

Evaluating the Usage of Reference Resources in the Library in Pune – The Challenges

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Abstract

Evaluating the usage of Reference Resources and the use of E-resources are essential and challenging tasks in any library. We are very accustomed to evaluating the usage of the text book. Generally, usability or re-usability of Reference Resources is sometimes not considered for collection development in most the libraries. Usage of E-resources is also very crucial because institutions/universities are expending a lot for subscription or licensing of databases. It is due to the high cost of Reference Resources and not being used by the users in most of the institutes. Evaluation of the usage of Reference Resources and E-resources should be taken into account for the possible variety of requirements in the collection development in any library. This study evaluated the use of Reference Resources in the Institutional Library in Pune.

Research Design/Methodology/Approach: Literature on the topic was analysed for finding the gap in research. The visibility of evaluating the usage of Reference Resources was found to be less.

Findings: This research found some essential and important means of evaluating the usage of Reference Resources. It found that most of the libraries are not very careful of this kind of evaluation. Some LISPs are found to be very well-prepared and giving much value to such activities. LISPs are also facing some challenges for implementing the evaluation system. However, they are giving their best effort to overcome such challenges.

Research Limitation:

- *Area of Study:* Pune and nearby
- *Choice of Library:* Popular Institutions/Universities with good library environments.
- *The population of study:* Selected LISPs in academic and corporate libraries.

Originality/Value/Ethics: This study is fully research based. This research is to find out some suggestions which would give value to the need for collecting and evaluating Reference Resources in the library. From the ethical point of view the name of institutions or organisations of respondents are promised to be unrevealed.

Keywords: Library and Information Science Professionals (LISPs), Reference Resources

Introduction

Collection development requires a large investment in any library. E-resources and other infrastructure like Wi-Fi facilities are now essential to delight the user of the library. Even though libraries are procuring lots of text books, collection of Reference Resources and E-resources are generally neglected. It is seen that those are also becoming demanding for user assignment work or project work. It is also very important for research works. As a librarian sometimes we may face questions like “What is the use of Reference Resources?” “How would we evaluate the usage of Reference Resources as well as the E-resources in a particular library?” “What percentage of investment is giving much return in terms of usage of those Reference Resources or E-resources?” “Whether the Reference Resources and E-resources serve the needs of the students?” “What is the percentage of satisfaction of users?” etc.

As today’s economic situation is higher, management of any institution is re-thinking about the investment in collection development in library. Thus, there is a demand for evaluating the usage of Reference Resources

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in libraries. The primary aim of this study is to fetch some ideas on evaluating the usage of Reference Resources. In some institutions the reference section is identified as an essential section of the library. Reference Resources enhance the research on various aspects in institution, and library helps the smooth function of such research. To satisfy the information need on various subjects, Reference Resources play an important role. This is to increase the possibility of research in higher education. Information seeking behaviour of users is also enhancing the collection of Reference Resources. Depending on the necessity of information, libraries are spending a huge amount of money on the collection of Reference Resources. However, evaluation of the use of Reference Resources is necessary to have further collection or to modify the collection of Reference Resources.

Objectives

- To find out the method of evaluating the usage of Reference Resources.
- To identify some path finding suggestions for systematic evaluation of the usage of Reference Resources.
- To judge the proactivity of LISPs for evaluating the usage of Reference Resources.
- To examine the challenges faced by LISPs for evaluation and the way they are overcoming the challenges.

Research Outcome

- LISPs will be able to get some ideas on evaluating the Reference Resources.
- A path can be found for an easier and swift way to do this noble job.

