



Implementation of Digital Reference Services as a Tool for Social Justice in Judicial Libraries: Challenges and Strategies.

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ABSTRACT: This surveyed the emergence of digital reference services and their benefits to the user community especially special libraries that deal with a specialized way of delivering information to their clientele as a result of the weakness of the traditional reference services. The study found that with digital reference services, the administration of justice will be very fast because judges and likewise lawyers can have information at their fingertips in various forms. However, it was revealed that there are hindrances associated with the implementation of digital reference services in judicial libraries after which strategies were highlighted to ensure proper implementation for better service delivery to the user community.

Keywords: Implementation; Digital Reference Services; Social Justice; Judicial Libraries: Challenges and Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

The channels or activities that libraries utilize to help people access and use information resources for their information requirements are known as library services. University libraries, according to Agu (2014), offer the following services to users: user education (instruction/orientation), interlibrary loan/cooperation, abstracting and indexing services, reference services, bibliographic services, cataloging, information services, and circulation services. The several departments or sections of the university library are where these services are offered. The reference staff of the university library's reference section offers reference assistance. One of the main functions of special libraries is the reference service, which works to encourage patrons' access to and use of the libraries' collection of information resources by giving them one-on-one guidance and support. The idea has been defined in a variety of ways by several academics. The main purpose of a reference service is to establish communication between the user and the information to guarantee that the user's information demands are met. Every user has a unique reference query, hence reference service is typically offered on a one-on-one basis to meet each user's

specific demands. Similar to Udofot (2015), who saw reference service as an intentional and personalized service supplied by the reference librarian to translate requests or questions made by a library customer into words that can be satisfied by a specific reference resource. As a result, reference service can be summed up as the individual assistance a reference librarian offers to a library patron looking for information. It may also be interpreted as any aid provided by the reference staff to users in obtaining the information they need.

Reference services were first offered in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in response to several factors and trends, including an increase in the quantity and variety of information resources available both inside and outside of libraries; an increase in the complexity of those information resources, which made it more challenging for people to locate the resources they needed and to find the information they needed within them; and an increase in the number and variety of online sources (Janes, 2002). These elements have led to the importance of reference services in libraries. In a related development, Singh (2012) distinguishes between two categories of reference services: short-range ready-range reference services and long-range ready-range reference services. On the other hand, Udofot (2015) distinguished four types of reference services, which are as follows: It is not necessary to employ any information resources to use the directional reference service. To provide this service, it usually suffices to have a general understanding of the geography of the library and where objects are located. Reference services can be categorized into the following:

A Ready or Quick Reference Service

A ready or quick reference service uses specialized reference materials, such as an almanac, yearbook, directories, and biographies, to respond to users' specific queries. And the average time to provide the service is brief;

Search Reference Service

This service typically gives users background/general information on a specific theme. To provide responses to such questions, a variety of sources are often



Research Service

This is a more serious kind of reference service, particularly when a user needs access to thorough reference materials to support their literature review. Users typically have to wait longer for responses from this type of service.

Attorneys and judges seek information from the reference desk or librarian to make informed decisions. Reference requests are requests for information made in the form of questions made to the reference librarian with the expectation that they will be answered with information that will meet their needs. Reference questions can be submitted directly, over the phone, by telex, fax, mail, email, or by offering to the reference librarian, according to Eze (2016). Due to the ongoing advancements in information distribution and production, manual reference services have been replaced by digital reference services. Reference librarians can be sure to provide their customers with thorough, up-to-date, and quick answers thanks to digital technology. Different academics have characterized the idea of digital reference services in different ways. It was described by Tutu (2016) as an information service that links library users and librarians through electronic contact. Digital reference services were defined by the Reference Users Service Association (RUSA, 2010) as reference services that were initiated electronically, frequently in real-time, and in which customers used computers or other internet technology to communicate with reference staff without being physically present.

The digital reference service was first developed in 1984. The University of Maryland Health Services Library in Baltimore introduced the Electronic Access to Reference Service (EARS) in the same year as one of the first services to go online (Zanin-Yost, 2004). Since then, well-intentioned libraries, particularly special libraries, have taken an interest in making sure that customers are not disappointed when they cannot find the answers to their questions. Because "justice delayed is as good as justice denied," special libraries and judges specifically need digital reference services for quick social justice decisions.

The Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study is to bring out the benefits of implementing digital reference services in the judicial system to ensure equal justice. Since there is no single library that is self-sufficient, judicial information with particular reference to primary sources needs to reach clients. It is also aimed at drawing the attention of stakeholders to the possible challenges that they may face and strategies to overcome them for effective implementation of digital reference services to bring about justice in the land.

Benefits of Implementing Digital Reference Services

Adopting a digital reference service instead of a traditional one has many advantages for academic libraries in general and university libraries in particular. Some of which include:

E-Mail Reference Service:

This is a straightforward, inexpensive, and economically advantageous service that involves a back-and-forth exchange of information during transactions. Users submit their inquiry as a message, and a response is sent back to them later. Even when the library is closed, users can still ask questions. According to Singh (2012), e-mail reference services are well-liked by users since they are generally accessible, don't call for additional software, aren't obtrusive or threatening, and allow users to express their queries in their language. From the standpoint of the librarian, e-mail-based reference is simple to deploy and doesn't require additional training.

