Library Automation in Providing Reference Services in Some two (2) Selected Polytechnic Libraries North-Eastern States of Nigeria

Daniel Mathew Marke; & Raymond Andrew Waziri

Library Department, Federal Polytechnic Bali, Taraba State

Abstract

This study was considered to explore the picture of library automated reference service in some two (2) selected Polytechnic libraries in North East Nigeria. A quantitative research design using a descriptive survey method was used and a five (5) point liker-type questionnaire was employed. Evidence was also gathered through semi-structured interviews with reference librarians in the selected Polytechnics. Data presented were analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequencies counts, percentages and the tables The findings revealed that the level of library automation system in terms of reference service in the two (2) selected Polytechnics involved were not implemented. Based on the findings, upgrading of library technology tools and partial implementation of library automation of reference service were recommended.

Keywords: Information Communication Technology (ICT); Library Automation; Reference services; Library Service; Nigeria.

Introduction

Reference services can be defined as personal assistance provided by professionals to library users seeking information. Dr. S.R. Ranganathan, defined reference service as "a personal service to each reader in helping him to find the documents answering his interest at the moment pin pointedly,

exhaustively and expeditiously". In his view, providing reference service means making contact between the right user and the right book at the right time and in the right personal way. Consequently, reference services in Nigerian libraries is an age long tradition as reference librarians serve as pilot toward directing library patrons on the latest information that are inherent in a particular field of human endeavour, library is a growing organism that requires consistent positive changes to address the needs of its users, Innovations in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have revolutionized every aspect of life and libraries are no exception. Libraries have seen automation as an unprecedented vicissitude that happened in the last 2 decades which forces especially academic libraries to transform their operations according to the present digital environment where users expect reference service in 24/7 mode. Therefore, automation in library reference service simply means conversion of this procedure of rendering such services to users from a manual to a computer-based system thereby reducing the stress of traditional system of providing such service to the user. The researcher observed that the present state of reference services in polytechnic Libraries North-Eastern States of Nigeria is bedevilled by a number of problems ranging from inadequate skills in the use of library automation, inadequate funding, electricity failure etc. The consequences of these could lead to inability of the libraries under study to provide effective services to its client. it is against this background that the study intends to investigate the library automation in providing reference service in some two (2) selected polytechnic Libraries North-Eastern States of Nigeria.

Information is recorded in a variety of documents like books, reports, periodicals, digests, theses, standards, patents, and so on. A reader may need a precise form of information for a specific purpose. The number of documents produced is very large, so it is impossible for the reader to keep track of their variety and location. Users, often spend considerable time locating information required by them. After making a lot of effort, users sometimes fail to retrieve information due to a lack of proper search strategy or not having the subject knowledge in the field. Therefore, assistance is required by the users for getting the required information from the library. For providing personal assistance a service was developed which was termed a reference service.

Reference services can be defined as personal assistance provided by professionals to library users seeking information. Bunge and Boppa noted that such personal assistance is the essence of reference services and is the fundamental role of the reference librarian. The goal of the reference librarian is to meet the information needs of the users. How and to what level this is done varies from library to library and depends on the type of library. Dr. S.R. Ranganathan, defined reference service as "a personal service to each reader in helping him to find the documents answering his interest at the moment pin pointedly, exhaustively and expeditiously". In his view, providing reference service means making contact between the right user and the right book at the right time and in the right personal way.

Margaret Hutchins described the term reference service as "Reference service includes direct personal aid, within a library, to persons in search of information whatever

purpose, and also various library activities especially aimed at making information as easily available as possible''

OPERATING THE LIBRARY.

In discussing the operation of the libraries, the researchers sought to ascertain the type of personal assistance obtainable to the library user (making enquiries by mails, WhatsApp, Facebook. telephone or online in locating information sources or access needed information). This is in line with the study of Mardikan (2007) where he opines that libraries are expected to provide personalized assistance for their users irrespective of their location and time. The reference librarian either provides electronic reference services like interactive social networked technologies, email communication, video conferencing through which users can ask questions and receive feedback online. This has further untied up doors to the emerging of wider communication and much more user friendly platforms through the use of social media tools. Chebe (2012) describe that reference and information service is an aspect of library services in which contact between the reader and library materials is established through staff assistance, matching the patrons with the library materials which could be print or electronic resources. Interestingly, these services can be facilitated and made possible remotely by the use of mobile technology platforms by the academic library personnel