Review of Literature

Otonekwu, Saliu and Oyedokun (2019) defined Reference Resources as non-circulating library collections that present current information in a bound format. Reference Resources provide factual information (hardly will a reference material represent opinion) in words and figures. According to McEnery (2018), Reference

Resources are infallible and authoritative sources that provide concise, clear and organised information in either systematic or chronological order. Those assist in locating accurate information about people, places, time and events. Correspondingly, Reference Resources are not meant to be read from cover to cover; instead, users consulted them for topic summaries, geographical and biographical information, statistical data and bibliographical information. Reference Resources are either in-print or non-print format and they are of different type, which include but not limited to dictionaries, thesauri, encyclopaedia, directories, almanacs, traveler's guide, biographies, bibliographies, manuals, gazetteers, gazettes, hand books and many more (Pressley & Yun, 2013). Kumari and Talawar (2009) investigate the use of Reference Resources in university libraries of Karnataka. The study found that there is upward interest in Reference Resources among the users in university libraries. Dictionaries and encyclopaedias are found to be the most used Reference Resources and directories are less used. There are very little literature on the evaluation of the usage of Reference Resources.

Research Gap: Very less research on evaluating the usage of Reference Resources.

Methodology

Research Design: This study may be treated as descriptive research.

Population: Nearly 250 LISPs were approached as stratified sampling techniques. Questionnaire was sent to all LISPs. Response received 232. Thus nearly 93% (92.8%) response was received.

Type of Sources of Data: Quantitative data is taken.

Data Collection Method: A Well-defined questionnaire was made. Data collected from the response of the respondents. Online data collection mode is applied. Person to person interaction was made to get clarification from some respondents.

Data Analysis and Presentation: Statistical methods are applied using frequency and percentages. Data is presented in tabular and graphical form.

Reference Resources

Reference Resources is to give answers to brief facts and findings, background information and statistical data. According to ALA Glossary of Library and Information Sciences reference source is “a book designed by arrangement and treatment of its subject matter to be consulted for definitive items of information rather than to be read consecutively.”

We broadly divide Reference Resources in two major parts like Reference Documents and E-Resources. Reference Resources usually contain short, factual information. Those can be used to provide background information on an unfamiliar topic or to find a specific fact to support an argument. Examples of Reference Resources include the general encyclopaedia e.g., Encyclopaedia Britannica, statistical compendium, bibliographical handbook, dictionaries, yearbooks, almanacs, manuals, directories, Atlas or geographical information sources, biography, bibliography, indexing and abstracting periodicals, databases, etc. Many Reference Resources have online counterparts, such as Wikipedia, Britannica Online or the Oxford English Dictionary, etc. A Reference Documents is usually categorised, designed to find the required information in an easy way. They aren't really intended to be read straight through.

If there are only a few things you need to know on the topic, the Reference document might be better for finding only few things we need because those things would be easier to find in reference document. A reference document is a document with authoritative information such as a dictionary or an encyclopaedia, to which one can refer for information. It is normally thorough with broad coverage of the subject.

In different libraries, the meaning of Reference Documents is also different. Libraries decided to make some important books as Reference. It also varies from

library to library. In many libraries, we differentiate reference books depending upon the following:

Books which are costly. For example, when the cost is more than Rs. 2000/-, some libraries treat that book as reference book.

- Books which are not listed as text book in the Institutional Syllabus. Those are listed as reference book.
- Single copy of book. If a library procures only one copy of any book it is being treated as a Reference Resource.
- Series of any particular titles, e.g. Kirk Othmer's Encyclopaedia of Chemical Technology.
- Non-academic book, e.g., Novel, Spiritual, etc.
- Journals, Magazines, Newspapers and Bound volume of Journals.
- Project Documents.
- Research report / Theses.
- Company Reports,
- Audio Visual documents like DVDs, CDs, cassettes etc.
- Photos and Maps.
- Syllabus files, Question Papers, etc.

Feedback, Result and Discussion

The percentage of LISPs from renowned Institute is 53%. LISPs from corporate libraries are 15% and 32% is from university library.

