Qualities of Academic Librarians and their Relationship with Library Users

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ABSTRACT

Librarianship is a dynamic profession which faces new changes and challenges. The shift from traditional means of disseminating information to the application of Information and Communication Technology facilities, and the challenges of managing the manpower in order to get the best result out of them cannot be over emphasized. This study is a review of the qualities of academiclibrarians and their relationship with library users. Librarians need to exhibit some qualities so as to enhance good relationship with both staff and users, they most stand up to embrace these changes and face the challenges ahead. The study highlighted that the key aspect of the librarians work is facilitating and supporting learning by teaching information retrieval skills to students and staff. Therefore, a broad understanding of all aspects of librarianship from reference work to technical services as well as experiences in teaching and web development are also important in building and sustaining good relationship with library users in the academic system.
Keywords: *Librarianship, library users, academic library*

INTRODUCTION

For the past few decades, the profession of librarianship has been characterized as a profession in transition, the question becoming, how long can a state of transition exist without it eventually becomes institutionalized? In what seems to be a paradox, transition becomes the foundation of everyday life and change becomes normalized. The 21st century librarians will need to be comfortable with these changes because that is the environment in which they will display their career. Librarians do not exist in vacuum, and the trends of the future will strongly influence the future of the profession. Given the changes in the profession that will inevitably occur, librarians' needs to change too, they should exhibit some qualities that will enhance their relationship with their clientele so that they can serve them in the best way.

Winder and Judd (1996) argue that quality is fundamentally relational, and it is the ongoing process of building and sustaining relationships by accessing, anticipating and fulfilling stated and implied needs. According to them, even those quality definitions which are not expressly relational have an implicit relational character. All efforts towards living a qualitative, effective and efficient life is geared towords building and sustaining relationships. This presupposes the efficacy of quality as a virtue. Hence, it would be difficult to find a realistic definition of Quality that does not contain within the definition, a fundamental express or implied focus of building and sustain relationships. Two major types of quality are hereby adopted for the study. They are (i) the quality of design and (ii) the quality of the

process. The Quality of design is the ability to live up to the desired and expected quality. While the Quality of the process is an action that is aimed at the translation, transformation and realization of clientele expectations. Even with the changes that radically occur in the last few decades in the library system, the design and process of the quality are expected to stand the test of time. Of librarianship, the characteristics needed in academic librarians of contemporary days are much more different from those of previous generations of the profession. However, several of them may be needed in greater measure because of technological, political or economic challenges. Academic librarian is a person that works in the academic environment be it a university, polytechnic, college of education or any other higher institutions of learning.

Job description and activities of academic librarians

Academic librarians provide support to members of an academic community including students, researchers and lectures. Typically, academic librarians will mange, organize, evaluate and disseminate information within and outside their community. They will often be responsible for a specific academic subject area or a particular function such as resource ordering, loans, special collections or ICT systems. They may also undertake project work for the library as a whole. A key aspect of their work is facilitating and supporting learning by teaching information retrieval skills to students and staff. Academic librarians spend a considerable amount of time working with electronic resources and are increasingly involved with database management and web page development. This role has little to do with reading books and is very much a people- focused occupation. There are typical work activities for academic librarians. These activities are specialized responsibility for an academic subject or function which are common even at basic-level posts. The following list contains specifically, the tasks typically undertaken as an academic librarian.

i   Managing and developing collections of books, journals and websites

ii   Managing buildings, furniture and equipment

iii   Managing staff, which may involve recruitment and selection, appraisals, disciplinary action, staff development and training, as well as day-to-day activities.

iv   Managing budgets and in some cases purchasing resources.

v   Maintaining relationships with external bodies such as suppliers.

vi   Contributing to academic course development and liaising with academic departments.

vii   Managing books for reading list and allocating length of loans.

viii Creating, updating and managing information resources both electronic and printed, selecting acquiring and cataloging information using library and information software.

ix   Assisting researchers with literature searches using database, printed resources and the internet.

x   Delivering information and learning skills course for students and staff.

xi   Dealing with user enquiries which may involve one-on-one advice sessions.

xii   Keeping up to date with relevant debates in the library sector.

xiii Participation in professional groups or networks.

Expected Qualities to be possessed by academic librarians
The challenges that face the 21st century librarians are outgrowths of those that began appearing at the close of the last century. What one sees now is a growth of them on a much greater scale and development at a must faster rate. With this being the case, librarians are being called on to be more and more responsible for what goes on in their libraries and being called on to deal with issues not foreseen in years past. To be able to execute it successfully, he/she must possess some of these qualities if not all.

Good communication skills: Librarians must have good communication skills that will allow them to negotiate a contract, a question, or a query with someone across the desk, across town or across the globe by telephones, e-mail, or face to face. Chat reference is more and more common, so being able to negotiate a question by written communication is that much important and distance education students must be helped by mail, video, telephone, or e-mail or face to face interactions. Librarians are the image maker of the library as such they should develop personality traits that would enable them to be outspoken, articulate, assertive and precise in information provision.

