

A Descriptive Study on Reference Work in University Libraries

Dr. Dilek KÖPRÜLÜ*

Abstract

In this study the essentials of traditional reference work and impacts of technological developments on reference work in university libraries are described.

At the end of the paper a general evaluation of reference work in developed countries and Turkey is made.

Keywords:

College and university libraries-reference work or reference services; reference librarian; reference collection; reference interview, bibliographic instruction or use instruction, reference work and technology; reference work-Internet.

Özet :

Bu çalışmada üniversite kütüphanelerindeki geleneksel danışma hizmetinin esasları ve teknolojik gelişmelerin danışma hizmeti üzerindeki etkileri ele alınmaktadır.

Makalenin sonunda gelişmiş ülkelerde ve Türkiye'deki danışma hizmetlerine ait genel bir değerlendirme yapılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler:

Üniversite kütüphaneleri - danışma hizmeti, danışma kütüphanecisi, danışma koleksiyonu, danışma hizmetinde görüşme (interview); bibliyografik eğitim, üniversite kütüphaneleri - kullanıcı eğitimi, danışma hizmeti-teknoloji, danışma hizmeti-Internet.

* Dr. Dilek Köprülü, lecturer at Hacettepe University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Library Science.

1. Introduction

University libraries are integral parts of the universities. They have supportive role on the education and research functions of the universities. Therefore, they have an important role on the development of the universities. Since its user groups (faculty members, graduate and undergraduate students) and collection (many scholarly and research materials) differ from the other type of libraries, reference work differs in university libraries as well.

Today's university library differs from the libraries of thirty years ago. Impacts of technological developments on libraries are great: Invention of microcomputers and compact disc technology, networks and electronic telecommunications. Library services have been computerized. Most of the libraries have computerized catalog (OPAC: Online Public Access Catalog) and now, users of the universities may sit on a terminal and search it. Also they may search CDROMs, read full text journal articles and use the network to access libraries in their country and world wide.

New technological developments have also affected the reference services. Reference librarianship has changed tremendously. New reference formats have been produced such as CDROMs and electronic databases. Librarians use Internet for some reference purposes. Briefly, new technology has introduced new skills, new services to reference work and information access has gained much speed.

This particular study aims to give basic information about traditional reference work in university libraries and impacts of new technological developments on reference services as well.

2. Description of Reference Work

Many definitions about reference work have been offered over the years. One of them though an old phrase, is a good sum of reference work: "Right information to the right person at the right time in the right form" (Aspnes, 1967:165). William Katz has defined reference work as "The process of answering questions" (in Jahoda and Braunagel, 1980:4). Reference work can be defined generally as the process of satisfying information needs of users by using internal and external library sources in the fastest and easiest way. New technology brought speed;

therefore, we can say that today reference work has been converted into rapid access of information.

"Reference desk" is the contact point where users find information, services and assistance. It should also be placed near card catalog, because librarians instruct the users on how to use card and automated catalog; they interview with the users and teach them how to use reference tools at this desk.

3. Reference Librarian

After Samuel S. Green's article was published in 1876 in *Library Journal* ("Personal Relations Between Librarians and Readers") the reference librarians' role was changed. Since then they have become a bridge between users and the library collection. University library reference work began with Melvil Dewey's creation of reference department in Columbia University and the assistance which the university librarians had given to readers became very important (Retting, 1993: 703). Today even though university libraries have electronic reference services there is and will be a need for a reference librarian to help users learn how to use the electronic library (Yurdadoğ, 1997:77).

If we look at the literature we can see that various names are attributed to reference librarians, such as "information specialist", "information scientist", "information providers", "information mediators"... As the reference librarians have an important role on information transmission, some competences are expected from them. Katz and Sherrer define these competences as the ability to comprise skills, knowledge and attitudes (Katz, 1987b:8 and Sherrer, 1996:14). Experience is a major factor (over ten years). They should be competent and able to establish good relationship with users, able to negotiate a reference interview and its evaluation and act as an adviser to the users as to the currency, accuracy and sufficiency of information retrieved and received (Katz, 1987b: 8). In line with new technological developments on reference work, reference librarians must increase their knowledge in technology, software development and information systems. Besides, university library reference librarians should have researcher behaviour and have analytic and creative thinking skills as well.

