

# THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES AND LIS PROFESSIONALS IN CHANGING THE OPEN ACCESS LANDSCAPE DURING COVID-19 CRISIS

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**Abstract** *The COVID-19 has made us realize the importance of “R4: information must reach the ‘right information’ ‘in right time’ ‘to right person’ and ‘through a right channel or platforms’ and eventually witnessed to the era of ‘teach for all’ ‘learn by all’ ‘learn without a wall, without teacher’ ‘service on finger’ and ‘information on devices.’ The unexpected outbreak of COVID-19 infections in 2020 has a global impact without any man-women, aged-child, color, rich-poor, literate-illiterate, and other geographical and ethnographical differentiation. As non-profit service centers of libraries, geographic locality and size are learning the facts about this global health crisis, informing the different communities and adapting community-centric emerging services and facilities to meet changing community information needs and expectations during these health emergencies. It is time to realize and remind the social communities of the essentialness of libraries and their library professionals to collect, organize, preserve, and disseminate information through different virtual platforms to fulfill the remotely scattered library users due to the shocking spread of COVID-19 deadly disease. This paper researcher has demonstrated the role of libraries and library professionals in selecting, collecting, organizing, preserving, and disseminating information along with challenges of library professionals to restricting library services, facilities, and other ‘user-centric’ functional activities to move on user door-steps and fulfill existing information needs.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Coronavirus, Pandemic, LIS Professional, Library Services, Open Access

## INTRODUCTION

In 2020, various natural and health emergencies had created ‘social disaster’ in various social, transports, educational, trade and economic, business frames that have been quarantined and closed. Most of the libraries have been physically closed down as a result of pandemic emergencies. Then libraries had realized the importance of information in these pandemic conditions and continuing service to assist individuals, community peoples, students, teachers, researchers, planners, and decision-makers to discover, retrieve, analyze and make use of desired drive-based information; many library services have been. They can be adapted to ensure they remain to continue, available, and accessible to user communities through web or mobile enable platforms, and physical access to remain relevant, are urgently needed in this current global health crisis.

Some of the personal or professional challenges will make ‘man perfect’ with finding professional ‘weakness’/ professional ‘gaps’ and increase ‘professional efficiency’

to promote set up quality things in libraries. As a result, it witnessed a new door open for library staff to learn new things, expertise with different conditions, employees becoming more equipped to handle technological advancements, and creative and collaborative. Simultaneously, some have created real barriers that affect their abilities, stabilities, and capabilities to perform jobs and demonstrate their potential by providing richer and quality services to their users. It indirectly impacts an increase in the library’s imaginary aspect. In this curial time, from first week of March-2020, the national and international professional associations, expert groups and committees were realized their COVID-19 statements i.e., by

- ALA ‘statement on COVID-19’ on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020, (ALA, 2020) followed by
- CILIP-‘concerning COVID-19 and knowledge, library and information professionals from the (CILIP, 2020) board’ on 18<sup>th</sup> March,
- LIASA’s present stated statement on COVID-19 crisis on 18<sup>th</sup> March,

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- ALIA's- 'message from ALIA's board' on 20<sup>th</sup> March, e) IFLA- Secretary-General stated that (LIASA, 2020) 'COVID-19 and the Global library filed' on 23<sup>rd</sup> March,
- Library Association of Ireland-'a message to LAI's membership' (LAI, 2020) on 24<sup>th</sup> March and etc., library association and discussion platforms were brought convenient regulation, guidelines for safety measures to continuing the library services in this changing pandemic environment and share current alerts issues, continual updates and handling social issues through websites, portals and social networks and promote to continue the library services on this fast-moving situation.

## COVID-19 IMPACT ON LIBRARIES

As we all know, COVID-19 is one of the epidemic deadly diseases like Spanish flu, chikungunya, measles, etc., because it has been shockingly spreading all over the globe, without differentiation of developed and under developing countries, communities, skin and colors and geographical or regional differences, etc. The most obvious symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, dry cough, listlessness, body ache, and others such as shortness of breath, pains, aches, sore throat and reported diarrhea, nausea symptoms in some cases (IFLA, 2020a). The COVID coronavirus is transmitted from person to person, especially those who normally neglect their health concerns. In this difficult pandemic, the role of libraries and professionals would be appreciated because, in this uncertainty, all the libraries and professionals are struggling to provide timely information to all categories of users, especially whoever sheltered in their home, whether located in urban or remote places and satisfy user's needs, to engage them in pandemic (Stay Safe, Stay home, Save Lives). Also, providing services to user's door-steps by using many online platforms and advising them to no need to panic about the coronavirus and accessing materials from the library. Libraries provide equal opportunity access to free information to all the users; the libraries are always ready to fulfill the user's information needs, which exist in the library services/system.

