

# **Perceived value of satisfaction with services provided to faculties among liaison librarians**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study examines the changes in the way the information services are delivered to the faculty. One of the delivery methods for the faculty adopted by most academic libraries in Malaysia is putting in place a liaison programme. Generally, online resources have made faculty less reliant on the partnership under the programme for help with teaching and research, while electronic communication, such as e-mail, with the library has the potential to make the partnership more lasting and effective. Under this programme, a reference librarian is appointed as a liaison librarian for each Faculty to which he/she is responsible. The study revealed that the liaison librarians have no choice but to upgrade their competencies which they lack in order to perform their responsibilities up to the expected level of excellence demanded by the faculty. They must promote, collaborate and maintain good rapport with the faculty.*

Keywords: Liaison librarian; Reference librarians; Faculty satisfaction; University libraries; Academic libraries; Malaysia,

## **INTRODUCTION**

It is important for any information professional working in an academic library to know the real needs of the community of users. Understanding the needs of the target groups will help the information professional to develop and devise marketing strategies that are appropriate to attain effective results. One of the approaches taken by academic libraries to market effectively their services is to introduce a service delivery totally dedicated to meet the multitude of academic programmes being offered by the faculties of the university. One of the strategic approaches taken by most academic libraries in Malaysia in order to ensure that the best services are provided to the faculty is the deployment of reference librarians as liaison librarians. In the case of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), the liaison librarians are placed under a newly established entity, the liaison programme. It started only in 2000. Prior to that, the interactions between librarians and the faculty were through the reference help desk services handled by the Reference and Information Services Department. With the

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establishment of the liaison programme, the liaison librarians are answerable to the faculty directly (Rodwell and Fairbarin 2008).

One of the good reasons why liaison librarians need to interact directly with the faculty is due to the digital technologies and channels of communication. The faculty members and students can easily fulfill their information needs from other information providers besides libraries. Using the Internet, they can access databases and other repositories over the personal computers without the necessity of coming into the library building or interacting with a librarian at all. It is imperative, therefore for academic libraries to develop solid marketing strategies that are necessary or relevant to faculty's needs. The newly created positions of liaison librarians have to fulfill adequately their designated purposes, otherwise the librarians may lead to incalculable losses for the academic libraries. Thus, a study on the issue of effectiveness and relevancy of the liaison programme is outrightly pertinent.

Under the liaison programme the librarians are supposed to have some reciprocal partnership with the faculty. The partnership can be sustained if the services are effectively marketed. However, it can also be affected by the academic level, discipline and attitude of the individual academics (Dale 2006). It has been shown in the literature that the librarians have actually been using the marketing techniques without realizing it. Smith (1995) stated that many academic librarians access their users and their needs, segment their intended users, and target services to certain populations. This idea is in line with the definition of marketing that "marketing consists of individual and organizational activities designed to sense and serve the client's needs and to facilitate and expedite exchange with a view to achieving the goals of the individuals or organizations through the satisfaction of the client's needs" (Agbonifoh 1998). In marketing its services, a library should take into account certain marketing principles to ensure a good return on its ventures. For profit-oriented organizations, success is measured ultimately on Return on Investment (ROI) or profitability. For non-profit organizations such as libraries, measuring success is not easy. The concept of ROI for a library as measuring success in library services marketing proves to be difficult. Nonetheless, several libraries have adopted the level of satisfaction of their clients as the basis for measuring success in library services marketing. However, services cannot be marketed unless those services have been developed such that they are able to satisfy the needs of the library clients. The importance of marketing in libraries was aptly stated by De Saez (2002) that "marketing concepts and techniques can contribute a dynamic approach to total strategy development for libraries and information professionals that will ensure effective management, the achievement of goals and the creation of a confident blueprint for the future"

It is clear from the foregoing that the establishment of the liaison programme has opened a dialogue between the faculty and librarians. With this dialogue libraries have to come to grip with some issues affecting the relationship. Ducas (1987) revealed that when librarians interact with faculty, faculty members become more aware of librarian's skills and abilities. In addition, the level of awareness on the library services increases as shown by a study conducted by Roberts (1995). Another study done by Yang (2000) concluded that the librarians need to be proactive in making faculty member aware of

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library services as well as to ensure that there is a continued input from the faculty on their needs.

The effectiveness of a liaison programme is dependent heavily on the close partnership of both the librarians and the faculty. To leverage the liaison work, the librarians will have to ensure that they are capable of communicating the library's collection, policies and regulations, special services offered to the faculty and whatever developmental activities in place that are important for the faculty to know.

