Assessing and Evaluating Specialized Libraries

Оцінка спеціалізованих бібліотек

This study deals with measuring and evaluating specialized libraries since the institutions they are attached to do not feel that such libraries do not fall within the elements of production and development. Furthermore, this study aims at discussing some of the definitions that deal with the concept of assessment in general, and the assessment of specialized libraries in particular.

The study highlights the main purpose of the performance assessment within specialized libraries, from which one can determine a specific level so that the true level of performance inside the library is clearly demonstrated. The study confirms that the assessment is considered a basic element of any specialized library's success. The study attempts to provide a set of proposals that can be implemented effectively within specialized libraries in order to convince officials and decision makers of the importance of the role of the library in the development and advancement of the production of the parent organization that it belongs to. There are difficulties in evaluating specialized libraries, due to different functional levels, and the inability of attaching uniform standards for assessment of all specialized libraries. Special criteria must be developed to fit the needs of each library separately, including the need to assess the specialized library and establish policies and measures to improve the library’s role and increase the library’s effectiveness so as to convince decision makers of the importance of its presence, including measuring both its cost and cost effectiveness in light of the high cost of access to information sources and the revolution in information and communications technology that we are witnessing. The study recommends to carry out similar studies in view of the importance of this kind of studies, especially for those working in specialized libraries.

Дослідження присвячена оцінці роботи спеціалізованих бібліотек, оскільки організації, до яких вони прикреплені, часто не усвідомлюють, що такі бібліотеки важливі для виробництва та розвитку. Більше того, метою цього дослідження є обговорення деяких визначень, пов'язаних з поняттям оцінки в цілому, і з оціною спеціалізованих бібліотек зокрема.

Це дослідження підкреслює основну мету оцінки результатів діяльності спеціалізованих бібліотек, яка дозволяє визначити і чітко продемонструвати спрощеній рівень внутрішньої діяльності бібліотеки. Дослідження підтверджує, що оцінка діяльності є основною складовою успіху будь-якої
Introduction

It is very important to evaluate library services in order to improve services and solve problems for both staff and users. Of the first librarians, who were credited for initiating a study of assessing and clarifying the main concept of libraries are James Gerould, F. Wilfred Lancaster, and Duane Webster. (Lancaster, 2000).

Evaluation and problem-solving in libraries aim at drawing future policies in a particular program or service seeking whether to continue, stop, enhance, upgrade or modify its operation, it works on improving and practicing work procedures leading to an increase in productivity, keeping in mind the time factor and the speed and type of released information to users. It can enhance or discard some of the techniques and strategies that are specific and which are related to increasing the effectiveness in terms of the quality of the information. Libraries can also manage financial library allocations and distribution of programs, leading to an increase in its effectiveness as a profitable unit.

Evaluation enables libraries full exploitation of available energies by possibly adding services or new staff, or cancelling some activities and duties. Libraries in fact need to develop tools to assessing and evaluation of their performance especially services, whereby they play an important role in the development of library services and information centers (Mount, 1988).

Assessment and evaluation in libraries aim at the following:

- Determining the status and used methods by the library in order to achieve their goals and develop future plans that will contribute to supporting and raising the level of services that the library provides.
- Savings in expenditures that cover financial, human resources and sources of information through limiting and assessing the available financial resources, office equipment, groups, and staff.
- Achieving the knowledge-based economy in the management and delivery of services, through the identification and rectifying of weaknesses and gaps they might find in the library.

The problem that this study addresses:

Specialized libraries experience no assurance and like of conviction on the side of establishments that they are «part and parcel» of production and development, and that the assessment and evaluations of the services offered by specialized libraries, and the method of augmenting its effectiveness as profitable units, will in return enable, develop and provide such units to remain serving the specialized sector of users. There is however a certain difficulty in evaluating libraries that are specialized as a result of the different institutions that they are part of, and the extent of their dependence on the library in developing their activities. The study attempts to identify ways of evaluating specialized libraries by answering the following questions:

- Standards of specialized libraries and tools for assessing them.
- Scopes of evaluation of specialized libraries.
- Relationship of evaluation and the stages of the evolution of specialized libraries.
- The importance of assessment and evaluation of specialized libraries.
- Methods of assessing specialized library services?
Highlighting the role of specialized libraries in increasing and developing production in the establishments and they are a part of through the assessment.

**Importance of the study:**

The importance of the study is demonstrated by the following:

1. To identify the level of performance of the libraries through the assessment of the administrative status and offered services based on libraries’ standards and assessment tools.
2. To identify ways of evaluate specialized libraries and offered services that will help staff recognize the present condition of such type of libraries in order to modify their status and turn them into profitable units.
3. Studying and evaluating library services help diagnose its strengths and weaknesses, thus striving to improve the services and boost its efficiency and effectiveness.
4. The importance of conducting this study stems from the scarcity of studies on this subject.