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
Automation in Academic libraries
The word "automation" has been derived from Greek word "automose" means something, which has power of spontaneous motion or self-movement. The term "Automation" was first introduced by D.S. Harder in 1936, who was then with General Motor Company in the U.S. He used the term automation to mean automatic handling of parts between progressive production processes. Automation is technology of automatic working in which the handling method, the process and design of professional material are integrated. This is the effort to achieve an automatic and self-regulating chain of processes. According to Kent, (2008) in Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science, "automation is the technology concerned with the design and development of process and system that minimize the necessity of human intervention in Operation". (Kent, 2008) Automation is required for the improvement of reference service to be delivered to users. Ashikuzzaman (2014) justifying the need for library automation identify some importance of library automation among others including;
1. Provide users with timely access to library resources
2. Better access to the collection
3. Allows easy sharing of resources, sharing with other libraries
4. More interface with library users with other information resources
5. Better facilities for the users as other libraries are also automated
6. Enhance consistency in the collection, streamlines circulation
7. Speed up of searching for user
8. Time saving of clerical and repetitive tasks

9. Ease of maintenances of statistic and overdue
10. Report to the management

Library automation has been defined differently by experts Iwe (2000) defines library automation as the application of computers to perform traditional library housekeeping activities such as acquisition, circulation, cataloguing, reference and serial control. Macias-Chapula (2001) also describes library automation as a process which involves linking computers electronically within and outside the institution, entering the bibliographical data of resources in a database to create an open access cataloguing, which allows users to access and retrieve information in a timely manner. While Fatoki, (2004) Viewed library automation as the use of computers to serve the need of library users. The operation of library services gets to a quantum jump with the introduction of computers. The computers help to provide fast and reliable access to resources available in the library. Allan et al. (2000) further emphasizes that automation should always be used as a means to achieve overall better patron's services. Uddin, (2009) on the other hand defined Library automation as the application of automatic and semiautomatic data processing machines (computers) to perform traditional library housekeeping activities such as acquisition, circulation, cataloguing and reference and serials control. Today "Library Automation" is by far the most commonly used terms to describe the mechanization of library activities using the computer. Similarly, Kent, (1977) in Encyclopaedia of Library and Information Sciences "Library Automation is the use of automatic and semiautomatic data processing machines to perform such traditional library activities as acquisitions, cataloguing, and circulation, These activities are not necessarily performed in traditional ways, the activities themselves are those traditionally associated with libraries; library automation may thus be distinguished from related fields such as information retrieval fields such as information retrieval, automatic indexing and abstracting and automatic textual analysis" (Kent, 1977).

Mathew, (1980) Outline the following Objectives of library automation
1. To maintain bibliographical records of all the materials, in a computerized form.
2. To reduce the repetition in the technical processes of housekeeping operations.
3. To provide access to information at a faster rate.
4. To share the resources through library networking.
5. To implement new IT processes to provide high quality information.

Automation of libraries have become necessary for efficiently managing the acquisition of the increasing number of information resources like print and electronic, as well as the increasing number of users who have variety of demands for information. In essence, the capacity to store a large volume of information in a cost-effective manner coupled with accuracy and consistency in processing and efficiency in retrieval of desired information, have made the computer an essential tool for library and information management today.

Application of automation in providing references services in libraries

The application of information communication technology in the library is an umbrella term that encompasses the use of computer and other computer accessories such as computer connected with Internet, electronic storage device I. e compact disc, floppy discs, flash drive, etc. other electronic resources such as e-book, e-journals etc. In providing services to library user. Therefore, automation is the use of machine to carry out services which are ordinarily or Manually Carried out by staff. The application of automation in providing reference services therefore, can generally be referred to as the use of information communication technology (ICT's) in providing effective references services to library users.

Digital Reference Services (DRS) and its models

Sherikar, Jange and Jadhav,(2006), described Digital reference as a network of expertise, intermediation and resources placed at the disposal of someone seeking answers in an online environment. Digital reference can provide support for users who find online tools and resources unfamiliar, difficult to learn, or insufficient to answer their information needs. It can also provide valuable user feedback to collection builders so that they may better tailor their resources and maximize their investment in content creation. Kurma and Singh (2003), defined Digital reference services as "a network of expertise, human intermediation and resources placed at the disposal of users in an online environment, which employs automated tools wherever possible, allowing human experts to concentrate on 'hard questions'". Digital reference services are fast becoming part of today's core library services, especially the academic libraries. These services were necessitated mainly by two factors:

  a) The increase number of library patrons using the Internet for their information needs and, as a result, few come to the libraries for help
  b) The growing sense among librarians that they desire to reach out to their users and bring them back to the library (Francoeur, 2001; Coffman & Mcglamery 2018, as cited in Okoli, ukwedeh, and Joseph, 2021).

