# Chapter 14
# Sustainable Reference Service Practices in the 21st Century

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## ABSTRACT

*This chapter focused on sustainable reference service practices in the 21st century. The chapter discussed issues relating to overview of reference service, traditional reference services, reference resources prior ICT proliferation, reference service practices in the 21st century. Also, issues relating to 21st century reference sources/resources, advantages of electronic/virtual reference service, sustaining reference service practices in the 21st century, as well as sustainability challenges of 21st century reference service practices were all discussed. The chapter reviewed significant literature on the topic of discussion, and the researcher used Google to obtain scholarly papers from open access databases that are relevant to the study, which provided the basis for the reviewed literature.*

## INTRODUCTION

Reference services have long been an important part of librarianship. Its origin can be traced to the early years of the twentieth Century. It is a public knowledge that, reference is one of the essential services rendered in the library and information centers, in reference, we have the core of librarianship. Due to the interaction between reference librarians and library patrons, it is also recognized as the most fasci-

nating and exciting aspect of library services (Kudu, 2011). Reference librarians who act as a mediator between the questioner and the appropriate information resource provide information in a formalized manner through reference services in a variety of formats. As a result, reference services are provided by the reference librarian, the information resources, and the person making the inquiry. The reference service comprises not only finding the information-bearing materials where the information needed may be found, but also finding the information and separating what information is useful from the plethora of information before making it available to the user who demands it. It is worth noting that, despite a lengthy period of stability, there is currently no basic library function experiencing more significant change than reference.

While reference work is changing dramatically, the essential roles of reference described by Louis Shores in 1954 remain mostly unchanged. There are six major reference roles, according to Shores' Basic Reference Sources: supervision, information, direction, teaching, bibliography, and appraisal. These functions are still the primary goals of today's reference departments (Dougherty, n.d). The forms of the information sources reference librarians consult, as well as the tools they employ to search, retrieve, communicate, and distribute information, are the two obvious contrasts. The foundation of references service practices in the 21st Century is therefore laid on the two aforementioned differences. The influx of information in circulation that was orchestrated by the emanation and proliferation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has affected how information services are provided to clienteles of the library (Ayeni, 2015). Similarly, in the twenty-first century, reference services have undergone a worldview shift from the traditional model, in which receiving and answering of users' questions was primarily done physically, i.e. face-to-face, to the modern model, which involves the use of computer technologies and telecommunications (Nmecha, 2013).

These developments are however welcomed by librarians in all types of libraries around the world as they believe that to be able to sustain the service rendered in the library and still remain relevance in the 21st Century information environment; libraries must embrace ICT to render all their services and reference service in particular.

## OVERVIEW OF REFERENCE SERVICES

Udensi and Akor (2014) as cited by Aba, Idoko, and Akor (2017) defined reference service as "direct personal assistance to readers seeking information in the library." The availability of reference services is critical to the survival and operation of libraries. Every functions provided by librarians to address the information needs of library customers are referred to as reference services (Aba, Idoko & Akor, 2017). Part of the role includes responding to pertinent questions, guiding and aiding users in finding resources outside the library, maintaining reference statistics, and creating reference collections. Any library's reference department/unit acts as a link between the library and its immediate users, such as the library's immediate community or groups of specialized users. The major goal of the reference department or unit is to provide a wide variety of services and facilities that will improve productive use of the literature by utilizing the principles of support and self-direction. According to Retiz (2004), reference services include all tasks performed by a trained librarian working in the reference section of a library to meet patrons' information needs (in person, over the phone, or online), including but not limited to answering questions, assisting with information evaluation, directing users to library resources, and conducting searches on their behalf.

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