Web Forms

This transaction can be started from a specific website where consumers are required to react to questions in addition to asking their own. Users must click on a button expressly marked for that purpose to transmit the form, which will typically be received by the library in the form of an e-mail. This type of transaction is preferred over e-mail correspondence since it depends on the user's capacity to articulate their needs. It lessens misunderstandings and erroneous assumptions on the part of the user and the librarian (Owoeye, 2007). It is more convenient for users to adopt this method of reference service delivery.



Ask A Services

Which are frequently business-sponsored websites that let users ask questions and get free answers from either publicly available information, which is primarily on the World Wide Web, or from private databases and networks of subject-matter experts. There are numerous Ask A services, ranging from Ask A Reporter to Ask An Antarctic Expert (Das, 2015). When the reference staff is unavailable, users can still access the information they need thanks to this kind of service.

Chatterbots

are produced by computer software that examines user-submitted questions for the keywords present utilizing linguistic techniques and programs. In an ideal world, these keywords are already connected to specific knowledge base responses that are subsequently shown to the user. In this type of digital reference, the user instead interacts with an interactive database that has a variety of already prepared information rather than a librarian.

Synchronous Transaction

Takes place in "real-time," with the information specialist or expert responding to the inquiry right away. This transaction is frequently carried out via text-based chat, instant messaging, webcam services, video conferencing, live web references, and digital robotics.

Text-Based Chat

Due to the ongoing information interchange between the user and reference librarian, this service serves as a supplement to the e-mail reference service (takes place in real-time). The same standards are applied while responding to a query online as they are when responding at the reference desk. Web-based or electronic materials are frequently preferred by librarians who employ DRS because they are simpler for users to access and share. Nowadays, the majority of users desire to access full-text internet sources. Reference librarians can provide instructions on how to use a specific resource if a user is having trouble finding information from it (Das, 2015). Because it takes less time to provide an immediate response to inquiries, digital services were introduced.

Instant Messaging Reference Service:

Instant message service is being offered by contemporary libraries to their patrons. Users are updated about the newest library activities via SMS. The reference services of the institutions are also covered by instant messaging; if a user has a question about library resources or services, they can send a message to the library, and the library will immediately respond with the needed information. The delivery of library services to the user perspective is quite successful with this messaging service (Rajput, 2016)

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP)

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is a technology that makes it possible to send voice and other types of data simultaneously via the common Internet protocol. Both parties must have speakers and microphones installed on their PCs in addition to the usual gear.

Collaborative Digital Reference Service (CDRS)

The Library of Congress and more than 100 partner libraries from different nations are working together on this free reference service project. The joint venture's goal is to offer users expert reference services whenever and wherever they need them, using global digital networks of libraries and informational institutions (Das, 2015). According to the author, the Online Catalogue Library Centre (OCLC) creates and manages a database that consists of three primary parts for a global network of libraries. *Member profile* (contain information on strengths and features of members); *Request manager* (software for entering, routing, and answering reference questions; and *Knowledge base* (a searchable database for questions and answers for future use). It supports reference efforts by the power of resources and manpower with the diversity and availability of libraries and librarians anywhere

Organizational Challenges Hindering Implementation of Digital Reference Services in Special Libraries

Funding

The deployment of DRS is hampered by a lack of sufficient financing because it depends on reliable Internet connectivity for interactions between reference personnel and users. Funding has reportedly been a



significant issue at university libraries, which has led to the libraries having epileptic Internet access and preventing many people from using the library, according to Inyang and Igwechi (2015). And the main issues that the majority of special libraries face revolve around the lack of financing for the effective deployment of online reference services. The frequent complaints from library staff regarding a lack of qualified staff, a lack of top management support, poor Internet availability, a lack of reliable power supply, users' expectation of quick responses, and the availability of current reference materials all stem from a lack of funding to ensure that the necessary facilities are provided.

Lack of Skilled Workers

Organizational difficulties with DRS deployment in academic libraries According to Baro, Ife, and Oyeniran's (2014) list of issues facing libraries, DRS policies don't exist, there aren't enough qualified staff members, there isn't enough top management support, there isn't enough Internet access, there isn't a reliable power supply, users expect quick responses, and there aren't enough current reference resources. Insufficient funding, which has been emphasized in the literature review, is a likely cause of these issues. According to Dollah and Singh's (2010) study on the effectiveness of digital reference services in Malaysian libraries, issues with copyright and licenses, how to handle technical difficulties, and a lack of top management support related to increased workload are the main obstacles to the service's implementation.