Table 1: Percentage of Response

| Type of Institution ↓ | Total | %-age of |
|---------------------------------|----------|----------|
| Response → | Response | Yes |
| LISPs from college/institutions | 124 | 53 |
| LISPs from corporate library | 33 | 15 |
| LISPs from university library | 75 | 32 |

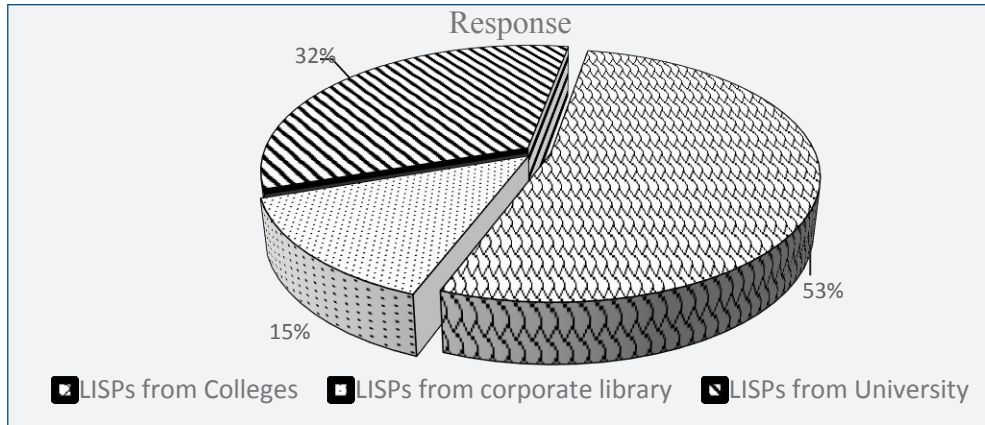


Fig. 1: Percentage of Response

Existence of Evaluation

This question aimed to find out the existing evaluation for recording the usage of Reference Resources. Nearly 51% of respondents are not doing any such evaluation. Nearly

39% is already taking a well-designed measurement system to evaluate the usage of Reference Resources. 10% respondents have just initiated. It is therefore clear that 49.13% LISPs have taken positive initiation for evaluating the usage of Reference Resources.

Table 2: Existence of Evaluation

| Response | Yes | %-age of Yes | No | %-age of No | Just Initiated | %-age of Just Initiated |
|----------------------------------|-----|--------------|-----|-------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| LISPs' Initiative for Evaluation | 90 | 38.79% | 118 | 50.86% | 24 | 10.34% |

Thus, total percentage of initiation taken = 49.13%

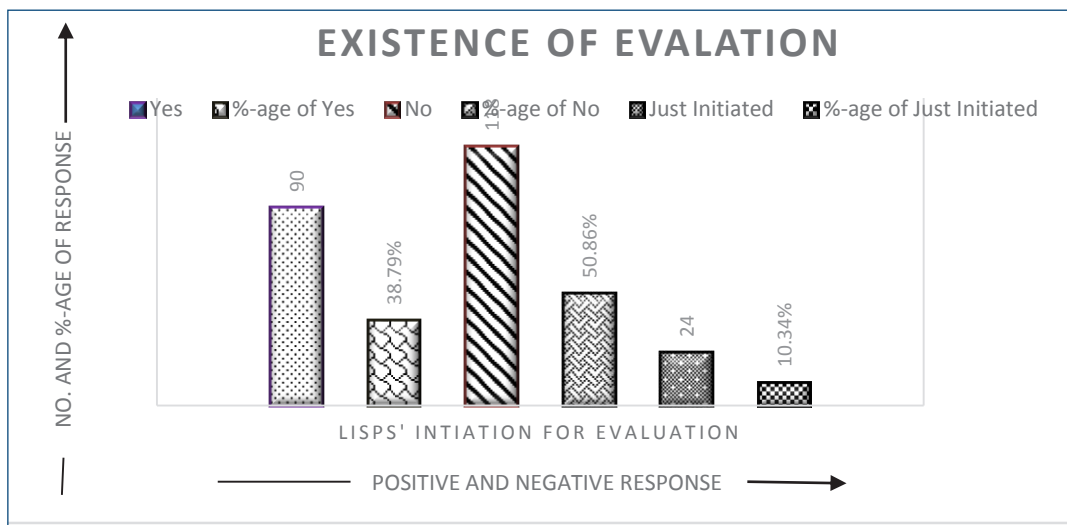


Fig. 2: Existence of Evaluation

Out of 90 respondents who taken initiation 35 is from College/Institutional library, 46 is from university library and 9 is from Corporate library.

