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Role of Library in Research Support: a Study of Bharathiar University

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Role of Library in Research Support:
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Abstract

The pressure for increased research productivity to raise institutional ranking has shifted priorities for Indian universities. The role libraries can play in this scenario is of vital importance. Research Support from libraries needs to be examined along with how researchers are responding to this. The purpose of the study was to understand how aware and satisfied the researchers in AHSS (Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences) were regarding the Research Support provision of an Indian University Library (Anna Arignar Library). The authors surveyed the relationship between researchers and Library Research Support at an Indian university which had a high research ranking in the National Institute Ranking Framework (Bharathiar University). A structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. It was found that although researchers were comparatively satisfied with most of the traditional services and resources, they were unaware of newer, researcher-specific services like bibliometrics and Research Data Management. On the basis of findings, the authors recommended proactive participation of libraries in research process, and publicizing their services. The study helps understand needs of researchers with respect to the library, and how satisfied they are with the status quo.

Keywords: Library Research Support, Research Support, Doctoral research, Library Satisfaction, Research Development, Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences

1.   Introduction

Recent years have seen an increased focus on research ranking of universities, other HEIs (Higher Education Institutes). The pressure on researchers to perform and produce research output has increased owing to this, along with the reminder that research productivity can benefit them in their career growth as well. Libraries have a potential role they can take over in helping accelerate research productivity and elevate the ranking of its respective parent organization (Hollister & Schroeder, 2015).

University Libraries are the scholarly resort for all academia, especially for research scholars. But the services provided therein tend to be dissimilar across each university. Adeniran (2012) stated that academic libraries are designed to fulfil two purposes which are supporting the university curriculum and supporting research of university. Meeting requirements of the various user groups of the university or academic institute is a fine balancing act for the library. Many a doctoral student depend on their library for resources and services that will help them with their research. Libraries have the additional role of being the "lab space" for AHSS (Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences) research students (Keller, 2015). It remains to be seen if libraries have the services to cater to them all. And even if libraries are providing all

necessary services, whether their users are aware of the services designed especially for them, is also a matter worth examining.

A functional and successful library can essentially be perceived to be in two parts: (i) Timely provision of resources and services and (ii) Creating awareness about library. It is not enough that libraries design and provide resources and information services, they also need to actively market the same among users. Otherwise, these will end up unused and users will remain ignorant about the many beneficial services of the library. In the current dynamic and technology-powered era, libraries need to actively step up and harness their strengths in a proactive way, if they are to help researchers. People in general tend to prefer easier methods to find information, and this mostly consists of "Googling" anything they need to learn or find. Although Google is helpful, it cannot compete with libraries in supporting their more complex, academic queries and requirements of the researchers. Libraries have a lot more to offer than a search engine. But this involves librarians adapting to the current situation and taking on newer roles to support their patrons and make them aware.

2. Research Support (RS)

Research Support (RS) in the library framework is concerned with providing help and assistance toward the cause of research, thus supporting researchers. This can be in the form of services especially, but also relevant library resources, space to work and skilled-cum-supportive library staff. A researcher is an individual overwhelmed by information, information needs, pressing deadlines, and research work to be done. Providing requisite assistance to this demographic segment is both expected and mandatory. Neglecting their needs in favor of supporting the teaching aspect alone would go against the library's mission. AHSS researchers depend on library resources and library space for their work. But they may be missing out on the fact that the library has a lot more to offer than this. Combined with the fact that librarians generally do not publicize their efforts, many researchers remain unaware of the benefits of library.

Most libraries tend to focus on how they can keep running the earlier established services, and end up remaining passive in this process. As early as the 1980s, there was an exhortation that librarians become proactive and welcome the new technological changes (Grover & Hale, 1988). In this transformative era, librarians have the immense responsibility to take charge of the situation and design or usher in services that can serve their patrons, including researchers efficiently.

Across the globe, several academic institutes and organizations have worked towards implementation of Research Support in libraries. Carnegie Research Libraries Consortium had a project to advance research in South Africa. They intended to create a model of "proactive librarianship" with three elements which were a space for researchers ("research commons") where they would be assisted by trained library staff, a web portal which gave access to all subscribed resources, and development of staff through training programmes to help them acquire required skills (Kuhn, 2008). Many universities across the world have implemented LRS to varying degrees in their libraries (Ahmat et al, 2016; Finlayson & Mitha, 2014; Raju & Schoombee, 2014; Larsen et al, 2010; RLUK, 2011; Wikilund & Voog, 2013; Keller, 2015).

