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## **Evaluation of Electronic Reference Service for Online Resources: A case study of SVKM's NMIMS (Deemed to be University)**

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### **Abstract:**

This case study reports the Evaluation of electronic reference services (ERS) for online resources. It tries to find out librarians' approach of electronic reference services for online resources. It tries to find out the challenges faced by librarians while providing reference services for online help. This research study concentrates on the Evaluation of the electronic reference services of NMIMS University. It also tries to determine the adequacy of the reference services provided in the NMIMS libraries. Providing electronic reference services is the best practice of libraries, and this best practice should evaluate with user's feedback which helps librarians improve their services. This study helps to understand the importance of the evaluation of reference services.

**Keywords:** Electronic reference services, virtual libraries, instant messages, digital library services, Electronic resource management, Evaluation of reference services.

### **Introduction**

Today the world has become a universal place of information, so there is a precondition of information manager who circulates information and grapples with the development of information technology. For a long time, library and information professionals provide reference services to their users. In today's e-informative world, traditional reference services are not enough to fulfil the user's needs. It requires widespread, professional, and skilled reference services. Now libraries provide internet and online databases that give millions of journal articles, other reading material, and audio and video. Now required information can be identified and gets quickly; it saves user's time. It gives multiple access at a time, so it is imperative to provide the best reference services for e-resources. In this twenty-first century, electronic reference services have become a prevalent feature of e-resource management. The main aim of electronic reference services is to provide quick assistance and complete user's needs anytime, anywhere; these services interacting with users through internet technology in

this virtual environment. Libraries are expanding the reference services by interacting with users and solve their queries via the internet. (Wilhelm Elinashe Utoni 2014) (Lankes & Kasowitz, 1998). explains that Evaluation is necessary to improve and justify the services provided by librarians. (Ekwelem, Vincent Onyeacholam, etc. 2018) explain that the development of information technology is transforming the libraries' work, the formation of the internet provided an avenue for the development of electronic reference services. Evaluation investigates a particular program or policies intending to know their weakness and improve the skills.

### **Need of the Study**

In today's technological world, practical information is essential in teaching and learning in higher education. Information is a crucial element in our lives as it provides a direct gain in knowledge. In today's electronic world, users are dully willing to use the internet. They entirely depend on the internet and think everything is available on the internet. Still, all information is always not freely available, so this is the librarian's responsibility to educate the users about the availability of resources, elements of resources, charges, and authorization of resources not ensured on the internet. Librarians should inform users how to approach the content, which requires a password, not freely available. Reference staff should motivate users to use online databases subscribed by the Library and authenticate reliable and current information. These librarians provide electronic reference services; through electronic reference services, it is easy to reach to the users and help them search for information. Electronic reference services allow users to connect with librarians quickly. These reference services have become essential parts of the Library, so there is a need to evaluate these services, which help users to provide the most valuable and fast services. Evaluation is required to determine whether these services fulfil the Library's objectives; it helps to find out the difficulties of information gaining. It allows librarians to find out the problems of their services and support to provide efficient and best e-reference services.

### **Statement of Problem**

Evaluation is always essential to find out the value of things. Evaluation of electronic reference services is necessary to determine whether providing reference services satisfies the user's needs. This study tries to find out the level of adequacy of reference services provided in the libraries.

### **Scope of the Study:**

SVKM'S NMIMS (Deemed-to-be University)

SVKM's NMIMS is a Deemed-to-be University, located in vile parle Mumbai. It is a multi-disciplinary, multi-campus University with a widespread suite of innovative Undergraduate and postgraduate programs. The libraries of these institutes are the richest with electronic databases, it has a good number of databases, and the librarians of these institutes provide e reference services to users, so for the study of this research author select NMIMS Mumbai

campus to evaluate their reference services and find out the need of Evaluation of reference services. For this study, the Survey is taken from undergraduates' colleges on the Mumbai campus only.

### **Electronic Reference Services.**

The services conducted online and the reference transaction are computer-mediated communication, called electronic reference services—the library professionals provide these reference services through remote or computer-mediated.

Academic libraries exploring their services by interacting with users and responding to user inquiries via the Internet (Wilhelm Elinashe Uutoni 2014)

Electronic reference services meet the user's needs in this changing technological environment. Users of e-resources use the internet to connect to the Library. In this electronic world, librarians receive user's queries via email or messages, and the librarian provides them with the required information or solves their queries.

Electronic reference services are intermediate human services over a digital network. Electronic reference services require computer communication with the electronic grid; there is a need to concur between users and librarians. Librarians need to give a quick answer to the user's query.

### **Objectives**

To find out the available electronic reference services.

To find out the importance and benefits of electronic reference services in e-resource management

To find out librarians' and user's attitudes towards electronic reference services.

To find out librarians' efficiency towards the electronic reference services.

### **Research Methodology:**

The survey method is applied for this study. Data has been collected by using a questionnaire and personal interviews of library professionals and library users of NMIMS. Electronic reference services were evaluated on the basis of user feedback.

### **Literature review**

**Anna, N. E. V., & Srirahayu, D. P. (2020)** focused on the librarian's understandings of virtual reference and information services, said that the success of these reference services depends on the knowledge of the leadership of these service functions. **Eke, Helen Nneka and Ekwelem, Vincent Onyeacholam. (2014)** concluded that online reference services are a tool to assess information and explains that cost is the most challenging aspect of the evolving world of electronic technology. **Khobragade, Amol & Lihitkar, Shalini. (2016)** acknowledges exceptional development in electronic communication. **Gómez-Cruz,**

**M.E. (2019)** explains that quality of services should be considered while doing the Evaluation, suggests five dimensions for quality of services, i.e., reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. **Jo, B. W. (2001)** concluded that the Evaluation of electronic reference services is necessary to determine and constantly improve these services. **Kloss, L., & Zhang, Y. (2003)** evaluated a real-time online interactive reference service and found the positive response of the librarians towards these services. **Pomerantz, J. (2008)** explains that the Evaluation of online reference services is helpful for management to make decisions that can affect the future of these services and the Library itself. **Ramos-Eclevia, M. (2012)** explained how to improve the quality of digital reference services and said that the success of digital reference services depends on librarians' knowledge and a fast and stable Internet connection. **Sloan, B. (1998)** noted a need for guidelines for the development of electronic reference services; basic guidelines help librarians ensure the continuity of the service perspective in the digital Library, **M., Hsiao-Ting, W., & Hung-Hsi Hsu. (2010)**. Explain that there is a need to improve and enhance the quality of digital reference services to satisfy the user's needs.

