

LIBRARY SERVICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES DURING AND AFTER COVID-19 PERIOD

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Abstract

The purpose of writing this article is to create the awareness among the library professionals regarding the functionality of higher educational institutional libraries who preferred to serve their users during the period of covid-19 pandemic and to discuss the issues and challenges they have faced while confronting the tough situation and new techniques they used to beat the pandemic situation and at the same time the role played by library staff of higher educational institutions while providing information for needy users, to avoid the transformation of corona virus during the transaction of library physical information resources/materials, library services to their users and also the precautionary measures to be taken to provide the service to reader or users.

Key Words: Library Services, Information Technology in Libraries, Digital Technology, Digital Library, Higher Educational Institutions, Library Services in Covid-19 Situation.

1. Introduction:

Across the world covid-19 pandemic has impacted very badly on all the areas of human life such as Human health, Human life style, industrial and manufacturing sector, Country's GDP (Gross domestic product), Employment and business sector, Day to day activities of human life including human academic activity. Till date many doctors and scientists across the countries are in search of vaccine for covid-19 (for corona virus) using all the available literature and non literature sources. Due to the very bad impact of covid-19 pandemic the working style of many sectors have been completely changed from traditional method to automated or online method, and working environment of office to work from home environment, physical work places to automated work place using automated machines and robots. Similarly the academic activities across the world have been changed from classroom teaching method to online teaching method. Based on the changes of academic activities, the service of library has also changed across the world. Here we are going to discuss how the academic libraries of higher educational institutions are serving their users and what are the issues and challenges they are facing and how they tackle

the challenges and what are the new methods they adopted in providing the services to their users community.

2. Methodology:

To write this paper the resources and materials used are based on the past experience and some of the papers have been referred and same will be given in references, As this a conceptual papers most of the paper is written on the basis of the personal experience of the author.

3. Objectives: Following are some of important objectives of the paper.

1. The main objectives of the paper are to know the issues and challenges faced by higher education institutional library users in accessing the required academic information resources.

2. The issues and challenges faced by library professional in providing the required academic information for the students and faculty.

3. It helps many other library professionals who are in confusion about, how to provide the required information for their academic user who are stuck at their home due to covid-19 pandemic situation.

4. What all the traditional services have affected due to covid-19 pandemic and how the higher education institutional library professionals tackled such challenges in academic library.

5. How online resources and online based services have been provided to required users and what all the methods the professionals used to provide the subscribed resources to their users.

6. How the freely available and open access resources are helpful to academic users during this period to conduct the online teaching and academic activities? how library professionals helped the users in getting such information and what are the major platforms library staff used in providing the information.

7. How the social medias and social platforms are been used to provide the academic information and services by library professionals?

8. What all the initiatives that have been made available for the purpose of academic activities by Government of India and how those are been made available to users by library professionals?

9. How the traditional information sources are been handled by library professionals in these period and what are the precautionary majors that could be taken in future while providing the service to their users in physical?

10. How to handle the overall library and library services after opening of library activities in academic institutions? What all the measures need to be followed in future for providing the required information to user community?

4. Review of literature:

A. Information dissemination in an era of a pandemic (COVID-19): librarians' role, (Okike , Benedict Ifeanyichukwu- 2020): In this article author discusses about how Librarians and information professionals disseminate information as often as they have access to authoritative information and resources to users. How social media and other online platforms are helpful to disseminate information to users. Librarians should serve as catalysts for the effective dissemination of information to promote true knowledge. (Okike, 2020) [1]

B. COVID-19 and digital library services – a case study of a university library, (Dipti Mehta & Xiaocan Wang -2020): This paper describes the Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts, USA, library's position during the crisis and illustrates the uncharted challenges that the pandemic has posed to its digital services. In this paper different kinds of challenges, library staff faced during lock down period are discussed such as challenges during working in-house, Challenges for library staff working at-home, Challenges for digital library services and users, etc. Different type of digital services offered by library staff such as, Reference services, Bibliographic instructions, providing electronic resources (e-resources), Digital repository, etc. the outcome of the paper is to promote the use of digital content and digital services for academic use by staff and students. (Mehta & Wang, 2020) [2]

C. Role of Library Professionals in a Pandemic Situation Like COVID-19, (Pankaj Bhati & Inder Kumar - 2020) This paper emphasizes the various roles of library professionals during the pandemic situation like COVID 19. It also identifies the advocacy role that Library Professionals have taken up. In the papers the author presented the number of digital platforms made available around the world for academic use from government and other non government organizations. This article has also discussed the use of social media / social networks for use of academic activities. How library professionals support the entire community in their scholarly endeavors during the covid-19 period. (Bhati & Kumar, 2020)[3]

5. Major Issus and challenges faced in higher educational institutional library during Covid-19 period

A. Challenges of library staff working at-home: Following are some of the challenges faced during lockdown period by library staff.

