

Users' perception of electronic reference services in Babcock University Library, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract:

The study investigated users' perception of electronic reference services at Babcock University Library. With the advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs) which is the use of computers and other technological equipment to carry out activities, the library has witnessed a great transformation in all aspects of its service provision. Patrons can send queries anywhere and receive answers from the reference librarian without necessarily visiting the library in person. Despite the transformation brought by ICTs in the library, it seems that users are yet to experience the tremendous advantage brought by ICTs in the aspect of electronic reference services.

The survey research design was used for the study. The population includes 250 registered library users. A questionnaire was used to gather data from the respondents. Out of 250 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 179(70%) were duly completed and returned.

Findings show that Babcock University Library users have a limited level of awareness of electronic reference services. It is therefore recommended that library management should create awareness at the various school seminars, during the use of library and study skills classes, etc. The reference librarian(s) should be trained regularly on the use of these modern technologies. If these are done, the awareness and use of electronic services will improve.

Keywords: Users perception of electronic reference service, Reference service, electronic reference service, e-reference service, Babcock University Library.

Introduction

The world has become a global village due to the jet speed of information and communication technology (ICT), and there is a need for information managers and disseminators to equip themselves with the skills required to cope with this trend of development, one of which is to embrace the use of ICT in their reference services. Reference service is a personal service given to a user of information, in the library, or in any other information center. According to Unegbu (2013), myriads ways of disseminating information in information centers exist, each aiming at accomplishing an objective. Reference librarians now provide users with databases that give access to millions of journal articles as well as access to the internet which has holdings of even more libraries and a limitless variety of information from both formal and informal sources. This implies that needed information can now be identified, accessed and delivered within the shortest time possible with very little effort from both the librarian and the client (Ifijeh and Isiakpona, 2013). Also, patrons can send queries anywhere and receive answers from the reference librarian without necessarily visiting the library in person.

Electronic reference service has become a universal feature of libraries in the twenty-first century. Other nomenclatures for electronic reference service include virtual reference service, online reference service and real-time service (Nicholas, 2011; Opara, 2006; Jabir, 2008; and Malik and Mahmood, 2014). In this study, these terms are used interchangeably. Malik and Mahmood (2014) also affirmed that many libraries are offering or advancing towards digital reference service with the intention to meet users' needs anytime anywhere. Electronic reference service is communicating and interacting with users in virtual environments by utilizing computer and internet technology. Digital reference service is defined as a mechanism by which people can submit their questions and have them answered by a library staff member through some electronic means (e-mail, chat, web forms, etc.), not in person (Janes, Carter & Memmott, 1999 in Malik & Mahmood, 2014). Moreover, Nicholas (2011) expressed that students born in the information age want services that are fast and efficient, making the model of providing a service through a physical reference desk obsolete. Nicholas (2011) affirmed that college students, especially undergraduate students live in a 24/7 world and seek out services that cater to their life style. They want services that will assist them in completing their assignments while off-campus, and at any time of the day.

The provision of information services to clients in this age of globalization is tasking especially in developing countries, such as Nigeria. Nicholas (2011) submitted that this new paradigm with its various models each with its own unique functionalities has been much debated in the professional discourses of librarianship. Libraries in developed countries have adopted models of these innovative online reference services in their operations while libraries in countries with developing economies are moving toward embracing them. In a similar vein, Unegbu (2013) stated that developing countries where the needed gadgets may either not be available and/or are too expensive to afford due to poverty are finding it difficult to cope. Notwithstanding any impediment to access the global new technology or from which bloc any country belongs, development does not wait for anybody. The best any country lagging behind could do is to brace up and run a little faster, otherwise, the gap may be too wide to be covered. This is the reason Babcock University library as one of the pioneers of private universities in Nigeria has risen against these impediments to acquire and embrace modern technology in order to provide and meet the information needs of library users at any point in time. However, the level and

extent to which services especially reference services are offered to users electronically is not well known.