### **Response rate.**

The questionnaire was distributed to 12 library professionals & randomly 300 library users. The respondents were given one week to fill the questionnaire. Out of 12 library professionals nine professionals, respond to the questionnaire. The response rate of library professionals is 75%. Out of 300, 124 (41.33%) users give responses to the questionnaire.

### **Major Finding & Discussion**

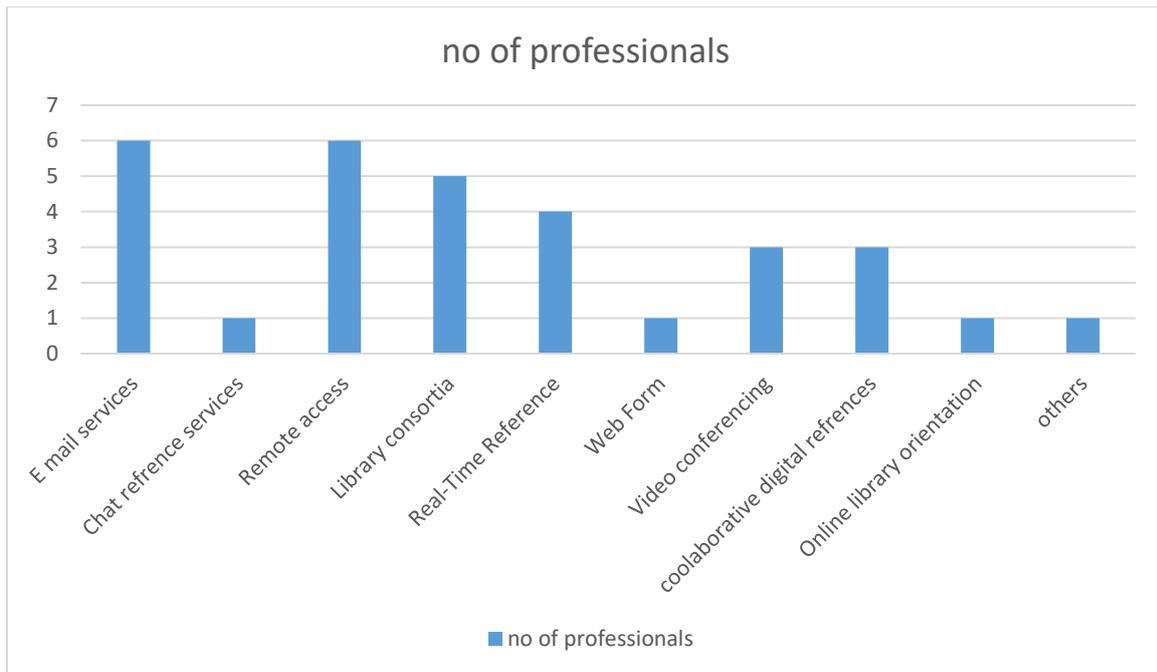
Form the Survey of library professionals.

Survey filled by one librarian. Two deputy librarians, two assistant librarians, and four library assistants. Among these, seven professionals have a master's in Library & information science. One professional is having a doctorate in library science. One is a graduate in Library and information science. This Survey finds out that the university has qualified and experienced staff. While asking about the year of work experience, two professionals have more than 25 years of experience, two persons with more than 20 years of experience, and four professionals with more than 15 years of experience; only one professional has less than ten years of experience.

Applications of Electronic reference services

Available applications of ERS in the Library shown in Fig 1. 6 professionals responded to this question. In response to this question, 6(100%) respondents say that they are providing email

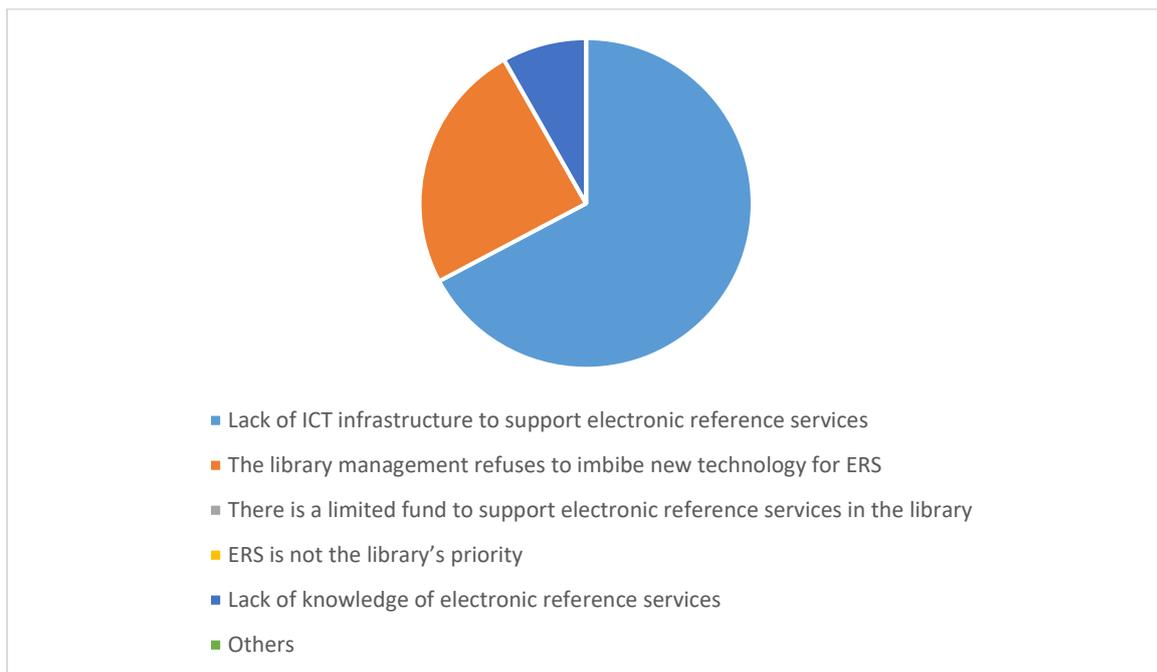
are providing remote access services. 5(83.3) says that they are giving the facility of library consortia. 4(66.7%) offering Real-Time Reference services, 1(16.7%) says they are providing Web Form (filling of online forms on the library website) service. 3(50%) professionals say that they provide Video Conferencing or Webcam Services and Collaborative digital reference services. 1 person added in that Library providing online library orientation.