In developed countries some university libraries require master's degree as well for reference librarians.

4. Reference Collection

Since education and research are primary functions of the universities, reference collection has great importance. It includes printed and electronic sources. Some of them are information sources of curriculum, some of them are starting point of researches and some of them develop researches. Therefore, they should be current resources.

Printed reference sources are; general and subject encyclopedias, all kinds of dictionaries, various biographical sources and yearbooks, almanacs, all kinds of bibliographies, all kinds of indexes and abstracts. In addition to printed forms almost all indexes and abstracts can be acquired in electronic forms (databases). We can search these databases by online or via CDROMs. These are bibliographic databases. Also some encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources are in non-bibliographic databases (Moore, 1996:7).

5. Reference Interview

Answering a query successfully depends on a good reference interview. The reference interview is the main element of reference work and it means communication between reference librarian and library users. It requires good listening. This is the main element of successful interviewing (Katz, 1992d:56).

Reference librarian use "open" and "close" questions in the interview. In the first step the reference librarian delivers open questions to determine the users need(s). After general understanding which was provided by open questions, reference librarian delivers close questions to determine how much information is needed. Close questions limit the conversation between the librarian and the user since they involve just "yes" or "no" answer. Open questions can not be answered with "yes" or "no" since they seek additional information on the users' need(s) (Katz, 1992d:93).

Interviewing the user is not always necessary. Reference librarian should decide whether to conduct an interview or not. It can be said that it is on the basis of the question type. Especially when the user asks directional questions and simple ready reference questions, reference interview is not necessary.

6. Question Types

The question is the heart of the reference work. Each question should be considered and tried to be answered by the reference librarian. The measure of the reference work is the proper answer. As indicated by Katz and Moore, reference questions can be grouped as follows (Katz, 1987b: 11-16 and Moore, 1996:6).

Directional questions: User who knows what he looks for, but doesn't know where it is, asks directional questions. The time required to answer such questions is negligible. They are % 30 of the total questions.

Ready reference (quick reference) questions: They are answered from one or two of the standard reference sources (such as an encyclopedia, dictionary, almanac, handbook...). Their answers are short and simple. The answering time is about one to ten minutes.

Specific search questions: The user who needs much deeper information, asks specific search questions. They are called bibliographic inquiries because users are referred to bibliographic tools of the library, such as card catalog (or OPAC), various indexes or bibliographies. Their answer are not only in the reference materials but on the shelf materials of the library. The reference librarian may use interlibrary loan service to bring a book, an article or the photocopies of them. The answering time of specific search questions is about ten to sixty minutes.

Research questions: Every specific search question may turn to a research question. The differences between them are their scope and time spent. Research questions are much broader than specific search questions. Various materials are used for answering them such as a book, an article, a pamphlet, a newspaper article, microfilm, photocopy of rare materials, etc. Sometimes they are obtained from the other libraries of the country or the other countries. These types of questions include the major percentage of the all questions in university libraries. Users ask them for their researches, term papers, seminars or conference papers.

In addition to the ones above, reference queries may be divided into two general categories (Katz, 1987b: 11).

1- The user asks for a known item. The user who asks these questions knows what he looks for (name of a book or an article or film or author). The reference librarian locates the item through card catalog (or OPAC), an index, a bibliography...

2- The user asks for information without any knowledge of a specific source. In these cases reference interview should be used.

7. Search strategy

Search strategy generally begins with an interview once the reference librarian has received the message and has understood the question. The next step is to match the question with the source(s) most likely yield to the answer. Here, librarian's decision depends on the user's need(s). One simple source or more complex sources or even several sources may be needed. The search strategy depends primarily upon the nature of the inquiry.

The search process may be outlined as follows (Katz, 1992b: 71):

1- The query is first analyzed and clarified via the reference interview. Then the reference librarian determine the type of the question to be asked, the parameters to be established (i.e. purpose, time spent, amount of material, level of material, etc.) and the sources where the necessary information is likely to be found.

2- In the majority of ready reference questions a source readily come to mind, the source is consulted and the answer is given.

3- In the case of specific search and research queries (and more difficult ready reference questions), it is necessary to consider many sources or possibilities.

4- At this point, a likely source usually is one of the following possibilities:

- a)- Bibliographic tools such as card catalog, bibliographies, indexes. They have access point to answers.
- b)- Subject sources from standard reference books to magazines, newspapers, pamphlets and books on the shelves.

