REMOTE ACCESS IN THE ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN KERALA-AFTER THE EPIDEMIC: A USER POINT OF VIEW

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Abstract

The Covid-19 Pandemic has resulted in extraordinary situations where global economies have been shut down using lockdown procedures to prevent the spread of this disease. Information has become the most valuable asset in the emerging world. Hence, information has become one of the major driving forces that lead a country towards sustainable development. So this study based upon the kinds of services provided by the academic libraries during and after the pandemic and the challenges faced by them. Also the studies discuss the measures taken to overcome the problems are examined and also the changes adapted by the libraries to manage the situation. The data was collected from the library staffs of University and College libraries of Kerala using Google form.

The study shows that most of the academic libraries have started new online services and have been using social media new online software's to communicate with their users after this pandemic period. The results indicated that effective use of electronic resources requires library users possess skills to use the access equipment such as computers and Internet facilities. The findings further indicated that there is need for the library staff to create awareness of the available resources among library users.

Key words: Remote Access; Covid-19; Pandemic; Academic libraries; Kerala; Library services; College Libraries

Introduction

Remote access is the act of connecting to IT services, applications or data from a location other than headquarters or a location closest to the data center. This connection allows users to access a network or computer remotely via an internet connection or telecommunications. The Corona Virus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic presented libraries with a chance to re-evaluate their services with the aim of enhancing access to meet users' needs even in unusual times. It was a defining moment for libraries considering that even before Covid-19 erupted questions were already being raised about libraries and whether their existence was justified. Nevertheless, it was now time for the library to justify the important role it plays not only within the institution

but the community. For the last few years we have been going through a different life fighting with Covid-19. It has changed our way of living drastically. It is a period of realization that a virus is enough to threaten the whole world. It has affected all walks of life like education, profession, economy, business, culture, etc.

The pandemic helped to emphasize the importance of electronic resources and remote access within the library, the need to allocate funds for the purchase of electronic resources and Information Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure and the need to adhere to the new trends. The impact of Corona in the field of academic institutions and libraries are not different. During lockdown days, the libraries could not provide their normal services to the users as they were forced to close their physical services. At the same time, the courses offered in universities and colleges were not suspended. The main aim of any academic library is to support the teaching, learning and research process in their institution. So the libraries have to provide services to the students, research scholars, teachers and other users.

Information technology has been a boon for higher education in the Covid period. And the main purpose behind it is that more and more students should take advantage of it. If the role of ICT appears to be very important in higher education, it is equally necessary to build a large-scale infrastructure as well as to train the faculty and teachers in that method. Apart from this, it is not so easy to effectively structure the online education system unless the national education policy is linked to which these factors are needed to make it effective.

Review of literature

The overall functioning of university libraries in Sri Lanka during Covid-19 outbreak was studied by Jeyaraj (2021). It presents a set of recommendations for the shift of library from physical to digital paradigm. Libraries introduced new technologies and tools for users since it was physically inaccessible to them during the pandemic and these services kept the library functioning alive. The article by Medawar and Tabet (2021) describes how Qatar National Library managed the Covid-19 situation and also the services, collections and support offered to the users. The library extended online support to the users and the services provided before lockdown were changed to virtual during lockdown.

A survey was undertaken in December 2021 and January 2022 by Robinson, et al. (2022) regarding the experiences of Covid-19, lockdowns and subsequent re-openings, mental health and views about the future of services among the public library staffs of United Kingdom. The responses indicate the importance of library as a community resource. The staffs face stress and mental health issues when dealing with users while the virus remained highly prevalent and they have a fear that new technologies like e-books may replace the traditional library services. Mehta and Wang (2020) describe the position and the challenges faced by a University library during the pandemic based on their personal experiences. The library has changed some of their services into digital format and started new initiatives to support the university's online teaching since March 2020.

Dadhe and Dubey (2020) made a content analysis of websites of IITs of India in order to find out the services by their libraries during Covid-19 pandemic. The libraries provided remote access to e-resources and some of the libraries started a new service by putting all required resources under one heading namely library services during Covid-19.

According to Hussain (2021), during the covid-19 book publishers and vendors allowed off-campus access to subscribed resources to encourage use in times when physical library services were restricted. In addition, publishers have been urged to waiver licensing fees for the online resources to increase the electronic content and serve more users.

Perappadan (2020) noted that libraries revamped their web pages, reassigned resources, and adopted some ad-hoc strategies and robust online offerings to their patrons.

