



## **LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE: AN OVERVIEW OF LIBRARY USERS' INFORMATION NEEDS**

**\*ALIYU NASIRU MUHAMMAD; \*\*MARGARET A. AMAO; &  
\*\*AUWAL IDRIS**

*\*Abu Ali Library, Aminu Saleh College of Education, Azare, Bauchi State.*

*\*\*Department of Library and Information Sciences, A.D.Rufai College of  
Education and Legal Studies, Misau, Bauchi State*

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### **Abstract**

*This paper dwells on the library and information services available in each library. It highlights various types of information services needed by users as well as the role of information services to the clientele of library. In addition to that, the paper also talks on the categories of information services offered in the library to its users or clientele. However, the paper explain the various approaches for the need of information services by the users in the library, it also talks on the provision of divergent information needs of various users ranges from researchers, health care personnel, problem solving, recreation and lifelong learning.*

*Keywords: Library, Information, Service, Responsive, Anticipatory*

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### **Introduction**

An important need for human development is to seek information, and today libraries have become more than the information centres. Libraries may also be considered as service centres. Libraries have evolved from being a closed store house of documents (data-centric) to being an open destination where users are catered with information according to their needs (user-centric). Over the years, the task of the librarian has transformed from being a caretaker of information to being an information professional, who manages a system of information in multiple formats. This information is disseminated through specifically designed services as per the users' demands (Mathew, 2013).

Libraries, since ages, have stored materials that enable ideas, knowledge and experiences to be passed on from generation to generation. Libraries build collections tailored to the needs and goals of the organizations they serve. For example, academic libraries, build collections for students, teachers and researchers. This collection is systematically organized by the library for use by the users. The library collection serves as an important resource in education, work, and recreation of millions of people. Whereas, earlier libraries were considered merely storehouses of knowledge, and the librarian a custodian of the collection. Users were expected to use the libraries on their own. Librarians concentrated more on the collection development and maintenance of the library rather than promoting its use (Bawden, 2014).

Present day libraries are different. These are considered as educational and service institutions. Here librarians not only organize the collection, but provide assistance to library users in various ways, to support learning, interest and other vocation related activities. The assistance and services provided by the librarians can be broadly grouped as reference and information services. These services promote the use of library material, connect the users with the library resources and meet the information needs of the users. (Giridhari, 2018)

One of the prime objectives of any library is to satisfy the needs of its users and library and information services are designed to achieve this. The obligation of a library to its users is to provide information services to support their educational and recreational needs. This demands well-planned information services and proper implementation. There are basically three categories of information sources, primary, secondary, and tertiary. The method of dissemination of information is also variable. The basic methods are of two types, one is to provide information to the user in response to an expressed demand (on demand or responsive services) and the other one is to anticipate user's needs and provide them the right information (anticipatory services). The main focus of this unit would be to focus on basic categories of information there, services, needs, functions and role of information service. (CBSE, 2015) In libraries, user cannot easily locate a piece of information and have to spend more time in searching information. But in this age of Information Communication Technology (ICT), computers are being used for day to day housekeeping activities of the libraries, to read and download of texts of articles,

reports and other materials. Thus, it saves the time of the library professional and end user and makes the library service smooth and effective.

### **Need for Information Services**

Information is crucial for all our activities. Libraries fulfill the needs of the user communities by acquiring a wide variety of information sources of diverse nature and formats, storing and preserving these sources at a suitable location, and adding value to them by organizing for easy access. People need information for study, research, for pursuing their careers, health care, problem solving, recreation and lifelong learning. Everybody needs information for some purpose or the other. For example, students need information to supplement their textbook studies and for project work. Teachers need information for teaching and research. Professionals (doctors, engineers, consultants, etc.) need information to pursue their careers efficiently. Planners and policy makers need information to frame policies and take correct decisions. Researchers need information to keep up-to-date in their areas of research, to find out new areas of research and to solve any research problem. A large number of surveys have been conducted to find out information requirements of all categories of library users. These surveys in general, have identified four types of information needs of the users, such as i) Current Information Need, ii) Exhaustive Information Need, iii) Everyday Information Need, and iv) Catching up Information Need. It is further observed that information needs vary from person to person and a particular person may have different needs at different points of time. ((Olowu, 2016)

When library users need information to keep themselves up-to-date with latest developments in their areas of interest on a regular basis, the need is known as *Current Information need*.