5- Where the card catalog, bibliographies, etc. which are to be searched for key sources, the reference librarian must determine the likely subject headings. Lists of keywords are helpful aids. Subject headings are chosen.

6- A Choice of action must then be made. The reference librarian may broaden the search in terms of the subject headings, narrow the search, select more specific or less specific subject headings or find more appropriate terms.

7- In the 4 to 6 steps there should be some dialog between the user and the librarian. Sometimes the dialog may follow later when likely material is gathered.

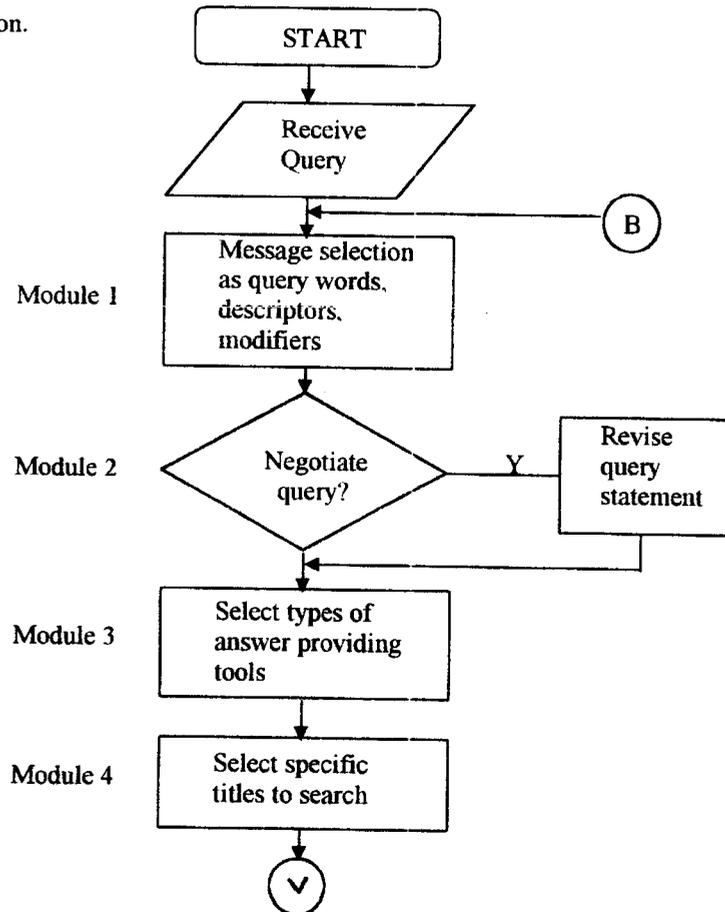
8- At this point of the search the following decisions are made:

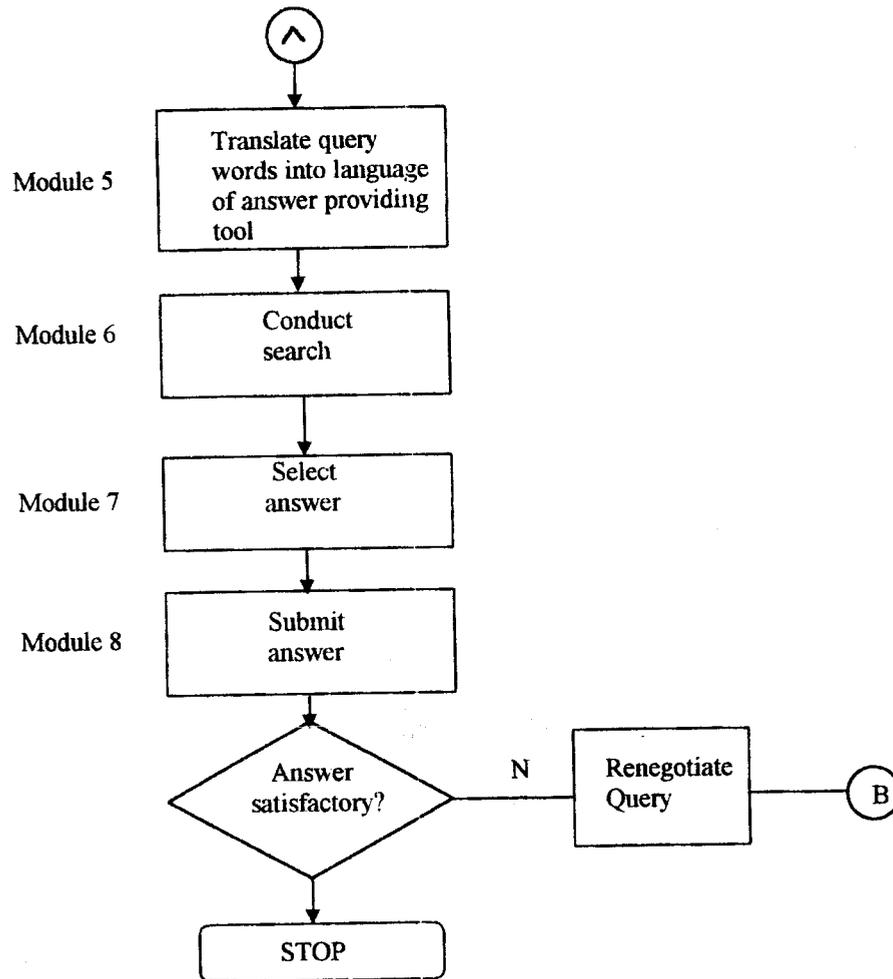
a)- If there is more than a minimal amount of material, the librarian must decide in what order to search the material located via the bibliography, catalog, index, etc.