Research Support has been discussed only rarely in the milieu of Indian academic libraries. Services are not provided under any such objective or mission. Nevertheless, there were Indian academic library websites found to have services specifically under the section of "Research Support" exhibited (examples include IIT Madras (Research Support Tools, n.d.), IIM Kozhikode (Research Support, n.d.), Tezpur University (Research Support Services, n.d.). In the context of Indian academic libraries, RS can be understood as not one but a suite of services and tangible provisions that go toward supporting the research process, even though they may not be mentioned as such.

Significance of Research Support

Research productivity is of prime importance in every university and academic institute, and this directly equates towards institutional ranking. Budd (2006) pointed out that institutional support for libraries means better faculty research productivity. Research Support can aid in elevating university ranking, and with institutional help, can boost productivity through library services. The role library can play in supporting researchers of an institute, and consequently improve research ranking of their parent organization is of great import. Libraries need to take initiative, harness all the knowledge at their disposal, become proactive, and adapt to changes in scenario in order to remain relevant to be of support to the academia.

3. Statement of Problem

Academic libraries provide resources and services to support the education and research process of their parent institutions. If the researchers are not satisfied with the library's services and resources, the library would have failed to achieve its objective in supporting the research work, thus failing in supporting the advancement of research productivity of the university. The purpose of this study was to assess research support satisfaction and awareness amongst the AHSS (Arts, Humanities, and Social Science) research scholars, to understand whether Anna Arignar Library of Bharathiar University was able to fulfil its purpose to a greater extent or not.

As the library is the work area for AHSS researchers in particular, they tend to be active users of library. PhD students across AHSS disciplines tend to work in their own departments or from libraries. Either way, AHSS researchers lean more on library's services as their research builds on published materials, and not on laboratory experiments. The first step towards understanding and implementing Library Research Support (LRS) is by assessing the awareness, satisfaction, and needs of the researchers of that particular library. The purpose of this study is to examine the AHSS doctoral students of Bharathiar University, which has a high ranking in the Indian institute ranking system the NIRF (National Institute Ranking Framework). Bharathiar University is ranked at 11th spot among HEIs in the Research and Professional Practice parameter on NIRF. Bharathiar University is situated in Southern India, in the state of Tamil Nadu. The study will help us assess whether doctoral students at a high ranking institute are receiving satisfactory Research Support services from their university library.

4. Objectives
   1. Identify the services researchers were most satisfied with
   2. Identify the services researchers were least satisfied with
   3. Identify the services researchers were least aware of
   4. Level of satisfaction and awareness of researchers with library resources
   5. Level of satisfaction and awareness of researchers with library services
   6. Level of satisfaction and awareness of researchers with library website
   7. Level of satisfaction and awareness of researchers with library space and hours

5. METHODOLOGY

Bharathiar University was selected as universe for the study. The current study is an empirical based quantitative survey on AHSS doctoral students. Data was collected from sample with the aid of a self-administered structured questionnaire. The questionnaire covered LRS (Library Research Support) in respect of five dimensions namely: (i) Resources/Collection Support (ii) Services Support (iii) Library

Website (iv) Staff Support and (v) Space and Working Hours Support, along with questions about purpose for library visit, whether or not they had participated in Library training programmes, and regarding their demographics.

From the approximately 120 AHSS PhD students in the university, a sample of 83 responded. A response rate of 69% was achieved. The collected data was entered and tabulated on MS Excel.

