a “co-pilot” provides a useful framework for understanding the changing professional identity of academic librarians. The researcher remains the principal decision-maker concerning the research question, disciplinary framework, methodology and scholarly conclusions. The librarian, however, contributes specialized expertise in information discovery, research data, digital resources, scholarly communication and research visibility.

The research journey may therefore be represented as:

Research Idea → Literature Discovery → Research Design → Data → Analysis → Publication → Dissemination → Impact

At each stage, the librarian has the potential to provide meaningful professional support.

The Librarian as a Research Co-Pilot :

The term “co-pilot” is used in this paper as a metaphor for collaboration, navigation and complementary expertise. It does not suggest that librarians replace researchers or assume responsibility for disciplinary decisions. Instead, it recognizes that research is increasingly interdisciplinary and information-intensive, requiring different forms of expertise.

A researcher may have extensive knowledge of a particular discipline and research methodology, while the librarian may possess specialized knowledge of bibliographic databases, information retrieval, search strategies, metadata, repositories, copyright, research identifiers and scholarly communication.



The traditional interaction can be represented as:

Researcher → Request → Librarian → Information → Researcher

The emerging partnership model is more collaborative:

**Researcher ↔ Librarian ↔ Research Team → Knowledge Creation → Dissemination
→ Impact**

Borrego, Ardanuy and Urbano (2018) examined librarians as research partners and demonstrated that librarians can contribute to scholarly work beyond conventional Library and Information Science activities. This reinforces the idea that academic librarians can become active participants in the research ecosystem.

The co-pilot model therefore involves three important principles:

1. **Complementary expertise** : researchers and librarians contribute different but mutually useful skills.
2. **Continuous engagement** : library support extends beyond a single information request.
3. **Shared scholarly objectives** : both work towards improving the quality, visibility and impact of research.

Embedded Librarianship :

Embedded librarianship is one of the most significant developments in contemporary academic library practice. It involves integrating librarians more closely into the academic and research environments in which users work. An embedded librarian may participate in research consultations, departmental meetings, research workshops, literature reviews, curriculum activities and research projects. The objective is to understand the research context and provide support that is relevant to actual scholarly needs.

Important areas of embedded library support include:

- advanced literature searching;
- systematic and structured literature reviews;
- database selection and evaluation;
- research consultations;
- information-literacy training;
- citation and reference-management support;
- research workshops; and
- continuing consultation with faculty and research scholars.

The importance of embedded librarianship lies in its movement away from a purely reactive service. The librarian becomes proactive and develops an understanding of the



research environment. Research on embedded librarianship has identified its potential to strengthen relationships between librarians, academics and researchers (Abrizah et al., 2016). For Indian higher education institutions, embedded librarianship can be particularly useful because it can bring library expertise closer to departments, research centres and postgraduate programmes.

Research Data Stewardship :

Research is increasingly data-intensive. Modern projects may generate survey responses, interview transcripts, statistical datasets, GIS files, images, audiovisual materials, experimental results and other forms of digital content. Such data require systematic organization, description, storage, preservation and appropriate access. This creates an important opportunity for academic libraries to expand their traditional expertise in organization and preservation into the area of research data management.

Librarians can assist researchers with:

- developing Data Management Plans;
- identifying suitable data repositories;
- organizing and describing datasets;
- supporting metadata creation;
- advising on preservation;
- facilitating responsible data sharing;
- understanding copyright and licensing; and
- maintaining appropriate documentation.

Research data stewardship also involves ethical considerations. Researchers and librarians need to consider privacy, confidentiality, intellectual property and responsible access to data. The librarian can therefore act as a bridge between researchers, institutional policies and information-management practices.

This role represents a significant expansion of the traditional library function. Instead of managing only published information, the library becomes involved in the management of information generated during the research process itself.