Objectives of the study

- To identify the suitable library remote access platforms for the academic libraries in Kerala to continue uninterrupted library services lockdown periods

- To find out the types of services and facilities provided to the users during the Covid-19
- To know the way of communication after lockdown
- To provide 24x7 easy access to licensed multiple e resources subscribed by library through single interface.
- To analyses the challenges faced by the library staffs after this period

Methodology

The study was conducted among the library staff as well as UG and PG students of University and College libraries in Kerala. I had adopted a survey method for the primary data collection purpose. Random sampling was used and the sample selected was 90. The data was collected using Google form circulated via e-mail. A total number of 83 responses were received. The analysis was done using the simple percentage method.

Analysis and Interpretation

The sample consists of 62% of library staffs in University libraries and 38% from college libraries. Among them 45% are female and 41.09% are male. A good number of the respondents (68.5%) belong to the age group 45-55. Majority of them (68%) are having PG. as their qualification. The courses offered in these institutions are Degree, Post-Graduation and research.

- **Status of library after the epidemic**
  A major number of libraries (48.06%) were partially open during the Covid-19 period because of the lockdown. Only few libraries were fully open and some libraries opened in reading area only.

- **Working time of Library use**
   The new normal situation some of the library staffs were worked in their normal place (58%) and some worked from home for a short period (22%). Whereas, very few of them were worked from home most of the time as well as deployed to other services during the pandemic.

- **Services provided during Covid**
  Majority of the libraries (58%) provided virtual services to the users during the lockdown and near half of them (41%) provided other services. The services like book readers groups, scholars and mobile library services were practiced by only a few of them. During this period the libraries' main focus has been the development of e-resource collection to provide remote access to the users.

- **E-resources during lockdown**
  The major e-resource provided by the libraries during the pandemic was Open e-journals, Open E-books and databases also became a main source of information at that time.

- **Role of Social Media**
A majority of the library staffs (90%) are satisfied with the role of social media for facilitating library services, especially informing the users about the library services during the pandemic period.

- **Use of Twitter :-** Twitter has been used to connect with researchers and other institutions. A good number of users in younger group uses this patform.

- **Use of Whatsapp :-** Whatsapp has a major impact on the education system in Covid 19 pandemic. There is tremendous use of Whatsapp for not only higher education but also higher secondary education. By creating class groups on whatsapp, there is an effective way of dissemination of information in all the age groups**.**

- **Use of Youtube :-** Youtube is a most commonly used platform for encalcating education among the students. Services provided by Youtube are free of cost. That's the key which makes Youtube the most famous social media

- **New Platforms**
A good number of library staffs (68.7%) realised the need of new services for their users and introduced some services. This includes different online services and programmes like book review, quiz, essay competition, etc. on Google meet, Skype, go to webinar apps etc.

- **Difficulties faced in the new normal period**
Covid-19 has brought difficulties in all facets of life and so in libraries too. When the staffs were asked about the challenges they faced during the pandemic, there were a number of problems like decrease in the number of users coming to the library(63.89%), lack of infrastructure and e-resources (62.5%) which were the only service that could be provided to the users during lockdown. Lack of adequate fund was a problem faced by some of them (36.98%) and a few (15.06%) didn't have proficiency in providing online services to the users during lockdown.

- **Movements in library services**
The libraries started several new services for their users during the pandemic. Some of the services are introduction of mobile application for giving services to users. Some of them started online services and the users are provided with the user name and password in order to access the resources. During these period most of the libraries withdrew the fines for the overdue books. The university libraries promoted the usage of e-books, e-journal and databases subscribed in the university so that the users can access information from the home itself.

- **New Face of Library**
We asked which are the future plans for the library, the staffs mainly concerned about the introduction of new online services so that the users can access library resources in any such adverse situation. They are in the opinion that libraries need more fund in order to launch such new services and its management.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic revealed the other side of library and information professionals. It is evident that library services shall never be the same again, especially with the new and evolving information technology. The study demonstrates the different services provided by the academic libraries during the pandemic and the challenges faced by them. Many libraries have started new online services for their users and conducted Programmes through virtual platforms. They widely used social media to facilitate their functions and the e- resources like e-journals, e-books and databases attain importance during this time when users couldn't visit the library. Also the respondents realized the need of new technologies and more e-resources so that they can face such new normal situations.

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