The electronic reference, automated reference and virtual reference: Okoli, Ukwedeh, and Joseph, 2021) described the terms electronic reference virtual reference and automated reference are often used synonymously with digital reference, although virtual reference is limitless by distance and physical space. Digital Reference, Internet Information Services, E-reference, Virtual Reference, Real Time Reference, Live Reference, and Chat Reference are used to describe reference services that utilize computer technology in some way, they all share the central objective, use of software and internet to facilitate human intermediation at distance (Arya & Mishra 2012) in Jan (2018). Berube (2003) agrees that the distinctions used in characterizing digital reference service are quite often blurred and overlap. She however affirmed that 'digital reference' is used to include two broad components: 'it is Internet-based and designed to connect users with experts'. More importantly, Digital reference can provide support for users who find online tools and resources unfamiliar, difficult to learn, or insufficient to answer their information needs. It can also provide valuable

user feedback to collection builders so that they may better tailor their resources and maximize their investment in content creation. (Okoli, ukwedeh, and Joseph, 2021).
A digital reference transaction will usually include the following elements:

- ➢ The user
- ➢ The interface (web form; e-mail; chat; video etc.)
- ➢ Electronic resources (including electronic or CD-based resources; web resources; local digitized material etc.), as well as print resources
- ➢ The information professional

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design
Survey research design was used for this study. A survey research is the gathering of information about a large number of people or object by studying a representative sample of the entire group (Yoloms and Ndomi, 2000).

Area of the Study
The area of the study comprised of two polytechnic libraries in Adamawa State of Nigeria. Specifically, Prof. Jibril Aminu library Federal Polytechnic Mubi, and Federal polytechnic library, respectively

Population of the study
Population is the entire members of a given area, (Webster, New 3rd ed Dictionary) the population for this study consist of the staff of some two (2) selected polytechnic Libraries in North-Eastern States of Nigeria. The libraries have 66 staff members both professional and non-professional staff.

Sample Technique:
Sampling is the process of selecting unit (e.g. people) from a population of interest so that by studying the sample one can generalized the result back to the population from which the one chosen. Therefore, the sampling technique to be used for this study is purposive sampling technique. According to Ngra, (2001) purposive sampling is the act of using the entire population as a sample in carrying out research work. While Black, (2010) on the other hand stated that purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method and it occurred when element selected for the Sample are chosen by the judgement of the research. Therefore, this sampling technique is appropriate for this study because the population of the study is not large and the characteristics of the population is similar as such the researchers used there own judgement to select the entire population as a sample.

Conclusion
This article has shed light on the difficulties in providing automated reference services to library users. Key lessons that can be inferred from this study can be summarized as follows:

- The lack of a national policy and funding for Polytechnic libraries has a negative impact on the automation of the reference service.
- None of the libraries visited in this study had an automated system. The opportunity for clientele to use ICT was therefore limited.

We acknowledge that the study does not claim to articulate the complete story of library automation in Polytechnics in northeast Nigeria; rather it attempts to provide a description of two selected polytechnic libraries in the geopolitical zone at a particular time. As the scope of the study is restricted to two Polytechnics, it is important to acknowledge that the findings may not apply to Polytechnics in other zones. Nevertheless, we contend that we have opened a window on the difficulties facing 2 Polytechnics providing automated reference service to users, which could have relevance to similar Polytechnics in the country. The findings suggest that academic libraries are not playing an effective role required by the users getting the required information from the library. This needs to be addressed by the government as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation

For reference service to contribute meaningfully and significantly towards user's satisfaction of the library using library automation, the following recommendations have been suggested
- ➤ Computer skills of librarians as important factor in use of library automation for providing reference service should be developed through training, retraining and motivation
- ➤ The curriculum of library schools in Nigeria should be information communication technology compliant
- ➤ The polytechnic library management should provide the necessary ICT support to ensure availability of automated reference services to users.
- ➤ There is also need for capacity development and reorientation for librarians concerning the use of devices and online tools to eliminate any phobia for the use of ICT facilities.
- ➤ Librarians and the library managers should be creative in automated library services.

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