**Objectives of the study:**

This study aims at defining the concept of assessment and evaluation, their importance and their relationship in developing and identifying steps to measure specialized libraries, including identifying them as profitable units.

**Research Methodology:**

The study used the traditional theoretical approach as a method of interpretation and clarification, adopting former sources and studies in generating facts and data, by surveying these studies, they determined method of dealing with these topics. Then they followed the system of extrapolating and restructuring such facts and data, relying on data collection for the assessment of libraries and standards to determine the methods and assessment tools with the help of researchers' experience in this area.

**Previous studies:**

One of the most important studies that have focused on specialized libraries was done by (Ellis Mount, 1983). The said study aimed at defining the concept of specialized libraries, stages of development and ways to their evaluation. It pointed out that there was a difficulty in evaluating specialized libraries, identifying the most important measuring tools that can be relied upon in the assessment of such type of libraries.

The study which was conducted by (Sharon Baker, 1991) specified the assessing tools of libraries in general, pointing out methods and criteria of assessment for libraries in general, while the study by (Ahmed Bader, 1998) defined the concept of specialized libraries, components, management, and evaluation methods.

The study of (Dubayyan, 2005) explained the concept of assessment, its relationship to evaluation, factors affecting it, requirements and types of assessment, objectives of assessing library services and ways to evaluate levels of libraries' assessment in general.

The study of (Matthew, 2008) shows the concept of assessment and its tools in library services including the qualitative & quantitative assessment of library services. The study emphasized the system of measuring and evaluating library services and demonstrated the existence of many library officials and directors that have failed in the assessment of their libraries, since most libraries assess their services through the collection of statistical information only, and not through an analysis according to qualitative & quantitative assessment & evaluation criteria.

The study included different standards of assessment tools; some were specific to users of the library while the others were specific for available information at the library like e-reference services, internet systems, library instructions, customer services and literacy information. The study showed that it was necessary to determine the economic and social impact of libraries, such as holding cultural programs.
(Poetry readings, crafts, etc.), creating a place to revive the human spirit by using the library, a community cultural center, supplying the library with the latest modern technology such as Internet, wireless services and designing the library website.

In another study by (Martha, 2008,) whereby she reviewed the evolution of assessment and evaluation of libraries from the point of view of (James Gerould, F. Wilfrid Lancaster, and Duane Webster.) who founded the needed infrastructure for assessing the libraries in the last century up to the present day, describing the basis for building future developments in the field of library assessment.

The study of (Han, 2007) aimed at providing a definition of the quality of library services and proposing the use of APH method with respect to the analysis of changeable factors that affect the assessment of library services. The study concluded that the factors affecting library services are: sources of information that the library carries, human resources and infrastructure. The study was conducted on the case of a library at SouthWestern University.

The study of (Meng, 2009) presented the hierarchy analysis method for assessing the quality of library services, using the study method in the case of Changyen University.

Comparing this study with previous ones, we find that there is a paucity of studies that examined the standards and assessment tools of specialized libraries, as most studies focused on assessment and evaluation of library services in general. What will this study add to previous studies is the clarification the relationship development of specialized libraries with their standards and measuring tools. It will also explain the basis for assessing specialized libraries and the problems facing their assessment, thus complementing previous studies.

**Concept of assessment and evaluation of libraries**

Assessment is usually understood as a tool or means of evaluation, thus assessment and evaluation are two activities that go hand in hand.

To evaluate libraries' activities, «Their performance and services must be assessed to have the evaluation included in the assessment. In other words assessment is the «collection of quantitative information on the subject to be measured» (Dubayyan, 2005)

The relationship between evaluation and assessment is that assessment is considered one of the means used by the evaluation to obtain data and information needed to study the phenomenon, on which evaluation and opinion issuing are based. Assessment is considered complete when data is supplied, while evaluation deals with issuing opinions and recommendations as per data supplied by the assessment.

Both assessment and evaluation are used in determining the EFFECTIVENESS of the service. Assessment furthermore, involves specifying changes that takes place on library services through the information provided by the study of this phenomenon; evaluation on the other side involves determining the value of these changes or results that were achieved.

Evaluation is management tool designed to identify strengths, obstacles or difficulties, proposing appropriate solutions to improve the service (Lancaster, 2000).

Service in specialized libraries is measured according to visitor's or research's satisfaction, based on his/her feedback in realizing the benefit obtained from the visit, and through his opinion on the scope of library collection of materials and services, taking into account the efficiency, effectiveness and the speed in providing such service.

