Digital Access to LRC services and resources during COVID-19 Pandemic: Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University LRC Experience

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Abstract:

This study aims to discuss digital access to the Learning Resources Center services and resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. The PMU LRC's response on the pandemic situation during the periods of closure concerning resources and services is discussed and analyzed. The LRC implements new virtual services and expands the electronic resources to ensure that the PMU community is able to access the resources and information that they needed. The LRC makes efforts to gain access to their digital and physical collections as well as to provide their services remotely, with the transformation of teaching from traditional style to distance learning. There are several virtual initiatives that LRC has taken to promote digital access to the library resources and to make LRC services more efficient while challenging to deliver access to information with library closure. The researchers also examine the changes that PMU library has made to library services throughout the year 2020.

Keywords: Digital Access, LRC, Digital Resources, Virtual Services, COVID-19, Pandemic

Introduction:

The Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University (PMU) has developed an effective management plan and a preventive method aimed at reducing the effects of the current crisis (COVID 19), especially related to the unexpected transition to distance education learning. These rely on the use of information resources to implement the educational and research processes of the university and deal with the pandemic through the development of strategic plans and the allocation of a university team with experience to develop an integrated action plan. Some of these steps have become useful for the continuity of the university's teaching and research process while developing expectations for the immediate and future needs during the pandemic period.

The LRC delivers Learning Enrichment Services to provide PMU students with assistance in gaining and maintaining an adequate level of academic proficiency in order to be successful within the intellectual environment. It assists the students in cultivating good reading habits. The purpose of Learning Enrichment Services is to offer academic support through the curriculum program, and individual intervention so that every student has the opportunity to become an independent life-long learner. Considering the rapid developments in education by moving to distance education, the LRC has worked to meet the needs of the stage, developed digital content, and implemented online information resources within the library collections, as well as developing information services into remote services.

Literature Review:

Academic libraries around the world faced difficult choices about the services to the academic community, researchers, faculty members, students, and staff. These options were varied from specific restrictions that require library users to follow them. The LRC team has been working diligently to create an effective learning environment that enriches the teaching-learning process at the PMU. The team aims to provide the community members with the resources and academic support that enable them to engage PMU learners in activities. These allow them to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for advancing their academic success and future employability competencies. During the epidemic outbreak, the Learning Resources Center had provided services virtually to the users and worked hard to strengthen services remotely. The LRC team had made a lot of efforts and actions were taken to make the library ready to address the pandemic from the beginning. Therefore, virtual services were provided to the users by preparing virtual offices and providing remote services to ensure the continuity of access of users. This was continued after the control of COVID 19 in the Saudi Kingdom and the state allowed people to go back to schools and universities for classroom study. Since then, the LRC has returned to its regular business. An introduction of multiple and diverse services and programs in a hybrid manner is performed. In addition, the LRC has changed its approach to providing its services and programs using the hybrid method (both face-to-face and online) and has contributed to social justice in accessing knowledge sources with all the health constraints and economic consequences of the COVID19 epidemic.

The Learning Resources Center is seeking partnerships with international publishers to obtain more digital information sources that are not available at the Saudi Digital Library (SDL). The Library currently subscribes 21 international academic databases from the best international publishers and contains modern books and journals that are made available to PMU library users. The Learning Resources Center has also communicated with the British

Library in providing interlibrary loan services to sources not available at the LRC collections. The LRC provides a large number of information resources to the users through this service.

The Center has also concluded a cooperation agreement with the International Publishing Cengage Learning. The PMU Press provides the physical and electronic books to the LRC and contributes for publishing PMU Authors' books and make them available to the LRC physically and electronically through this agreement. The LRC has also participated in the Arab Union Catalogue and has been awarded membership, which provides online catalogue services to all Arab countries.

Digital Access to LRC during COVID-19 Pandemic:

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the PMU library has made the following changes to library services for the rest of the fall 2020 semester:

- **On-Campus and Off-Campus Access**: PMU Libraries and the Information Technology Department recognize the significance of Web-based information resources and services to off-site members of the PMU community and both are committed to initiatives that support equality of access to information resources. The Libraries have EZProxy authentication that allows a single sign-in for all valid users of library information, regardless of their location. The EZProxy service is reliable and has significantly simplified the process of accessing electronic resources off-campus.