Background to the study

Babcock University has its roots in the Adventist College of West Africa (ACWA) established on September 17, 1959 by the first Adventist missionary in Nigeria, Elder David C. Babcock with an initial intake of seven ministerial students (Babcock University, 2009). The University is fully owned and operated by the Seventh - day Adventist (SDA) Church, and registered under the laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to operate as a private university in 1999. According to Babcock University (2006), the vision of the university library is to be a first class provider of research, instructional and information materials in a user friendly environment. As a means of meeting this great task, Babcock University Library has a current holding of 69,719 books (in print), 763 current periodical titles (in print). The library has access to online journals, abstracts and full-text online materials that are accessible to users in and outside the library environment. Babcock University Library has seven service points of now, namely Laz Otti Library, which is the central library, Education and Humanities Library, Management and Social Sciences Library, Science and Technology Library, Nursing Library, Medical Library, and Law and Security Library.

Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of the study aim to:

1. assess the level of users awareness of electronic reference services at Babcock University Library;
2. determine the electronic reference services mostly used by Babcock University Library patrons;
3. find out which electronic reference services are preferred by Babcock University Library patrons;
4. ascertain the adequacy of electronic reference services at Babcock University Library; and
5. find areas patrons would like the library to improve on or provide services.

Literature Review

Library services

In meeting the objectives of the parent institution, the library designed a group of services to fulfill the institutional mission and goals which include reference services. According to Igwe and Onah (2013), the services of libraries and information centers are broadly categorized into technical services (such as collection development, cataloguing, classification, etc.) and readers' services, which are those services that have direct impact on the users for the satisfaction of their information needs. This means that they are services directed at actively exploiting the collection of information resources in response to users' information requirements. Readers services include lending services, reference services, current awareness services (CAS), selective dissemination of information (SDI), indexing and abstracting services, interlibrary loan and document delivery services, resource sharing, and others. Arua (2014) opined that the lecturers require the service of a well-stocked (balanced) and up-to-date library for the preparation of their

lectures and research while the students need it for class assignments, research, projects, term papers, and further readings. The author further identified the following services to library registered users: loan services, reference services (both digital and print), interlibrary cooperation services, photocopy services, bibliographical services, binding services, lamination services, document printing services, computer services like internet browsing, CD-ROM search, and readers' advisory services, etc. Thus, the focus of this study is on e-reference services but before discussing e-reference services, a reference service is briefly looked into.

Reference services

The ultimate aim of any university library is to transmit knowledge to library users. It is said that information is an indispensable tool for survival. This purpose will only be achieved therefore, when the library resources are maximized, effectively and efficiently utilized. It is also true that only when the library and its resources are effectively, maximally, and efficiently utilized that the objectives of the library can be achieved. Reference services fulfill the functions of dissemination of information. Nonetheless, reference services are likely to vary from one library to the other. Odiase, Unegbu and Haliso (2003) categorized reference service into two: retrospective searching; and current awareness services and selective dissemination of information.

Reference sources such as dictionaries, abstracts, encyclopedias, bibliographies, etc. are reference tools used to help patrons meet their information needs. Reference sources provide answers to a specific question, such as brief facts, statistics, and technical instructions; they give background information; or direct users to additional information sources. Simmonds and Andaleeb (2001) in Ademodi (2011) stated that given that the use of academic libraries is influenced most by a user's perceived familiarity with a library and its resources, it is the duty of the librarians to thoroughly acquaint users with their information resources and to teach them to profitably use these resources. Such orientation is not limited to the brick and mortar location but extends to remote use of resources as well.

Electronic reference services

In recent time, there has been an increased usage of ICT in provision of services in the library including the reference services. The fast growth and advancement of these ICTs has led to massive and progressive changes in the services offered and delivered to library clients. This is the reason Egunjobi and Awoyemi (2013) opined that the application of ICTs such as computers, internet, e-mail as well as other networked technologies, has opened up new and wider possibilities and opportunities to global library and information services and products which the traditional library cannot provide. This is evident by the evolution and emergence of virtual, digital, or libraries without borders. Velmurugan (n.d.) also posited that changes in recent years have dramatically altered how information is accessed, stored and disseminated. Whereas information provision in academic libraries was previously based upon the collection of physical library materials, it is now increasingly the case that academic libraries are moving into the virtual arena, providing access to information on local, regional, national and international, overcoming the traditional barriers of time and space.

