

NEW APPROACHES TO REAL-TIME REFERENCE SERVICES AND THE ROLE OF LIBRARIANS: AN OVERVIEW

Dr. Deepak Kumar Shrivastava

INELI India and South Asia Mentor,
Divisional Librarian and Head, Government
Divisional Public Library Kota, Rajasthan
Email : deepakshri1974@yahoo.co.in

Dr. Hamza Ukashatu Musa

Maryam Bashir Aminu & Hauwa Ibrahim
CLN (BLIS & MLS)
ICT-Kashim Ibrahim Library,
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria
Email : hamzaukashat@gmail.com

Abstract : *Reference and information services has always been the main component of library information Service. Reference services provide personal assistance to information users in searching, accessing and use of information resources to meet their needs. This paper discusses the new approaches to real-time reference services and the role of librarians explaining that “The real-time reference service is a service by which a library reference service is conducted online or using any social media platform. The models and various aspects attached to real-time reference were also highlighted including email and web forms, Ask A services, online chat reference, video conferencing, GoToMeeting apps, Blue jean, Zoom, digital robots, and collaborative real-time reference. The real-time reference is a new powerful method for delivering reference services to serve the users. With the help of digital technology and e-resources, reference librarian fulfill the needs of the users. The paper concluded that librarians should accept innovation to discharge their service or the situation would force them to accept it.*

Keywords: Education, information, Reference services, Real-time reference, role of librarian,

Introduction :

Investing in Education through libraries and information centre is the best of all investments, we shall therefore, continue to invest in it as much as possible” I consider the investment as a collective work, not for an individual or an organization, it starts from the parents, Teachers, the community, traditional leaders, Nongovernmental organization and finally the government as a whole. Our investment as librarians is to share our knowledge, skill, information and teaching experience in order to move our country forward. In every developed society, librarianship is one of the most important professions in the world and people considered librarians as propellers of knowledge because they provide an effective learning environment through facilitating access to information (Ukashatu : 2018). Today we are in the age of information. A large amount of information is being generated every moment. The dynamic and unending source of information affects all discipline and walks of life. Information support education, research and development. Information improves the quality of our life. Libraries have been in collection business for centuries to select content appropriate for a particular users, make it accessible, manage it and preserve it. With such kind of services, libraries and librarians are regarded as the engine room of knowledge,

custodians of information and eradicators of ignorance. In library daily activity, information is acquired, process, stored, search, accessed, shared, and used properly to support educational society (Ukashatu: 2018).

Therefore, Education is not just to have obtained qualifications such as DLIS/NCE, BLIS, MLIS and PhD in library and information science, It is to use what you know and make society more informed using different means of communication (Ukashatu: 2018). Today almost eighty toninety percent of individual group of people or the entire society depends on different means of communication to search, access, use and share information due to theparadigm shift in information world. Education is a continuous process; no one can say he is satisfied with knowledge that is why Education becomes an important ingredient in human life. With the advent of paradigm shifts in Education, no society can develop and achieve the global recognition without proper and adequate skills in acquiring information which leads to knowledge and most organizations use it differently as a key concept such as “Knowledge economy” “Information common” “learning common” This has to do with the availability and usability of information resources and service.

However, in most of private organizations, education and information are the key asset that makes them to compete favorably with their competitors and that is what makes them to invest heavily in it by ordering and acquiring relevant information resources and service for that organization. Therefore, society can only achieve the global recognition with the availability of information resources and services (Ukashatu & Hassan: 2018)

Information is the light of human endeavor, information gives guidance and counselling, information provides human direction, and it is the heart of any organization be it government or nongovernmental organization. Information make individual group and society to leave in peace and harmony, it make individual to appreciate the purpose of his living in this world, at the same time information make individual group to unite and develop their society, information gives security to individual group and the society. Information gives power, it is sources of global political power, social, educational and economic development. Without valid information people would remain in a darkness. Therefore you need to be informed consciously or unconsciously to achieve the success of your life. Muhammad(2012) stated that people need to be informed positively or negatively because:

- When you are informed, You are not ignorant;
- When you are not ignorant, you are enlightened;
- When you are enlightened, you are educated;
- When you are educated, you are knowledgeable;
- When you are knowledgeable, you are experienced;
- When you are experienced, you are progressive;
- When are progressive, you are advancing;
- When you are advancing, you are relevant;
- When you are relevant, you are productive;
- When you are productive, you are an asset
- When you are an asset, you contribute and impact positively;

- When you are contributing and impacting positively, the nation and the world advance further;
- When thenation and the world advance further, you are better for it;
- When you are better for it, the entire nation and the world becomes peaceful to live;
- So when you are living peacefully, it becomes worthwhile to live;
- When it becomes worthwhile to live, you will need to stay more informed and
- When you stay more informed, you will need to seek, identify, access, manage, share, disseminate and utilize more information.