When a library user wants to have information on a particular topic as exhaustive as possible, the need is known as *Exhaustive Information need*. The researchers mainly have this type of information need when they start their research work. *Everyday Information need* is the need for a specific piece of information which users require, generally in their day-to-day activities. The need is subject generally for factual information, which is normally available in standard reference books. *Catching-up Information need* arises when a user,

who is not conversant with a particular field, requires an account of overall development of that subject in a short and compact form. (Neelameghan, 2016) Libraries provide users with information resources and in some cases leads or refer them to other information sources. The difference between a source and a resource is that a source is a raw material whereas a resource is a processed product. Sources become resources when they become relevant for the user. It should be verified and the content should be enriched with proper storage and easy retrieval. The development of a system or mechanism to acquire required sources, providing uninterrupted access to users, managing it in an organized way and customizing the resources and providing information services as per the needs of the users are the basic functions carried out successfully by any well-managed library or information centre. Information services in a library are also focused on marketing its products to the potential user or the one who demands. Making the information products marketable is a challenge before any modern library. The trends in the information required by the users of different educational, economic, and social backgrounds are to be conducted in order to decide the nature and scope of information services a library or information centre intends to provide. (Khan, 2013)

### **Users' Approach to Information**

According to Burke, (2017) the nature and functions of an information service depends on the information and requirements of the end user. A user needs information for accomplishing certain objectives. He classified a user's approach to information as below:

- i. **Everyday Approach:** This approach satisfies the daily information needs of the users. For example, Data on the property of a substance like colour of a substance.
- ii. **Comprehensive or Exhaustive Approach:** The purpose may be to identify a research area or to formulate a research proposal of a given subject by the users. This approach facilitates a detailed study on the field of interest.
- iii. **Current Approach:** This is the most essential approach to information for professionals and researchers. The user tries to keep abreast of what is being published from time to time in his/her area of specialization and in areas closely related to it. The knowledge about

the latest advancements in the field of interest to keeps a professional up-to-date and also helps a researcher in avoiding duplication in research.

A library may device information services that are adequate to provide right information within the shortest time limit, keeping in mind the above approaches of information

### **Types of Information Services:**

The variety and number of information services and products provided by modern libraries and information centres are quite large in the present era of information and knowledge explosion. The surge in knowledge creation and consumption happens in basic and interdisciplinary fields of technology, development, industry, marketing, trade and research and calls for an increase in personalized services. (Bawden, 2014)

He further categorized library and information services as:

- i. Responsive services or services on demand, and
- ii. Anticipatory services Responsive information services, also known as passive information services, are provided in response to the requests from the library users. Anticipatory information services, also known as active information services are provided in anticipation of the needs of the library users.

The following are some of the important information services provided by libraries under these categories are discussed in the following sections: -

### **Responsive Information Service:**

An information service provided in response to an expressed demand by the user is called a responsive or on demand information service. Here, the user requests an information professional to search and find out the specific information that he/she needs. A brief description of important responsive information services provided by a library is given below.

Reference service:

Is a personalized service which is provided in response to the request from the user. Request may be for locating an answer to the fact finding question; for literature search for solving research problem; for compiling a bibliography; or

for general help and to provide the right book to the right reader, in the right personal way. To provide the service the librarian may utilize the resources available in the library as well as those available outside the library. Depending upon the user's requirement, librarian may give information itself or the documents containing the information.

Reference service, is not including but not limited to answering substantive questions, instructing users in the selection of appropriate tools and techniques for finding information, conducting searches on behalf of the patron, directing users to the location of library resources, assisting in the evaluation of information, referring patrons to resources outside the library when appropriate, keeping reference statistics, and participating in the development of the reference collection. The nature of service also varies from one type to another type of library. The reference services may be divided into three categories –

- a. Basic services: There are several essential and minimum reference services that a library should perform, in the assistance of in the location and searching of documents on the shelf, assistance in the consultation of reference books, assistance in the use of library catalogue etc.
- b. Services perform on regular basis: these services include among others
- c. Readers' advisory service: This is the process of recommending sources to library users based on their needs/queries. The reference librarian chooses a source which may be a book, journal, database, or website based on his/her skills, expertise and the nature of user's query.
- d. Inter-library loan and document delivery: Inter-library loan is the process of sharing materials between libraries. The libraries under a consortium or a mutual agreement may loan a physical item in original or a partial copy of it and deliver the same to the requesting library for a specific period of time based on certain established codes and copyright guidelines.
- e. Reservation of documents: This service allows a user to reserve an item of the library that has been loaned out to another user. When the item is returned, the user who reserved the same is informed and allowed to borrow it.