Evaluation involves many methods, each is unique and carries certain objectives; thus library services are evaluated through some or all methods collectively in order to be exposed to the quality of library services, measure the effectiveness of services and the extent of benefit obtained. (Table 1) explains further.
### System & assessment methods and its objectives in libraries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System of measurement</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Purpose of measurement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEW</td>
<td>Personal interviews with current or potential users of library</td>
<td>To identify their views regarding the quality of library services it provides</td>
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<tr>
<td>OBSERVATION</td>
<td>Observation activity during library hours, especially at peak times, when visitors volume is large.</td>
<td>To assess the effectiveness of library services targeted to users.</td>
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<tr>
<td>STATISTICAL METHOD</td>
<td>Statistical method</td>
<td>Assessing the benefit gained from library services at main libraries and information centers, measuring the effectiveness of services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASE STUDIES</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Focusing on a particular phenomenon and the compilation of comprehensive data on this phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STANDARD</td>
<td>Issuing specifications or adopting standard specifications issued by the specialized institutions</td>
<td>To evaluate the performance of the service desk directed at the group of library users.</td>
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</table>

**Assessment** is a tool or a means of evaluation. It is considered as one of the means of main assessment, since there can be no evaluation without assessment, confirming the fact that evaluation is broader and more comprehensive than the assessment (Tamraz, 1988).

To assess and evaluate specialized libraries, it is necessary to refer to the standards of these libraries which were created as a result of the emergence of specialized libraries. Like other types of libraries, the specialized libraries have come forward, most notably the special American libraries Association of America, boasting its distinguished activities in developing their own standards, in addition to the many institutions that identified a set of different criteria. Table (2) demonstrates the most important criteria and the establishments that exported such criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPECIFICATIONS</th>
<th>EXPORTED FROM</th>
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<tr>
<td>Standards for specialized libraries</td>
<td>American Special library Association (<a href="http://www.sal.org">www.sal.org</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association of college and Research Library (ACRL) (15) (<a href="http://www.alal.org">www.alal.org</a>)</td>
<td>Standard specification in rehabilitation (bibliographic education). Standards for professional ethics with regard to rare books and manuscripts Special criteria for theft of library materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>American library Association</td>
<td>Standard assessment for Library Academic the effective academic: The effective academic : a framework for Evaluating the Performance Of UK Academic libraries (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO (<a href="http://www.unesco.org/webworld/libraries">www.unesco.org/webworld/libraries</a>)</td>
<td>A document for measuring the quality of public libraries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFLA</td>
<td>A guide to measuring the service quality of university libraries</td>
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</table>

The importance of assessment and evaluation in specialized libraries and its relationship to the development of specialized libraries

To determine the relationship between stages of development of specialized libraries and standards, and demonstrate the importance of assessment and evaluation in specialized libraries, it is necessary to refer to the concept of specialized libraries, which was defined by Mr. John Cotton Dana, founder of the Special Libraries Association of America, saying that they are these libraries that cover a specific subject/subjects, or a specific set of interrelated topics. The concept of specialized libraries has developed, based
on the features that characterize these libraries, most importantly objective, professional, these related to users of the library; and these related to features of speed delivery of information.

It is clear that the Industrial Revolution contributed significantly to the emergence and development of the concept of specialized libraries, emerging in the nineteenth century as a result of the industrial enterprises for the need of libraries specializing in topics and industries that are manufactured, to help in decision-making and to be exposed to the latest material published in their field. What distinguishes mostly specialized libraries and their development in the twentieth century is the emergence of associations like the **Association for Specialized Libraries**, information offices, and the **Special Libraries Association of America**, which was established in 1909. The researchers conclude that those professional associations play an important role in the development of specialized libraries because they reflect and assemble professional entities in the field of contemporary specialized libraries.

The information on specialized libraries received good attention and interest leading to the introduction of functions and new services that were not known to other libraries, prompting to the activation of services that were not known in other types of libraries such as translation services, especially from foreign journal articles, current awareness and selective information supply service.

Library services therefore gained the spirit of careful documentation speed, great care in obtaining the required information at the hands of skilled information experts, performing critical analysis of intellectual production that require extensive experience in the field of library science and subject specialization. Specialized libraries then started inventing new professional methods in the field of indexing, classification and other verification analysis of sources of information. This in turn led to the change in the concept as information centers, whereby they became focused on information services for the final users; concentrating on the unit of information rather than the source. The eighties of the last century witnessed a merger between the specialized libraries and information centers, a matter confirmed by (Mount,1983), and through the continuing development of specialized libraries which was accompanied by the development of tools and standards of assessment. This development continued to produce different levels of specialized libraries, leading to a marked difficulty in developing assessment tools and uniform standards for all such types of libraries (Bdier,1998). Thus the development of specialized libraries, up to the beginning of the twenty first century, could be grouped into five chronological stages evolving separately from each other, creating jobs and new services, and a constant evolution in assessment tools as explained earlier. Table (3) clarifies this point.