Iwhiwhu, Ruteyan and Eghwubare (2010) noted that before the advent of ICTs, communication in the library was done through books, newspapers, microforms, slides, etc. The use of telephones and computers led to the internet. They also note that the application of telecommunications to an automated library system can bring more efficiency to library services. Just as the Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) has revolutionized the daily lives of individuals, so has it enhanced library operations, including the reference service. This implies that operations carried out manually and physically in the reference section of the library can be done electronically.

Lotts and Graves (2011) assert that reference services are becoming more mobile as technology allows librarians to expand service points and outreach opportunities. They note that the iPad is used primarily for roving reference by the reference and instruction librarians. When librarians are scheduled for a “roving reference” shift, they can check out an iPad from a locked staff drawer at the information Desk (Lotts & Graves, 2011). Oulton and Fisher (1995) remarked that reference plays an important role in reaching patrons (international students and general public). In this era of information and communication technologies, users can request a service via the internet, ask a question and send to the reference librarian by a text, request for a document to be scanned and sent to him/her, make a call to a reference librarian, and much more. Zickuhr, Rainie and Purcell (2013) found in their study that a notable share of Americans say they would embrace even wider uses of technology at libraries which include but are not limited to online research service allowing patrons to pose questions and get answers from the librarians. Elahi and Islam (2014) affirmed that mobile devices and application provide access to information in the comfort of people’s homes and offices, using their cellular phones or personal digital assistance. Hence the authors established in their study of “Go fast, go with mobile ...” a satisfactory response of students on the status of mobile phone usage for library services.

Herman (2007) in Elahi and Islam (2014) noted that short message services (SMS) has become a popular way of communication particularly, among the younger generation. In the same vein, Maxymuk (2009) declared that text messaging offers a variety of ways to stay vital and visible to younger patrons with whom libraries most need to establish a relationship to ensure their future. Fox (2010) in Elahi and Islam (2014) expressed that the fabric of our lives has become interwoven with mobile technology as our day-to-day means of operation have, by necessity, become more mobile in the education context, factors such as the increasing role of distance education enhance the need for mobile technology. Libraries that add mobile technologies to their traditional services will not make them only available but also more relevant to their users. Mobile technologies can be used to present the following services: library websites, Short Message Services (SMS) reference, and Mobile Online Public Access Catalogue (MOPA C) (Murray, 2010).

Massey-Burzio (2002) in Malik and Mahmood (2014) however expressed that although libraries own authentic and credible resource, students computer use and internet connectivity often compromise quality for convenience. Malik and Mahmood (2014) stated that the literature reveals that a large number of students perceive Google as a solution to every problem despite the dilemma of irrelevant and unauthentic retrieval due to insufficient searching skills. Zanin-Yost (2004) submitted that having access to sophisticated technology and more information does not necessarily mean that users have better searching skills. Thus, this is where librarians come

in to help users sieve relevant information from the myriad of information. Dunn and Morgan (2003) and Massey-Burzio (2002) in Malik and Mahmood also believe that this state of affairs gave libraries an impulse to reach users electronically where they are and provide quick access to relevant, credible and authentic sources. Therefore, taking these services as a challenge, librarians are moving aggressively towards designing new types of services, accessible virtually to remote users by incorporating modern technologies like fax, cellphone, e-mail, chatting and video conferencing.

According to Nicholas (2011) digital/electronic reference services may be divided into two main categories – asynchronous or delayed, and synchronous or real-time service. Asynchronous services include services such as web-based email, web form service, ‘ask-a’ service, and online pathfinders. These services share a number of similarities and disadvantages. Although they are easy to use, convenient and cheaper to implement, they are often criticized for their lack of interactivity and immediacy. The possibility of librarians conducting reference is either limited or non-existent. The other category of service, synchronous, is described as real-time communication between librarian and the patrons over the internet. The methods used to provide this type of service include chat and instant messaging (IM), real-time live web chat reference using web-based contact software, and 24/7 (24hours a day/7 days a week) collaboration. One main characteristic is that these services allow the patron to be online during the reference process. Added features of the web chat services and the cooperatives include co-browsing, electronic queuing of patrons, sending of webpages, pre-defined text messaging, chat transfers among librarians, conferencing, complete transcript record of the entire session, and a knowledge base.

