Reference services in College Libraries: Scope,Methods and barriers

Soumen Chakraborty[1]and Anupam Ghosh[2*]

[1]Central Library, Panchakot Mahavidyalaya, Purulia, W.B.-723121, India; e-mail: panchakotsaumen@gmail.com

[2*]Central Library, Netaji Subhas Open University, Kolkata; e-mail: pikpam2003@gmail.com

Abstract

Reference services are very important for the college libraries. These services are communicated by the human beings to take the libraries effectively to the users. Reference services need well organization and supports form the college authorities. Besides some barriers regerence services are inevitable in college libraries.

Keywords: Reference service, Digital reference service, Ready reference service, Library orientation, Long range reference service

Introduction

Libraries reach to the users by their services. Reference services are actually a group of services which are human intervened and act like a bridge between the collection and the users. The reference service also develops the relations between the users and the library personnel. Libraries of every level should provide reference services in any form.

Reference service

S R Ranganathan defined reference service as "the process of establishing contact between a reader and his documents in a personal way" [1]**.** Which means the readers or users of a library should be guided by the librarians in finding their required documents or information when needed by them. The human mediators play a vital role in this regard.

With the advancement of the time Ranganathan's idea of *documents* have been extended to *information*. The concept of contact establishment between the users and the books are now have been changed in to the following as stated by Mukherjee [2]:

- Attending the queries received from the readers either in person or over the phone or through correspondence
- helping users at the all levels in the use of library tools like catalogue, bibliographies, etc.,
- providing general information about the library and the institution ,
- preparing 'reading list" and ad-hoc bibliographies on request from the users,
- helping researchers by preparing abstracting and indexing services,
- making arrangements for inter-library loans,

- providing translation services,

- collecting information regarding library resources of regional, national and international level,

- providing photocopying services to the users as required

- locating information required by the research scholars, scientists, etc.

- So these enhanced scope of reference service has given birth of many specialized information services at the later stages of time like Selective Dissemination of Information(SDI), Current Awareness service(CAS), Translation services etc.

Reference service in college libraries

College libraries act like a bridge between the school and university libraries. Here the learners should learn their academic curricula as well as how to get information. Reference services in college libraries are therefore very vital not only for providing the information to the learners but also to make them "information literate".

Classification of reference services in college libraries

Reference services in a library may be classified in the following types as per their information content

- **Ready reference service (services through reference books)-**Her factual information is given to the users as per their queries. Readymade reference books like Dictionaries, encyclopedias, directories, travel guides, yearbooks are used for the purpose. As readymade answers are available and provided in quick succession of time so this reference services are known as short range reference service or ready reference service. Here reference librarian also trains the students how to search information from reference books and that is the beginning of a student in the way of information searching.

- **Library orientation-**A big academic library like a college library have many sections, varieties of collection, many services and other academic support programs, The students or new comers should be oriented about the library in a scientific way. This work may be done with lectures, video shows, booklets, etc. The use of the library may be increased to a great extent by this orientation programs.

- **Long range reference service-**Some research type questions are not readily available in any documents. The researcher as well as the reference librarians has to consult many documents after consulting the documents the information is analysed and consolidated for the required query. It takes some times in days or even in some weeks .So it is called long range reference service

- **Services on demand-**Sometimes few users required some bibliography or reading lists, etc for their study purpose. The reference librarian has to consult his/her own library collection or the other library collections also for the purpose.

- **Referral service-**Sometimes a piece of information is not available at the library but the librarian knows that the information is available at the documents of another library nearby. In this case he/she simply guide the users to that library to get that information. This service is known as referral service.

Reference service in digital form

Reference services in this internet era may also be provided to remote users. C J Memmott described digital reference service as "a mechanism by which people can submit their questions and have them answered by a library staff member through some electronic means(email, chat, web form etc)" [3].Digital reference services may be provided by E-mails, library websites, chats, etc.

Organization of reference section

- For providing effective reference services the reference section of a college library should be well organized. The following points to be remembered-

- Reference books like encyclopedias, dictionaries, etc should be purchased as per the requirements of the users. Some foreign publishers (like *Encyclopedia Britannica)* are now publishing reference books in digital form. Librarians may subscribe the digital sources for quick updates and saving of spaces.

- Only update versions of reference books are to be kept at the reference section.

- Reference librarians should be well aware about the collection of his library as well as the collection of the nearby libraries.

- Before purchasing a reference book it must be evaluated as per requirements of the users of that library.

- Online search facilities must be provided at the library for reference purpose.

- For providing digital reference service proper infrastructure and policies should be framed.

- Librarians should behave friendly with the users and he/she should involve himself/herself with the information searching with the user if necessary.

- A record should be maintained for answered queries for future reference.

- An user should be kept waiting for any queries, either solve it as early as possible or tell him for contact sometimes or days later for the query. If till it is unsolved you may guide him to another library.

- Reference librarian should accept the queries in electronic form also like Whatsapp,etc for remote users.

- For long range reference service subject experts of the college may also be consulted if necessary.

- Users should be trained to use the reference tools, electronic databases, etc by the reference librarian.
- Regular feedbacks to be taken from the users for the improvement of the service.

Barriers of ref service in a college library

Many college libraries have a good collection of reference books. But the reference services are neglected there because-

- Lacking of fund-Colleges are not willing to purchase new reference books for insufficient fund.
- Lacking of library personnel-Most of the colleges have only one Librarian as the professional. It is not possible to manage a good reference service frame work of a single staff.
- Myth of internet-It is the common idea of most of the students that each and every information is available in internet freely. So they are not going for reference services which more efficiently provided by a trained librarian.

Conclusion

Samuel Johnson once said that knowledge is of two types-one we know the subject itself and another we know the sources where the information on that subject is available. Reference service actually informs the users about the information sources. It also enriches the librarians in their professional efficiency development. According to Ranganathan's famous five laws Information are for use and every user should have his/her information. Reference service is the way by which this motto of the libraries may be satisfied.

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