

Chapter 25

Library Services and Preventive Measures in University Libraries During the COVID–19 Pandemic

B. P. Singh

Dayalbagh Educational Institute, India

ABSTRACT

During and post COVID-19 pandemic, all states of India and major cities are in nationalized lockdown. Across the country, suspected cases are found daily, and this is increasing day by day. This will undoubtedly increase if precautionary measures are not taken. Indian universities, colleges, and schools were in lockdown, and most of the students are locked down in their homes physically. The main objective of this chapter is to share the best practice of library services during this pandemic with the personal experience of a university library. In this chapter, the author presents the university library's condition during this health crisis and describes the certain challenges to deliver the virtual library services under the work-from-home model.

INTRODUCTION

A novel coronavirus was first discovered in Wuhan city of China in October 2019, and it declared a global pandemic in March 2020 by the World Health Organization. In India, the first case of coronavirus was noticed on 30th January 2020 in the Kerala state (The Wire, 2020). This disease, called Corona Virus Disease (COVID), spreads among humans through direct, indirect, or close contact with infected persons through mouth and nose secretions (Kabadayi et al. 2020). After the spread of COVID19, many countries were adversely affected by this pandemic since October 2019. Since December 2019, COVID-19 has been a huge challenge to save the human community. The novel COVID 19 created the health emergency and human life crisis over the world. Also, all types of libraries and museums are adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and almost all libraries around the world have been facing complete lockdown challenges in opening and providing access to their print collections and services by patrons. In India, all

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educational institutions, schools, colleges, universities are in complete lockdown as per central government guidelines which affect the student's studies. The majority of students are staying in their homes and they are not able to get their study materials from libraries. Today, university libraries are playing a crucial role to perform the duty and delivery of reading materials (books/journals) through digital library services to the registered users on their mobile devices. During the nationalize lockdown March-June 2020 all the services were delivered through online mode as virtual services to avoid the spread of coronavirus in the human community. This study covered the best practices and service delivery during the pandemic when the University Grant Commission (UGC) issued an official circular to all universities for classes suspended and online classes were started through virtual meeting tools. During the online classes offered by university teaching faculty, university libraries are implemented virtual library services as opportunities to changing the information delivery landscape. At the beginning of April 2020, library professionals for the first time in world history found themselves without their library space to share the information resources and their cultural heritage. Almost all Indian university libraries and most higher education institution libraries had already given their registered users some special kind of access to online e-resources (e-journals, e-books, and audiobooks, reports, and research data as well as streaming access to multimedia resources over the internet. The COVID 19 pandemic created a crisis with staff trying to perform their normal duties at the workplace they had to resort to working remotely.

After COVID-19 was declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organization in 2020. The entire education system of India has been closed by MHRD, the Government of India. In educational institutions, both teachers and students participated in educational activities through an e-learning system. During the lockdown period, the Indian government promoted e-learning platforms like SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds), NPTEL (National Program for Technology Enhanced Learning), ATAL, NME (National Mission on Education), PG Pathshala, e-Gyankosh, Gyan Darshan, National Digital Library of India, etc. Also, University libraries started the remote accessible collections and services for worldwide access by registered patrons on their mobile devices. The delivery of library services during lockdown was a major challenge with the transition from physical to online mode. In India, almost all university libraries deliver online information services. The university libraries are adversely affected during the pandemic due to lack of staff, technology applications, off-campus access, financial shortage to subscribed web-based e-resources, etc. However, the National Digital Library of India, Institutional repositories, PG pathshala, Shodhganga repository, MOOCs, and other digital initiatives/projects were helpful to patrons to continue their study in this pandemic.

The main objective of this chapter is to share the best practice of library services and challenges during this pandemic with the university libraries of India and to make other university libraries aware of the safety precautions for library staff and users during this pandemic. Additionally, the implementation of emerging technologies to the efficient delivery of virtual library services to its faculty members, scholars, and students on their mobile devices during the pandemic and to provide a description of the certain challenges and implications for the library staff working from home and remotely over the networks.

BACKGROUND

In India, the second wave of COVID-19 has started in the middle of March 2021 and during May 2021 it was on peak. India has recorded the highest 4,12,262 new coronavirus cases in a single day on Thursday, 6th May 2021, and 3980 deaths. The major states affected of India from the second wave of coronavirus

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