Nicholas (2011) further stated that recently, there has been an increased usage of Web 2.0 applications, mobile technologies, and virtual world in the provision of reference services. However, their application is dependent on the skills and knowledge of the reference librarians or the preferences of the librarians. Librarians are encouraged to assist patrons where they need help – in the stacks, at the OPAC terminal, and in the hallways. The roving librarian concept makes it possible for the librarian to answer patrons’ call and at the same time be in contact with other librarian either on other floors or at other branches. Nicholas advised that reference should never be seen as a place; it is a service which can be provided from anywhere – at home or on the move.

Methodology

The survey research design was used for the study. The total population includes 250 registered users of the library made up of students from various schools, faculty members, postgraduate students, and community users. A questionnaire was used for data collection, which was distributed to the respondents in the library to ensure they are library users within the period of two weeks. Out of the 250 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 179 (70%) were duly completed and returned. Data was analyzed using frequency count, percentages, mean and standard deviation, presented in tables.

Interpretation and presentation of result

The analysis and interpretation of users' perception of electronic reference services in Babcock University Library is shown below.

Table 1: showing distribution of the respondents school

School of the Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Babcock Business School	100	55.9
Science & Technology	32	17.9
Education & Humanities	15	8.4
Faculty	13	7.3
Postgraduate	12	6.7
Law & Security Studies	5	2.8
Community	2	1.1
Total	179	100.0

Table 1: shows the respondents at various schools. It revealed that majority (55.9%) of the respondents were from Babcock Business School, followed by Science and Technology with 17.9%, and then followed by Education and Humanity with 8.4%. Faculty members and Postgraduate school form 7.3% and 6.7% respectively; while Law & Security and Community had 2.8% and 1.1% respectively.

Table 2: showing age distribution of the respondents

Age (years)	Frequency	Percentage
16 – 25	127	71.0
26 – 35	31	17.3
36 – 45	12	6.7
46 – 55	7	4.0
56 and above	2	1.0
Total	179	100.0

Table 2 shows that majority 127(71.0%) of the respondents fall between the ages of 16 – 25years. Those within the ages of 26 – 35 had score rate of 31(17.3%). This is followed by those between the ages of 36 – 45 with 12(6.7%). Also, those between the ages of 46 – 55 had a score rate of 7(4.0), while those from 56 years and above had a score rate of 2(1.0%).

Table 3: Showing level of awareness of electronic reference services at Babcock University Library

E-Reference Services	HA	A	SA	NA	Mean	SD
Internet	91 50.8%	45 25.1%	26 14.5%	17 9.5%	2.17	1.01
Printer	59 33.0%	54 30.2%	29 16.2%	37 20.7%	1.75	1.13
E-Mail	51 28.5%	40 22.3%	31 17.3%	57 31.8%	1.47	1.21
Scanner	32 17.9%	55 30.7%	43 24.0%	49 27.4%	1.39	1.07
SMS	45 25.1%	43 24.0%	23 12.8%	68 38.0%	1.36	1.23
Cellphone	45 25.1%	40 22.3%	29 16.2%	65 36.3%	1.36	1.21
Android	34 19.0%	39 21.8%	16 8.9%	90 50.3%	1.09	1.22
CD-ROM	23 12.8%	38 21.2%	33 18.4%	85 47.5%	.99	1.10
I-pod	25 14.0%	30 16.8%	24 13.4%	100 55.9%	.89	1.13
Video Conferencing	14 7.8%	20 11.2%	21 11.7%	124 69.3%	.58	.97
Fascimile (Fax)	5 2.8%	17 9.5%	34 19.0%	123 68.7%	.46	.78
Grand mean					1.23	.76

Highly Aware (HA) = 3; Aware (A) = 2; Slightly Aware (SA) = 1; Not Aware (NA) = 0

Table 3 shows the order of awareness of users' awareness of electronic reference services at Babcock University Library. Level of awareness of each service has been ordered by the mean value. Mean value above 2 indicates most respondents are aware, below 2 indicates slight awareness, and below 1 indicates majority are not aware. Thus, it is evident that majority (2.17) of the respondents are aware of the internet services at Babcock University Library. Some are slightly aware of printer (1.75), e-mail (1.47), scanner (1.39), SMS and cellphone (1.36) respectively, and android (1.09). The respondents were not aware of CDROM, I-pod, video conferencing and facsimile with mean values of .99, .89, .58, and .46 respectively. This implies that if the respondents are not aware of the existence of the various services, they are not likely to make use of them. The finding is dissimilar to the opinion of Lotts and Graves (2011) who stated that reference services are becoming more mobile as technology allows librarians to expand service points; also Egunjobi and Awoyemi (2013) who stated that the application of ICTs such as computers, internet, email, etc. has opened new and wider possibilities and opportunities to global library and information services and products which the traditional library cannot provide.

