Reference Service at School Library: Going Virtual or Not?

[1]Destiya Prabowo S. Hum and [2]Tamara Susetyo-Salim
[1]Mahasiswa Magister Ilmu Perpustakaan dan Informasi, Fakultas Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya,
Universitas Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia
[2]Dosen Departemen Ilmu Perpustakaan dan Informasi, Fakultas Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya,
Universitas Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia

Abstract: School library as a learning center has an important role to help students working on their assignments with reference service. However, various devices, emerging internet and popular search engines and online encyclopedias run them to search information from virtual space instead of library and therefore are marginalizing library reference service. Nevertheless, the richness of information resources from the internet has counterproductive effects on students in constructing and articulating information based on their understanding. Derived from there, this study is going to study how reference service transformation is beneficial for students in learning process at school. This study is using qualitative approach with in-depth interview and non-participant observation at Surya International School Jakarta (SISJ). Findings from this study show that students would rather search information online from their own gadget than go to the library to research on their assignments. The result of this study is school library has to transform reference service from conventional to virtual based on the newest ICT commonly used by students. Ask librarian one of the device based reference services can be an alternative solution for students in working on their assignments. This study is expected to give a new perspective on school library reference service in digital era.

Key words: Reference service, internet, virtual reference, ask librarian, school library

INTRODUCTION

In line with the digital revolution, libraries are expected to adapt to the changes in order to stay relevant with the developing era and the demand of users needs, especially in service at school libraries. As a learning center, school library plays an important role in helping students with assignments at school. The overwhelming of information search through internet has affected school libraries directly and indirectly. As for the direct impact, we can see the diminishing number of student's visit to school libraries. The effect is that many library collections and some services within school libraries are less used optimally by students. This happens because users nowadays prefer to search from the Internet via smartphone easily and fast without having to visit the library. Indirectly, library as one of information sources is gradually marginalized in the eyes of users by the sophisticated search engines like Google. This search engine is able to generate thousands to millions of information search results based on search text input within only seconds. If we compare it with conventional library information service we are not going to find similar information result which is not so much and fast as with Google feature.

Therefore, in order to maintain the existence and credibility in the digital era, libraries transform their reference service as one of the biggest and most innovative changes of library services in fulfilling today's users needs.

The reason is that this service requires interaction with users the most of other services at libraries, either physically or virtually. Reference librarian is considered as the 'spearhead' of library service itself.

In other words, the overall library service quality depends on its reference service, besides the quantity and quality of its collection. Derived from the problem stated above, this article actually intends to uplift how reference service at school library transforms into virtual service.

Corresponding Author: Destiya Prabowo S. Hum, Pustakawan Pusat Pengembangan Koleksi dan Pengolahan Bahan Pustaka,
Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia

Literature review

Reference service: Reference service is service provided by librarian related to help in information selection and to how to obtain it according to user's wish (Cassell and Hiremath, 2011). Another definition comes from Reference and User Service Association (RUSA) in Bopp and Smith (2011) stating that reference service as information service at library consists of various activity forms, including personal guidance, directory, informasi provision selected from reference sources and access to digital information for library users.

Reference service type: According to Bopp and Smith (2011), reference service consists of three basic types information provision, guidelines in how to use library information resources and guidance in selecting information resources. These three basic types of service is explained by Cassell, namely:

- Library information service is to provide information service to users according to their request and to fulfill their specific needs
- Learning service in which librarian is able to provide learning in selecting too much information and easy to access
- Guidance service is similar to learning service.

However, this guideline is more to the providing direct instruction and guidance to those who need to be guided (Cassell and Hiremath, 2011).

Teenagers and reference service at school library: Reference service has grown well in line with the technology development and users needs that they serve (Forrest, 2008). Virtual reference world is still as the earlt stage of development and many researches need to be conducted to determine its actual effectivity (Forrest, 2008). It is important that library explores how service can be provided in virtual world so that they are ready for the future in virtual world. Rapid electronic resources development as well as its availability in a large amount caused libraries change its vision and mission of reference service (Cassell and Hiremath, 2011). This is followed by the growing number of Internet rate causing the overall aspect of libraries to change. Librarians and users regularly bombarded with variety of information whose amount is so much that there should be a sort of evaluation for its authenticity and accuracy. School libraries as part of learning center at school also experience changes with the coming of this technology (Beheshti, 2012).