**Fig 1 Applications of Electronic reference services**

**Barriers to applying the application of Electronic reference services in the Library.**

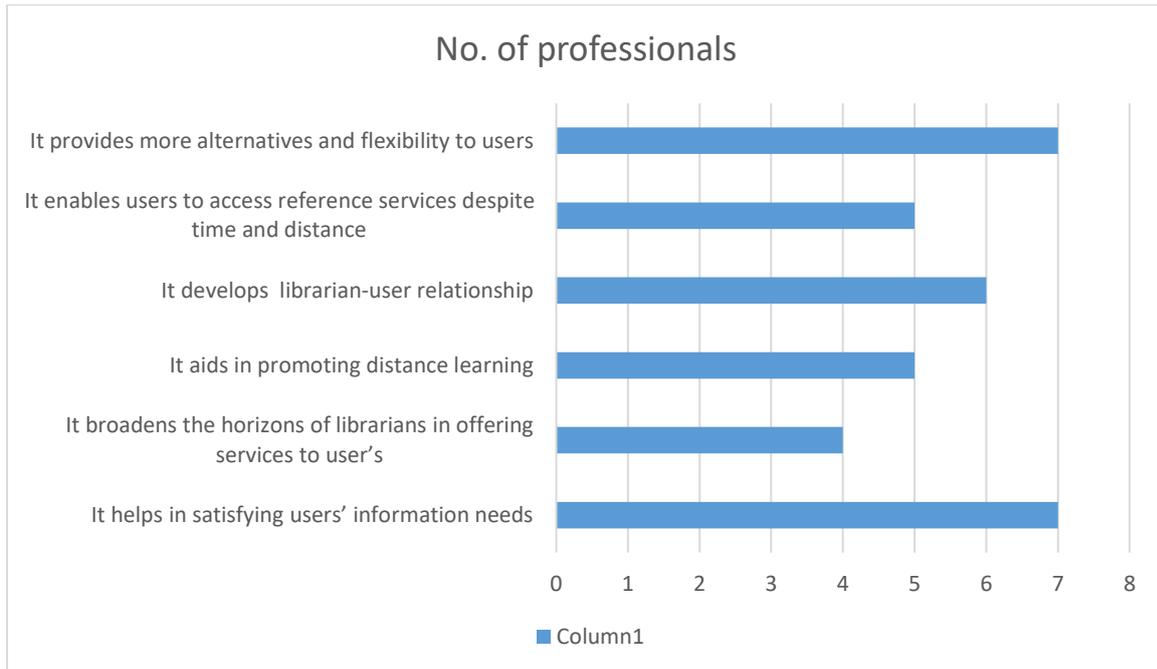
Fig 2 shows the response to this question, 8 professionals respond to this. 3 (37.5%) professionals agreed that there is a lack of IT infrastructure. No one (0%) says that library management refuses to imbibe new technology of ERS and limited funds to support ERS in the Library. No one (0%) agreed that ERS is not the Library's priority. 1(12.5) says that there is a lack of knowledge of electronic reference services. Analysis of data find out that the management support to ERS.



**Fig 2 Barriers of Electronic reference services in the Library**

### **Benefits of using ERS**

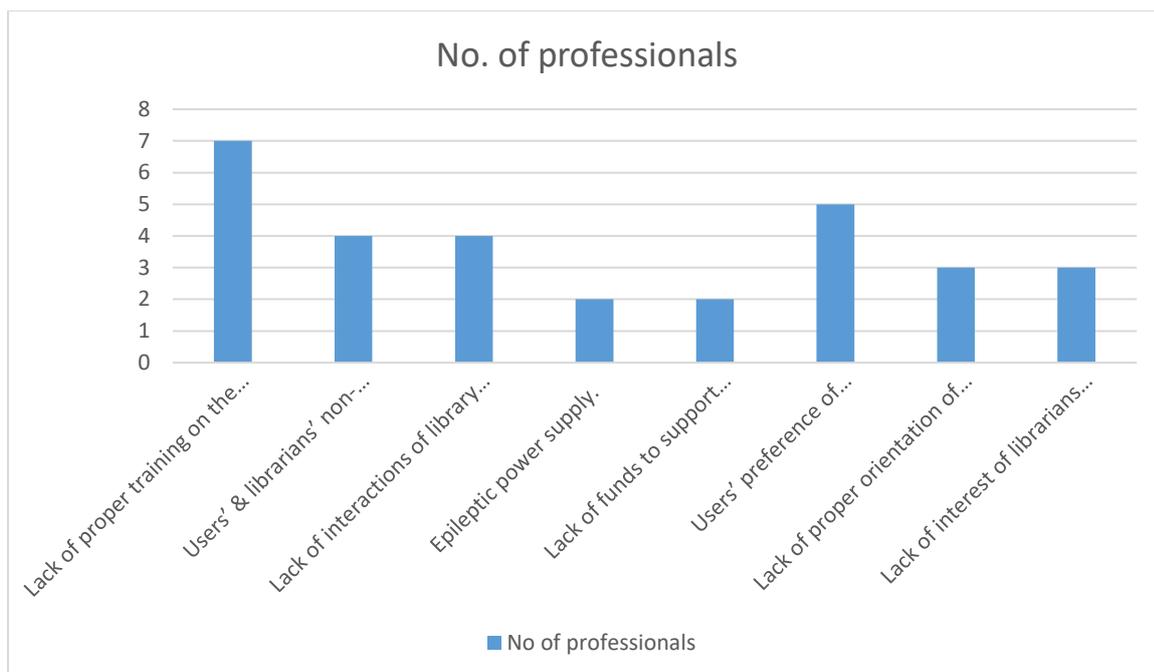
Fig. 3 shows the analysis of the responses of library professionals on the benefits of using ERS. 7(77.77%) agreed that it helps in satisfying users' information needs. 4(44.4%) says that ERS broadens the librarian's horizons. 5(5.55%) says that it enables users to access reference services despite time and distance. 7(7.77%) says that it gives more opportunities and flexibility to users.