- Lockdown is not well planned and pre-prepared which has created hurdles in work.
- All the library staffs don't have computers and internet connection at their home to work from home during lockdown period.
- This creates very hampered situation, when the requisitions from students and faculty are raised for information.
- It became necessity to purchase the new computers and internet connection in their own money to serve the users.
- Accessing of subscribed resources by library staff, library users outside the campus was not possible in that case it was necessary to purchase the remote access tools.
- **Working time became big challenge:** Before lockdown period the library services and library staff work time is fixed. But during lockdown period all the users who need information started asking library staff at any point of time as there is no fixed time for them to ask the resources. It has created problem for all the library staff.
- **Use of more than one medium to provide the same information to users.** During the lockdown period different users are asking information through different mode of communication, some would ask information through e-mail, some would ask through whatsapp, some would put text message and some would call through telephone and ask information. Some would ask through face book page etc. this is also very panic situation to library staff that as per the requisition the library staff need to replay for their queries.
- **Converting of some traditional services into digital services:** During the lockdown period some of the library services such as issuing of physical books is converted as providing access of e-books to users, print news paper service is totally converted to access through online mode. All the print journals are made access as online journals.
- The limitation of working at home increases the difficulty of effectively fulfilling job responsibilities of library staff, such situation create problem in understanding the users requirements and providing the right information to them. If they don't get the right information again the same effort need to put by library staff for providing information.
- All these challenges directly or indirectly affect the ability of library staff to explore the right tools and provide digital library services efficiently, confidently and comfortably during the pandemic period.

B. Challenges in access of digital content and online services:

- All the users do not have digital devices to access the library resources from their home.

- All the library content are also not available in digital format. Only earlier subscribed online journals, online magazines, online news papers, online databases, subscribed e-books and some of the digital library content are available in digital format but most of the library resources are still not accessible in lockdown period.
- Due to lack of technical support some institutions are unable to provide the online services of subscribed resources.
- Lack of infrastructure in accessing of digital content also a big challenge to users.
- All the required information for teaching and research are not available in digital formats also a challenge to users for complete their work.
- Those who are using digital resource and digital content and digital devices such staff and students are faced many issues during lockdown period.
- Working for long time in digital device has caused health issues. This is also a challenging for users.

C. Circulation Section: The functions of circulation section is to checkout, check in and reservation of books, reading materials, registration of new users, monitoring of proper issue and return of library books as per the standard rules of the institute by faculty and students of the institute.

Following are past practices in Circulation Section:

- Issues of library books as per the rules of the institutions for fixed period of time.
- Receiving of library books through check-in after used by user.
- Reserving of books which are already issued to users.
- Registering of new users in the library automation software and providing them a library borrower ID card.
- Replacing of returned library books in the stock area.
- If the issued book is in demand and other users need the same book that time the book maybe retained during renewal time and issued to reserved person.

Changes in past practices after covid-19 pandemic:

- During lockdown period libraries are fully closed and during that time above said past practices are completely closed at circulation.
- If the library is reopened based on the govt. orders during that time the following standard operating procedures need to be followed to quarantine the library materials or books returned by users which are issued before lockdown period.

- If the issued book are returned to the library such books can be collected and kept in the specified area inside the library (before that the librarian need to identify the separate location to collect and keep such books for the purpose of quarantine)
- The returned book needs to be kept in an isolated area for the period of 24 hours because corona virus survives on cardboard, paper jacket materials for 24 hours.
- After that the books can be salved or it can be issued to needy users.
- The staff wanted to return books needs to write down the return time of book duration and quarantining period by wearing mask, hand gloves.
- After that the library staff needs to monitor the users' whether they are following SOP in the library to prevent the spread of virus or not. If they are not following library staff needs to tell them to follow SOP in the library.

6. Some suggestion to prevent the spread of corona virus in the library:

- The duration of the overdue period may be extended for some more periods with the approval of administration.
- The charges may be waived off for such books which are overdue.
- The eBook of high demand title may be purchased in library to prevent the spread of corona virus in the library.
- The user can make use of OPAC facility to search the book instead of searching the book in the library or in the racks. it also helps in avoiding of virus spread.
- If the required book is available in the library after searching in OPAC the same title may be requested through the mail to the library staff for issue purpose library staff should make arrangement for the same. It also helps in avoiding virus spread.
- To avoid the spread of corona virus in the library, access of library for uses may be restricted by converting open access system to close access system for some period or until this problem of corona is solved.
- The library cards need to be handled by library staff only. Users need not touch the library card and book cards.
- During the issue of library books users need to maintain social distancing between them otherwise they can come and collect the book on allotted time.
- The library may provide the table of content services for newly arrived books along with high demeaned books through OPAC.
- Till the eradication of corona virus, library can plan for subscription of e-news papers, e-journals, e-magazine instead of print sources.

- For return of books RFID self check in stations can be installed. The books returned through self check in station quarantine need to be followed thoroughly.

7. Conclusion:

During the lock down period the library staff worked hard to provide required information to users through various channels and medium. They found their own ways to serve their users queries in various ways. Covid-19 lockdown period is really challenging for people across world. Its impact is not only on educational field but on all the sectors of human life even though people are trying their best to prevent the situation and it is must to prevent the spread of covid-19 and break the chain of corona spread by maintaining social distancing, wearing face masks and following of the SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) guidelines issued by government from time to time.

Reference:

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