The American Library Association (ALA) stated that *'in times of crisis, all kinds of libraries and information centers have played invaluable roles in supporting, assisting their geographically scattered communities both in-person and virtually.'* (Hall, 2020).

Information centers and information professionals are trusted experts/specialists who have a crucial role in not only showing the spread of the COVID-19 virus infections but also the spread of 'misinformation' in all layers of the social communities.

The International Federation of Library Association (IFLA, 2020) immediately effectuated in mid of March 2020 and addressing the health emergencies in real-time during this precise stage of its alarming of COVID-19 spreading chances. In this case,

*'libraries and information centers and their user communities in across the globe are being affected by the emergence and shocking spread of the Covid-19 coronavirus and escalating outlined various early approaches to mitigate and diminish these COVID-19 pandemic impacts and effects on libraries'*

When libraries had to shut their doors due to the pandemic, most of the things jumped into the fray for continuing to offer services and user satisfaction depends on skilled professionals and their professional concerns to serve with these pandemic difficulties and fulfillment of user's needs the top priority. But this unexpected pandemic has dragged more challenges and inconveniences for both libraries and professionals. Some of the COVID difficulties and issues noticed are as follows:

- It is better sudden sheltered libraries while controlling the spreading corona-virus, but most of the developing country library users most depend on physical libraries.
- Subscription of e-resources and databases is the fittest solution to provide reliable information in this health crisis, but the cost of the subscription is high, and all libraries may not be able to subscribe to all contents.
- Virtual/online platforms will become more convenient for the prevailing pandemic condition, but most users are aware, and some use it for the first time.
- Online orientation, webinars, and virtual discussion are impressive about new things of learning. Yet, most of the learners are not able to clear and get on the spot solution for their doubts and learning problems, and webinars become playing events for students and learners.
- The Internet makes an equal provision of educating facilitates to anybody, anywhere, anytime, but the speed of the network, download, and connectivity will make learning differentiation.
- COVID-19 crisis will give existing challenges for libraries and library professionals, and it can increase the professional efficiency, and the pandemic rules and additional works will create more pressures and increase professionals' stress of the staff.
- Web-based, online library services will increase the library and professional identity. However, most libraries are still facing the skilled or expert staff to handle web-based activities of libraries.
- Libraries coordination and professional collaborations are most helpful to resource-sharing activities in this

pandemic, but there is a difference between big and small libraries, levels of their collections, and other institutional and individual issues.

- Libraries can provide and serve anything to anybody, but there are certain rules and restrictions for continuation when it comes to implementation.
- Libraries are permanent, but unexpected crises like COVID-19 will not have a long life, so for whole things, can't do at a particular time and issue.
- Continuing communication with users is good for providing library services, but the users are there in remote or not reachable areas.
- Work from will overcome travel tiredness, but the consistency and innovative works will not be expected from remote work, because reason is more!
- ICT revolution has made all provisions to learners, teachers, researchers, and libraries, but due to cost, personal, institutional, and some of the administrative issues impact effectively to make use.

## ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN COVID-19

During the global health emergencies caused by the novel COVID-19 coronavirus infection and impact, user communities- as publics, teaching, learning, and research communities need authentic and adequate information to face such an unexpected event. In a changing environment, libraries and information centers around the world have been facing both international and external problems in providing access to its resources both in physical and electronic form. (Asif Mohammad & Singh, 2020) and impact on providing library services ranging from continuing services though in person or online or some of them full closures, (Mestri, 2020). The a) financial burdens, b) infrastructure issues, c) additional hardware and software assistance for COVID-19 operations, d) professional collaboration and commitments with COVID-19 handling issues, e) initial stages of library automation and digitization, f) problem of professional expertise to handling virtual things, g) different regulations, policies and guidelines of governments, i) public and peoples negligence about the COVID-19 rules, j) inadequate COVID-19 information available in libraries, k) lack of public awareness about COVID-19 nature, l) difficult for small institutions to manage this COVID-19 issues, m) encountered problems in providing digital access due to copyright, n) poor ICT handling skills of professionals, o) publishers will refusing to provide online access and accessing prices far higher than for physical works, r) users were scattered in different urban and remote areas, s) limitation of working at living destinations increases the difficulty of effectively fulfilling professional responsibilities, and other issues have been impact in handling of libraries in these pandemic conditions.

