Usage of Library Services during the COVID 19 Pandemic in Rajarata University of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

In Sri Lanka, many academic libraries provide their library services on-premises until the sudden unexpected Covid 19 pandemic. The pandemic caused a huge impact on ongoing library services and library professionals were challenged to continuing library services with the limited resources. Considering the prevailing situation, the library system of Rajarata University of Sri Lanka initiated new service delivery platforms to continue the existing library services and continued previously provided services. This research analyses the usage of library services provided by the main library during the pandemic. Evaluated services were online resource request and delivery service, online awareness sessions, past papers delivery service through Moodle, online public access catalog service and library website. Different evaluation methodologies were used to evaluate the provided services and a new research model was developed using separate evaluation criteria for each evaluation methodology. The selected evaluation criteria were the number of resource requests, participation percentage of online awareness sessions, access percentage of past papers Moodle course, usage of online public access catalog and usage of the library website. Each criterion was analysed using a different methodology and results were presented separately. The study concludes that the main library of Rajarata university of Sri Lanka was able to provide a significant service to the university community during the Covid 19 with the help of technology, even though the library was not physically accessible.

Keywords: Library services, Covid 19, Online resource request and delivery service, Online awareness sessions, Web analytics

Extended abstract

Introduction

The novel coronavirus has made a significant impact to all most all the ongoing activities in the world. Many of the countries had to undergo partial or full lockdowns (Humaid et al., 2020). The lockdown of countries also affected the education sector and the education professionals had to take various approaches to continue the services provided (Espino-Díaz, Fernandez-Caminero, Hernandez-Lloret, Gonzalez-Gonzalez & Alvarez-Castillo, 2020). With the purpose of distributing knowledge and information to the university community, the library system of Rajarata University initiated new service delivery platforms during the Covid 19 pandemic. As students are away from university premises, the library introduced an online resource request and delivery service via emails so that students could maintain their reading habits even in the midst of the pandemic. Online awareness session series provided more details regarding newly introduced services and continued services. Since the Rajarata University library system is still implementing the remote access facility for past papers server, library system provided the open-access facility for past papers via Moodle, the Learning Management System (LMS) of the university. Further, an online library registration service and online clearance service were introduced. In addition to that, previously provided Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) service and service of the library website were continued. OPAC service is used to provide information regarding existing

book titles and the library website is used to post the most recent updates to the patrons. This research focused in measuring the usage of selected newly introduced service delivery platforms (online resource delivery, online awareness sessions, past papers delivery using LMS) and continued library services (OPAC, library website) that the main library provided during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Objectives

As this pandemic is a new challenge for both library professionals and patrons, it is essential to measure the usage of providing services for future decision making. Therefore, the main objective of the research was measuring the usage of provided library services during the Covid 19 period. Moreover, research has been carried out to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the newly introduced service delivery platforms and to identify the methods to uplift the library services. The research can be used as a SWOT analysis to implement a new library automation system. Ultimately, the obtained results can be used to analyse the effectiveness of library contribution for the online teaching and learning process during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Methodology