Notwithstanding the above responsibilities, the liaison librarians have to be capable of handling training, library instruction, collection development and management and curriculum development, including curriculum proposal and accreditation report (Mozenter 2000). It stands to reason that the roles and responsibilities of the liaison librarians are important for inclusion in any evaluation study on liaison programme. As there was a study undertaken concerning the academic faculty perceptions towards the liaison librarians of IIUM library (Nor Hasyimah 2005), the focus of this study is therefore directed at the liaison librarians.

## **OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceived value of the liaison programme in satisfying the needs of the faculty. As perceived value influences satisfaction, it is pertinent for the study to rate the value attributed to tasks, skills, interactivity, services and marketing activities undertaken by liaison librarians.

A survey questionnaire was used for the purpose of data gathering. The questionnaire was sent to each of the liaison librarian who is responsible for managing the liaison programme of the respective *Kulliyah* or faculty at the IIUM. The liaison librarians were given a grace period of one month to fill in the questionnaire. A reminder was sent to those liaison librarians who failed to respond after the expiry date had elapsed. All the liaison librarians finally submitted their responses and these are documented for analysis. The *Kulliyahs* involved belong to those that are located in the IIUM Gombak campus; they are:

1. Ahmad Ibrahim *Kulliyah* of Law
2. *Kulliyah* of Architecture and Environmental Design
3. *Kulliyah* of Economics & Management Sciences
4. *Kulliyah* of Engineering
5. *Kulliyah* of Information & Communication Technology
6. *Kulliyah* of Islamic Revealed Knowledge & Human Sciences.
7. *Kulliyah* of Science

## **FINDINGS**

The data that are considered important for this study were delineated from the outset for purpose of analysis. Data from the following categories were analyzed: task  
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performance, skills requirement, interaction with faculty members, satisfaction in rendering services, and marketing mode of delivery. Additionally, data on success factors and major impediment were also analyzed.

As shown in Table 1, the liaison librarians identified the 'notification of new arrivals and latest library development' as the most important task. In other words, the liaison librarian is expected to notify promptly any new items that the library has acquired as well as other latest development that the library has put in place which affects the usage of the library's collection and services. This is followed closely by the task of 'providing personalized assistance in collection development' which means the liaison librarian is supposed to deal with the faculty in handling any difficulty confronting the faculty, especially in assisting the faculty in getting class textbooks on time for the forthcoming semester. However, the faculty is less reliant on the provision of specialized reference services by the liaison librarian as only 43% responded to this task.

Table 1: Task performed by liaison librarians (n=7)

Number	Task	Frequency (Percentage)
1	Notification of new arrivals and latest library development	7 (100%)
2	Providing personalized assistance in collection development	6 (86%)
3	Develop guide to resources and services related to <i>Kulliyah</i>	5 (72%)
4	Giving advice to faculty pertaining to library policy	4 (58%)
4	Providing information alert services	4 (58%)
5	Providing specialized reference services for faculty	3 (43%)

Table 2 shows the required skills of the liaison librarians. The respondents agreed in totality that the liaison librarians must possess the ability to handle information literacy and also must be competent in communication. Majority of the respondents (83%), considered the ability to assess academic information needs as an important skill required by a liaison librarian. However, all the respondents agreed that they should not engage in research as this skill should be vested in the faculty. Other skills that are considered useful for the liaison librarians to possess are ability to teach, to analyse matters, to present information products and services effectively as well as to be aware of the development in ICT. These skills must be in the possession or acquired by the liaison librarians in order to market their services successfully to the faculty. Without such skills it would be difficult for them to make high impact or influence the information requirements and seeking behaviours of the faculty members. If this situation were to occur then there is a strong possibility for the faculty members to seek their information elsewhere from other information providers. If this happens the library will be on the losing end and will face disastrous consequences, especially on the budgetary provision appropriated by the stakeholders.

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Table 2: Skills perceived as important by liaison librarians (n=7)

Number	Skills	Frequency (Percentage)
1	Proficiency in communication	7 (100%)
1	Proficiency in information literacy	7 (100%)
3	Ability to assess academic information needs	6 (86%)
4	Ability to teach	4 (58%)
4	Mastering of technology development	4 (58%)
4	Possessing presentation skills	4 (58%)
4	Ability to analyze matters	4 (58%)
5	Ability to solve problems	3 (43%)
6	Possessing subject expertise	2 (29%)
6	Ability to conduct research	2 (29%)

Another important element affecting the liaison programme is the extent of interaction among the key players. Under the liaison programme, it is expected that the liaison librarians will have to consistently interact with the faculty members. It is imperative therefore, to determine the most important type of interaction that takes place in the work setting.