Table 4: Showing level of utilization of electronic reference services at Babcock University

E-Reference Services Utilized	HU	U	SU	NU	Mean	SD
Internet	79 44.1%	30 16.8%	37 20.7%	33 18.4%	1.87	1.17
Printer	38 21.2%	52 29.1%	36 20.1%	53 29.6%	1.42	1.13
E-Mail	43 24.0%	44 24.6%	32 17.9%	60 33.5%	1.39	1.18
Cellphone	50 27.9%	32 17.9%	30 16.8%	67 37.4%	1.36	1.24
SMS	43 24.0%	36 20.1%	33 18.4%	67 37.4%	1.31	1.20
Scanner	22 12.3%	39 21.8%	57 31.8%	61 34.1%	1.12	1.02
Android	27 15.1%	29 16.2%	21 11.7%	102 57.0%	.89	1.15
I-pod	20 11.2%	25 14.0%	24 13.4%	110 61.5%	.75	1.07
CD-ROM	18 10.1%	20 11.2%	39 21.8%	102 57.0%	.74	1.01
Video Conferencing	11 6.1%	18 10.1%	25 14.0%	125 69.8%	.53	.91
Fascimile (Fax)	6 3.4%	11 6.1%	35 19.6%	127 70.9%	.42	.76
				Grand mean	1.07	0.77

Highly Utilized (HU) = 3; Utilized (U) = 2; Slightly Utilized (SU) = 1; Not Utilized (NU) = 0

Level of utilization of each service has been ordered by the mean value. Mean value above 2 indicates most respondents utilized such, below 2 indicates slight utilization, and below 1 indicates majority do not utilize the service. Table 4 shows that majority of the respondents slightly utilize internet, printer, e-mail, cellphone, SMS, and scanner. Their mean values are 1.87, 1.42, 1.39, 1.36, 1.31, and 1.12; while Android (.89), I-pod (.75), CD-ROM (.74), video conferencing (.53) and facsimile (.42) were not utilized. This result is in contrast with that of Dun and Morgan (2003) and Massey-Burzio (2002) who noted that the current state of affairs (technology) will give libraries an impulse to reach users electronically where they are and provide access to relevant, credible and authentic sources. Also, Zickhr, Rainie and Purcell (2013) who found out that a notable share of Americans say they would embrace even wider uses of technology at libraries which include but not limited to online research service that allow patrons to pose questions and get answers from the librarians.

Table 5: Showing the level of preference of electronic reference services at Babcock University Library

E-Reference Services Preferred	Highly Preferred	Preferred	Slightly Preferred	Not Preferred	Mean	SD
Internet	137 76.5%	24 13.4%	13 7.3%	5 2.8%	2.64	.74
E-Mail	86 48.0%	54 30.2%	30 16.8%	9 5.0%	2.21	.890
SMS	76 42.5%	59 33.0%	28 15.6%	16 8.9%	2.09	.97
Cellphone	71 39.7%	61 34.1%	29 16.2%	18 10.1%	2.03	.98
Printer	66 36.9%	68 38.0%	30 16.8%	15 8.4%	2.03	.94
Android	74 41.3%	33 18.4%	43 24.0%	29 16.2%	1.85	1.13
Scanner	59 33.0%	56 31.3%	40 22.3%	24 13.4%	1.84	1.03
I-pod	65 36.3%	38 21.2%	41 22.9%	35 19.6%	1.74	1.15
Video Conferencing	48 26.8%	46 25.7%	46 25.7%	39 21.8%	1.58	1.11
CD-ROM	39 21.8%	52 29.1%	48 26.8%	40 22.3%	1.50	1.07
Fascimile (Fax)	21 11.7%	25 14.0%	49 27.4%	84 46.9%	.91	1.04
Grand mean					1.86	0.68