7. Results and Discussion
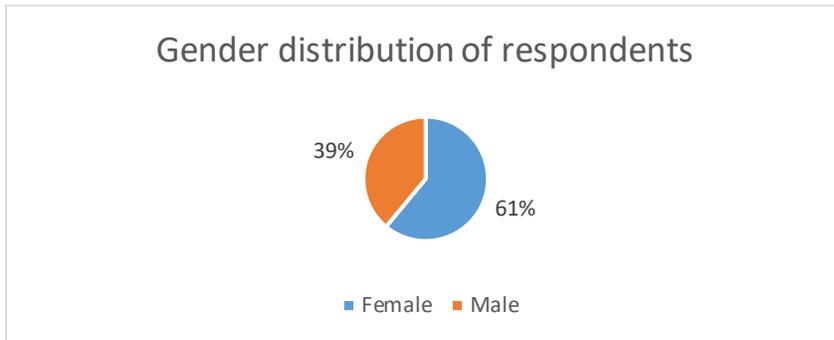
7.1 AHSS researchers at Bharathiar University

Figure 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

The AHSS researcher population of Bharathiar University was composed with a clear majority of female researchers (61%) over male researchers (39%). This indicates a healthy trend of females actively pursuing academic growth.
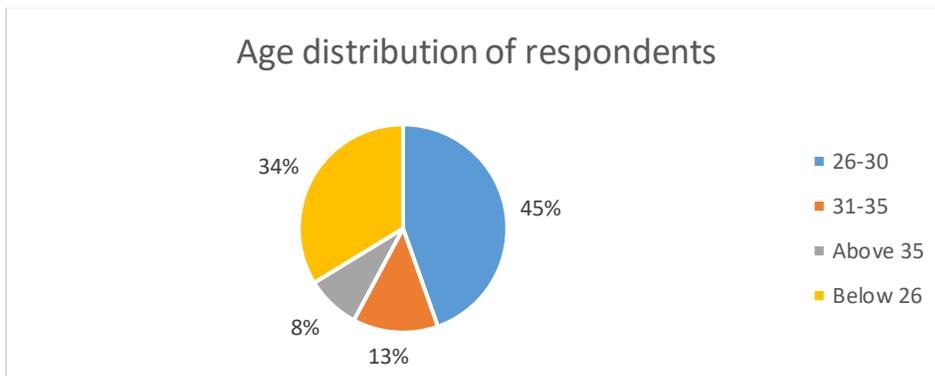

Figure 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Figure 2 describes the age distribution of the respondents of the study. It can be seen that 79% of the researchers are from the age group of 30 and under. AHSS doctoral students of the university are mostly of a younger demographic, with 45% of the respondents belonging to the 26-30 age group. Thus it can be understood that a vast majority of the respondents were of age 30 and under. A vast majority of the respondents were female.

7.2 Purpose(s) of library visit

Purpose of Library Visit	Count

	(%)
Find resources on relevant research topic	76
Issue/return books	69
Use library space for work	11
Consult lib staff for research doubts	1
Browse lib collection	47
Browse Internet	12

Table 1: Purpose of Library Visit

Table 1 examined the purposes for which researchers visited the library. It was found that a majority of 76% respondents visited library to find resources on their relevant research topic. 69% of the respondents visited regarding issue/return of library books. 47% researchers visited to browse the library collection. 12% visited to browse Internet, and 11% visited library to use the library space for research work. A meagre 1% visited library to consult library staff for research related doubts. Excepting one respondent, none of the 83 researchers visited library to consult library staff regarding research related doubts. This indicates that most researchers do not equate library as a space to seek research advice.

7.3 Frequency of physical visits to Library and visits to Library Website
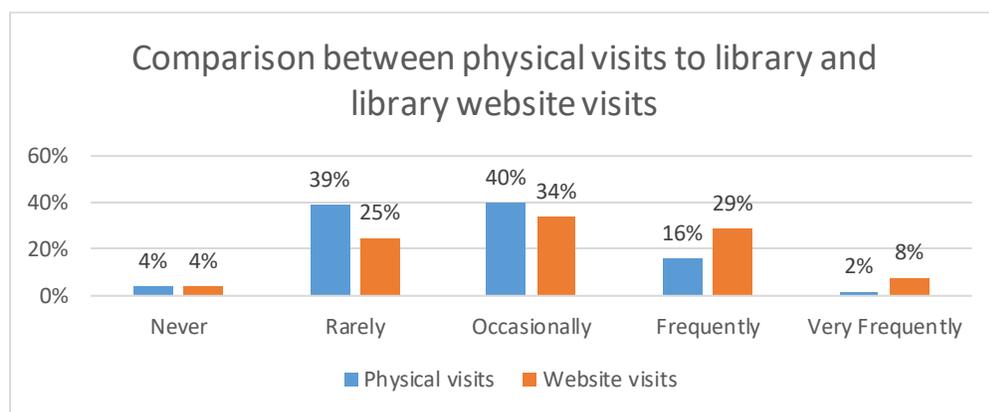

Figure 3 Comparison in frequency of physical library visits Vs library website visits

Researchers were asked regarding the frequency of their visits to the library, and also regarding how often they use the library website. It was found that 29% frequently used the library website, compared to the 16% who frequently went to the library. 40% of researchers went to the library occasionally, compared to the 34% who occasionally visited the library website. 39% rarely visited the library, and 25% rarely visited the library website. 4% each mentioned they never went to the library, and never visited the library website. More respondents were found to be occasional and rare visitors of the library and library website, compared to those who were frequent and very frequent users. Researchers who visited the library and used the library website frequently were less, compared to researchers who visited occasionally and rarely.

