

User Perspectives on Digital Reference Services (DRS): A Study of State University Libraries in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The provision of human intermediated service to users over a digital network is identified as DRS and an essential service for novel users who are much more comfortable with new technologies. It is a question whether patrons are aware of DRS available for them. This study demonstrates the users' awareness level on DRS, benefits and user suggestions to improve DRS activities in academic libraries in Sri Lanka. Identifying the available ICT facilities for DRS, level of satisfaction on DRS, the benefit obtained through DRS and identifying suggestions to improve DRS in Sri Lanka are the objectives of the study.

Methodology: Undergraduates of the state universities in Sri Lanka were the population of the study where 240 number of responds selected using the convenience sampling technique via an online questionnaire survey. Poor response of the users was a major limitation.

Findings: Results revealed that many of the users are aware about computers, servers, scanners, and printers along with Wi-Fi facilities are available at their libraries for DRS. Only 22% of the respondents aware about library mobile apps and 33% about online indexes used for DRS. 36% of users previously used DRS. 25% stated that DRS need more improve where 23% are satisfied with what they obtained as DRS. Users were not happy about video conferencing, reference bots and web reference among the DRS provided. Personalized Service, convenience, time factor, no time and location barriers and faster service identified as highest ranked benefits by the users. Improving network facilities, online resources with remote access facilities, funding for establishing well equipped libraries with proper infrastructure, providing awareness and adequate training were the suggestions for improving DRS by the library users. This is denoted that whatever the back-end processes were there when implementing DRS in libraries, what users feel is the interface and the services through the platform.

Implications: Librarians must focus their attention on developing user friendly interfaces to cope with end users in real time and in a sustainable manner. With the support of the donors and collaboration academic libraries may enhance their digital collections to have rich knowledge base to provide better DRS in future.

Keywords: *Digital Reference Service, University Libraries, User perspective*