Digital Scholarship and Digital Humanities :

The growth of digital scholarship has created new opportunities for academic libraries. Digital humanities, in particular, combines humanities research with digital technologies and may involve digitized manuscripts, historical documents, maps, images, textual collections and digital archives.

Academic librarians can contribute to these activities through:

- digitization of collections;



- metadata development;
- digital preservation;
- creation of digital collections;
- discovery and access systems;
- digital exhibitions;
- copyright and licensing guidance; and
- support for digital research tools.

The library can consequently evolve from a place primarily associated with physical collections into a collaborative environment for digital research and experimentation. Digital scholarship also requires librarians to develop new technical competencies. Familiarity with digital tools, metadata standards, repositories, data visualization and emerging technologies can enable librarians to participate more effectively in interdisciplinary research teams.

Research Support Across the Research Lifecycle :

A modern research-support service should not be restricted to literature searching. Academic libraries can potentially support researchers throughout the complete research lifecycle.

The process can be represented as:

Research Idea → Literature Review → Data Collection → Data Management → Analysis → Publication → Dissemination → Research Impact

At the initial stage, librarians can assist researchers in identifying relevant literature, databases and authoritative information sources. During the literature-review stage, they can help construct effective search strategies and identify appropriate databases.

During data collection and management, librarians can provide guidance on organization, documentation, metadata and repository selection. At the publication stage, they can support researchers in understanding scholarly communication, open-access options, copyright and institutional repositories.

Following publication, the library can assist with research visibility, researcher identifiers and institutional dissemination. Thus, library support can extend from the beginning of a research project to the assessment of its scholarly and societal impact.

This lifecycle approach changes the fundamental question from “What information does the researcher need?” to “How can the library contribute to the researcher’s complete scholarly journey?”

Scholarly Communication and Open Access :

The scholarly communication environment has undergone considerable change due to



electronic publishing, open access, institutional repositories and researcher identifiers.

Academic librarians are well positioned to support researchers in understanding this changing environment. Their responsibilities may include:

- identifying suitable journals and publication channels;
- explaining open-access models;
- supporting institutional repository deposits;
- assisting with copyright and licensing;
- promoting ORCID and other researcher identifiers;
- improving discoverability of scholarly publications; and
- providing information about research visibility and impact.

Institutional repositories are especially important because they preserve and disseminate the intellectual output of universities and colleges. They also increase the accessibility and discoverability of research produced within an institution. Research partnership literature indicates that librarians increasingly contribute to scholarly communication and research-related activities (Rabasa & Abrizah, 2022). This makes scholarly communication an important component of the modern research library.

Librarian–Researcher Partnership :

The central transformation proposed in this paper is the movement from “service provider” to “research partner.” In the traditional model, the researcher approaches the library with a specific request and the librarian provides an answer. In a partnership model, the relationship is more sustained. The librarian seeks to understand the research problem and contributes specialized expertise throughout the project.

The relationship can therefore be expressed as:

Researcher ↔ Librarian ↔ Research Team → Knowledge Creation → Dissemination → Impact

Borrego, Ardanuy and Urbano (2018) provide evidence that librarians can participate in scholarly work outside their traditional professional boundaries. Such collaboration may include systematic reviews, higher education research and disciplinary research projects. However, effective partnership requires clarity regarding professional roles. The librarian should contribute expertise without compromising the intellectual ownership of the researcher. Where a librarian makes a substantial intellectual contribution to a scholarly publication, appropriate acknowledgement or authorship should be considered according to accepted scholarly standards.

Competencies Required for the Co-Pilot Role :

The transition towards research partnership requires academic librarians to



continuously update their professional competencies.

Important areas include:

- advanced literature searching;
- information evaluation and research literacy;
- research data management;
- metadata and digital preservation;
- digital scholarship;
- scholarly communication;
- open-access publishing;
- copyright and licensing;
- bibliometrics and research impact;
- artificial intelligence and digital literacy;
- research ethics; and
- communication and collaborative research skills.