**Fig 3 Benefits of using Electronic Reference Services in Library**

### **Challenges facing Electronic Reference Services**

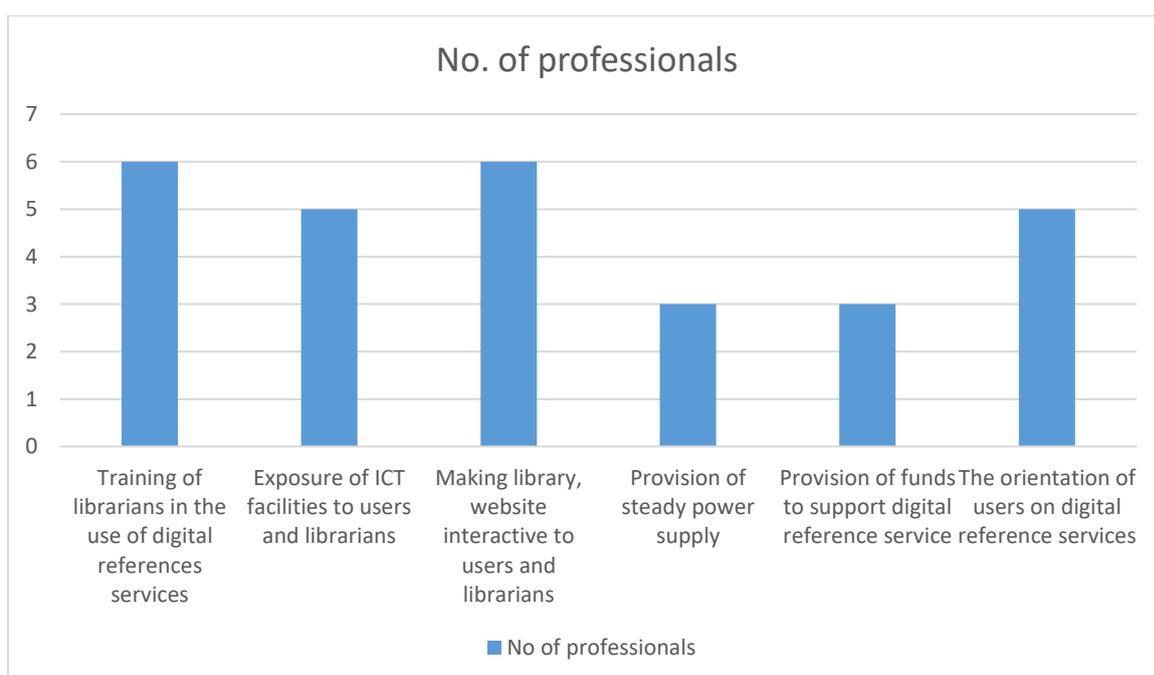
Seven library professionals responded to this question. 4(57.1%) says that lack of proper training on the use of ICT infrastructure among librarians, 4(57.1%) says that Users' & librarians' non-exposure to ICT facilities in Libraries, 2(28.6%) says that lack of interactions of library website to support ERS, 2(28.6%) says that Epileptic power supply, 2(28.6%) says that lack of funds to support digital Reference Services, 5(71.4%) says that users still prefer traditional reference services. 3(42.9%) says that lack of proper orientation of users on electronic references Services, 3(42.9%) says that librarians lack interest in adopting electronic Reference Services. This data analysis shows in fig 4.