b)- Given some of the material a judgement has to be made as to the relevance of material to the specific question put forth by the user.

c)- If nothing can be found, the librarian must decide whether to try new or modified approaches, to give up or to suggest to the user other ways of approach (i.e. other libraries, interlibrary loan, a reframing of the request etc.).

d)- In any case the librarian must determine how much time can be devoted to answering the question.





This reference process model was developed by Jahoda and Braunagel (1980:2).

8. Reference Work

As indicated by Katz, reference work might be divided into two categories; directional and indirectional reference work (Katz, 1969a: 35). The first is a person to person relationship, the second consists of behind the scenes activities. These categories can be applied to all kinds of libraries. Since university libraries have different levels of users, reference work related to these categories differ from the other types of libraries.

8.1. Directional reference work includes the following:

Information: According to user queries information is given directly to users or they have been referred to information sources. Since university libraries have the users of various academic levels this service is given in various ways.

Needed information is not given to undergraduate students directly. But they are referred to relevant sources. However, needed information is found and given directly to postgraduate students, except bibliographies which are not prepared for them and they are expected to be able to use the reference sources. However librarians help them when they need assistance. Needed information is given directly to faculty members (Katz, 1969a:151-154 and Çapar, 1972:34).

Guidance: It is an important function of the reference work. It is an assistance of identification and selection of relevant library materials to a particular need of users (Retting 1993:705).

Literature searching: There are two types of searches in reference work. One of them is manual search or searching of printed materials. The other is the computer-assisted search (i.e. online or CD-ROM). In this search various bibliographic databases are searched by reference librarians (Katz, 1992d: 67). Bibliographies related to users' topics are prepared by librarians. Successful searching depends on setting up a robots search strategy and obtaining relevant keywords from the user. The search is conducted by reference librarian by using Boolean connectory (Katz, 1987c:136-137).

Selective Dissemination Information (SDI) Service: It is the most important current awareness service of the university library. The librarian searches the available new literature and prepares bibliographies to the faculty members. In the first step for each faculty member

a profile is prepared. According to the profile, the librarian searches databases via computer and obtain the latest information on the topic and the printout is sent to the faculty member periodically (such as once a week, once a month etc.). In this way the material is "selected" from the latest periodical indexes or databases and the "information" is "disseminated" to the user (Katz, 1992d: 17 and Thomas, Hinckle and Eisenbach, 1981:18).

Library Instruction (broadly defined library user education): Since it includes to teach users how to use library and reference sources effectively, it is one of the important functions of reference work. (Tiefel, 1995:319). Instruction is applied in two ways: Informal and formal instruction. Informal instruction is applied from the reference desk by the reference librarian when the user asks question. The interaction between reference librarian and the user performed effectively at this point. The user's question is answered by the reference librarian in a specialist-quality way. Teaching is done what the user permits and answers are limited by the question of the user. The librarian cannot give additional information if the user does not want to take in (Katz, 1992d:56 and Keyman, 1981:165).