Therefore, we can say that the security and success of any society depend on theavailability of information resources and service provided by the librarians or information scientist.In today's environment, a large amount of information needs to be processed to make a viable conclusion in a library or in any community. (Ukashatu & Hassan: 2018) affirms that information has received wider acceptance as the essential feature of production, consumption and exchange in this digital erausing modern methods such as, **WeChat**, **Tweeter**, **Facebook**, **WhatsApp**, **Flickr** and **Instagram**applicationamong others. The world has entered an era where the sources of political power, socio-economic development, information security and world recognition are due to theavailability of information on media platform and today libraries uses some of the media platform, to attract their customers, share knowledge, and advertise their products andservices.

One can say that the world of librarians has gone through a fundamental change. The dynamic nature of technology enables the librarians and library customers tohave an open access to knowledge, to share using open sources software and contribute local content on the network space. Though the technology and its modernization have knocked' at the door for which have impacted on all aspect of library service including real-time reference service. Therefore, in the modern era of librarianship, technology has completely changed library operations, informationresources, information services, and staff skills requirements as well as the user's expectations.

Reference Services :

Directing, guiding and instructing has always been an essential component of reference librarians in any established library. The librarians is responsible for assisting library users in searching information in various subject areas through direct or indirect reference services. Reference librarians has long been teaching information seeker and other users about information resources, information retrieval tools and database searching strategies regularly and one-on-one basis at the reference desks. (Aditi & Mary, 2017).Reference transactions are done via direct, face-to-face contact between librarians and information users had once been the "gold standard" in today academic libraries. However, the use of digital technology in providing real-time reference services to remotely located users is very common in today' libraries. To meet twenty-first-century users' needs, therefore, the reference librarians have shift their roles from "information searchers" to "information creators" and also involve in preparing online tutorials, instructional videos and digital subject or course guides using online reference tools.

Real-Time Referece Service:

As librarians, you can be at home or traveling and a need may be arise, so you use the technology to interact with information users and connect them with relevant and reliable information as well as discussing some issue and way forward. So technology has totally change the face of traditional reference service to real-time reference service or virtual reference services and the main objective is to provide pin-pointed, exhaustive, expeditious service to its information seekers whenever theyhave a query.

The real-time reference service is a service by which a library reference service is conducted online or using any social media platform in helping users to search their needed information and the reference transaction is a computer aided communication. Libraries and librarians play an important role in providingaccess to information resources, organizing, guiding, instructing and helping information users to find their needed information.

Real-time Reference Service

Real-time Reference Service can be known as a Digital reference services or Virtual reference services etc. The aims of real-time reference service is providing reference service with the help of technology to its users. According to **Reference Users Services Association (RUSA)** “Digital or Virtual Reference is reference service initiated electronically often in real-time, where information seeker employs computer application or other internet technologies tocommunicate with reference librarian without being physically present”. However, According to **Lankes (2012)** “Digital reference services refer to the position of human-intermediated service over digital network”. Communication channels used frequently in digital reference include chat, Videoconferencing, email, voice overIP, Co- browsing, Ask a services, and instant messaging. In this process, reference librarian receives query online cater through e-mail or live chat, analyses the query, find the appropriate sources and revertback to the user with answer.

Development of Web Based Information Services

Digital technology has made a deep impact on Library information services. Real-time Reference Service are widelyregarded as present day innovations through the beginnings of e-mail reference can be traced back to the mid1980’s. The advancement of technology and radical changes in the information environment in the past decade are themajor factors lending to implementation of reference service that can be assessed electronically by remote users. 24/7 services, universal access and ease of use are among the factors that have contributed to e-mail reference being the most heavily used types of real-time reference services.