### Table (3)

**Shows evolution stages of specialized libraries and functional levels of information services in specialized libraries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First phase</th>
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<tr>
<td>Concentration element</td>
<td>Development stages of information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Library collections</td>
<td>Books and periodicals</td>
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<th>Second phase</th>
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<td>Group type and theme</td>
<td>Audio and visual material</td>
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<th>Third phase</th>
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<tr>
<td>Enter of the user beneficiary as part of the concept of libraries.</td>
<td>databases stored on digital compact disks</td>
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<th>Fourth phase</th>
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<tr>
<td>Expecting special-</td>
<td>Online databases,</td>
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</table>
Therefore, to determine the criteria in whose light a specialized library would be evaluated, it is necessary to classify the library within these five categories.

With the technological development, certain standards for a category of specialized libraries have emerged; these are the scientific and technology based libraries whose management follows research centers. These types of specialized libraries are no longer concerned with the size of groups of library users that visit, because the libraries’ data can easily be reached through information and communication networks, and they do not assess their anymore their contribution to users for specialized reference or intellectual searches, since it is subscribed to the search services on-line, providing users with the latest global information easily and very quickly.

Libraries for the time being focus on delivering advanced services with high-efficiency and quality, given the complex needs of researchers, provided that such services are inexpensive, due to lack of resources and the financial burdens of the library in covering such expenses to update its information technology.

**Steps of assessing specialized libraries:**

As explained earlier on the subject of absence general standards in that can be relied upon to evaluate specialized libraries, this is again confirmed by Mr. Strabol, Chairman of the Special Libraries Association 1974 in the United States of America (Mount,1983).

First – to define the criteria that will be evaluate specialized libraries, it is necessary to classify them within the five categories that show functional levels of information services as shown in table No. (3).

The next steps follow the definition of the librarian (Dubayyan, 2005).

Second – identifying the area of assessment through the launch of a range of questions that should be answered by careful assessment. These questions are:

A – What is the overall level of performance of the library? (i.e. the overall efficiency in general).

B – What is the validity of the plans that cover the intellectual output in the library?

C – What is the degree of users’ satisfaction of library services?

Third – Developing evaluation programs: Launching an operational plan to collect the necessary data that answers questions raised in determining the area of evaluation.

Fourth- Verification of the data properties needed to answer each question and to identify actions that must be followed to collect data with the highest degree of efficiency and speed, such as the compilation of statistics of conventional assessment of library activities, such as identification of sources of information, the number of staff who can provide services as a unit at specific request and the ability of the library staff to accommodate many users at the same time.

This type of statistics, however, does not measure the cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness of the library, since this is considered a very important assessment in specialized libraries.

Fifth – Analyzing and interpreting results through data processing by answering questions that are raised at the action plan.

Sixth – Specifying all results including recommendations that could be adopted to upgrade the performance of services.

Seventh – Implementing recommendations based on the results of the assessment that applies to the development of services.

Since the assessment and evaluation processes are correlated, they play an important role in the development of library services and information centers for the purpose of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of library services and information centers; consequently reaching the highest levels in taking

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Rapid response to the needs of Internet users.</th>
<th>Internet and information networks</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Office systems, Information and Translation specialist, researcher and analyst</th>
<th>Specialized turned into an information network unit</th>
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</table>

**Fifth phase**

- Information and Translation specialist
- Broadcast of abstract information
- Registered services required by users.
appropriate decisions and raising the service efficiency and developing qualitative and quantitative improvements.

The question arises as to what should the decision maker do in the absence of assessment tools and evaluation? (Tamraz, 1988).

Specialized libraries must perform the following evaluation:

1 – **Evaluate** the degree of library responsiveness to the needs of information, so as to develop a tool intended for users that focus on what information services users usually receive, and the efficiency & effectiveness of the library to meet these services to the benefit of users.

These tools are to be created by specialists who understand the work of libraries and the needs of researchers or users.

2 – **Assessing the relationship** between ongoing research and actual return on cost so as to prepare for establishing information systems and specialized libraries. In other words, it examines the relationship between the level of performance and costs of achieving this level.

3 – **Evaluation and assessment** of specialized library services and the method of increasing their effectiveness as profitable units by measuring the cost-benefit and cost effectiveness.