In between the hide and seek of COVID-19 spreading, the world is taking slow moves towards the reopening of libraries, and information centers are increasingly on the agenda as countries look to lift broader restrictions. But nobody knows what eject happens about the COVID-19 future shape, and people had already started 'live with corona.' In this intricate time, libraries must be the primary information resources of accurate information by rendering changing and seeking easy access to authentic and adequate information. Along with that set of web-based services such as remote access, design website, subscription of electronic resources, ask librarian, frequently ask questions, live chats, streaming interaction, user assistance, virtual information literacy, online document delivery services, virtual bulletin service, e-mail alerts, online newspaper clipping, inter-library loan services through various e-Consortium, digital library services, and other web-based services have given back end support to libraries provide reliable information can be very vital to their academic, teaching and research secluded user communities.

The innovative, technological advancements and developments have changed shifting paradigms from traditional libraries to the present 'electronic' digital 'virtual' and 'smart' libraries. These ICT enabled libraries efficiently propose a wide variety of web-enabled services to the costumers and meet their information needs in the pandemic condition. Whatever developments, facilities, and infrastructures have in the libraries, all kinds of libraries are required to take care of some user-centric or library perspective precautionary concerns and safety measures to make it accessible in this health crisis without any COVID-19 disruption. Some of the crucial library safety measures coated are as below:

- There are several emerging initiatives underway to collect information resources for libraries and increase our shared knowledge across the field and with the information media.
- Libraries need to follow four stages, if the libraries willing to reopen, i.e., I<sup>st</sup> - analysis risks from surfaces, II<sup>nd</sup> - close contacts with users, III<sup>rd</sup> - the ways in with people used libraries and fourth overall levels of infection in that region, (Japan Library Association, 2020).
- All libraries to be considered to put up COVID-19 precautionary concerns and safety measures information on library websites home page.
- Library websites and portals need to continuously update the COVID-19 information on pandemic preservation, guidelines for disinfecting workplaces, and what library professionals and their library users can do to reduce contagion risk.
- Libraries need to ensure that the valuable resources provided by libraries, such as support for learning,

teaching, and research communities engaging in online instruction; access to hotspots, electronic resources; e-books, e-journals and e-databases subscriptions to online resources and curated list to COVID-19 information and related issues best-practice.

- Libraries should strictly instruct their professional staff and users to take basic defensive concerns and safety measures to avoid spreading germs, i.e., wash hands often with alcoholic soaps and hand sanitizer, avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with their unwashed hands, and keep maintain two meters distance in between their walks in the library, avoiding close contact with peoples who are sick, instruct to unnecessarily don't touch book racks, shelves, and cubicles and create user awareness about digital and remote access facilities which support to access library resources from their home and avoid a physical visit to libraries.
- Libraries need the refinement of library policies, guidelines, regulations, and transaction rules of users as this pandemic situation.
- Libraries need to frequently clean and sanitize transaction cabins, racks, shelves, especially the returned materials of books, thesis, reports, etc.,
- Libraries need to do refinement of library facilities such as safe entry and exit ways, detachment of reading areas, handling the shelving and re-shelving of reading materials and other physical and digital pieces of equipment.
- Libraries need to give proper COVID-19 training for all professionals and supporting library staff engaging in library functions, interaction with users, and handling their information queries which have been raised from both physical and their living destinations.
- Libraries need to increase professional efficiency and create a COVID-19 library taskforce in handling the online, web-based, and virtual tools and services by giving specialized training.
- Libraries need to phase the opening of the building for library staff, users, and the COVID-19 infected persons because libraries' fundamental vision is to provide information on the needs and requirements of the information seeker.
- Libraries need to precedence library services continuation with the adaption of long-term programs to betterment library services in a crucial time.
- Libraries need to create a professional coordination working environment to improve internal and external communication between the library and users.
- Libraries need to maintain good collaboration, cooperation, coordination with other parent and sister institutions and other public organization libraries for easy resource sharing in pandemic nuisance.

- Libraries need to restructure and recalibrate their library resources, services, facilities, functionalities, and extensional activities as on the COVID-19 crisis.

Lockdown is a sudden heartbreak/human freezing situation all over the world as people are not able to move from one place to another place. So through these conditions, the libraries are also not able to provide the books physically, but for sure, the library will provide the digital collections for their users for easy access at their home.