- **Online Catalogue (OPAC):** To simplify user access and improve administrative operations, the library decided to migrate from SirsiDynix to open source library integrated system KOHA. KOHA integrated library system enables patrons to access their library account using PMU credentials. They were also able to view their borrowing history and renew materials from the library. OPAC URL http://lib.pmu.edu.sa/

- **SUMMON discovery tool:** Summon is a customized search engine that helps library users to search across most of PMU library's catalogs and online resources (SDL databases) and digital repositories from a single search box. The single search box is now available in the PMU library website. The library users can:
  - Discovery, Locating resources across multiple sources,
  - Conducting and refining searches,
  - Identifying relevant resources
  - Getting access to the resources
  - Holdings information for physical items
  - Access to the Full-text for online items
  - Request options for items without local access

- **PMU Library Training:** The library provided the necessary training to enable full access to, and use of the library's resources. The library staff conducted almost 20 sessions to students (online), The following services illustrate the LRC efforts in providing training services to the library users to access and use information resources:
  - Information Literacy Session provided through Blackboard Collaborate Ultra
  - Research Class through Blackboard Collaborate Ultra
  - Research Assistance (LRC Staff have a virtual office through Blackboard Collaborate Ultra). With the recent transition to online learning, the LRC team members are working online to ensure that queries and needs of the students and teachers are addressed in a timely manner through online Collaborate Ultra

- **Reference Services**: LRC has developed an initiative (LRC Services during COVID 19) because the current facilities do not serve online educational purposes and

distance learning. In this initiative we are dealing to provide services remotely like Virtual research help and Virtual instruction and reference Help (phone & email). These include a process by which an access and use of electronic resources available in the library through Blackboard Collaboration is implemented. Very few students are coming to the library especially those who have classes on campus. The LRC building is always open to faculty, staff, and students. All library patrons need to follow the library precautions.

- **Virtual Services:** Includes Online reference via email, phone, and chat, Online Research appointments, Virtual meet with Librarians via Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, Online databases and resources 24/7, and Interlibrary loan.
- **Facility Upgrades:** The following equipment were installed in both libraries:
  - RFID Gate/ Self: A self-issue item which efficiently helps libraries to manage human resources without the assistance from the library staff.
  - Self-Check Station: This machine can view account information, renew, and return borrowed items using a patron ID.
  - Inventory Device: This device can be used to rapidly search for books and stock-taking. In addition, lost books can be found by this device.
  - RFID Staff Work station: Librarians can check in and check out multiple items at a time using this station.
- **Collection Development**: The availability of related Physical and electronic resources to students' field such as books, periodicals, videos, programs, and databases, Inter Library Loan from other institutions is available for items not found in the library collection. Users can request FREE Inter-library loan for electronic versions of full text articles and chapter from books that can usually be provided within a 1-2 day. The LRC also have partnerships with local academic libraries and the British Library on exchange lending.
- **Improved Research Repository**: The library is pleased to announce improvements to our Research Repository. This upgraded platform incorporates the latest tools and innovative services for PMU researchers, faculty, and students. PMU Digital Repository link http://research.pmu.edu.sa/jspui/

Data Analysis:

This study highlighted the services, workshops, activities, and events that the LRC offered. The Library Staff provided more than 20 online instruction sessions and presentations. The Staff conducted several orientation sessions for students on how to access and use electronic resources. They also provided supportive services to students, faculty, and staff in areas related to research and inter-library loan requests. Table 1 displays the statistical overview of the services provided in the male and female libraries.

Table 1. Statistical overview of the services provided in the male and female libraries.

Online Research Questions	Online Information Literacy Classes	Number of Students attended the Online Information literacy classes	Inter Library Loan Request
185	28	560	220