Formal instruction is applied with various continuous programs to users. They are "orientation" and "instruction" programs. Orientation programs are local programs and are applied to new students at the beginning of each academic year. Students are introduced to the library and services. Orientation includes guided tours, lectures or self guided tours (Moore, 1996:8 and Keyman, 1981:165).

Insturction programs differ from orientation programs. These are designed to teach library users how to locate information efficiently. The essential goals of this process are an understanding of the library system and an ability to use selected reference materials such as indexes, abstracts, etc. (Emerson, 1984:69). These programs should provide basic, intermediate and advanced guidance in the use of the library for students and faculty as well (Tiefel, 1995: 336).

In developed countries these programs are designed as credit and non credit courses by reference librarians in the universities. These are one of the most effective user education methods. They involve the basic methodology of finding information that can be applied to various disciplines (Tiefel, 1995: 324 and Renford and Hendrickson, 1980:167).

One of the most used instruction method is tape-slide programs for groups and individuals

(Thomas, Hinckle and Eisenbach, 1981: 11). Also printed guides, handbooks, leaflets are important orientation and instruction tools. They include the plan of the library, library services and use of card catalog and reference sources (Renford and Hendrickson, 1980:22).

Another instruction method is the computer assisted instruction. It involves the use of the computer and teaching of the library skills. Individuals can learn by interacting with pre-programmed lessons. Programs are selected by users and questions are answered step by step (Collins and Takacs, 1995: 47 and Renford and Hendrickson, 1980:150).

Since electronic reference services have been initiated in the university libraries, the reference librarian should teach library user how to make use of electronic services such as CDROM's, computerized catalog, Internet etc (Yurdadağ, 1997:77 and Blumenthal, Howard and Kinyon, 1993:12).

8.2. Indirect reference work includes the following(Katz, 1987b:6-7)

Management of Reference Department: The Reference Department's work is managed by head of the department. The head is responsible for effective performance of professional and non professional personnels, arrangement of physical possibilities, preparation of reference collection policy and selection of reference collection. Also the department's activities with other departments of the library are coordinated by the head.

Selecting and weeding of reference materials: Although the last decision belongs to the reference librarian, the selection process is done by faculty members and the librarian together. Book and serial formats of reference collection are selected from standard and subject bibliographic guides, publishers catalogs, national library catalogs, trade bibliographies of books and serials, reviews of reference books.

The reference collection policy is a part of whole collection development policy of the library. Such policies define the criteria of acquiring new materials and weeding obsolete or unused materials. (Thomas, Hinckle and Eisenbach, 1981: 28). There is an essential rule for a university library reference collection" to have up to date materials".

Interlibrary loan activities: It is one of the most useful service of the reference department. Regional and national university libraries lend books, periodicals to other libraries which haven't

got these materials.

Keeping statistics of reference questions: According to the types of questions, statistics of answers are kept at reference desk, such as information, teaching, research etc. They are evaluated monthly and annually.

Organizing pamphlet files (vertical file) and university catalogs: Pamphlets and university catalogs of national and foreign countries are kept at the reference room. Their records are organized by the reference department. Since the pamphlets have valuable information for their possible users their records should be kept in both card catalog and the reference department.

Miscellaneous works: Reference librarians develop and maintain in-house files of reference materials to meet their local needs. They display new books after their being catalogued. Besides reference librarians are responsible for organizing the reference collection and the reference room as well.

9. Evaluation of Reference Services

In developed countries some studies on the quality of reference services are conducted. These are evaluative studies and the data obtained from them are important for development of the quality of reference services.

As indicated by Katz, evaluation of reference services should be conducted for following purposes:

- 1- To check the current status of the service.
- 2- To discover methods for immediate and long range improvement.
- 3- To determine the need for modification of goals and philosophy of service.

There are some evaluation techniques for fulfilling these purposes. These are interviewing direct observations, case studies, sampling, questionnaires and self evaluation. Ideally reference librarians must try all of them in a combination (Katz, 1987c: 257).

10. Internet and Reference Work

Since 1992, information sources (some dictionaries, thesauri, government documents, various historical documents) have become increasingly available on the Internet. In U.S.A.,

reference librarians have begun to use the Internet in providing ready reference services to their users. Providing access to information via Internet is often quicker than using print sources (Lanier and Wilkins, 1994: 359).