Accordingly, Table 3 revealed the most important type of interaction that occurred between the faculty members and liaison librarians. The findings indicated that the provision of information concerning library development that has a bearing on the teaching and learning process is essential and must be intimated to the faculty. In order to communicate effectively to the faculty, the information ought to be tabled at the faculty's meeting. Consequently, the respondents indicated that attending faculty meeting was useful. Other types of interaction were considered least important especially participating with faculty in research partnership, social committee, faculty exhibition and curriculum development.

Table 3: Interaction with faculty members reported by liaison librarians (n=7)

Number	Type/Nature of Interaction	Frequency (Percentage)
1	Provide info on library development	7 (100%)
2	Attend faculty meeting	4 (58%)
3	Information budget allocation to faculty	3 (43%)
3	Participate in <i>Kulliyah</i> exhibition	3 (43%)
4	Participate in curriculum committee	2 (29%)
4	Organized personal library instruction	2 (29%)
4	Engage in research partnership	2 (29%)
4	Provide opinion in meeting	2 (29%)
5	Participate in <i>Kulliyah</i> social committee	1(14%)

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Concerning the level of satisfaction for the services rendered under the liaison programme, the results revealed that the most important category was 'notification of new arrivals'. This is based on the perceived level of satisfaction expressed by librarians when delivering the services. The liaison librarians must communicate immediately to the faculty of any new additions which pertain to the information needs of the faculty. In order to achieve this goal usually the liaison librarians will notify promptly the latest additions by email to all faculty members. Also of importance is 'gathering reading list items'. Based on these outcomes, it can be inferred that the liaison librarians would be willing to go all out if the matters are related directly to instructional materials, especially those concerning the reading lists. All this is evident from Table 4 which presents the findings.

Table 4: Liaison librarians's perceived satisfactory with level of services provided (n=7)

Number	Type/Nature of services	Frequency (Percentage)
1	Notification of new arrivals and latest library development	7 (100%)
2	Gathering reading list items	6 (86%)
3	Providing information alert services	5 (72%)
3	Providing interlibrary loan and document delivery	5 (72%)
3	Organizing library instruction for faculty members	5 (72%)
4	Providing library orientation for students at Kulliyah level	4 (58%)
4	Attending Kulliyah meeting	4(58%)
4	Serving on academic committees concerned with library services	4 (58%)
5	Involved in the accreditation process of the Kulliyah	3 (43%)
5	Visiting faculty members individually	3 (43%)
5	Develop guide to resources and services related to Kulliyah	3 (43%)
6	Participate in Kulliyah decision making	2 (29%)
6	Providing specialised reference services	2 (29%)

There are several modes of service delivery which are available to the liaison librarians for marketing purposes. It would be beneficial for the clients to know of the most important channel of service delivery. Table 5 revealed that the liaison librarians considered as important the strategy to market the product and services through 'e-mails' and 'Kulliyah meeting'. From this it can be inferred that the liaison librarian preferred these channels in alerting the products and services to the faculty.

Table 5: Marketing library activities undertaken by liaison librarians (n=7)

Number	Mode of marketing	Frequency
1	E-mails	6 (86%)
2	Kulliyah meeting	5 (72%)
2	Telephone	5 (72%)
3	Bulletin board	4 (58%)
4	Formal written communication (e.g. letters)	2 (29%)
5	Informal written communication (e.g. memos)	1 (15%)
5	Individual meeting with faculty	1 (15%)

## CONCLUSION

The liaison librarians opined that the liaison programme has made them realized the importance of marketing their services. They must promote, collaborate and maintain good rapport with the faculty. In order to perform their responsibilities up to the expected level of excellence demanded by the faculty, the liaison librarians have no choice but to upgrade their competencies which they lack. From the results of the study it is evident that the liaison librarians have to upgrade their competencies in those areas which enable them to act as an equal professional partner in the research, teaching and learning functions. The liaison librarians have to be embedded in the work of the *Kulliyah* and they have to do more research into what faculty needs. To accomplish these targets the liaison librarians should upgrade their competencies in conducting research and problem solving, which receive low rating from the results of the study. Thus there is a need for the liaison librarians to develop their capabilities to operate in a new way with the partners in the *Kulliyah*.

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