Importantly, 185 online research questions from students on finding reliable resources were addressed and 560 students attended literacy orientation classes on how to use the library for research purposes. 220 Interlibrary loan requests from students and faculty were also

addressed. The literacy classes focused on how to utilize digital and print sources effectively. The Figure 1 provides information of the statistical usage of the LRC services.
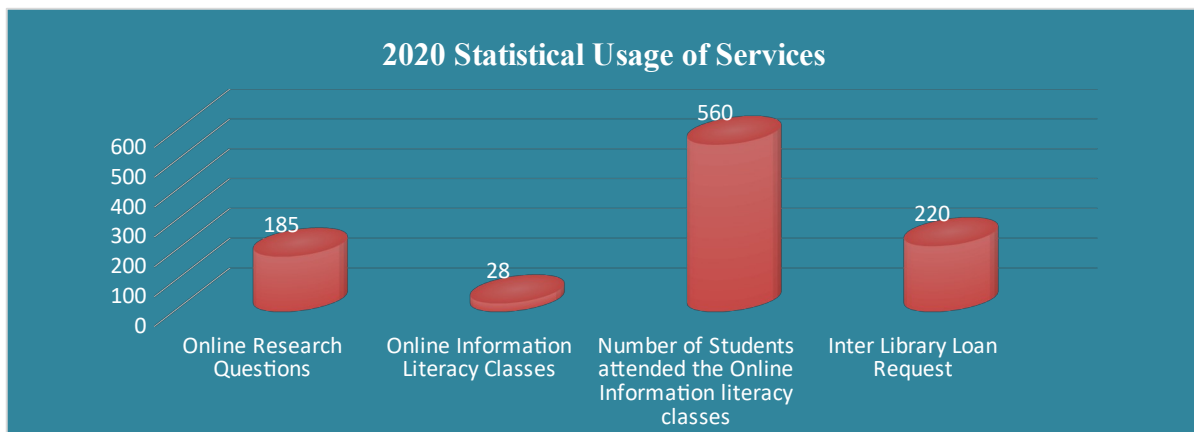

Figure 1. 2020 Statistical Usage of Services.

- **Collections**
  In this year, one of the highlights was to select, acquire, manage, preserve, and provide access to informational resources to support all programs, inspirational teaching, relevant research, and service.

- **Print Collection**
  The current available print collection is 22,968 for male and female libraries. The library received donations and student's thesis from College of Business Administration which were archived and demonstrated in the library. A total of 182 volumes were added to the library collections in 2020. The Figure 2 displays the number of library print collections.
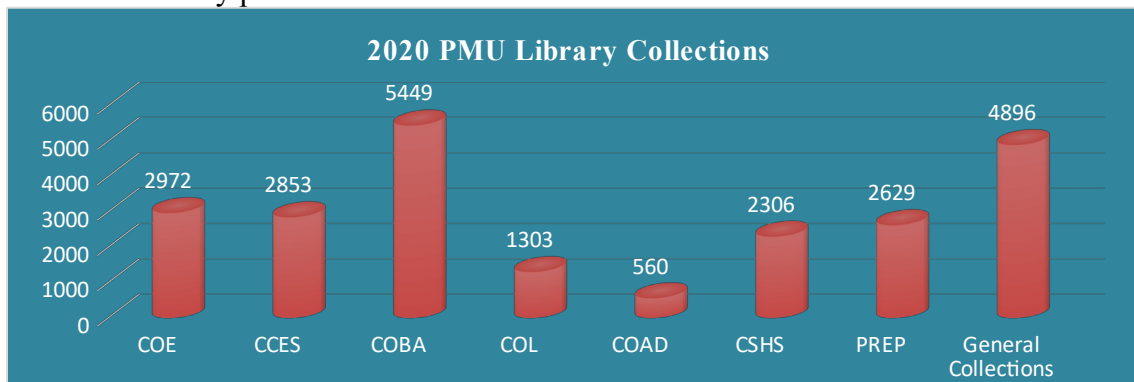

Figure 2. 2020 PMU Library Collections.

- **Statistical Usage of Electronic Resources**

  In 2020, the LRC continued maintaining its annual subscription to the Saudi Digital Library (SDL) which provides access to over 18 million digital resources to students and faculty. The SDL provided 24/7 on and off campus to all available digital journals, e-books, monographs, videos, and other e resources needed for the development of the teaching-learning and research process at PMU. The SDL provided access to four electronic book databases and seventeen electronic journal databases. The total SDL usage by faculty and students in 2020 was 85,798. The total usage included searches run and reports the number of keyword searches performed.