Some substantive reference questions can be negotiated successfully via e-mail. So as indicated by Abels, we can say it will be possible to provide reference interview through Internet (Abels, 1996:357). According to Koutnik's study, almost one of every three reference questions is searched in the Web (Study of 104 reference questions) (Koutnik, 1997: 429). Also the reference librarians communicate with each other using Internet. In case of difficult reference questions, they need professional communications (Cramer and Johnson, 1996:140).

With Internet users and librarians easily have access to OPACs. It is possible to obtain bibliographic information of many libraries' materials in a short time. Also reference librarians access online bibliographic databases such as DIALOG, MEDLINE, OCLC, RLN... Therefore they can give readily bibliographic services to their users (Lanier and Wilkins, 1994:361).

Interlibrary loan service can be provided by using Internet. According to users' needs some library materials are loaned from the other libraries. According to results of the Kadner and Tillman's study, the ratio of this kind of questions among the other reference questions is about % 90 (in Kurbanoglu, 1997:267).

Handbooks and guides prepared for library user education purposes are also placed in Internet. They are updated more easily than the printed ones. Therefore users easily find new changes about them. According to Brandt some user education programs will be placed on Web, such as orientation tours, catalog use.. with text, graphic, voice and action (Brandt, 1997:52).

World Wide Web is a powerfull source of information, but it will not answer all reference questions. Therefore it will not replace reference sources (Koutnik, 1997:429). Dickstein and Greenfield have grouped the subjects of the questions which are answered by using Internet, in nine areas: Current interesting events and developments, management information of financial and industrial organizations, information about government, information about arts, culture, sports and, health, Internet information, directory information about some organizations, tourism and travel information (Dickstein and Greenfield, 1997:62).

In Turkey Internet is in the Library Science Departments' curriculum. Many university libraries have Web pages on Internet. For librarians KUTUP-L discussion list is also very useful. It can be used for answering reference questions, as well.

Turkish academic community has recently started a new Internet (Internet II) which is different from the known Internet. They are working on it now, which seems to be developing fast. (For detailed information one can contact to the address of <http://www.Internet2.edu>).

11. Conclusion

In developed countries many university libraries are being changed into electronic libraries. Reference Departments of the university librarians are in the period of transition of between electronic and printed world. They should find a balance between maintaining traditional services and moving forward to the new technologies of 21st century.

Although reference librarianship has changed tremendously in the last 20 years, reference librarian's - in a traditional phrase - intermediary role between users and library collections or - in a new phrase - providing personal assistance to individuals seeking information has remained constant.

In our country we can see many automated university libraries. Beside, most of them have new technological facilities such as online and CD-ROM search and literature searching. But we also have unautomated university libraries.

Library Schools teach new applications beside theoretical and practical courses to the students. Therefore the graduates have become skilled and knowledged librarians. Bilkent University, M.E.T.U., Gazi University and Hacettepe University Libraries are good examples which have new technological applications at different levels.

University libraries which have a limited budget face serious problems in Turkey. These are rising costs of reference materials, lack of necessary hardware and personnel. SDI which is an important current awareness service of university libraries can not be provided. It can be said that well-organized funds are the initial and vital necessity of some university libraries in our country.

Studies on evaluation of reference services are not performed in Turkish university libraries,

because this kind of studies require personnel, time and money; but there are some researches on the evaluation of library services in Library Science Departments in Turkey. We hope that these researches will be applied in a short time.

In U.S.A. many university library collections have been altered from a "just in case" approach to "just in time" approach and high speed networks provide user access to information in a very short time. Also, they have electronic collections and faculty members use them. Turkish university libraries should catch up with this electronic revolution.

For university libraries, there is a well-known phrase in the library community. "Library is the heart of the university". Since the reference departments are the access points of libraries, we can adopt the above phrase as, "reference work is the heart of university library". The success of academic units as well as academic members are affected by the library services mainly by reference services.

Bibliography

Abels, Elien G. (1996). "The E-mail Reference Interview", *REFERENCE LIBRARIAN* Spring 35(3): 345-357.

Aspens, Grieg. (1967). "Comment". Winifred B. Linderman (ed). *THE PRESENT STATUS AD FUTURE PROSPECTS OF REFERENCE INFORMATION SERVICE* içinde (165-167). Chicago: American Library Association.

