



An Overview Of Reference Service In Central University Libraries Of North East India: A Study

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Abstract

Reference section is considered the core of the library and specialised section of any library system, and in higher education system university system may be considered as core. To understand the importance of human resource management in the university library system by specifying a particular section i.e. reference section the study aims to understand the significance of library professionals, their role and impact in the particular section and its services. Since reference section is one of the particular sections where point to point service is provided and maximum user interaction is done apart from circular section it is necessary to be able to provide and remain up to the library service specially all the services coming under reference section.

Key words – Reference service, library staff, library service, Central university, north east India

I. Introduction

In aspect of higher education system universities are the core of the higher education system. And considering the importance of library in higher education system the university library system may be considered at the top of hierarchy. In North East India, a total of 10 central universities are covered for the study. The significance of these central universities goes beyond the profile of academic system, being in a diverse culture the universities act as the hub of knowledge and culture exchange also. Here the role of these libraries also become more of knowledge hub rather than just an academic library. To bring the maximum impact of library system, it is necessary to understand the capability of staff strength in every aspect.

Ranganathan, S.R. (1961) has conceptualised in book Reference service as “ the process of establishing contact between a reader and his documents in a personal way”. In his book he has discussed the aspect of reference service in accordance with the five laws of library science. Here four categories of readers discussed; the freshmen, the general reader, the ordinary or generalist enquirer and the specialist reader. And accordingly, four aspects of reference services; initiation of freshmen, general help to general reader, ready reference service to the ordinary or generalist enquirer, and long range reference service to the specialist as well as generalist reader.

Solorzano, R (2013) notes that reference work is formed of several interlocking components, including information provision, instruction and research guidance.

In order to deliver the maximum service it is necessary to put the right person or professional in right job profile and reference section is one of them in a library system. No doubt each section is important but since in the reference section where most of the intense users approaches for maximum of the specialised

services it is very important to have a professional who should be responsible as well as capable to understand and provide all types of queries or direct towards the right directions with authority.

At first one must understand the required characteristics of reference librarian or professional in general. According to **Bunge and Bopp (2001)** categorized reference service into 3 broad groups

- I. Information service that involve either the required information on behalf of the users, or assisting users in finding information.
- II. Instructions in the use of library resources and services
- III. User guidance in which users are guided in selecting the most appropriate information sources and services

In a university library which is one of the academic system where most of the users will be of higher academic intellect and capabilities, so their information seeking behaviour as well as the information requirements are mostly pre-determined or precise. And here the impact of research environment develops and intense form of information seeking environment is formed so as expected services also. To provided best it is necessary to have the best and most capable professional I the library and specially the reference section.

II. Objective of the study

- I. To find out the status of reference services in the selected university libraries
- II. To find out the actual staff strength and involvement in reference section
- III. To understand the status ICT based reference services in the libraries

IV. Reference service in university library

Among all the academic libraries university library is the highest in the library hierarchy, university library is largest in different aspects like, collection development, number of users, number of staff employed, engagement of different designation and job profiles, number of different sections, types of users etc. So the roles and responsibility of the staffs both professional and non-professional is very crucial for smooth and effective running of academic library system

Reference service is considered the core of library services, if one has to define reference service it is a service which provided point to point or directly library professionals to the user. Under the reference eservice the are both anticipatory and participatory service are available which is again categories in two; long term reference service and short-term reference service.

Generally, reference service is provided in specific section of library and focus on point to point or person to person involvement and anticipatory attitude is crucial. Since library is considered as service-oriented organisation, the library professional or the library staffs needs to have a positive attitude towards its users. And though all library staffs are required to carry service oriented nature, in reference section it become more then just a general library service. **1989 Robinson B.M.** sated in his paper about the importance of careful handling of reference questions according to the level of reference services, in his paper he mentioned about four (4) levels of reference services i.e., Ready reference service, references, research, and referral.

2. Population and sample

The study was conducted by collecting primary data from the central university libraries of north east India which have similar structure of statutory body for functioning.