The Figure 3 displays the electronic resources usage statistics for 2020. Statistics indicate that ProQuest E book Central represents the highest usage with a total of 12,685 searches throughout the year, while the lowest used database was Springer Link. This can be attributed to the various databases that ProQuest holds (One million titles with many special features, e.g. save book into personal bookshelf, online reading, and allowing users to highlight and add notes and download).
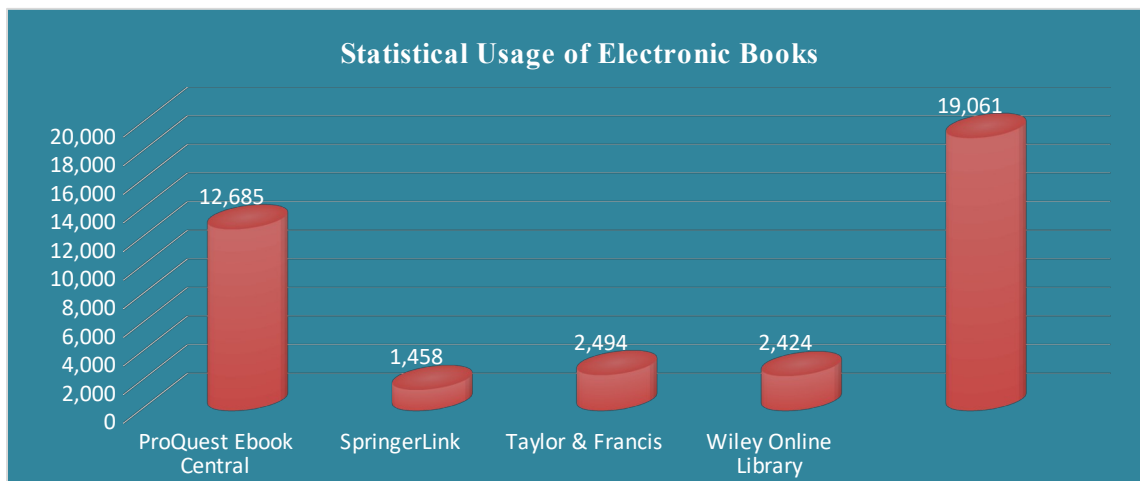

Figure 3. Statistical Usage of Electronic Books.

The Figure 4 shows that SAGE represents the highest usage with 12,010 searches throughout the year, while the lowest used database was ASCE library.
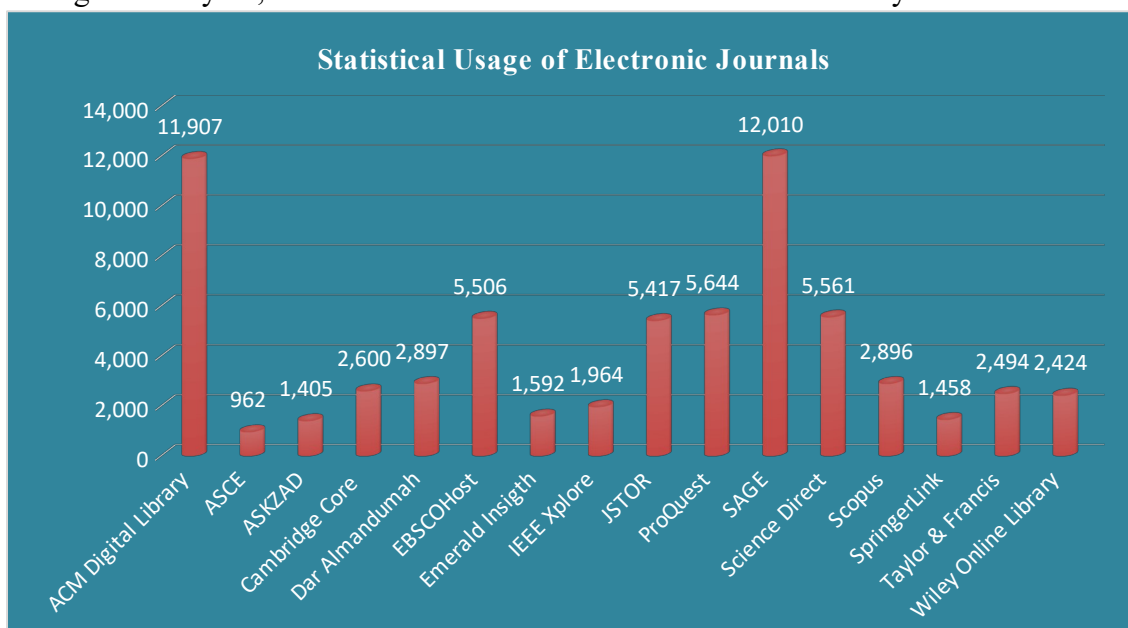

Figure 4. Statistical Usage of Electronic Journals.

