THE LIBRARIAN AS CO-PILOT: NEW ROLES AND RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

Tarana Shaikh
Research Scholar (Ph.D.),
Department of Library & Information Science, Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University
(Supervisor)

Dr Aparna Sanjay Choudhary
Librarian, Department of Library & Information Science,
Smt. Binzani Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Nagpur

Crossref DOI - https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23387594

Abstract :

The role of the librarian is undergoing a significant transformation in the contemporary educational and information environment. Traditionally associated with the collection, organization, preservation and circulation of information resources, librarians are now expected to contribute actively to teaching, learning, digital literacy, research and innovation. This paper explores the concept of the librarian as a "co-pilot"—a professional who works alongside teachers, students, researchers and institutions to navigate an increasingly complex information landscape. The co-pilot role involves collaboration, guidance, resource curation, research support, information and media literacy, technology integration, and responsible use of emerging tools such as artificial intelligence (AI). The paper examines the growing importance of research partnerships between librarians and academic communities. Librarians can support literature searching, research data discovery, citation management, scholarly communication, open educational resources, research visibility, and evidence-based practice. In schools, the librarian can serve as a bridge among the curriculum, information resources, technology, and inquiry-based learning. In higher education and research environments, the librarian can contribute to the research lifecycle from topic identification and literature review to dissemination and preservation. However, this transformation requires continuous professional development, technological competence, collaborative skills, and institutional recognition. The paper argues that repositioning librarians as co-pilots rather than service providers alone can strengthen learning communities and create sustainable research partnerships.

Keywords : Librarian as Co-Pilot, Information Literacy, Digital Literacy, Research Partnerships, Artificial Intelligence, Library Collaboration, Scholarly Communication, School Libraries

---

Introduction :

Libraries have always played a central role in supporting education, scholarship and the dissemination of knowledge. However, the nature of information and how people

discover, evaluate, create and share knowledge have changed dramatically. The expansion of the internet, electronic resources, digital libraries, open-access publishing, social media, and artificial intelligence has transformed the information ecosystem. In this environment, the traditional image of the librarian as a custodian of books is no longer sufficient to describe the profession. The contemporary librarian is increasingly required to act as an educator, information navigator, technology facilitator, research partner, curator, collaborator, and knowledge manager.

The metaphor of the "co-pilot" provides a useful way to understand this transition. A co-pilot does not replace the person responsible for the journey; rather, the co-pilot shares expertise, monitors changing conditions, provides guidance and helps the team reach its destination safely and effectively. Similarly, a librarian can work alongside teachers and researchers without replacing their professional roles. The librarian contributes specialized knowledge about information resources, search strategies, evaluation of evidence, ethical information use, research tools and knowledge organization.

The co-pilot concept is particularly relevant in schools, colleges and universities where learning increasingly depends on interdisciplinary collaboration. Students need support not only in finding information but also in judging its credibility, synthesizing ideas and using information ethically. Teachers require relevant resources and innovative ways to integrate them into learning. Researchers need sophisticated support throughout the research lifecycle. Librarians are well positioned to connect these needs with appropriate resources, technologies and expertise.

From Custodian to Co-Pilot: The Changing Role of the Librarian

The traditional library model emphasized collection development, classification, cataloguing, circulation, reference services and preservation. These functions remain important, but technological change has expanded the professional scope of librarianship. Automated library management systems, online public access catalogues, digital collections and electronic databases have reduced some routine activities and created opportunities for librarians to focus more strongly on user-centered services.

The modern librarian increasingly operates as an information professional who helps users navigate abundance rather than scarcity. Users can access millions of documents, websites, videos, datasets and social media posts within seconds. The challenge is determining which information is relevant, reliable, current, and ethically usable. Librarians can teach strategies for advanced searching, source evaluation, fact-checking, citation, and responsible digital participation.

In educational institutions, this change also means moving from a reactive service model to a proactive partnership model. Instead of waiting for users to ask for help, librarians can participate in curriculum planning, reading programmes, project-based learning, research activities, orientation programmes and professional development. The library can become a collaborative learning environment were information resources and technology support inquiry and creativity.

The Librarian as Co-Pilot in Teaching and Learning :

The co-pilot role is particularly valuable in school education. Modern curricula increasingly emphasize competency-based learning, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication and inquiry. Library resources can support these competencies when librarians and teachers plan learning activities together. A librarian can help teachers identify age-appropriate books, reference materials, digital resources, multimedia content and open educational resources aligned with learning outcomes.

Teacher–librarian collaboration can include co-designing reading activities, research assignments, project work, book discussions, information-literacy sessions and interdisciplinary activities. For example, a science teacher may collaborate with the librarian to help students locate reliable information about climate change, evaluate sources and present evidence. A language teacher may work with the librarian to develop reading circles, author studies, and book reviews. Such collaboration makes the library an active part of the curriculum rather than an isolated facility.