Table 3: Existence Evaluation in Type of Organisation

| Type of Institution ↓ | Total | %-age |
|---------------------------------|----------|-------|
| Response → | Response | |
| LISPs from college/institutions | 35 | 39% |
| LISPs from corporate library | 09 | 10% |
| LISPs from university library | 46 | 51% |

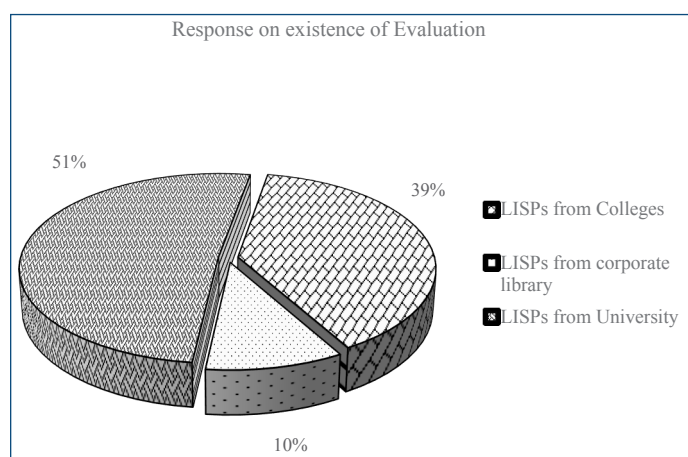


Fig. 3: Existence Evaluation in Type of Organisation

It is found that libraries of universities are already in action to evaluate. As per the respondents it is now becoming essential for various accreditations. Some of them revealed that as LISPs we should evaluate the Reference Resources because they are answerable to management for giving output of subscribed Reference Resources. Mostly the respondents are maintaining this evaluation process for E-resources. It is found that some Institutions are giving more trace to the evaluation of Reference Resources. This is the requirement of research department. Comparing the use of Reference Resources and that of text books some respondents is also deciding the forthcoming budget accordingly.

Process of Evaluation

This question was open because this study intends to get various processes. Limiting the process may result in a boundary. Many opinions were received.

- Made reference source more accessible by providing a separate reference section in the library.
- Enhance the usability by encouraging the users in the awareness programmes.
- Issuing facilities for Reference Resources on demand.
- An users' information sheet is attached in the Reference Resources so that they can enter their name, roll/employee no. and signature with date.
- Dedicated LISPs are employed to encourage the users to put their data in the data attached on or in the Reference Resources.