Need for Real-time Reference Services

- To provide individual assistance & instruction through social media application
- To helpthe information users in online informationsearching through digital apps.
- To access and share online information search result through media application
- To help in marketing information resources and service across the globe

- To assist information users in locating best information resources in the libraries.
- Links information users to authoritative information /website
- To link information users with online reference citation tools (Mendeley, Scopus and Zetere)

Models of Real-time Reference Service:-

There are two broad categories of real-time reference service models as (adapted from Francoeur, 2002 and Berube, 2003)

1. Asynchronous transactions, involves time delay between the question and answer like:
 - **E-mail:** This is still the major format for online information delivery. User sends the library an email with a reference query, supplying whatever information he or she feels is necessary and the library may reply by e-mail, telephone, fax, correspondence, etc.
 - **Web Forms:** Web form transactions as found in some library service, Ask A Librarian, can only be initiated from a designated web site, where users must respond to specific queries in addition to asking their questions. In order to send the form, which will usually be received by the library in the form of e-mail, users must click on a button specifically designated for that purpose.
 - **Ask a Service:** Ask a Service is usually corporate-sponsored web sites that allow users to ask questions and receive answers for free from public information located mainly on the World WideWeb or from proprietary databases and networks of field experts.
2. Synchronous transaction which takes place in 'real-time' with an immediate response to the query.
 - **Text-based chat:** Chat or Instant Messaging is where librarians and information users can 'speak' to each other in real time on the Internet using special text-based software. Although chat reference is associated with the 24/7 service model, this level of service is often impossible for single libraries to implement.
 - **WhatsApp Business:** Librarians and information users can make use of WhatsApp Business application to interact with their customers easily by providing tools to automate, sort and quickly respond to messages. In this service, the librarians don't need to be online because the software can interact with information users directly. The WhatsApp Business enables real-time reference librarians to have a presence on WhatsApp, communicate more efficiently with your customers, and help them to grow their services
 - **Video-conferencing app or web-cam services:** librarians can make use of video conferencing software like **GoToMeeting, Zoom, Hangout meet and Skype** among others for real-time reference services. Both librarians and users can be able to use text and speech for reference transactions, instead of a window for the textual exchange, this kind of services will give a window in which librarians and users can see each other while conducting a face-to-face interview which includes the visual element and may be an antidote to the communications problems inherent in the more text based Services.

Real-time Reference Robots: Real-time Reference Robots are essentially used for artificial intelligence to respond to questions. The other form of Real-time reference service is collaborative online reference where two or more libraries team up to offer reference services using any of the above formats.

There are other applications for Real-Time Reference Service such **MeetMe, Ask.fm, Snapchar, Gab, Reddit**, Instagram, Google+ and Google Map, Pinterest, Twitter, link-in, Houseparty, Wegather, Flickr, My Space among others.

Role of librarians :

Reference librarians should be prepared for an extraordinarily diverse range of responsibilities. Such that, these responsibilities will likely require potentially very different skill sets. A reference librarian may use technology application to serve as a classroom teacher, instructional designer, research assistant, collection specialist, data curator, communications expert, marketing information consultant, online program supervisor, project manager, Web developer and/or professional scholar, in addition to other reference tasks. Thus the core job of reference librarians still remains the same, i.e. helping users to locate and learn about appropriate resources and services that meet their information needs. However, the competency level and job responsibilities of reference librarians have changed as traditional reference services have taken on a new dimension as:

- To know the modern tools in information services and how to make use of the technologies
- Should learn how to communicate with information users using the technologies using the simple language to communicate with users
- Reference librarians should make the users library friendly. They should convince users to understand their role and importance of library by engaging them in mainly library activities using the media application
- Reference librarians should make use of media application to guide and instruct the information users on how to prepare something new that would enhance their career
- The professional reference librarians need to train the nonprofessional staff on how to answer basic reference questions and when to make effective referrals to professional reference librarians.
- The Reference librarian must learn how to search and navigate efficiently through those resources on various vendors' platforms.
- Reference librarians who provide library instruction need to learn how to use the technologies for effective and efficient reference services
- To meet twenty-first-century users' needs, the reference librarians have to shift their roles from "information searchers" to "information creators" and are involved in preparing online tutorials, instructional videos and digital subject or course guides.
- To make users understand what library is doing and how best for, by developing special collections for them or create something that would meet their needs

Conclusion :

Librarians should understand that their roles have change, therefore, they should work hard to make the system recognize their contribution, and they should not focus on staff designation rather convince the information users to use the library resources and services. However, librarians should accept and implement any kind of innovation to discharge their service or the situation would force them to accept it. Technology is something that make our life very easy, it help librarians to get more and more reputation. Therefore, libraries have to encourage the use of real-time reference technology as appropriate means of interacting with the user community. The real-time reference is a new powerful method of delivering a reference service to serve the users. With the help of digital technology and e-resources, reference librarian fulfill the needs of the users. So we can say that real-time reference service is a new approach to reference service

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