Based on the selected services, came up with a model which is shown under Figure 1, for measuring the usage of library services in Rajarata University of Sri Lanka.
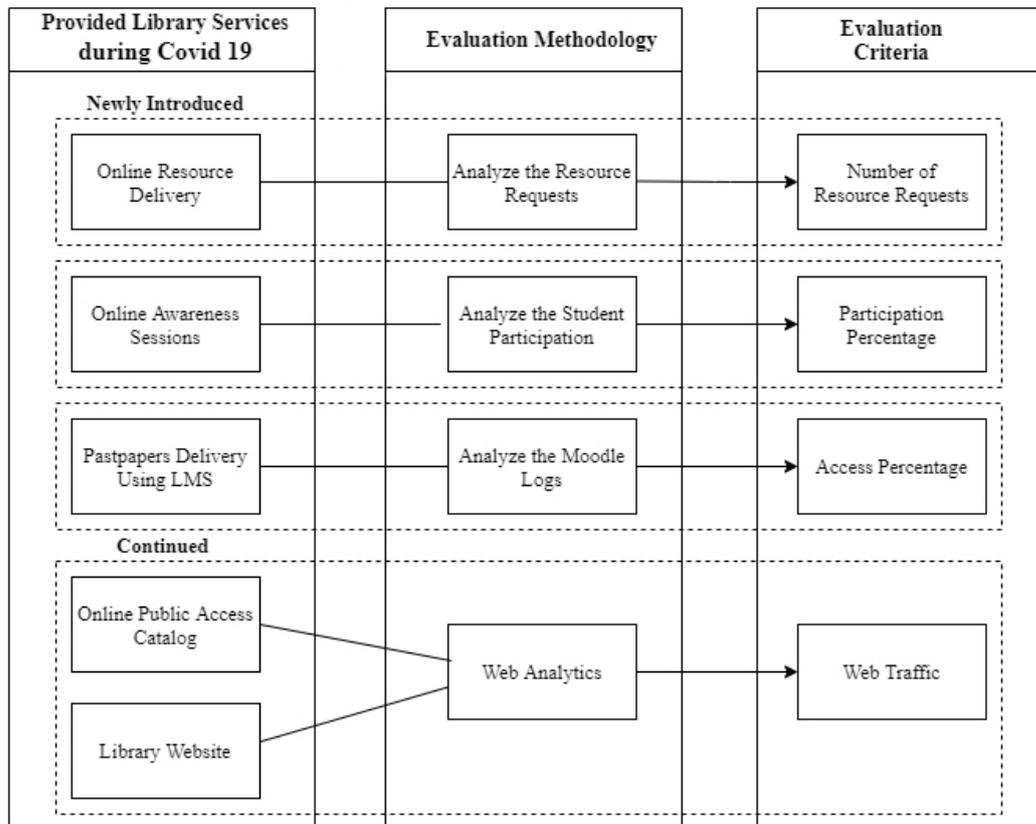

Figure 1. Developed model for measuring the usage of library services

In this model, the usage was measured with different evaluation methodologies and evaluation criteria. Data

was gathered under selected evaluation criteria from May 2020 to August 2021, intending to obtain a more accurate output from the research.

The usage of the online resource delivery service was determined using the number of resource requests forwarded by the patrons within the selected period. The Main library of the Rajarata University organized a number of online awareness sessions during the pandemic and the participant percentage was used to obtain the usage of the service. Participant percentage was calculated by dividing the number of participants from the expected participants.

$$Participant\ Percentage = \frac{No\ of\ Participants}{Expected\ Participants} \times 100\%$$

The Access percentage of the Moodle course was used as the evaluation criteria of the introduced past paper delivery service. As the Library system distributed the past papers through LMS, the Moodle logs generated within the selected time period were used to evaluate the access percentage.

$$Access\ Percentage = \frac{Active\ Participants\ during\ selected\ time\ period}{No\ of\ Participants} \times 100\%$$

The evaluation of the continued services was done using web analytics. Web analytics is a widespread method that is used to make a better assessment of websites or web pages (Mandal, Sukumar, 2019). There are numerous inbuilt tools introduced to perform web analytics and they provide an enhanced view of user interactions (Azim & Hasan, 2018). In this study, SEMrush web analytics tool was utilized to analyse the web traffic of both OPAC and library website.

Results

The proposed model was followed, and the obtained results were presented using diagrams and charts.

Usage of online resource delivery service – As the library responds to all resource requests, delivered resources via librarian's email were listed under a delivered month and obtained the monthly usage.
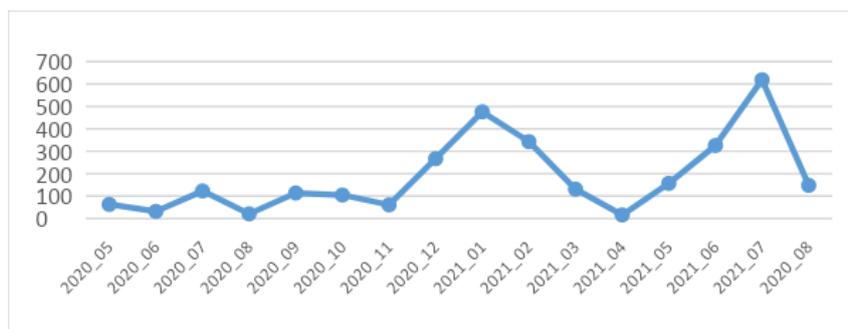
Figure 2. Usage of online resource delivery service

Usage of online awareness sessions **-** 85% Participation percentage for the online awareness sessions was obtained.