- f. User Education (instruction): User education deals with educating the user about the use of library facilities and services. In other words, this is a methodical approach to teach the users as to how to use the library effectively. There may be user education programmes on the general use of library and the use of library tools like catalogue, bibliographies, reference books, etc. Library orientation, which is given in the beginning (initiation of a freshman), is also a part of user education. But, user education is treated as a continuous service
- g. Referral Service Referral service is referred to a prospective user of information source. The Concise Dictionary of Library and Information Science defines referral service as a “service which, if unable to provide the information required, refers the enquirer to another potential source or service”. The distinction between a reference service and a referral service is that, in the former, the user is actually provided with the required document or information but in the latter (referral) the user is directed (referred to) the sources such as secondary publications, professional organizations, information units, research organizations or individual specialists. A referral service guides a user where to search for a resource which is presently not available in the library.
- h. Literature Search Services Literature search service is an extension of reference service. The process of literature search starts with the library professional first understanding the nature, scope, depth and exact area of enquiry of the user by a user interview. Assessment of these indicators decides whether the search is for specific information, or for a few select references or for a comprehensive bibliographic information (mainly for research). This is followed by the formulation of a search strategy for searching different information sources. Knowledge of the subject area of search is beneficial for the librarian here. Traditionally, books, journals, theses, etc. and in modern parlance online databases, CD-ROM databases and web sites are considered as the most important sources for literature search service.

### **Anticipatory Information Services**

An information service provided for anticipating a user's needs is called an anticipatory information service. The important services under this category are given below:

- i. **Current awareness service:** The meaning of the term “current awareness” is the knowledge regarding recent developments in a subject area of special interest to an individual. The process of current awareness function includes the reviewing of newly available resources relevant to the user community or pertinent to the programme of the organization and the selection and organization of individual items which must be brought to the attention of the user. The means for delivering this service varies depending upon the type of library. This service is concerned with the dissemination of latest information to a specialist to keep him/her up to date and well informed. Finding relevant information has become more and more difficult for a professional, particularly in the field of science and technology. The need and relevance of CAS comes into effect at this point. The CAS enables the researchers to keep them up-to date and well informed. The information products delivered periodically by the libraries under CAS keep the researchers abreast of the recent developments in their field of study or work and save their valuable time. This is a perfect example of an anticipatory information service which draws a user's attention to latest trends/developments in a specific area of interest.
- ii. **Selective Dissemination of Information** was originally given by Hans Peter Luhn in 1958. Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) is a highly personalized service. It is a method of supplying each user or a group of users with references of documents or abstracts relating to their pre-defined areas of interest selected from documents published recently/received during the period in question. This service saves the user the effort and time of having to scan through a number of publications, and to choose the documents of interest to him. The basic concept behind SDI is the matching of information/documents with the profile of each user or group of users with same interest. A user profile and document profile are two



important components of the SDI service. Then the matching items are brought to the attention of the user. The same activity can be performed effectively with the help of a computer. Commercial mechanized SDI services are available in highly information rich fields like science and technology. During the process of SDI, the 'user profile' which comprises of a set of 'key words' organised as meticulously as the 'system' permits, describe the subject of interest, in accordance with the keywords that appear on the documents. A document is selected when two key words coincide. In an automated environment, once a search profile of the user is created and saved, relevant information is sent to the researcher automatically (and the selected databases/catalogues are updated). The effectiveness of an SDI service depends on the completeness or comprehensiveness of the user profiles and the relevance of the information; which are to be matched with each other. The SDI is considered as one of the best current awareness services available at present.

### **Online Services:**

The on-line system is also a revolution, in which the user is provided a seat at a terminal connected to a database and has the capacity to interact with a computer, shaping search strategy on the basis of response and the searcher has quick access to the database. The user can interrogate the computer directly. The output can be printed out or displayed on the screen. The computer acts as a storage place for the accumulation of information. Online indicates that users have access to information through the usage of video display and keyboard. The user can operate the keyboard, give the commands and the outcome can be revealed on a video display or cathode ray tube. If the user reads the printed record then he has to push a button and record will be printed out. If the user has numerous indexes and abstracts available to search at a computer terminal, the contents of all those indexes and abstracts are known as a database (Dresang, 2015)

### **Conclusion**

The nature and scope of Information services are basically categorized into responsive or on-demand services and anticipatory services. Responsive

services are provided in response to the demand by the user. Major responsive information services include, reference services, referral services, and literature search. Reference services may be categorized into: (i) basic services (e.g., Provision of general and specific information, assistance in locating the document, searching the library catalogue and using a reference source), (ii) services performed usually (e.g., readers' advisory service, inter-library loan and document delivery, reservation of documents, user education. An information service provided by anticipating a user's needs is called an anticipatory information service. With the addition of something special this makes them more useful. The sudden growth of technology has changed the nature of library and information services tremendously, but their role in providing the right information to the needy users remains unquestioned

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