The librarian can also support differentiated learning by curating resources at different reading levels and in multiple formats. Print books, e-books, audio resources, videos, and accessible digital materials can be combined to meet diverse learner needs. This approach positions the librarian as a learning partner who helps teachers and students navigate resources effectively.

Digital Transformation and Emerging Technologies

Digital transformation has expanded the librarian's responsibilities. Library automation, Web OPACs, digital repositories, electronic journals, e-books, online databases, and cloud-based services have changed how collections are managed and accessed. Librarians must therefore develop digital competencies and understand how information systems work. They need to evaluate digital platforms, manage electronic resources, support remote access and guide users in using digital information effectively.

Artificial intelligence is another major development. AI tools can assist with searching, summarizing, translation, recommendation, and information discovery, but they also create concerns related to accuracy, bias, fabricated information, copyright, privacy, and academic integrity. Librarians can play an important role in developing AI literacy. Rather than simply promoting or rejecting AI tools, librarians can help users understand their strengths and limitations and use them responsibly.

The future-ready librarian should combine traditional information expertise with technological awareness. The objective is not to become a software engineer but to understand enough about emerging technologies to evaluate their impact on information services, learning, and research. This technological confidence strengthens the librarian's ability to act as a co-pilot in digital environments.

Information Literacy and Research Literacy :

Information literacy is one of the strongest foundations of the co-pilot role. Students and researchers must be able to recognize an information need, identify appropriate sources, search efficiently, evaluate information, synthesize evidence and communicate findings. These competencies are essential in an environment where misinformation, manipulated content and unreliable online sources can spread rapidly.

Librarians can develop structured information-literacy programs covering keyword selection, Boolean operators, database searching, source evaluation, reference books, encyclopedias, scholarly databases, citation styles and plagiarism awareness. Research-literacy programs can introduce students and researchers to literature reviews, research questions, bibliographic tools, reference management and scholarly communication.

Such programs are particularly valuable when integrated into authentic assignments. Students learn more effectively when information skills are connected to a real research task. The librarian can therefore work with teachers and researchers to embed information literacy within curriculum and research activities rather than treating it as a separate one-time orientation session.

Librarians as Research Partners :

Research partnership is an important extension of the librarian's professional role. Researchers often spend substantial time identifying literature, managing references, locating full-text resources, and understanding publication practices. Librarians possess expertise that can reduce these challenges and improve the efficiency and quality of research workflows.

A research-support librarian can assist with systematic searching, database selection, literature discovery, citation management, bibliometric tools, open-access resources and scholarly communication. Librarians can also help researchers identify appropriate repositories and understand issues related to copyright, licensing and research visibility. In institutions with research programs, librarians can contribute to workshops on research methodology, literature review techniques, citation practices and academic integrity.

Research partnerships should not be understood as one-directional support. Librarians can also participate as collaborators in research projects where their expertise is relevant. Library and information science research increasingly intersects with education, technology, data science, knowledge management and social sciences. Collaborative research can generate new knowledge about information behavior, digital learning, library services and emerging technologies.

The librarian can also contribute to evidence-based institutional decision-making. Usage statistics, circulation patterns, database analytics, user surveys and research-support data can help institutions understand information needs and improve services. When librarians engage with institutional research, they become contributors to planning and quality improvement rather than service providers operating at the margins.

The Librarian and the Research Lifecycle :

Research support can be organized around the entire research lifecycle. At the beginning, librarians can help researchers identify background literature and refine search strategies. During the literature review, they can provide database expertise and systematic searching guidance. During data collection and analysis, they may support information organization and discovery of relevant datasets or documentation. At the dissemination stage, they can guide researchers towards suitable repositories, open-access options and scholarly communication practices. Finally, librarians can support preservation and long-term access through institutional repositories and digital archiving.

This lifecycle perspective changes the relationship between researchers and libraries. Instead of approaching the library only when a book or article is required, researchers can see librarians as continuing partners in the research process. Institutions can strengthen this relationship by creating dedicated research-support services, consultation programs and collaborative training.

Building Research Partnerships in School Libraries :

Research partnerships are not limited to universities. School librarians can introduce young learners to research practices through age-appropriate inquiry activities. Students can learn how to frame questions, search for information, compare sources, record evidence and present conclusions. These activities prepare them for higher education and lifelong learning.

School librarians can also collaborate with teachers on action research and evidence-based educational practice. A librarian may assist teachers in locating literature on reading development, information literacy, classroom libraries or innovative pedagogy. Collaboration with universities and professional organizations can further expose school librarians to current research and professional development opportunities.

A school library can therefore become a small research and inquiry hub. Reading programs, project-based learning, book discussions, information-literacy activities and digital-resource exploration can all contribute to a culture of curiosity. The librarian's co-pilot role is to help learners and teachers move from information consumption towards knowledge creation.

New Competencies Required by Future-Ready Librarians :

The expanded role requires continuous professional development. Future-ready librarians need strong information-searching skills, digital literacy, communication skills, instructional abilities, research competence and collaborative leadership. They should understand electronic resources, digital repositories, open educational resources, emerging AI tools and basic data literacy.

