



Online services during the COVID-19 crisis by the agricultural libraries in Karnataka: An overview

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Abstract

The study discusses the background of the corona virus disease presented unique challenges to all the stakeholders of education system. It throws light on the different dimensions of education sectors affected by this pandemic and the response of the libraries and librarians during this period. The sudden and unexpected outbreak of the virus forced the library professionals, to ascertain ways of working in a rapid time frame like shifting to digital platform wherever possible and to provide adequate remote services to the users. The purpose of this paper is to find out how technology became a saviour for the premier Agricultural universities in Karnataka during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study explores the type of services provided by various Agricultural libraries in Karnataka.

Keywords: library services, remote services, virtual services, library services, covid-19 pandemic

Introduction

During the first phase of the COVID-19 induced lockdown period (25 March to 14 April 2020) and subsequently, in phases 2, 3, 4 (up to 31 May 2020), all educational institutions, government offices, businesses, malls, etc. were shut down and only emergency services operated. Libraries were no exception. The Government of India recommended that staff of all academic institutions should work from home as far as possible so that work should not suffer. The majority of the libraries were not adequately equipped to respond to the work from home situation, as it requires a strong information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure. Moreover, even today, the major proportion of library resources are in physical form. Libraries and librarians are offering reduced or alternative services until full services called as work from home. Then onwards several academic institutions/groups/associations started various online programs like webinars, Faculty Development Programme, workshops, quiz competition, exams and trainings etc. In fact library professionals have demonstrated their skills, empathy and flexibility during lockdown to respond to the rapidly evolving situation. But technology cannot do this alone the role of library professionals is very crucial to make their users aware about the facilities and services provided by them. The online library services provided during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis by the agricultural university libraries in Karnataka state are:

Access to Print Materials

Libraries have taken special effort to make the print collection available to its users. They have compiled a list of course reading materials and provided a link to it and have also introduced delivery of scanned pages limited to few pages or a chapter in a print document available in the library collection on request also introduced the service of online delivery of document/ research paper on request.

Ask a Librarian

The libraries started help through the 'Ask a Librarian' service, where students, teachers and researches have access to librarians' help in real time through email service. The link to the service is available on the library's homepage.

Remote Access to E-Resources

The main aim of any academic library is to enhance and strengthen the teaching, learning and research process by installing seamless document/information delivery system and around the country all libraries of higher education system have been working hard to provide services and access to collections to the users who have been displaced due to COVID-19. While all the libraries under study have provision of remote access to subscribed electronic resources, many have taken a lot of effort in leveraging and expanding existing online services.

Notably library have displayed step by step user guide on remote login to get access to the licensed electronic resources. User has to authenticate using their institutional e-mail ID and password or they may access the resources using common ID provided for COVID-19 crisis period.

Creating Awareness about Open Access Educational Resources

The libraries started online Users awareness programs to make users aware about Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), AMS Free Online Books, Book Boon, Directory of Open Access Books (DOAB) and other open access resources.

Organisation of Virtual Events/ Webinars

Libraries have taken effort in arranging webinars relating to topics starting from information literacy to research ethics to educate their users on the use of digital information in their learning and research activities.

Easing of Penalty Rules and Online Renewal of Print Resources

Most of the libraries have extended the due date for all types of reading materials issued to all categories of members. Whereas libraries has renewed thousands of books issued prior to lockdown to avoid penalty to users and even rights have been granted in the library automation software so that the users can renew the materials themselves from remote login.

Popularized Shodhganga, e-shodh Sindhu and e-PG Pathshala Services

The Shidhganga (<https://shodhganaa.inflibnet.ac.in>) is a digital repository platform of 2,60,000 plus Indian Electronic Theses and Dissertations for research students to deposit their Ph.D. theses and make it available to the entire scholarly community in open access.

The e-Shodh Sindhu (<https://ess.inflibnet.ac.in/>) provides current as well as archival access to more than 10,000 core and peer-reviewed journals and a number of bibliographic, citation and factual databases in different disciplines from a large number of publishers and aggregators to its member institutions, including centrally-funded technical institutions, universities and colleges that are covered under I2 (B) and 2 (f) Sections of the UGC Act.

The e-PG Pathshala (<http://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/>) hosts high quality, curriculum-based, interactive e-content ,e-text and video, Post Graduate disciplines of social sciences, arts, fine arts and humanities, natural and mathematical sciences.

Assistance in Information Searching and Scholarly Writing

It was found that that efficiency of libraries in providing virtual reference services in a new and improved manner got enhanced during this COVID-19 obligations on providing physical services in person. Various attempts were made by most of the libraries to facilitate Inter library loan services on a virtual basis from requisition to supply. Similarly Plagiarism checking, Email Alert services, Scanned document services were taken as the priority services and all efforts were taken by libraries to highlight these services on the websites with complete detailing of the requisite process for these services.

Providing Remote Access to Institutional Repositories

The libraries started uploading documents and metadata creation for institutional publications, tutorials, manuals, class notes, course kit etc and providing remote access to Institutional Repositories.

Creating Awareness to Users about National Digital Library of India.

The National Digital Library of India is a digital repository of a vast amount of academic content in different formats and provides interface support for leading Indian languages for all academic levels, including researchers and lifelong learners, all disciplines, all popular form of access devices and differently abled learners. Students of Science, Management, Engineering and Social Science streams can get benefited by visiting <https://www.ndl.gov.in/> or <https://ndl.iitkgp.ac.in/> and clicking “Corona Outbreak: Study from home” button on top to access, free of cost, Web courses Notes, Questions, Solutions, etc., on various subject areas they are studying, from authoritative sources to continue their study effectively during this difficult situation arising out of suspension of classes and closure of libraries due to COVID-19 Lockdown.

Conclusion

Though Indian librarians faced infrastructural problems, by and large, the situation was handled pretty well during the pandemic. Due to sudden outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic brought a radical changes in delivery of library and information services, as strict social distancing and lockdown measures were imposed in the early phases of the pandemic. The Internet and web technologies have created a new and unparallel environment and enabling the libraries to enhance and strengthen the research, teaching and learning even in this difficult and uncertain time. The concept and practice of providing remote access of electronic resources by libraries is not new, but the user friendly way adopted by libraries and the number of resources are made available during the pandemic.

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