The Web of Science indicates that PMU students, faculty, and staff had accessed and used it 181,810 times (see figure 5). This is an indication that Web of Science is a popular database which can be attributed to the extensive features and multimedia resources that it included. In addition, web of science is a renowned leading platform with a high-quality collection of journals and conference proceedings. The LRC

continued its yearly subscription to enhance the teaching, learning, and research environment at the university.
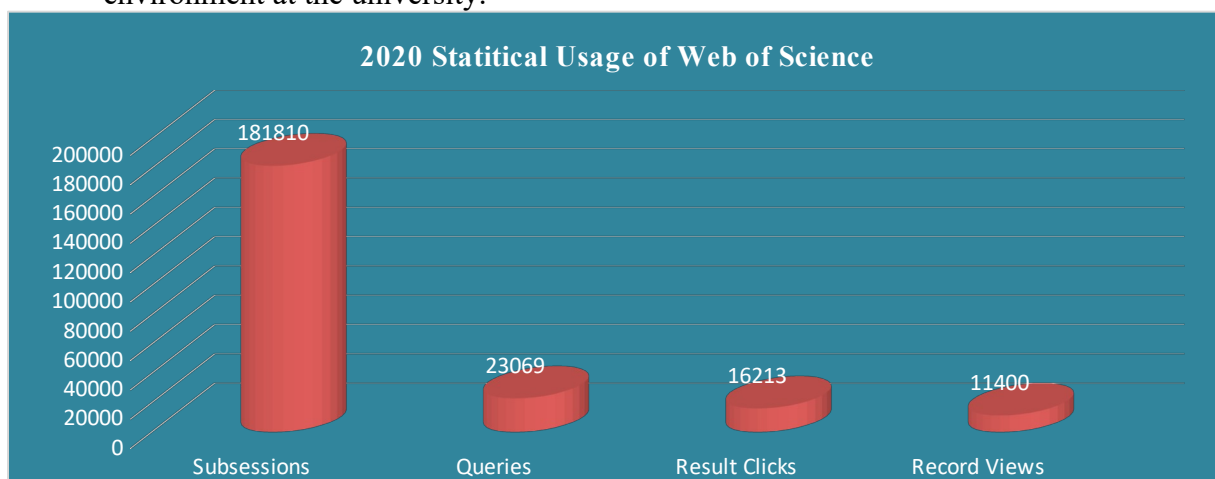

Figure 5. 2020 Statistical Usage of Web of Science.

Discussions:

A future plan has been prepared in the event of a continuing crisis. The plan considers the following actions:

1. Conducting a survey to identify the challenges faced by students and faculty during the period of using the online platform at the time of the crisis.
2. Maximizing the usage of the available international partnerships with renowned publishing houses such as Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press to access quality teaching and learning materials that are general and discipline-specific.
3. Facilitating the continuous subscription of the Saudi Digital Library and motivating faculty and students to attend webinars provided by the SDL administration to improve the utilization of the databases available on the platform.
4. Continuing to train both faculty and students periodically to access and use the library collections, and identify best practices that enhance the development of organized virtual academic interactions.
5. Activating Black Board Training and Development Manager is a platform for developing training and online courses. This online platform is specialized in creating online workshops and seminars for academic, professional development, and training programs on the Internet. This platform is necessary for providing cost effective and or free online courses that meet the needs and interests of the community.
6. Developing extracurricular activities that are in line with online distance education such as virtual Toastmasters Clubs.
7. Activating the role of the university's online platform (Collaborate Ultra) and other free platforms to be used electronically in providing the university services that support the educational process. Digitalizing the university services such as the medical clinic and the physical education exercises would create a culture of care and responsiveness that combats the consequences of COVID 19 crisis.

Conclusion:

This paper has discussed digital access to the Learning Resources Center services and resources during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as new virtual services that should be applied to support the academic libraries.

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