Usage of online past papers delivery **-** Participant's last access date of the past papers Moodle course showed 100% level usage of Past papers delivery service.

Usage of OPAC **-** Figure 3 shows the traffic analysis chart of OPAC site generated by the SEMrush web

analytics tool for the usage of the OPAC service from May 2020 to August 2021.
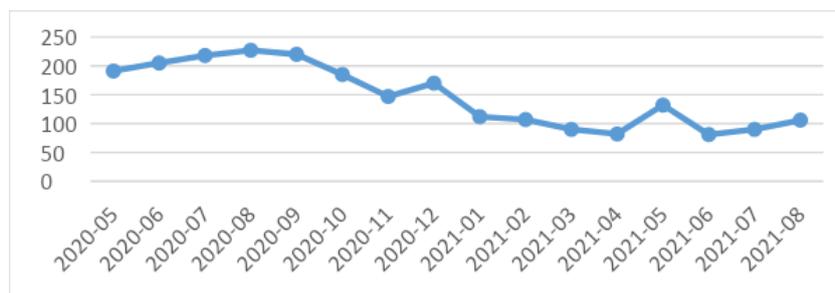
Figure 3. Usage of OPAC

Usage of the library website **-** Library website usage was also obtained from the SEMrush traffic analysis report and the chart shows the usage of the library website during the selected period.
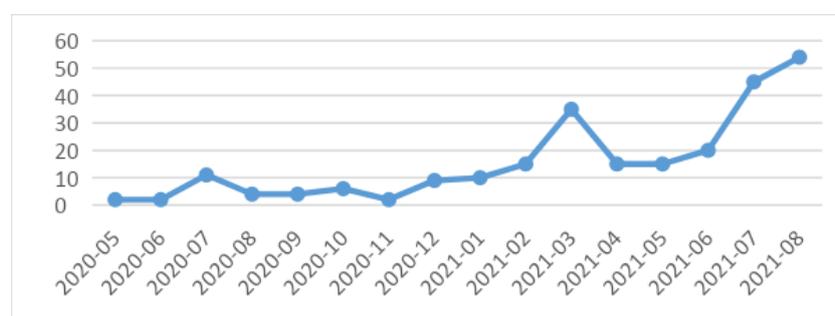
Figure 4. Usage of library website

Conclusion

Key findings show that the online resource delivery service played a significant role during the Covid 19 pandemic period for the online teaching and learning activities. Although most of the patrons actively engage with this process, the obtained results show a significant decrease in extra reading habits. Most of the patrons had only focused on the subject related materials and had shared the requested materials with others via social media groups. That shared material usage is not included in the obtained results. Participation percentage and student feedbacks conclude that the usefulness of online awareness sessions for continuing the library activities is satisfying. The obtained result for the past papers delivery service only considered the Moodle enrolled users and it does not provide a clear analysis of the patrons as a whole. Moreover, the usage of OPAC and the library website shows student engagement with library services during the pandemic.

Recommendations

With the analysis of the study results, it is recommended that remote access facility for institutional repository and past papers server should be provided to the patrons during the pandemic period. Document scanning facilities, infrastructure facilities must be improved, and sufficient staff training is needed to provide online services. Moreover, it is better to maintain a digital repository using delivered documents. It is important to update the governing bodies about the library services and improve the allocation time for library awareness sessions. Further, patron feedbacks should be evaluated to measure the effectiveness of provided services and

all the obtained data should be taken for developing plans for the post Covid era.

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