**Fig 4 Challenges facing Electronic Reference Services**

### Strategies to enhance Digital Reference Services

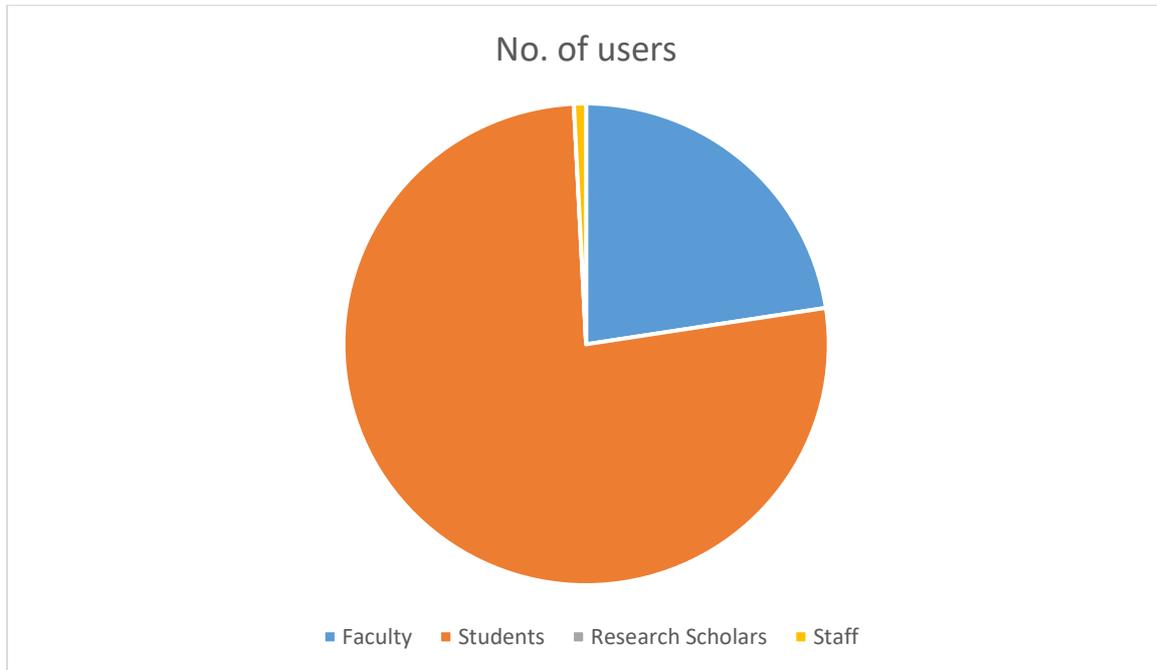
Eight professionals responded to this question. 6(75%) professionals agreed that there is a need for training of librarians in the use of digital reference services. 5(62.5%) says that there is a need to expose ICT facilities to users and librarians. 6(75%) says they need to make the library website interactive to users and librarians. 3(37.5%) says that there is a need to provide a steady power supply and enough funds to support digital reference services. 5(62.5%) says that there is a need for orientation for users on digital reference services. The analysis of this data shows in fig 5.



**Fig 5 Strategies to enhance Digital Reference Services.**

**Survey of library users.**

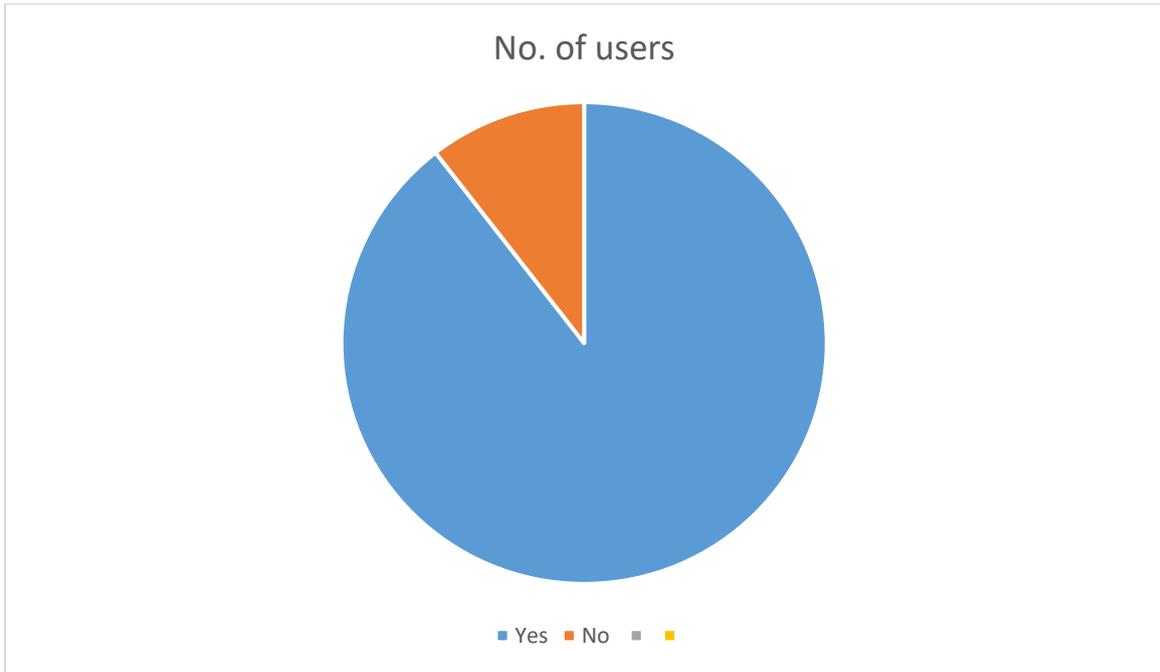
In this survey total of 124 responses were received among them, 28(28.6%) are faculties, 95(76.6%) are students, and 1(.8) is the staff. The analysis is shown in fig 6.