Challenges Faced by LISPs

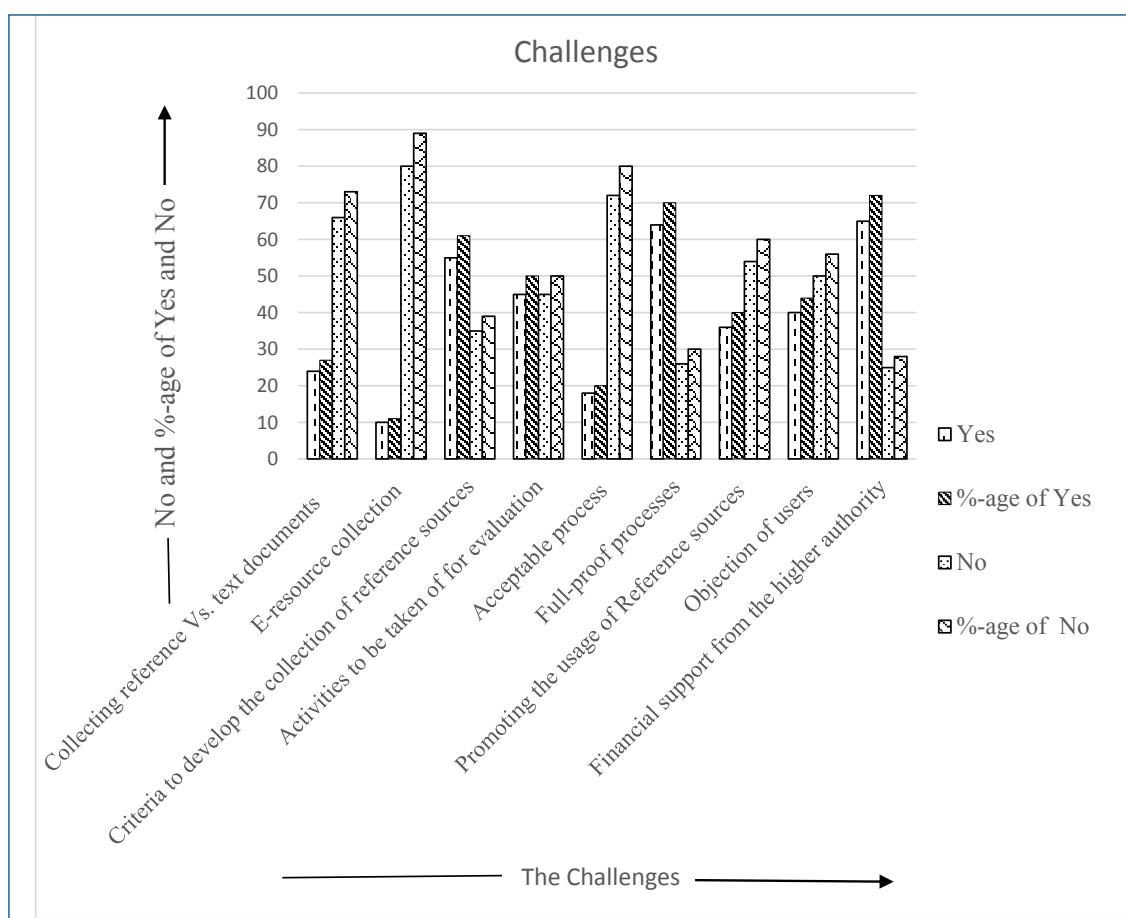
Every now and then LISPs have to face more and more challenges for giving better services to the users. To get some ideas on such challenges a set of questions was made with the different possible points.

- Collecting Reference Resources vis-à-vis text documents.
- Collection of E-resources.
- Criteria to develop the collection of Reference Resources.
- Activities to be taken of for evaluation.
- Concrete and full-proof process to make a proper evaluation.
- Increasing the usage of Reference Resources.

In this set of question some selected challenges were given to the LISPs. Choice was limited to 'Yes' or 'No'. This is to get the ideas of challenges. There was an option for any other remark to get an open minded answer from the respondents.

Table 4: Challenges

| Response LISPs are Facing Challenges in | Yes | %-age of Yes | No | %-age of No |
|---|-----|--------------|----|-------------|
| Collecting Reference Resources vis-à-vis text documents | 24 | 27% | 66 | 73% |
| E-resource collection | 10 | 11% | 80 | 89% |
| Criteria to develop the collection of Reference Resources | 55 | 61% | 35 | 39% |
| Activities to be taken of for evaluation | 45 | 50% | 45 | 50% |
| Acceptable process to make a proper evaluation | 18 | 20% | 72 | 80% |
| Full-proof process to make a proper evaluation | 64 | 70% | 26 | 30% |
| Promoting the usage of Reference Resources | 36 | 40% | 54 | 60% |
| Objection of users for monitoring their use | 40 | 44% | 50 | 56% |
| Financial support from the higher authority | 65 | 72% | 25 | 28% |

**Fig. 4: Challenges**

This question had the option of multiple choices. From the above feedback it is found that the majority of LISPs are facing challenges to:

- Decide the criteria to develop the collection of Reference Resources (61%),

- Adopting Full-proof process to make a proper evaluation (70%),
- Financial support from the higher authority (72%).

However, it is very interesting that LISPs are trying their best to evaluate the usage of Reference Resources.

Financial support is a big question for any development. Most of the LISPs are complaining of not having a dedicated reference librarian.