Blumenthal, Caroline, Mary Jo Howard William R. Kinyon. (1993). "The Impact of CD-ROM Technology on a Bibliographic Instruction Prgram", *COLLEGE AND RESEARCH LIBRARIES* 54(1):11-16.

Brandt. D. Scott. (1997). "Multiple Personalities of Delivering Training via the Web", *COMPUTERS IN LIBRARIES* 17(8): 51-53.

Collins, Kelly L.K. and Sharon Nelson Takacs. (1993). "Information Technology and the teaching role to the college librarian". Samuel T. Huang (ed). *MODERN LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY AND REFERENCE SERVICES* içinde (41-48). New York: The Howarth Press, Inc.

- Cramer, Donna E. and Mary E. Johnson. (1994). "The Impact of the Internet on Communication Among Reference Librarians", *REFERENCE LIBRARIAN* 41/44:139-157.
- Çapar (Üçok), Bengü. (1972). "Üniversite Kütüphaneleri ve Müracaat Hizmeti". *TÜRK KÜTÜPHANECİLER DERNEĞİ BÜLTENİ* 21(1):31-37.
- Dickstein, Ruth and Louise Greenfield (1997). "Using the World Wide Web at the Reference Desk", *COMPUTERS IN LIBRARIES* 17(8): 61-65.
- Emerson, Katherine (1984). "Definitions for Planning and Evaluation of Reference Services" Bill Katz and Ruth A. Fraley (eds). *EVALUATION OF REFERENCE SERVICES* içinde (63-77). New York: The Howarth Press.
- Henderson, Tona and Bonnie MacEwan (1997). "Electronic Collections and Wired Faculty". *LIBRARY TRENDS* 45(3):488-498.
- Jahoda, Gerald and Judith Schick Braunagel (1980). *The Librarian and Reference Queries: A Systematic approach*. New York: Academic Press.
- Katz, William A. (1969a). *Introduction to Reference Work. Vol.II: Reference Services*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Katz, William A.(1987b). *Introduction to Reference Work. Vol. I: Basic Information Sources*. 5th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Katz, William A. (1987c). *Introduction to Reference Work. Vol.II: Reference Services and Reference Process*. 5th ed. New York: McGraw-hill.
- Katz, William A. (1922d). *Introduction to Reference Work. Vol.II: Reference Services and Reference Process*. 6th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Keyman, Dilek. (1982). "Üniversite Kütüphanelerinde Okuyucu Eğitimi", *TÜRK KÜTÜPHANECİLER DERNEĞİ BÜLTENİ* 31(4):164-168.
- Koutnik, Chuck. (1997). "The World Wide Web Is There: Is the End of Printed Reference Sources Near", *RQ* 56:422-430.
- Kurbanoğlu, S. Serap. (1996). "Müracaat Hizmetlerinde İnternet", *TÜRK KÜTÜPHANECİLİĞİ* 10(3): 265-276.
- Lanier, Don and Walter Wilkins.(1994). "Ready Reference via İnternet", *RQ* 33(3) Spring: 359-368.

Moore, Audrey.(1996). "Reference Librarianship: It was the best of times it was..." RQ 54(3): 3-9.

Renford, Beverly and Linea Hendrickson, (1980). Bibliographic Instruction: A Handbook. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers.

Retting, James R. (1993). "Reference and Information Services". WORLD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES içinde (703-708) 3rd ed. Chicago: American Library Association.

Sherrer, Johannah. (1996). "Thriving in Changing Times: Competencies for Today's Reference Librarians", RQ 54(3):11-20.

Thomas, Diana M., Ann T. Hinckle and Elizabeth R. Eisenbach. (1981). The Effective Reference Librarian. New York: Academic Press.

Tiefel, Virginia M. (1995). "Library User Education, Examining Its Past, Projecting Its Future". LIBRARY TRENDS 44(2): 318-355.

Yurdadoğ, U. Berin. (1997). "Enformasyon Devriminin Getirdikleri ve Götüremedikleri" Bülent Yılmaz (haz.) KÜTÜPHANECİLİK BÖLÜMÜ 25. YIL'A ARMAĞAN içinde (61-68). Ankara: H.Ü. Kütüphanecilik Bölümü.