**Fig 6 Designation of users.**

**Awareness of available electronic reference services.**

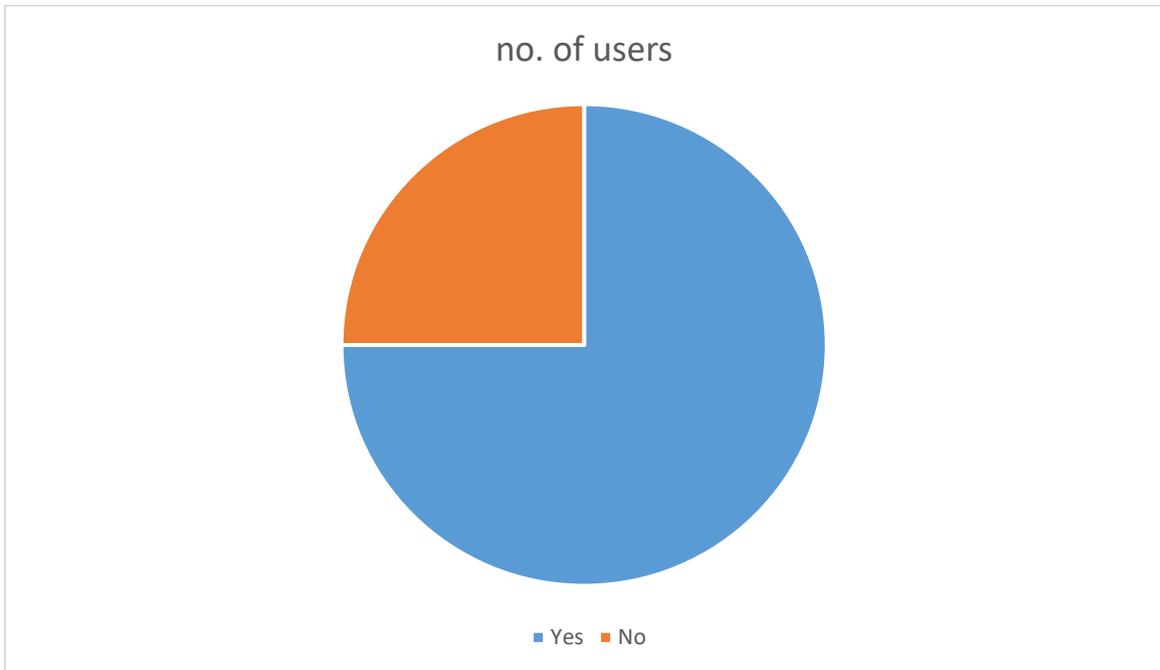
In response to this 111(89.5%) says Yes and 13(10.5%) says No. analysis shows in fig 7. It finds out that most of the users are aware of electronic reference services.



**Fig 7 awareness of ERS**

**Able to contact your librarian with email, chat, or messages.**

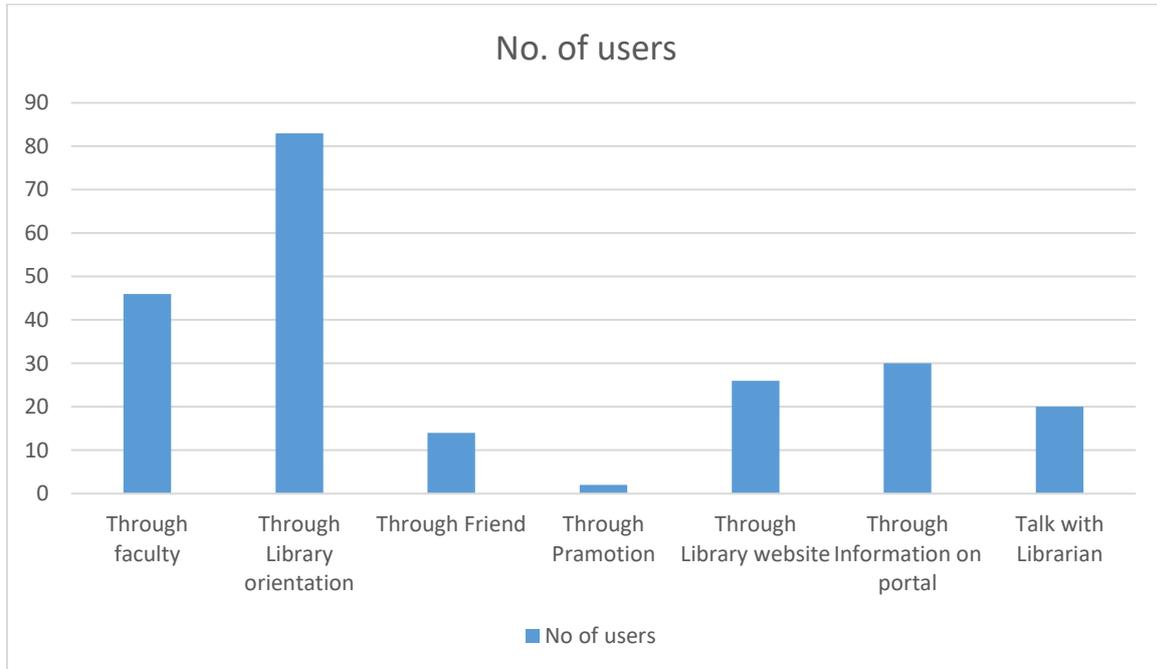
In response to this question, 116 responses received among them 87(75%) say yes or 29(25%) say no, it find out that majority of responses are yes. The analysis shows in fig 8.



**Fig 8**

**Sources to get knowledge about electronic reference services.**

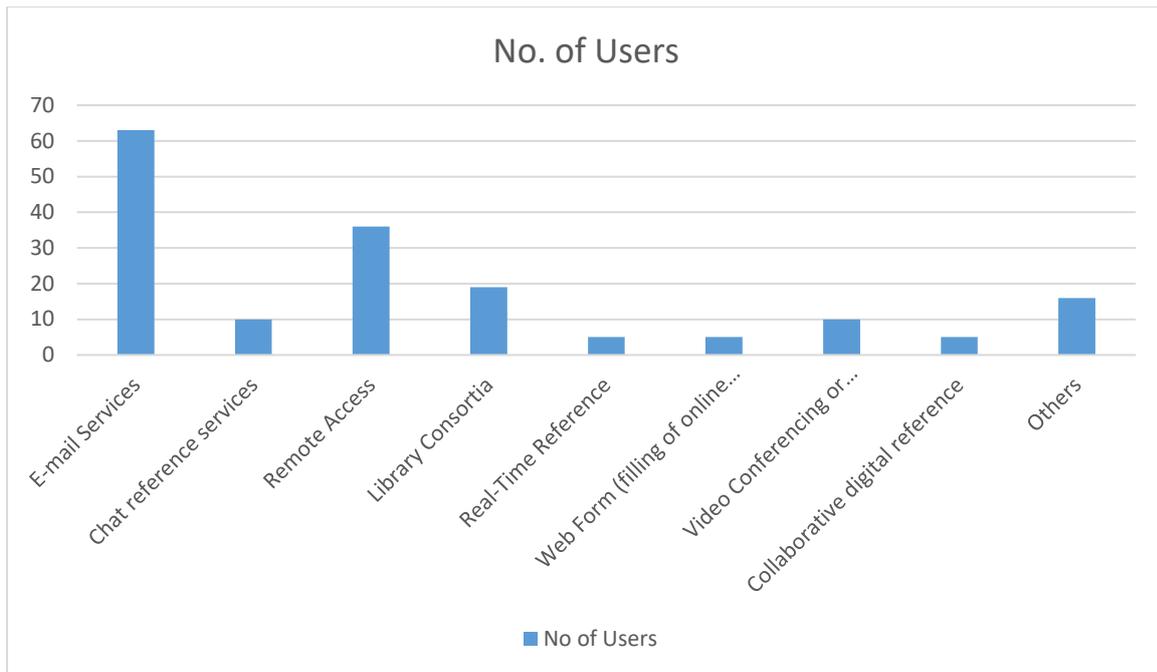
In response to this question, 121 responses were received. Users select given options. 46 (38%) say that they know this through faculty, 83 (68.6%) communicate through Library orientation. 14 (11.6%) say that they know it from their friend, 2 (1.7%) say from promotion. 26 (21.5%) says library website, 30 (24.8) says information on the portal, 20 (16.5%) says to talk with a librarian. The analysis shows in fig 9. Most of the users get knowledge from library orientation. It finds out that there is a need to make a promotion of ERS.