Table 1 List of surveyed Central Universities in north east India

SL. No	Name of the Universities	Year of establishment	Name of the library	State
1.	Tripura University	1972	Central library	Agartala, Tripura
2.	North Eastern Hills University	1973	Central University	Mawlai, Meghalaya
3.	Manipur University	1980	Central library	Canchipur, Manipur
4.	Rajiv Gandhi University	1984	Central library	Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh
5.	Central Agricultural University	1993	Central Library	Imphal, Manipur
6.	Assam University	1994	Rabindra Library	Silchar, Assam
7.	Tezpur University	1994	Central Library	Tezpur, Assam
8.	Nagaland University	1994	Central Library	Meriema, Nagaland
9.	Mizoram University	2001	Mizoram University library	Aizawl, Mizoram
10	Sikkim University	2006	Central Library	Sikkim
11	National Sports University	2018	Central Library	Manipur

Source: Central University Portal

Though there are 11 central universities only 10 universities were studied. All the data's and analysis are based on the samples from these 10 universities only. Here National Sports University, Manipur is excluded due to unavailability of permanent university campus and fully functioning library.

3. Data, Analysis and interpretation

The data's was collected from the central university libraries of north east India via a structured questionnaire by both online and offline mode, and the analysis is done using MS excel. Interpretations are provided in figure and tables as per requirement for ease understanding.

3.1 Availability of reference section

During study all the libraries of central universities were found to have a dedicated reference section in their respective libraries accounting with 100% response and availability.

3.2 Engagement staff in reference section

The reference service being a special form of service is required for a professionally qualified library staff be engaged in the designated section. During the survey out of the total staff strength of both professional and non – professional, majority of personal engaged in the reference section was found to be professional and semi professional staff accounting to 19% and non - professional engaged in reference section was 14%.

Table 2. staff strength and allocation in reference section

Types of staffs	No. of staffs	Engaged in reference section
Professional/semi staff	115	22
Non - professional staff	85	12
Total no. of staff	200	34

The total percentage of staff engaged in reference section is shown in the figure below, consisting of both semi-professional/professional staff, which are considered library and information science degree holder which may be from lowest to highest and non-professional, those who are engaged in library but does not have any formal library and information science qualification or degree.

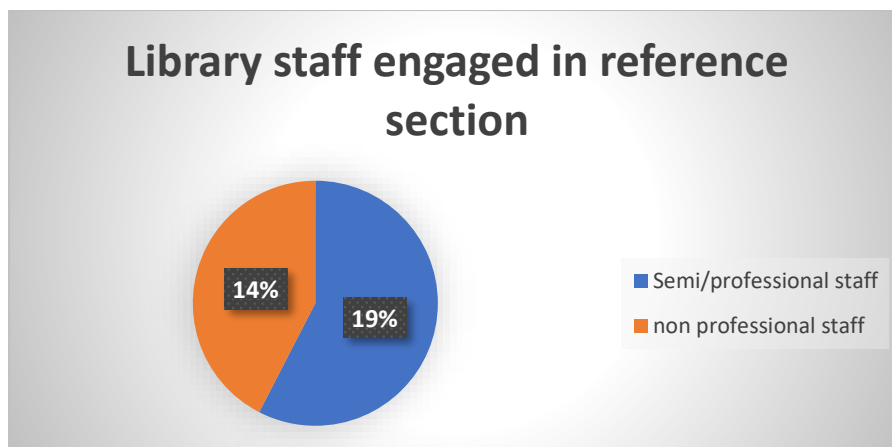


Fig. 1 Engagement of library staff in reference section

3.3 Basic library services provided in the Universities

During the study, all the libraries were found to have all the basic services of the library. In addition to the general library services some university libraries were found to have specialised services in lieu of their parent institution. The data of services available are shown in the figure below.