Suggestions

The Process of Evaluating the Use of Reference Resources/E-Resources in Library

In the case of an open access library, it is difficult to evaluate the usage of Reference Resources. However, we can easily evaluate the usage of E-Resources. Most libraries are following the open access system in recent the era. Thus, Reference Resources are easily available to read inside the library or inside the reading hall of the library. Most of the libraries are not issuing Reference Resources. Thus, it is a more difficult task to measure the usage of Reference Resources. Libraries which have a separate reference section may feel it a little easy to evaluate the usage of Reference Resources. We can follow several possibilities to evaluate the usage of Reference Resources.

Establishing Different Reference Sections in Library

It seems to be easy to measure the usage of Reference Resources if there is a different reference section. However, for that we need the followings:

- *A Swap Card System:* A Swap Card System at the entry of the reference section should be there. This will give us a statistic of the users who visited the reference section. This will not fulfil the measuring of the usage of Reference Resources. For it may be quite possible that one reader may use several Reference Resources at his/her time in reference section. A particular reader may use the same Reference Resources twice or thrice. Thus, the recording of usage is getting lapsed.
- *A Reference Section as a Controlled Access System:* Closed cataloguing for Reference Resources is to be displayed. However, we need dedicated personnel for control and monitoring. In such cases users may be deprived of getting relevant and fast information from the latest published articles available in the library. Thus, we may be away from the principle

of “right information at the right time to the right users”. It may also lead to less use of Reference Resources. A full-time issue and return section for Reference Resources is essential. Thus, there will be a demand for dedicated systems with dedicated personnel for issuing and returning the Reference Resources. Here the cost will be higher. Thus, cost effectiveness may be in question. We may face the higher authority’s demand to justify and effectiveness of such action. It may thus, not be advisable.

- *Labelling Journal Use Slip on the Front Page of Journals/Magazines:* Users may not be careful to put their name and signature on the slip. We have to put the label on Journals and Magazines for each new issue. It is time consuming and man hour consuming. Again, there is a point of cost effectiveness. In such action it is found that we have to be careful that all users who are referring the documents must put their name and signature. Monitoring such action from the user is also a question. It is always not possible to monitor the users in the reference section.
- *Observation Method:* Observing the use of Reference Resources requires dedicated personnel. The personnel would be well educated on the library and information science field. There may have possibility of skipping on counting the use. Users may feel odd when you would observe them. It may not always possible to keep the used Reference Resources back in the original position. And if we do not do it, we may not be able to trace how many users referred to the same Reference Resources when they were lying on the reading table.

Sum up of Suggestions

From the research findings, the following suggestions are made:

- A separate reference section in the library is highly recommended.
- The management should provide enough funds to have a dedicated reference librarian.
- LISPS should try to encourage users to use the Reference Resources. For this LISPs may take library orientation programmes. They should give refresher orientations to aware the users about the

utility of available sources.

- Adequate information sharing infrastructure and internet or Wi-Fi facilities should be available in the library. This will increase the use of Reference Resources.
- There should not be any restriction to the access of Reference Resources.
- Policies on the use of library resources should be users' friendly.
- Resources sharing, networking and using consortium is an important necessary for better use of Reference Resources.
- Binding of important reference journals is necessary.

Conclusion

Reference Resources are required to give better reference services to the users of the library. In the case of research reference services are very much essential. Reference service must ensure the timely access to the right information. A well-designed method is to be followed by LISPs to ensure the proper use of Reference Resources. The evaluation system for measuring the usage of Reference Resources is still in the growing stage. It is seen that it would take much time for such activity in the library. Many institutions are subscribing to E-resources and developing collection of Reference Resources with huge amounts of money. Thus, Reference Resources should have the possibility to get high accessibility from any desk of the users at anywhere they are. In some cases, Reference Resources are available but not accessible because of some forbidden criteria or for hard and fast library policies. Reference Resources are essentially required to develop the knowledge in users. It also helps the faculties to design lecture, writing assignment. It is cleared that Reference Resources are used by users. However, measuring the effectiveness of the necessity of Reference Resources is depending upon the usage of Reference Resources. Thus, a systematic and proper evaluation process is to be adopted in libraries. LISPs are still struggling to find a full-proof evaluation system for recording the usage of Reference Resources. Thus, here we have a great scope to do further study for getting such systems.

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