Students' and Librarians' Impressions on Chat Reference System (CRS) in Library

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Abstract—**This paper presents a progress study that determines how much the undergraduate students in Malaysia appreciate the virtual Chat Reference System (CRS) in library. The study is initiated in response to the importance of knowledge transfer in the digital age. Specifically, this study is part of encouragements towards the implementation of CRS, in which self-paced and active learning is supported. This paper starts with the issues of current state of the art of knowledge dissemination in electronic form. Then, the survey involved is explained as a part of methodology. Also, data have been collected through qualitative approaches which become the last part in this paper. The analysis on the collected data will be included in the second progress of this study once after all the data has been gathered.**

Index Terms—**Chat reference system, undergraduate students, library, knowledge transfer.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Technology nowadays has changed most of the industrial sector including library services. In particular, the use of the Internet has made a significant difference in the way that traditional services are provided. With the betterment of computer technologies, reference is no longer needs to be done face to face or over the telephone. Libraries are now able to conduct live chat reference, sometimes available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and can also respond to patron emails with ease. While these options allow for more flexibility in reference services, they are still fairly new and will need more time to maximize its effectiveness. [1]

According to [2], Reference Service is a critical service that has been changed by technology. Digital or virtual reference has been developed as a way of helping patrons "not only on the desk, but in cyberspace".

It has also been supported by [3], the use of technology, which allows for synchronous, virtual communication, has been steadily rising over the past five years. One of the example is Instant messaging, also known as online chat, represents the most impressive online revolution since the advent of email. It can be seen almost everyday when people in the office and at school are eagerly instant messaging to communicate with their peers. The trend is also happens in Malaysia when instant messaging becomes one of the famous methods of communication.

This article deals with the introduction of virtual CRS as a

new concept that is not extensively used in Malaysia's library. The advantages of CRS in gaining information in library are discussed.

II. THE ISSUES

There are two important issues that make the online knowledge transfer through CRS is a must for all nations; the first is that the information is now available extensively in digital form, including the Internet; and the second is the real time necessity where the information should be available wherever and whenever the patrons need it.

A. Digital Information

Information is now available extensively in digital form. The Internet stores information that is required by almost everyone. In fact, it connects people around the world for collaborations. This means besides the information is always available; the communication is also always made possible at anytime, anywhere. Those are all information [4].

The challenge begins over the past decade where patronage of libraries has been in decline, particularly among younger people who view the Internet as the ultimate source for any information or data they need. While the Internet undeniably vast and powerful, it lacks the filters most people need to assess the quality and veracity of information sources [5]. Traditionally, Malaysia's librarians have probed visitors about their needs and then guided them to sources that are both credible and appropriate to their purpose. Now, this is the suitable time where the librarian should do research on habits of patrons who prefer to stay online. Later, the research information can be used in upgrading the library's services.

B. Real-Time Response

The similarity of Internet as an information warehouse can be compared to library as a one-stop-centre to users where it is equipped with huge databases storing millions of resources that could be accessed from anywhere at any time. It could be much more interesting and challenging when the resources can be gained in a real time situation with the assistance or guidance from librarian.

The issue highlighted when the Internet becomes the backbone for most users to communicate to each other. It can be seen when people in office, school and other places are eagerly using internet to chat, get and share information. They are keenly getting resources and information as fast as they can. This situation has become a normal trend in most of the countries including Malaysia. Therefore, the real time based resources which is implemented in CRS is really appreciated when it is applied in library especially in

Malaysia. CRS is designed purposely to attract the patrons to enjoy seeking for online knowledge in the library databases. Hence, the expansion of students' knowledge can be unlimited and they become more productive, effective and also positive in their work [6].

III. CHAT REFERENCE SYSTEM

According to [7], CRS provides a great solution to patrons. This company is well known with LiveAssistance. LiveAssistance is a leading provider of virtual reference software for public, private and academic libraries around the world. The CRS is a real time based program where the patrons can feel the one-on-one text chat, and it is very cost effective solution for any library to better serve the needs of its patrons.