Children (age 13-17 years old) have a very positive point of view towards technology and technology is an important part from how they define themselves (Neuman, 2003). In both new technology development and library service creation for young generation, children's ideas may not be the first to consider. When visiting libraries, adults usually speak of children but seldom speak to them either on resources and service planning or in resources evaluation. Children and teenagers are potential users of virtual reference service because they are familiar with computer and the Internet. Therefore, virtual service such as Chat, vide oconferencing, co-browsing, Instant Messaging (IM), Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) or e-mail has to be implemented at libraries especially school library (Cheng, 2008).

Virtual reference service: Most researches which have been conducted on reference service and the evolution for virtual reference and it will be too complete to attach in this study (Lankes, 2000; West, 2014). Separated library service, means of providing reference has changes and evolved in line with library user's needs. Face-to-face reference service and reference interview are the first to be developed. As the developed technology, telephone reference service is an addition to reference service. The Internet has a deep impact in reference service and has delivered virtual or digital reference. Meanwhile key feature such as reference service is still in several forms. Reference librarian role has changed as users are able to perform simple search by themselves.

Joint (2008) and Lankes (2000) showed that traditional reference service provides mediation between users and collections (Lankes, 2000; Joint, 2008). As the collections move to the online format, it is important to provide help where the information is. Virtual reference service develops as means to provide help including e-mail and service chatting. First projects of e-mail reference service can be found in 1980s while chatting reference service synchronization started in the end of 1990s (Lou, 2008). Chatting and IM reference are started with commercial projects, many advantages offered by co-browsing, this function is virtual although it is a good idea it is often obstructed by technical problem such ah browser compatibility and problem authenticity. As a result, several libraries have moved to IM delivery through existing IM service such as AIM, Hotmail and Meebo. Meanwhile, variation in delivery method has changed, every new method provides reference service in line with the previous service. IM reference service is not replacing traditional reference service or other virtual reference service. There is not one method found to be appreciated by all library users and there is no service being replaced by other type of service.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research process in this study is using qualitative approach with case study method. Research object of this research is Surya International School Jakarta school library. Qualitative research aims to interpret view point of librarian and students concerning library reference service transformation from conventional into virtual.

Informant: This research is using purposive sampling technique in determining informant. The chosen informant is one librarian and three students at SISJ.

Data collection method: According to Gorman *et al.* (2005) research data is collected through three basic activities, namely observation, interview and document analysis. In this research, author is using two activities, interview and observation.

Data analysis: Data analysis process in this research is conducted through test process and studying all collected data and then them concluding based on the theory. The steps in analysis includes: data reduction, coding, presentation and data interpretation as well as conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Surya International School Jakarta (SISJ) is a well-known private international middle school in Jakarta developing international based curriculum in which every student has to be able to combine between theoretical ability, practice method in the field as well as information technology usage. Besides that, students have to be able to conduct researches since early years so it is necessary to be information literate. According to Cassell and Hiremath (2011) information literacy can only be found at libraries through reference service ("ICT develops very fast. The consequences of it, student's assignments are getting more difficult, more complex. Many of them look for literature at library and ask directly to the librarian. It is part of teacher's role to direct students to visit library" (Librarian, 14 Sept 2016). SISJ has a library whose function supports learning process at school. This school library provides reference service called ask librarian. Ask librarian service can be performed either face to face or through media which is e-mail.

Information technology development demands libraries to be able to fulfill all the needs of its main users,

namely students. Student's assignments are getting more complex so they need help in searching literatures at library. SISJ librarian statement:

> ICT develops very fast. The consequences of it, student's assignments are getting more difficult, more complex. Many of them look for literature at library and ask directly to the librarian. It is part of teacher's role to direct students to visit library"

Information technology exists along with smart mobile device development. Almost all students at SISJ use such devices as communication means and help them in completing assignments at school. Author asked them what they think of smart mobile device.