## ROLE OF LIS PROFESSIONALS IN COVID-19 CRISIS

In a distancing environment, library professionals have been using different physical and virtual connecting channels to connect with their scattered users and to serve effectively. In this crucial time, the role of the archives or information profession is impeccable in this unanticipated health dilemma, in the creation of personal and public awareness about available health resources, services, governing facilities, and safety concerns have been provisioned for the users and public to protect this COVID-19 crisis, (Muhammad Yousuf Ali & Bhatti, 2020). The creation of personal and public awareness has become essential to reduce the intensity and rapidity of the COVID-19 spreading, and necessary precautionary safety measures will impact this deadly pandemic disease. In this crucial time, the library professional's role is essential in managing libraries and continuing to serve the users. Some important the COVID-19 professional responsibilities demonstrated are as follows:

- *In the use of phonic-enabled apps and applications:* library professionals will provide resources through these kinds of applications and educate the public to know about the intensity and rapidity of the COVID-19. Most IT companies and government IT cells have come forward to design and introduce phonic apps and applications to provide community services concerns.
- *In the use of social media usage:* library professionals should take Social Medias support, i.e., Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Messenger, etc., which were integrated crucial part of human life; these will certainly become one of the fastest public convenient connecting platforms to create personal and public awareness about the latest health developments related to COVID-19.
- *In the use of video visual/virtual tools:* professionals should use and make awareness about the existing streaming and records visual applications continuously share the experts' advice, speeches, and suggestions about nature, characteristics, health tips, necessary precautionary, safety measures and other global health issues and developments.

- *In informative assistance taken by database provide:* library professionals take information assistance from well-known database service provider, i.e., Elsevier, Wiley, Nature, Sage, Thomson and Routledge, Emerald, J-Gate, Oxford, Cambridge, Web of Science, Scopus, Springer Links, etc., whoever come forwards to provide free access for most recent health contents in digital forms on concerns about the fight against novel coronavirus without any commercial expectations.
- First and foremost, the librarian should keep safety measures in the library and our responsibilities to take care of themselves and others.
- During COVID-19, the library professionals should take care of all the available library equipment.
- Library professionals make liberalization about library rules that will be changed from the traditional library environment to a digitized environment.
- The library staff must assess the online/virtual platform to the users and give proper theoretical and technical assistance to how it's going to be used, access, and take benefits from the e-resources from their place.
- Library professionals should keep on interacting and contact with the library users for their health information needs and other recreation assistance. It is hard to sit inside the four walls continuously, so the only reading good books that will help and keep the mind calm and improve knowledge.
- Library professionals should create their blogs, information sites, and portals and regularly update COVID-19 related issues and measure public awareness levels through the COVID-19 quiz programs and provide participation certificates to create interest among the users.

Library professionals must increase physical and intellectual strengthening to meet the needs and expectations of the user communities whether it is for the COVID-19 crisis or any other pandemic stipulation and succeed in the *unconditional roles in unexpected emergencies* because mostly library professionals have been working for *'non-profit service organizations'* in the society.

## LIBRARY SERVICES IN COVID-19

The unexpected COVID-19 health crisis, from the last eight months long, the traditional/physical library systems have been completely stuck, due to the COVID-19 social distance, safety measurements, and public's precautionary rules that are strictly implemented to overcome the rapidity of spreading the coronavirus infection (Bhati & Inder Kumar, 2020). Between this awful condition, most of the libraries have been engaging in reopening and continuing their services through conducting different aspects of online

meetings, conferences, webinars and workshops, etc.; many of them are created for their content, websites, blogs, social accounts to share information. Libraries and library professionals are struggling to make something to continue serving the user communities and fulfill the changing user needs and expectations; some of the primary library services mentioned which are most convenient for existing health dilemmas are:

- A library's first and foremost service is the design and development of more *'informative library website, blog and portals'* which represents the entire library information, i.e., library resources, services, facilities, accessing and remote access apps, applications, modified library usage manual, user assistance services and other library collaboration activities followed by libraries, especially during this pandemic time.
- Libraries and library professionals need to decide on providing services from *'traditional to virtual base service'* in these health emergencies.
- Libraries and library professionals need to increase the *'information/digital literacy skills'* among the users by conducting *'online orientation, awareness or user education programmes'* in webinar kind of lecture series demonstrated by library professionals, selected experts, and governing bodies.
- Library professionals must provide *'e-Mail and e-Mail alert'* service sharing of bulk or scanned information as request or demand drop-boxed by the users.
- Libraries and library professionals should provide *'current content information'* and *'current content alert'* service about the COVID-19 update issues and developments across the world.
- Libraries and library professionals need to keep awake on *'24/7 based service'* to facilitate the *'remote access'* service to users and make provision accessed library resources from their destinations.
- Library professional should design the *'Ask Librarian'* *'Frequently Ask Questions (FAQ)'* *'Quick response services (QRS)'* and *'Online Chats'* application services and integrate with the home page library website and assign a separate *'professional taskforce'* to handle these kinds of web-based services and providing resources.
- Libraries and library professional need to provide *'user educate/user assistance'* service to use and handle:
  - *Aware and use of visual online platforms:* i.e., Google classroom, Google Due, Hangouts Meet, Zoom Meeting, WebEx, Google Meet, Go to Meeting, Go to Webinar, Impartus, Easy class, Blackboard, Edmodo, Moodle, Skype, Testmoz, Screen Recorders, Hyper say, YouTube, Live Peer, Viuly, Flixxo, Videocon, hoopla, OverDrive,