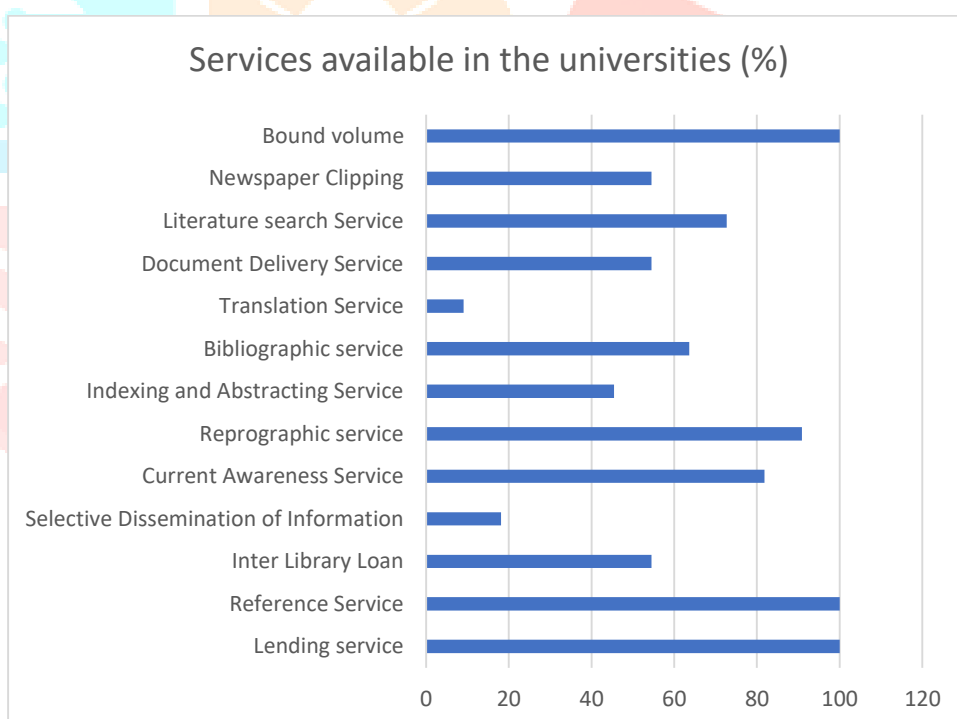


Fig. 3 services available in the libraries

The data indicates that there has been differences in the availability of services in the selected university libraries. Mainly three types of services i.e; Bound volume, Reference Service and lending service is found to be available in all the surveyed universities. It can be observed that the reference service, which the topic of the discussion has been found to be available in all the central universities of north east India. It shows that the three most basic library service i.e Lending service, Reference service and Bound volume service are being provided in all the central universities of north east India.

Though there are various types and mode of reference service available, some basic form of reference service was found to be provided in all the surveyed institutions. During the study all the institutions found to be equipped with the basic reference service in the libraries provided both manual/physical or ICT base. The availability of these service and mode of service are largely dependent on the staff of the library.

Table 3 Reference service being provided and mode of services in the selected libraries

Types of basic reference service	Mode of service (total number of institutions)			
	Online	Offline	Both	Not available
Help desk	0	5	5	0
Referral service	0	3	6	1
Literature search	4	1	4	1
Selective Dissemination of Information	0	4	5	1
Reminder service	1	1	5	3
Ask a librarian	3	1	5	1