Lack of Ideal Management of Software

The lack of proper management software is a problem that affects the implementation of digital reference services in the digital era. Das (2015) provided support for this by highlighting issues including the lack of suitable management software, the careless attitude of libraries, the upgrading of staff education and training, the lack of service promotion, and the lack of collaboration between libraries for the service. After surveying electronic resources in Nigerian law libraries, Owoeye (2007) agreed with Das and identified some organizational issues including a lack of infrastructure, telecommunications, qualified technical experts, a population that is literate on the DRS, and funding to acquire online databases. Because the software has a history of frequent failure and is

manufactured abroad, it has been difficult to adopt digital reference services in libraries in Nigeria.

Non-Existence of DRS Policies

There was no law mandating that judicial libraries serve as the focal point for protecting citizens from injustices or requiring their proper execution. This issue is not inconceivable given that there is insufficient legal support for the provision and maintenance of digital reference services as opposed to traditional reference services, which has put a strain on both librarians and lawyers to manage the adequate and insufficient physical literature. According to Dollah and Singh's (2010) study on the effectiveness of digital reference services in Malaysian libraries, among the issues preventing the service's implementation are a lack of top management support related to increased workload. They also identified library leadership as a significant issue that must be resolved to provide the necessary policies for digital reference services.

Strategies for Effective Implementation for digital reference Services in judicial Libraries in Nigeria.

No organization works without difficulties, but the capacity to plan how to deal with them successfully is what allows them to prosper and have an impact on society. Therefore, special libraries must plan how to improve these organizational elements to deploy digital reference services.

Improved Funding and Proper Fund Management

Every firm needs effective money management to be successful. The effectiveness of every other organizational aspect depends on the availability of cash. It makes sense why it is believed that money is a defense and the solution to all problems. According to Ubogu and Okiy (2011), the government should boost the amount of money it gives to libraries because money is the "glue" that holds libraries' objectives together. With adequate finance, libraries may acquire infrastructure, offer relevant information resources, and hire and train staff members who can successfully deliver required services. And that fund is essential for the implementation of any strategy for the university library. As a result, it is important to spend the finances wisely to deploy digital



reference services in judicial libraries in a way that serves the desired purpose.

Strategizing Means of Generating Fund

The judicial library system must look into additional revenue streams to have enough money to weather the current economic hardships. This is due to the capital-intensive nature of providing digital reference services, which makes financial management extremely important. By identifying areas of interest to donor organizations and writing research proposals to such agencies, libraries should come up with ways for developing ideas that can contribute revenue to the library. An example of a project for which libraries might apply for funding is the desire to create a digital reference service. In a similar vein, Olurotimi (2015) reports that the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria organized a workshop for librarians on grant proposal writing in Enugu, Nigeria, to provide librarians with technical skills in writing grant awarding proposals to serve as another means of generating funds for libraries to provide necessary services for users' information needs.

Human Resource Development

Any library's human resources are its greatest asset, and managing its employees is difficult yet necessary. Managing employees is a difficult undertaking that calls for hiring the right people, training them, and retraining them so they can perform to the best of their abilities when offering services to customers. Technology-based services like digital reference services necessitate the acquisition of new skills to properly address the demands of library customers online. The technical advances in information distribution necessitate the retraining and retooling of reference workers for the digital reference service. That is why Quadri (2012) suggested that information professionals need to be re-skilled in new technologies to be able to use e-resources and also instruct users properly on how to search online resources for their needed information. The skills can be learned through a variety of training methods, including seminars, workshops, conferences, on-the-job training, etc. In addition to personnel being supported to attend professional conferences, seminars, and workshops to acquire new skills, it should be part of the curriculum of the Library and Information Science program.

Provision of Adequate Infrastructural Facilities

The provision of adequate infrastructure facilities, such as computers, Internet access, sufficient bandwidth, and a steady supply of electricity, is necessary for implementation. To provide quick Internet access, the government should work to establish reliable infrastructure and pay for sufficient bandwidth. They also recommended that libraries sign contracts and warranties with hardware suppliers and subscribe to software vendors. An electronic library service is known as a "digital reference service" (DRS) depends on an electric power supply to operate during the implementation process. If this power source is not available, DRS implementation may be hampered because it is a crucial element of infrastructure requirements.

Enactment of Policies to Support Full Implementation of DRS

To improve swift and timely information production, organization retrieval, and dissemination among the teaming lawyers, the judicial system should see to it that the full deployment of digital reference services in all judicial libraries is signed into law. This will provide the libraries with the ability to allocate more funds to ensure that it is carried out and maintained.

CONCLUSION

It has been confirmed that the traditional reference services are limited in dishing out information to the user community. And special libraries that offer specialized information to their clients require urgent and exhaustive information to enable them to attend to the immediate need of the community as library staff has to take time surfing or visit individuals where necessary. The introduction of digital reference services is a relief to both judicial library staff and the judges and lawyers with total control over information flow and less stress. The world has gone global in information production, retrieval, and dissemination and anybody that want to be relevant must key into the system as it guarantees exhaustive and prompt information delivery. The inability of not has digital reference services boils back to the judges and lawyers as they would not be able to access the right information at the right time for justice administration.



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