Good human relation skills: Librarians should possess good human relations skills, good etiquette such as ability to interact with community, give talks and advertise the library, identify with users to channel their queries appropriately to yield positive result.

A solid, broad education: Not every librarian need to be classically trained, but the more one knows about a variety of subject, the better a librarian one can become. Library tools such as card catalogue, OPAC, CD ROM, internet, shelf guide, new arrival display. This will prevent the users been frustrated when they come looking for information that are contained or aided by these tools.

Personable: Librarians should be personable, not partial and arrogant but firm on issues. They should be approachable and ensures that users are satisfied and happy before leaving the library.

Self-Awareness: Librarians should have self awareness which is an understanding of your strength, weakness, needs, and motivators. People with strong self-awareness are neither overtly critical nor unrealistically hopeful; they are honest with themselves and others. People with self-awareness recognize how their feelings affect them, other people, and their job performance. They have a firm grasp of their capabilities and strengths and are less likely to set themselves up to fail because they are self confident and have good self-esteem (McCarthy, 2010).

Self-esteem: This is a realistic, appreciative opinion of one self. Realistic means you deal in the truth, accurately and honestly understanding your strengths weakness. Having an appreciative understanding your strengths and weaknesses. Having an appreciative understanding of oneself suggest that you feel good about, and are at peace with the person you are. Low-self esteem can lead to prejudice against yourself, you are guilty of distorting or ignoring information that disputes your skewed perception of yourself. To strengthen your self-esteem, bury your internal belief that makes negative internal talk, picture a friendly posture coming along, to replace it with affirmations that are positive and

affirming. Other methods for improving self esteem, according to Karl (2003), include:

a. Asking others to identify your strength.
b. Laughing at your weaknesses (because no one is perfect).
c. Putting your failure in perspective, as they allow you learn and grow.
d. Finding someone who needs your assistance and offering to help him.
e. Tasking on a challenge to stretch you.
f. Getting comfortable with compliments and accepting praise, and
g. Focusing your mental chatter on the positive aspect of your experience (McCarthy, 2010).

Self-confidence: People who lack self-confidence are apprehensive, frustrated, resentful, and often demoralized. To improve your confidence, ask yourself: "how would I behave if I was really confident" or "how would a confident person I know handle this?" just adopting the behaviour of self confidence will help you feel more confident. Do not keep admonishing yourself for failures, rather, reward yourself for success. Learn from your mistakes and move on. People with high self-esteem and self- confidence are assertive and not aggressive of which builds rather than destroy good working relationships (Benton, 2010).

Worry and anxiety: Assess the importance of what you are worrying about. Will it matter tomorrow, next week, or 100 years hence? Resist inventing new things to worry about. Deal with situations as they develop instead of wasting mental energy on worries ahead of time. Another way to deal with worry and anxiety is to take action, even if it is just making a list or developing an action plan. The act of writing things down helps you stop the mental chatter. Be aware of attitudes that are creating internal pressure. Do not tell yourself " I have to get this done " but say" I will do as much as I can in the time allowed" do not say I should not ask for help" but say "everyone asks for help some times. I would happily help someone else and that person would reciprocate" do not say" others cope far better than I do "but say" everyone is susceptible to stress, so I am not alone in this " (White, 2006)

Empathy for clientele: Having empathy means thoughtfully considering your clienteles feelings and their emotional make up when interacting with them. Empathy also includes the ability to read people's reactions and see things from their perspective, which fosters a team approach to work. Empathy leaves peoples' feelings understood and cared for. When people feel good, they do their best at work. Feeling good promotes mental efficiency making people better at understanding information and making complex judgment. It is very important to assist your client in building their self esteem and self- confidence so that they may be prepared to tackle the challenges of their academics activities. This will make them to develop and maintain good relationship with you (Fashp, 2010).

Flexibility: Flexibility in librarians entails the ability to take on different tasks, within the same day, or even within the same hour, and not loose one's equilibrium. The odds are that staffing levels for library will continue to decline. The chances are that the job that one was hired for is not the job one is doing, if one has been there longer than a year. This means that those who continue in the profession will have to develop new skills and adapt old ones.

A Sense of Humor: Librarians are better off with a robust sense of humor, as well as a good measure of humility. Exhibiting these qualities will make the users to come very close to you and to be open to you with regards to their information needs.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the foregoing discussion, librarianship can be regarded as a dynamic profession especially in the 21st century. The changes range from traditional method of disseminating information, to the application of ICT facilities, more especially in academic libraries. Librarians most keep abreast with these changes, in order to satisfy their client effectively, in doing so; librarians need to exhibit some qualities to their client, so as to enhance good relationship with them for smooth discharge of their responsibilities. Finally, for librarians to succeed in discharging their roles they must possess good leadership ability to work in a team, technical skills, and knowledge of the issues facing libraries. A broad understanding of all aspects of librarianship from reference work to technical services as well as experiences in teaching and web development are also important in building and sustaining good relationship with library users in the academic system.

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