> "Laptop, tablet, cellphone. Those three devices, it's like everywhere [are with me]. Especially cellphone"

Rosa's statement is clearly shows that smart mobile device has been part of her daily activities. Besides that, those devices can be used to study and search information related to assignments at school as a student named Rosa said.

> "Well, it's fifty-fifty. Sometimes it helps to study, like searching information, enhancing knowledge but sometimes cellphone is for communication"

This phenomena matches the thesis statement from Druin (2003) that students at school nowadays access and use digital equipments and information as important part of their daily lives. Children (age 12-16) have a very positive point of view towards technology and technology is an important part from how they define themselves (Neuman, 2003).

The development of information technology marked with easy access to the Internet through smartphone made students nowadays prefer to search information from the Internet trough smartphone easily and fast without having to visit libraries. Indirectly, library function as one of information sources is gradually marginalized in the eyes of users by the sophisticated search engines like Google. This search engine is able to generate thousands to millions of information search results based on search text input within only seconds. If we compare it with conventional library information service, we are not going to find similar information result which is not so much and fast as with Google feature.

"Of course, I'd prefer to use Google rather than library. Because information found at library is not complete. Google is more complete and faster"

Usually, conventional reference service is performed by a librarian at reference desk whose tasks are helping and guiding library users in searching information needed through reference collection, newspaper clipping and index. Unfortunately, this traditional reference service has many deficiencies such as lack of reference librarian quantity and quality, limited acquisition of and update on reference collections as well as deficiency in promotion of reference service itself. As a result, library reference service is less optimal in service and less used by library users. In order to survive in today's era, reference service has to adapt to changes by adopting information and communication technology supporting its service expansion in order to reach users virtually. At the present time, the existence of sophisticated technology and the Internet in the digital era drives conventional reference service to transform into virtual reference service.

At the present time reference service at SISJ libary is called ask librarian. With this service, users can ask all the things related to assignments at school to librarian. Ask librarian is performed through e-mail and telephone. The users of ask librarian are not only students but also teachers and other staff. According to SISJ librarian, after this service is launched there are many students interested to use it. They even ask things related to their subjects throguh e-mail.

"Usually students ask about how to write bibliography, foot note, all the things related to scientific article wrting format. And then the use of reference collections such as encyclopaedia, how to cite from it. What website providing free articles to be downloaded. Because at this school students are already introduced to assignments related to research, they need specific reading materials such as online international journal"

Search strategy is the most asked question by students through ask librarian. Sometimes students indeed experience difficulties to obtain the intended result from search engine because of incorrect search strategy. This is where users can benefit from librarian's role in giving them understanding to students.

Information search according to Gash (2000) is important because the "life" of information service in information unit or library is how to to fulfill information needs demanded by users, how to find information needed by users and how to give "way" to users to obtain information needed. Information search process is important to yield relevant, accurate and precise findings or information. The precise process and equipment use will generate precise information as well. Series of field researches show that SISJ school library has transformed its conventional service into virtual one thorugh e-mail. This media can be accesssed from various gadgets in order to ease students in accessing and contacting librarian when they find difficulties as they research on their assignments.

CONCLUSION

Library reference service is basically still relevant and is in demand by users in the digital era. In order to adapt to the current development, today's reference service has developed into virtual reference service. This service besides presenting valid and trustworthy information search results also understanding to users especially students as SISJ about filtering and interpreting information obtained from various sources (printed and electronic). This is the distinguishing point and opportunity for libraries to survive in the digital era. Although, user's behaviour trend nowadays tend to use gadgets to access the Internet rather than visiting libraries physically, library's role is not going to be replaced by search engines as sophisticated as Google. Libraries are expected to find new ways to promote and present its service in line with the users needs in the 21st century with the existence of virtual reference service.

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