The most interesting parts, CRS is a live chat where the patrons can communicate in a real time situation. In addition, CRS is also easy to setup and use and it also has customize interface where the users can modify the design anytime they like. Besides, the CRS comes with a full statistics module. These statistics include number of chat sessions, total time in chat, average chat time, average time in queue and total chats. These report can be generated per day, range of days or for the entire month. At the same time, CRS is very flexible where it uses the hands-on approach. These advantages have also been hihghlighted and agreed by [4].

The free trial of CRS has been installed in one of the libraries in Malaysia in order to know the students' acceptance and impression towards this new concept. The students have been asked by the librarian on the CRS features. Generally, the students were really impressive on the CRS as it is quite similar with instant messaging. They feel easy to handle the CRS as they are familiar with the instant messaging technology. They also prefer to use CRS compared to current system in library where they need to wait for the respond within 24 hours.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The survey research method was used to gather the data needed. The survey was conducted during the first week of the current semester (semester one), January 2012. The researcher is still in the progress of collecting the questionnaire. The researcher used a teacher-made questionnaire survey form consisting of two parts. In part 1, the students and librarians need to give some personal information and in part 2, they need to answer few questions. The respondents need to answer question number 1-5 except for students; they have to ignore question number 5. The questions are as follows:

1) What kind of system do you prefer? Stand alone system or real-time based system?

2) Which concepts do you like the most? (E.g. Facebook, Twitter, instant messaging etc.). Elaborate more on the selected concept.

3) How fast do you expect to get respond to the information needed?

4) In your opinion, do you want to upgrade the current system in library? Please specify the aspects or features of system to be upgraded.

5) Do you willing to handle and serve the students in a real-time based system?

A. Data Collection

Data were collected by using different techniques for University students/patrons and librarians because they serve different purpose. Particularly, this study intends to investigate how the students perceive the CRS based on their pattern in using instant messaging as their main communication method. While with the librarians, this study intends to investigate their ability to utilize such CRS in handling the patrons' questions. Hence, to achieve that, this study observed the students/patrons when they were experiencing the instant messaging and also the sample of CRS. Next is the interview session with the librarians after they were exhibited and explained with the CRS. The picture in Fig. 1 adapted from [4] outlines the techniques illustratively.
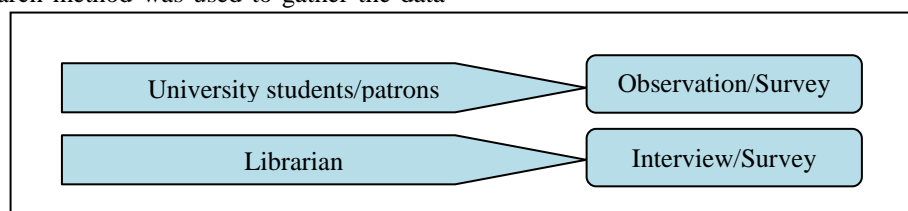

Fig. 1. Techniques of Data Collection

The University students involved in this study are studying different field/course in year one. The purpose of choosing them is because they are new in the university's life. Therefore, by introducing the new technology, it can attract them to come and spend their time in the library frequently. While for the librarian, they are selected to be interviewed as they are going to entertain the students through CRS. They should be familiar with the features in CRS.

Generally, based on informal interview with librarians and observation to the students, they expressed their thought to have a real-time based system like instant messaging to quickly respond their questions. The questionnaires were given to them to support this study.

B. The Development of CRS

The final design of CRS will be included in the second progress of this study. The final version of CRS will be designed based on requirement from library and students. Therefore, it can be the most effective system for students and also for the librarian itself. Later, the findings from the observation, interview and also the survey will conclude on CRS design.

V. Conclusion

In the first observation, it can be seen that the students/patrons prefer to use instant messaging as the way to communicate with peers because they can get faster respond. Therefore, the students prefer to have online system where they can have the resources in real time basis. On the librarian's side, generally they prefer to apply CRS as a new concept in Malaysia's library. It is hoped that CRS can attract the patrons to enjoy seeking for knowledge in library and indirectly will boost the library as one-stop centre for users who always look forward for quality resources.

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