Rabasa and Abrizah (2022) emphasize that librarians involved in research partnerships require competencies extending beyond conventional information services. Continuous professional development is therefore essential. Library professionals should have opportunities to attend workshops, participate in research projects, learn emerging technologies and collaborate with faculty members and research scholars.

Relevance to Indian Higher Education :

The changing role of academic librarians is particularly significant in the context of Indian higher education. Universities and colleges are increasingly concerned with research quality, innovation, digital resources, scholarly communication and institutional research performance.

Academic libraries can contribute to these objectives by developing:

- dedicated research-support services;
- institutional repositories;
- research data-management guidance;
- researcher training programmes;
- scholarly communication services;
- bibliometric and research-impact support; and
- librarian–faculty research partnerships.

The Indian academic library therefore needs to move from a collection-centred model to a researcher-centred model.

Institutional recognition is essential for this transformation. Librarians should be included, wherever appropriate, in research planning, academic development initiatives,



digital scholarship projects and institutional knowledge-management activities.

Challenges :

Despite considerable opportunities, the transformation of academic librarianship also presents challenges.

First, many librarians require additional training in research data management, bibliometrics, digital scholarship, artificial intelligence and emerging research technologies.

Second, researchers may not always be aware of the specialized expertise available within academic libraries.

Third, effective research support requires adequate digital infrastructure, software, staffing and institutional investment. Without these resources, librarians may find it difficult to provide advanced services. Professional perception is another challenge. If librarians continue to be regarded primarily as custodians of books and information resources, their potential contribution to research will remain underutilized.

These challenges can be addressed through continuous professional development, institutional support, collaborative research programmes and greater integration of library services with institutional research strategies.

The future academic library is likely to become increasingly integrated into the research ecosystem of the institution.

The following areas deserve particular attention:

- Research-support units within academic libraries.
- Embedded librarianship programmes connected with departments and research groups.
- Research data-management services and repository support.
- Digital scholarship and digital humanities centres.
- Scholarly communication and open-access support.
- Bibliometric and research-impact services.
- Artificial intelligence and digital-literacy training.
- Formal librarian–faculty research partnerships.

The success of academic libraries should therefore not be measured only through collection size, circulation or transaction statistics. Their contribution to research quality, knowledge creation, innovation, scholarly visibility and societal impact should also be recognized.

Conclusion :

Academic librarianship is moving beyond the traditional responsibility of collecting,



organizing and providing access to information. The contemporary research environment requires librarians to become collaborators, facilitators, digital specialists and partners in the scholarly process. The “librarian as co-pilot” provides a useful metaphor for this transformation. The researcher remains the principal navigator of the research project, while the librarian contributes expertise in information discovery, data management, digital scholarship, scholarly communication and research dissemination.

The future of the academic library therefore lies not simply in providing access to information, but in actively contributing to the creation, management, dissemination and impact of knowledge.

“The modern librarian is not merely a custodian of knowledge; the librarian is a co-pilot who helps researchers navigate information, data, technology and ideas towards meaningful knowledge creation and impact.”

References :

- Abrizah, A., Inuwa, S., & Afqah-Izzati, N. (2016). Systematic literature review informing LIS professionals on embedding librarianship roles. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 42(6), 636–643. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2016.08.010>
- Borrego, Á., Ardanuy, J., & Urbano, C. (2018). Librarians as research partners: Their contribution to the scholarly endeavour beyond library and information science. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 44(5), 663–670. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2018.07.012>
- Rabasa, T. A., & Abrizah, A. (2022). Academic librarians’ roles and competencies in research partnership: A qualitative study. *Malaysian Journal of Library and Information Science*, 27(3), 69–95. <https://doi.org/10.22452/mjlis.vol27no3.4>
- Leonard, A., Chigwada, J., & Mushi, G. (2023). The state of embedded librarianship in the university research processes in selected African academic libraries. *Library Management*, 44(8/9), 518–535. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LM-06-2023-0045>