Fig 2. Availability of help desk

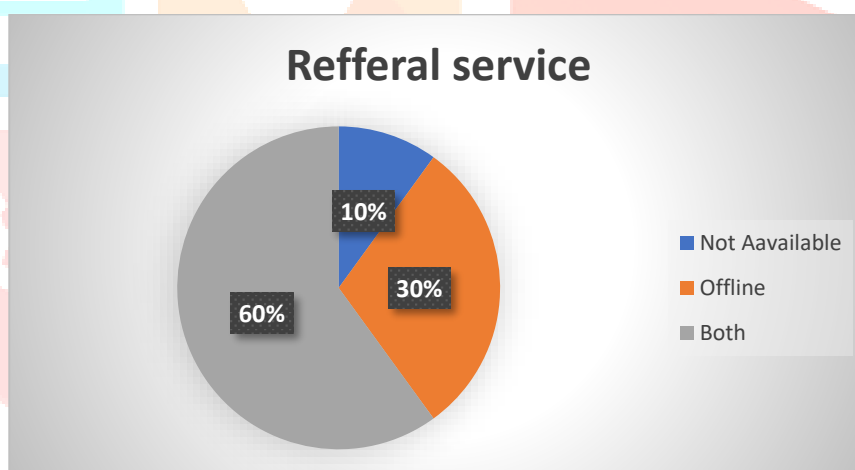


Fig. 3. Availability of referral service

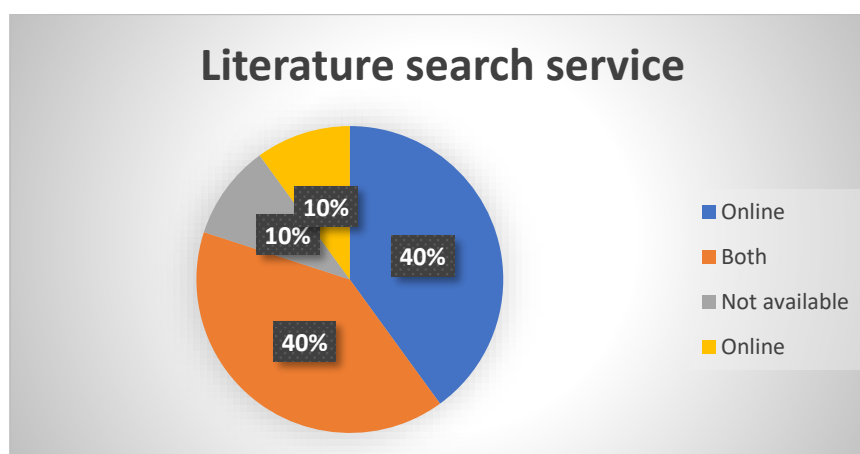


Fig. 4 availability of literature search service

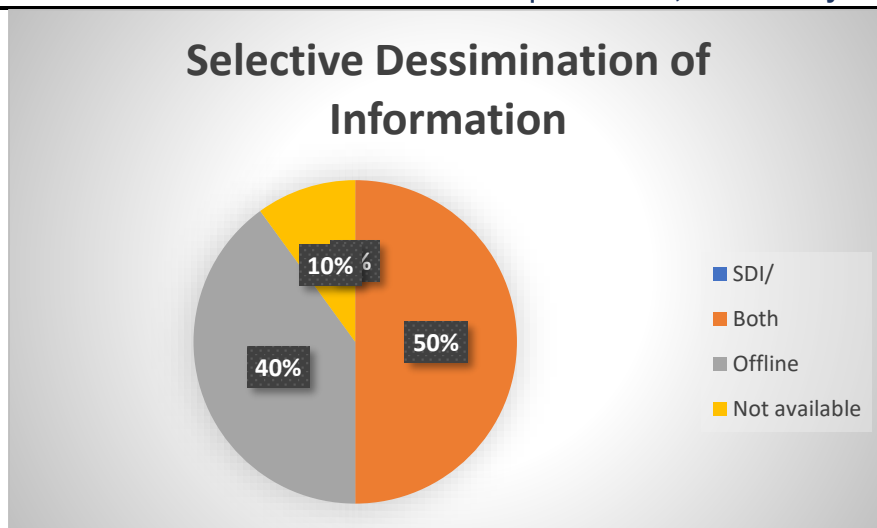


Fig. 5 Availability of selective dissemination of information

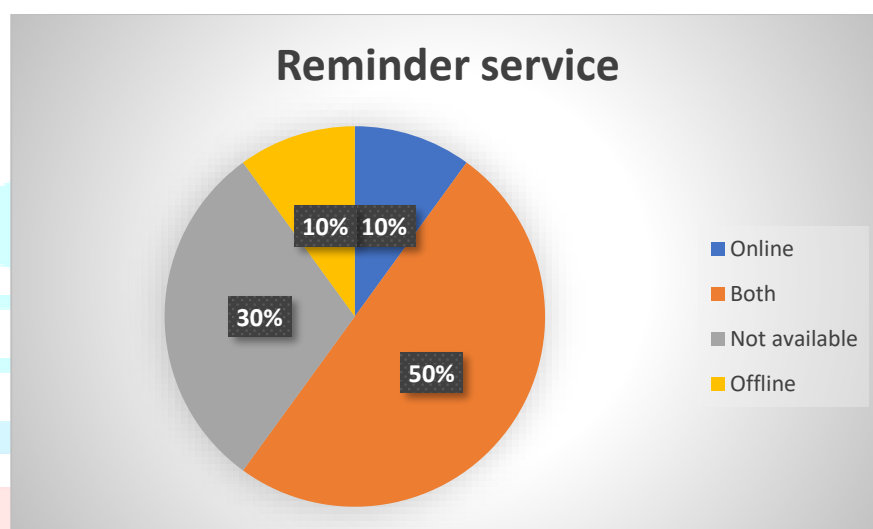


Fig. 6 Availability of reminder service



Fig. 7 Availability of Ask a Librarian

During the study the maximum of the university libraries were found with basic services available in their libraries in different modes, i.e. offline and online. Online availability of basic services shows the involvement of ICT in the service section. Majority of surveyed libraries were found to be providing the basic services as mention in table 3 and related figures, in both online and offline which makes in easier and convenient for the users as well as the service provider.

The above mention services are considered as the basic reference services and available in maximum of academic library system. since these are basic service to fulfil the objectives of the study these limited services were analyse to know the current scenario of reference section in these central university libraries.

And the availability of these basic reference services shows that the libraries of these central university libraries are providing all the basic reference services to its users which in some cases are available both online and offline for the convenience of the users.

3.4 ICT based reference services

In the present day, though the involvement of ICT have been acknowledged as integral part of the library system, when the involvement and awareness was questioned, new libraries were found to be unaware about the ICT based reference services, but majority of libraries total of 80 % were found to be aware. As shown in the figure 8.

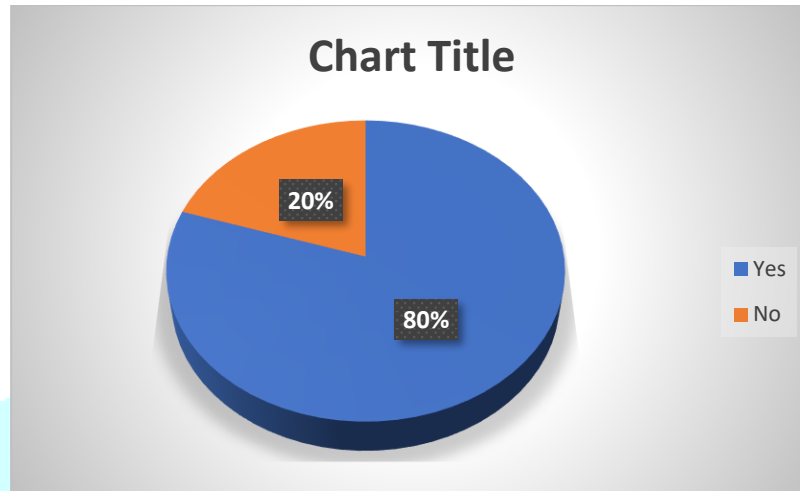


Fig. 8 Awareness of ICT based reference services

To keep up with the current information environment it is very important for the present libraries to have well equipped and professional acquired staffs to meet the needs of the current users.

It has been observed that all the central universities of the north eastern region of India were found with a library system, but there has been differences in the structure and functionality specially in the area of reference section.

Though these libraries having same authoritative background and credential differences were seen in, staff engagement, services available and mode of basic services. The major finding was the availability and engagement of library staff both library and information science qualified and non-professional personals. Since reference section is considered as a specialised section, the availability of professional qualified staffs and having distinguished and dedicated reference section is much needed but the study highlights the unavailability of reference section in one central university library and engagement on non-professional personal reference section. In addition to this though minimum 2 central university library were found to be un aware of ICT based reference services, which is considered as the latest trend the field.

4. Conclusion

The involvement of professionally qualified library professional is very much necessary in smooth functioning of any library system, and in case of specialised sections like reference section it became mandatory to have a designated professionally qualified library staff for optimum success. Without qualified library professional it may not be possible to have a successful and effective reference section since this provides most of the intense services available any library system, and involvement of person-to-person engagement is much encouraged here. But with the involvement of ICT based service it aims for the greater achievement, which is also possible only when the library provided the appropriate human resources, i.e. library and information science qualified professional with proper designation with properly defined roles and responsibility.

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