Level of preference of each service has been ordered by the mean value. Mean value above 2 indicates most respondents prefer such, below 2 indicates slight preference, and below 1 indicates majority do not prefer. As shown in table 5, the order of preference of electronic reference services of users at Babcock University Library: Internet, e-mail, SMS, cellphone and printer are preferred by the respondents. Their mean values are 2.64, 2.21, 2.09, and 2.03 respectively. Whereas, Android, scanner, I-pod, video conferencing and CD-ROM are found to be slightly preferred; while facsimile is not preferred with mean values of 1.85, 1.84, 1.74, 1.58, 1.50, and .91 respectively. This result closely corroborate with that of Zickhr, Rainie and Purcell (2013) that found out that a notable share of Americans say they would embrace even wider uses of technology at libraries which include but not limited to online research service that allow patrons to pose questions and get answers from the librarians.

Table 6: Showing adequacy of e-reference services at Babcock University Library

Adequacy of e-reference services	Highly Adequate	Adequate	Slightly Adequate	Not Adequate	Mean	SD
Internet	53 29.6%	41 22.9%	37 20.7%	48 26.8%	1.55	1.18
Printer	39 21.8%	53 29.6%	49 27.4%	38 21.2%	1.52	1.06
Cellphone	40 22.3%	50 27.9%	37 20.7%	52 29.1%	1.44	1.13
E-Mail	33 18.4%	56 31.3%	45 25.1%	45 25.1%	1.43	1.06
SMS	41 22.9%	45 25.1%	39 21.8%	54 30.2%	1.41	1.15
Scanner	39 21.8%	41 22.9%	42 23.5%	57 31.8%	1.35	1.14
I-pod	25 14.0%	32 17.9%	40 22.3%	82 45.8%	1.00	1.10
Android	24 13.4%	33 18.4%	40 22.3%	82 45.8%	.99	1.09
CD-ROM	17 9.5%	40 22.3%	45 25.1%	77 43.0%	.98	1.02
Video Conferencing	12 6.7%	42 23.5%	37 20.7%	88 49.2%	.88	.99
Fascimile (Fax)	20 11.2%	32 17.9%	30 16.8%	97 54.2%	.86	1.07
Grand mean					1.21	0.83

Level of adequacy of each service has been ordered by the mean value. Mean value above 2 shows that most respondents indicate that the e-reference services are adequate, below 2 indicates slightly adequate, and below 1 indicates majority agreed that the services are not adequate. Table 6 shows the level of adequacy of electronic reference services at Babcock University Library. It is evident that majority of the respondents indicated that internet, printer, cellphone e-mail, SMS, scanner and I-pod are slightly adequate. Their mean values are 1.55, 1.52, 1.44, 1.43, 1.41, 1.35 and 1.00 while Android, CD-ROM, video conferencing and facsimile are not adequate. This means that inadequacy of these devices in the library could likely lead to patrons not utilizing them. This is in contrast with Fox (2010) who noted that libraries that add mobile technologies to their traditional services will not make them only visible but also more relevant to their users, while Nicholas (2011) advised that reference services should never be seen as a place but rather as a service which can be provided at home or on the move.

As part of the objectives of this study, the study tried to find areas of electronic reference services the respondents would want the library to provide. The following were their responses:

1. Awareness of the available services should be created so that clients will know about their existence and therefore use them. X60
2. Free internet should be made accessible to all students within the campus. X 45
3. Adequate computers accessible by students at any time should be available. X 12
4. Librarians should make themselves visible. X8

These suggestions from the respondents indicate that not that these services are not available in the library, but the librarians have not created enough awareness for users to request for these services.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concluded that electronic reference services are not adequately utilized in Babcock University Library due to lack of awareness of the availability of these services in the library; hence it is recommended that proper and regular awareness of these services should be created to the users during the various schools weekly seminars where students and faculty members are expected to be present; during the undergraduate and postgraduate orientation; during the use of library and study skills classes. Memos can as well be sent to Deans and HODs to sensitize their staff during their meetings. Also, posters should be designed and pasted on strategic notice boards in the university premises. The reference librarian(s) should be trained regularly on the use of these modern technologies as these will help them on efficient and effective service provision. This will go a long way to help in creating awareness of electronic reference services in Babcock University Library that will lead to their use(s).

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