- Kanopy, Netflix, Twitch, Citrix, Tubi TV, Crackle, Kodi, Plex, Streemio, etc.,
- *Aware and use of massaging applications:* i.e., MSN, Q-Link, BroSix, Facebook messenger, Whatsapp, WeChat, Discord, Fleep, Chanty, Flock, Slack, LINE, Viber, iMessage, Twitter, and Snapchat, etc.,
- *Resource sharing platforms;* i.e., ScreenCloud, Google Slides, Google Data Studio, G-Suite, LibAnywhere, Catch, Evernote, Trello, AccessMyLibrary, Article Search, Zoho, Onehub, Zotero, Mendeley, Redcube, EndNote, and reference manager, etc.,
- *Aware and use of social networking platforms:* i.e., Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, LinkedIn, Tumblr, Blogging, Pinterest, Reddit, YouTube, Tagged, Mix, Nextdoor, Meetup, Goodreads, Classmates, Bubbly, Care, WeChat, TikTok, Skype, Viber, LINE, Myspace, Imgur, Telegram and Instagram, etc.,
- *Aware and use of Indian digital learning initiatives resources and services:* i.e., SWAYAM, SWAYAM Prabha, National Digital Library (NDL), e-Shodha Sindhu, e-PG Pathshala, Virtual labs, e-Yantra, A-VIEW (Talk to a teacher), e-Acharya, D'source (e-Kalpa), Vidwan, Spoken Tutorial, Shodhagangotri, Open Source Courseware Animations Repository (OSCAR), Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), SOS Tools, Krishikosh-Agr-ETD, InfStats, INFED, India Research Information Network System (IRINS), INFO SPORT, Indcat and other digital initiatives, apps and applications, that is designed, and developed to fulfill the desired information needs of the learning, teaching, research, and administrative communities.
- Libraries and library professionals need to make 'automat and digitize' library services and resources, which helps in increase 'resource sharing' activities among the 'parent, sister and subordinate libraries and helps in promoting the use of 'referral services' to their library users and also public.
- Libraries and library professionals should make use of 'social networking', 'professional and discussion forums' and 'professional networks', etc. online platforms for updating day-to-day COVID-19 activities will happen in the libraries.
- Libraries and library professionals should be considered to increase the use of the 'social media service' as a tool for providing information to different user communities.

- Libraries and library professionals should bring good collaboration between the libraries to execute and facilitate the 'Consortium' service to all without differentiation of big or small libraries to fight against the COVID-19 inconveniences.

Libraries and library professionals usually deal with the preservation and dissemination of information; it faced an uneventful pandemic global crisis as of now and earlier before throughout history, where some of it was while shaking the bottom of the whole community of humans. In such an emergency, it is questionable to continue conventional services to their users as of earlier and manage the traditional information gathering and dissemination process, (Chakraborty et al., 2020).

## CONCLUSION

In the changing scenario of the COVID-19, it is prime to recall the society changing the role of library and library professionals in the way of fighting with a hidden nature enemy of the COVID 19 and collect, organize and distribute reliable information to whoever facing this global health crisis. Today, the era of the internet has impacted libraries' efficiency and increased the intellectual skills and competencies of library professionals to manage both physical and digital resources, services, and facilities. In this pandemic inconvenience, libraries have been the gateways of providing relevant information related to learning, teaching, research, and also personal and public health concerns; all the users are mostly depended on the library because whenever they need accurate and updated information on existing needs, they have to consult libraries and ask information assistance by library professionals. During the COVID crisis, different types of resources, services, and facilities that are related to virtual platforms have been taking a leading role as a bridge between the users-libraries-professionals and maintain a significant role in the sharing of electronic/digital information resources, services, and facilities. The COVID-19 unexpected pandemic crisis does not seem to be eradicated. Libraries are taking this pandemic experience as a lesson and move forwards with the revitalization of their libraries by discovering and adapting innovative tools, techniques, and applications that will make enrichment of library, create opportunities to build a stronger library user interface and COVID-19 professional changes and opportunities will increase professional efficiency of library staff in the future and it encourages, libraries need to be equipped with latest physical, functional and ICT enabled infrastructure for facing any such kind pandemic situation in future.

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