4 – **Assessment of specialized libraries** and information centers

The most important point in the development policy is the budget of library periodicals, whereby it is necessary to allocate a budget for the periodicals since specialized libraries focus on quality and not on quantity, with a certain focus on new and updated publications.

5 – **Assessment of administrative and service criteria in the library**, including: geographic location, building structure, furniture, lighting, ventilation, staff, administration, targets set for the library and the scope of their realization, level of services provided by the library and the scope of collections, information technology and communications that the library provides.

**How to measure and evaluate specialized libraries as a profitable units**

Of the things that must be considered in the management of specialized libraries is that in periods of economic recession, the need for information provided by such type of libraries becomes more important and is considered relatively inexpensive, since the information and knowledge they provide are an asset for industries' development. This in turn will increase market penetration and awareness of the importance of the library in providing general expenditure (knowledge-based economics) out of the urgent needed necessities.

To assess and evaluate specialized library services and the method of increasing their effectiveness as profitable units, we assess the cost-yield and cost effectiveness. Cost yield means finding the best, efficient and the most inexpensive way to do a particular reference service operation. Measuring the cost-effectiveness would be answered the following question: What is the cost of this service? Is it worthwhile to continue or not?

Assessment is performed according to the number of queries by the user and specifying these that were replied to, and the ones that received no information, whereby the evaluation and assessment would be built on the extent of benefit received and realized by the user or researcher from the library. The focus here must concentrate on the quality of service, rather than the quantity or the statistics.

To illustrate this idea regarding the importance of the specialized library centers that carries information; let us look at the following example:

The field of agricultural research related to development of agricultural production, researchers rely on information provided by the library in the conduct of their research; the results of this research and reports from technology and techniques are then transferred to farmers in the form of farm instructions through publications and workshops. Farmers, in turn, apply this technology on their farms, and work to improve agricultural production. Hence the library has provided the information which played a big role in the improvement and development of their business.

It is important to note that the library’s budget should not be built on the basis of profit and loss, but on the feasibility of running such service. However, deciding on the library’s budget should take into consideration the community’s needs first.
Agricultural production, in this case, was a result of the good information service that the library offered. The increase in the agricultural production will then justify an increase in the library’s budget allocation.

Assigning a budget should be subject to the following study by answering the following questions:
– How large was last year’s budget?
– What is the volume of services provided by the library the last year?

To answer the questions and determine the size of services, we must develop a mechanism of assessment based on two factors:
1 – cost-benefit
2 – cost-effectiveness

Assessing the volume of financial expenditure on sources of information should be proportional to the development of the firm’s agricultural production vs. the volume of expenditure on the sources of information at the library as in the above example, and specifying the number of research papers conducted by the researchers that helped in technology transfer in the form of brochures or pamphlets. (Lancaster, 2000).

The following steps are therefore to be followed:

Farm production is determined by comparing the application of technology before and after the application, by taking the rate of increase the revenues of agricultural marketing that resulted from the application of technology at the national level with the size of spending on information sources. Table No. (4) illustrates the idea:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps of assessment and evaluation of specialized libraries in judging it as a profitable unit</th>
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<td><strong>3</strong></td>
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<td><strong>4</strong></td>
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</table>
5. volume of production before the application of technology at the farm = The added value

6. Financial income resulting from the commercialization of the product after the application of technological minus

7. Financial income resulting from the commercialization of the product before the application of technology = The added value

Conclusions and recommendations

The most important findings of this study are:

- There is a difficulty in evaluating specialized libraries because of the different levels of their functions. However, through specifying their function levels, necessary standards and assessment tools could determine their effectiveness.

- No uniform standards for all specialized libraries could be established; therefore, we must develop criteria to suit the specialized needs of each library separately, by studying user’s community and the interests of the library in question.

- It is extremely necessary to assess the specialized library in order to educate decision-makers and library executives of the importance and the great library role that the specialized library plays in increasing community production and economic development by addressing the institution that they are part of.

- Evaluation methods and special assessment techniques for specialized libraries are being continuously updated and developing.

The study recommended that specialized libraries take the initiative to assess the effectiveness of their libraries in a scientific and systematic manner, and to focus on measuring their cost-benefit and cost effectiveness, to persuade decision-makers and responsible executives that the library has a great role in increasing and developing the production of the institution that it follows, in order to maintain the existence of specialized libraries, especially with the high cost of information sources acquisition, organizing and facilitating their use in view of the successive daily development and marked explosion of information technology and communication. The study furthermore recommends conducting similar studies because of the importance of this kind of studies that helps specialized libraries evaluate performance.

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