Equally important are interpersonal competencies. Collaboration requires librarians to communicate with teachers, researchers, administrators and students using language relevant to each group. Librarians need confidence to participate in meetings, contribute ideas and demonstrate the educational value of library services. Leadership, project management,

problem-solving and adaptability are therefore becoming important professional competencies.

Professional learning should be continuous rather than occasional. Workshops, webinars, professional networks, conferences, peer learning, action research and communities of practice can help librarians remain current. Institutions should support such development through dedicated time, resources and recognition.

Challenges and Barriers :

Despite the opportunities, several challenges can limit the transition towards the co-pilot model. One challenge is the persistence of traditional perceptions of librarianship. When librarians are viewed primarily as custodians of books, their contribution to teaching and research may be underestimated. Institutional culture must therefore recognize librarians as educational and research professionals.

A second challenge is unequal access to technology and professional development. Libraries may have different levels of infrastructure, connectivity, databases and digital resources. Librarians also differ in their exposure to emerging technologies. Continuous training and institutional investment are necessary to reduce these gaps.

Time and workload are additional concerns. Routine administrative responsibilities can leave limited time for collaborative teaching and research. Library policies should therefore streamline repetitive processes through automation wherever possible and create opportunities for librarians to participate in higher-value activities.

Ethical challenges are also increasing. Privacy, copyright, plagiarism, misinformation, algorithmic bias and responsible AI use require librarians to develop clear professional guidance. The co-pilot role includes helping users understand not only how to access information but also how to use it ethically.

Recommendations :

The transformation of librarians into co-pilots requires coordinated action at institutional and professional levels. Librarians should be recognized as active members of teaching, curriculum and research teams. Teacher–librarian collaboration should be planned and linked to curriculum outcomes rather than depending only on individual initiative. Institutions should provide continuous professional development in digital literacy, AI literacy, research support and emerging technologies.

Information-literacy and research-literacy instruction should be embedded in authentic learning activities. Research-support services can include consultations, database training, literature-search workshops, citation-management guidance and scholarly communication programmes. Libraries should strengthen access to digital resources, institutional repositories and open educational resources.

Professional networks and partnerships among schools, universities, research

organizations and library associations can create opportunities for knowledge exchange. Librarians should be encouraged to undertake action research, publish professional work and participate in collaborative research projects. Institutions should also establish policies addressing copyright, privacy, academic integrity, misinformation and responsible AI use.

Finally, the impact of library collaboration should be evaluated. User feedback, learning outcomes, research-support indicators, resource usage and service analytics can demonstrate the value of the librarian's expanded role and guide future improvement.

Conclusion :

The librarian of the twenty-first century is no longer defined solely by the management of collections. The profession is moving towards collaboration, learning support, research partnership and digital knowledge facilitation. The concept of the librarian as a co-pilot captures this transformation: librarians work alongside teachers, students and researchers to navigate information, technology and knowledge creation.

The co-pilot role is especially significant in an environment shaped by digital transformation and artificial intelligence. Users need trusted professionals who can help them distinguish reliable evidence from misinformation, use technology responsibly and develop effective research practices. Librarians possess the professional foundations necessary for this work, but they must continually expand their technological, pedagogical and research competencies.

Research partnerships provide a powerful pathway for this transformation. By participating in the research lifecycle, supporting scholarly communication, developing information literacy and collaborating across institutional boundaries, librarians can demonstrate their strategic value. In schools, they can nurture inquiry and independent learning; in higher education, they can strengthen research capacity; and across institutions, they can connect people, resources and knowledge.

Ultimately, the future of librarianship depends not on replacing traditional library values but on extending them into new environments. Access, organization, preservation and dissemination of knowledge remain fundamental, while collaboration, innovation and research support become increasingly important. When librarians are empowered to serve as co-pilots, libraries can evolve into dynamic centers of learning, research and knowledge creation.

References :

- American Library Association. (2000). Information literacy competency standards for higher education. Association of College and Research Libraries.
- Association of College and Research Libraries. (2016). Framework for information literacy for higher education. American Library Association.
- Government of India. (2020). National Education Policy 2020. Ministry of Education.
- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. (2015). IFLA trends

report 2015 update: Riding the waves or caught in the tide?

- UNESCO. (2021). AI and education: Guidance for policy-makers. UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2023). Guidance for generative AI in education and research. UNESCO.
- Johnson, L., Adams Becker, S., Estrada, V., & Freeman, A. (2015). NMC Horizon Report: 2015 library edition. The New Media Consortium.
- Tenopir, C., Birch, B., & Allard, S. (2012). Academic libraries and research data services. Association of Research Libraries.
- Corrall, S., Kennan, M. A., & Afzal, W. (2013). Bibliometrics and research data management services: Emerging trends in library support for research. Library Trends, 61(3), 636–674.