**Fig 9 Sources to know of ERS.**

### **Using the applications of ERS**

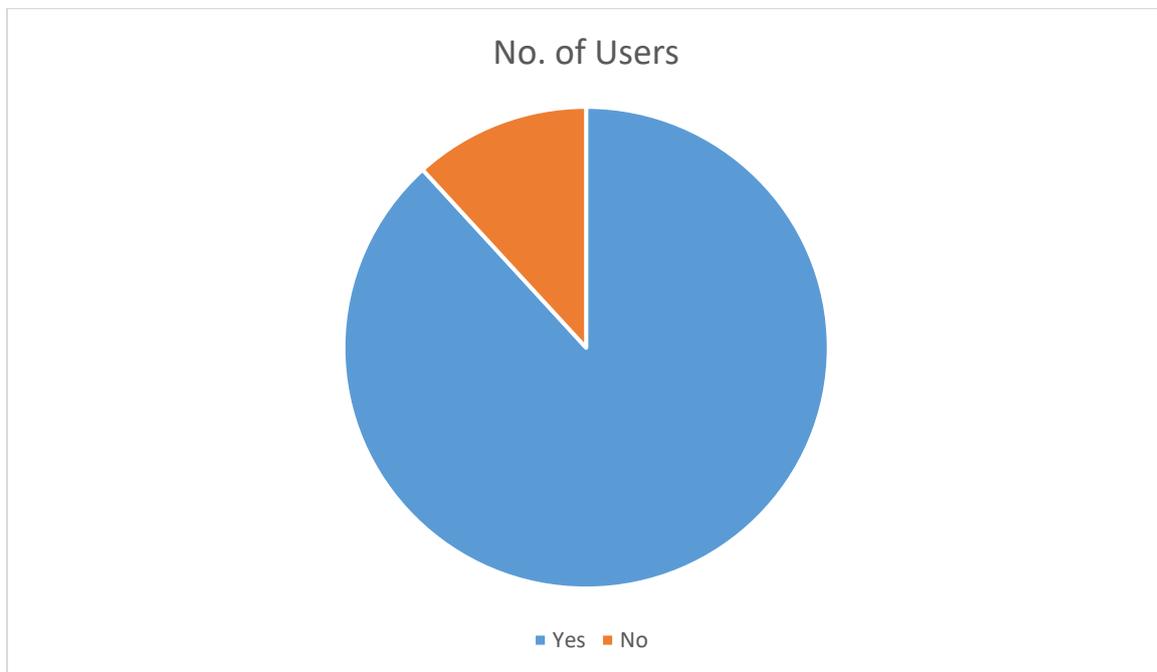
In response to this question, 109 responses were received. Library users are given options. 63 (57.8%) users selected email services. 10 (9.2%) chosen users chat reference services. 36 (33%) chosen users remote access, 19 (17.4%) users selected library consortia, 5 (4.6%) selected real-time reference services, 5 (4.6%) web form filing, 10 (9.2%) users selected collaborative digital reference services and 16 (14.7%) go with option others. The analysis is shown in fig 10. It offers most of the users use email reference services.



**Fig 10 Applications of ERS**

### Opinion about the usefulness of ERS

In response to this question, 119 responses were received, and among them, 105 (88.2%) say yes, and 14(11.8%) say no. A significant no of users gives positive responses. The analysis is shown in fig 11.



**Fig 11 usefulness of ERS**

### Efficiency of librarians

To know about this question, ask users if they got the earliest response from their librarian. One hundred one responses were received, and 81(80.2%) say yes or 20% (19.8%) say no. It shows the efficiency of library staff. The analysis is shown in Fig 12.

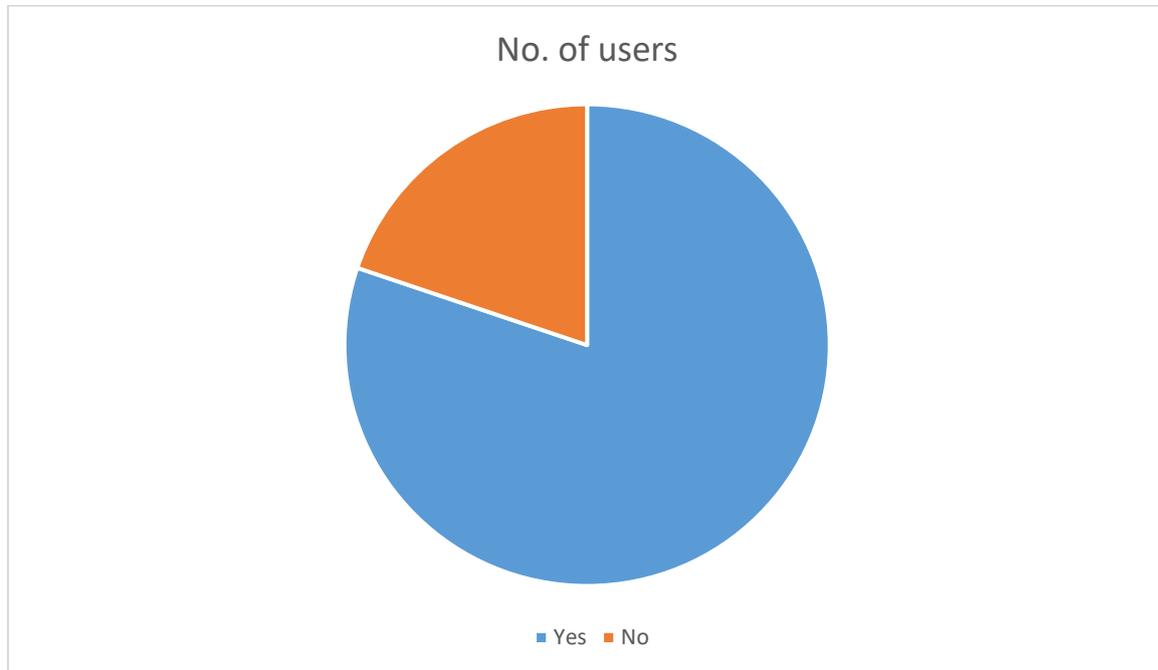
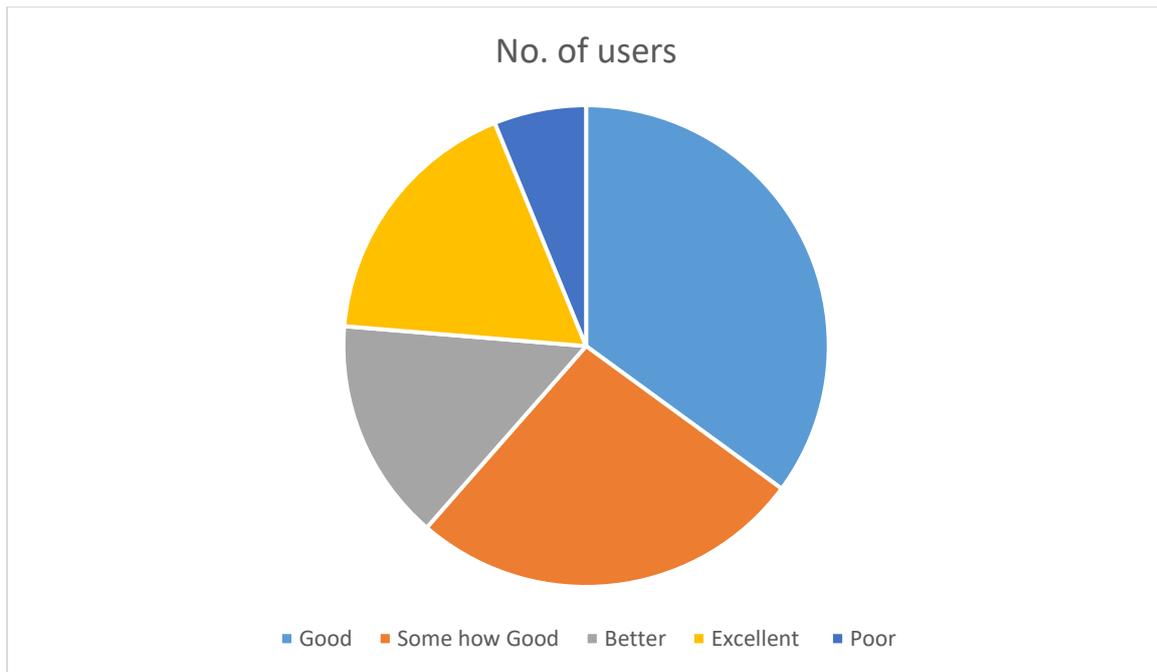


Fig 12 Efficiency of librarians

#### **Rating of the Library for electronic reference services.**

In response to this question, 118 users give a rating to the Library. 40(33.9%) says good, 30(25.4%) says somehow good, 17(14.4%) says better, 20(20.3%) says excellent, and 7(5.9%) says poor. The analysis is shown in fig 13.



**Fig 13 Rating of ERS in Library.**

### **Findings & Suggestion**

This study finds out that most users are using an Email reference service; sometimes some shy users hesitate to ask questions face-to-face, so it is an easy way for them to contact librarians via email. Email services do not require extra software or extra training, so it is the easiest way to reach the librarian. There is no restriction of time so that users can contact the librarian at any time. Library staffs are quick and efficient, so they get their answers quickly. The main barrier of electronic reference services is the ICT infrastructure facility, so we need to improve this. Information about electronic reference services is through Library orientation or talk with librarians, so librarians should give proper direction to all the users and explain the reference services. The librarian should assure users in the orientation that library staff will always be there for their help, so the users will not hesitate to use these services.

### **Suggestions**

- Need to improve ICT infrastructure
- Use new strategies to promote library services
- Make interactive library website
- Library portal should make user friendly
- Need more interaction with library users.

### **Conclusion.**

This study focuses on evaluating experimental electronic reference services. This study has the potential to improve library services. Every Library should develop its marketing skill, which is essential for developing active outreach services. Evaluation of library services is

necessary to improve outreach efforts. The study found that good quality of ICT infrastructure is required for providing better ERS. The librarians working with these services should be trained and professional, but only training and skills are not necessary; they should be efficient and dedicated to their work.

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