7.4 Attendance in Library Orientation and Training programmes

Distribution of PhD students who received orientation to library
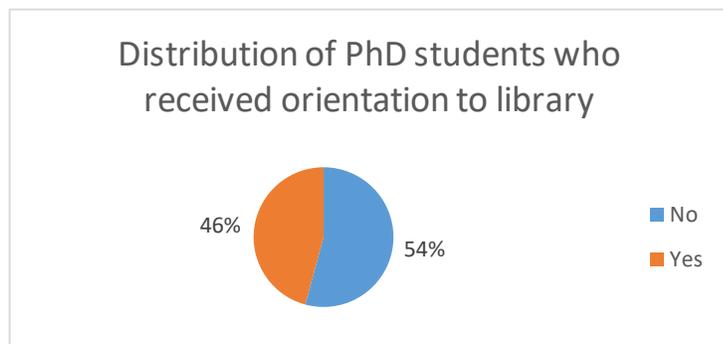
46% 54%
No
Yes

Figure 4 Distribution of respondents who received library orientation

A majority of 54% mentioned that they did not receive any orientation from the library, but 46% mentioned that they did receive orientation.

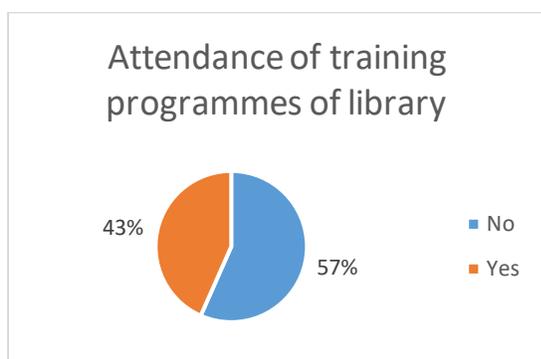Attendance of training programmes of library

43% 57%
No
Yes

Figure 5 Distribution of respondents who attended library training programmes

Majority of 57% researchers stated that they had not attended any of the training programmes organized by library for them, and 43% stated they had attended. More than half the number of respondents stated that they had not received any library orientation and that they had not attended any training programme organized by the library for researchers.

7.5 Opinion on focus of library

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Too focused on learning	16%	45%	24%	13%	2%
Too focused on research	11%	20%	39%	25%	5%
Balanced in research and learning	11%	37%	28%	22%	2%

Table 1: Opinion on focus of library

45% of respondents agreed that the library was focusing more on the teaching-learning aspect, rather than the research aspect. When asked whether they thought the library to be too focused on research, 39% of the respondents were neutral, 20% agreed, and 11% strongly agreed. 25% disagreed with the statement, and 5% strongly disagreed. The respondents were then asked whether they felt the library was balanced in

its approach to research and learning, 37% were in agreement, while 28% were neutral, and 22% disagreed.

7.6 Satisfaction and awareness on Library Collection and related services

Collection/service ――――――― Satisfaction/ Awareness	Books	ebooks	Journals	ejournals	Archives	Theses	Online databases	Dig. Lib	IR	Researcher guides	Book recs
Highly Satisfied	18%	7%	22%	22%	12%	12%	13%	7%	5%	5%	10%
Satisfied	60%	39%	46%	45%	37%	49%	43%	51%	30%	30%	35%
Neutral	7%	29%	18%	17%	28%	20%	19%	17%	28%	18%	19%
Dissatisfied	8%	11%	8%	8%	7%	10%	8%	8%	10%	17%	12%
Highly Dissatisfied	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	1%
Not Aware	6%	12%	6%	8%	14%	8%	16%	17%	28%	28%	23%

Table 2: Satisfaction and awareness on Library Collection and related services

60% of the researchers were satisfied with the books available in the library, and 18% were highly satisfied. With eBooks, 39% were satisfied and 29% were neutral. 22% were highly satisfied, and 46% were satisfied with the print journals subscribed by the library. Similar trend of satisfaction level is found with subscribed e-journals with 45% satisfied and 22% highly satisfied. In the case of Institutional repository and researcher guide books, 28% of the respondents were found to be not aware of such resources. Most of the respondents were satisfied with library's book collection and digital library.

7.7 Satisfaction and awareness on Library Information services

Information services ――――――― Satisfaction / Awareness	Lending	ILL	DDS	Indexing/ Abstract	Bibliographies	ToC	List of additions	Press clippings	CAS	SDI	Bibliometrics	RDM
Highly Satisfied	17%	4%	10%	4%	5%	4%	6%	2%	2%	6%	1%	1%
Satisfied	39%	16%	37%	20%	29%	29%	35%	29%	25%	20%	6%	7%
Neutral	12%	24%	19%	25%	24%	20%	18%	19%	22%	23%	6%	6%
Dissatisfied	12%	20%	13%	14%	16%	20%	20%	18%	16%	14%	18%	14%
Highly Dissatisfied	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Not Aware	18%	35%	19%	34%	24%	24%	19%	29%	33%	35%	67%	70%

Table 3: Satisfaction and awareness on Information Services

Table 3 reflected that among the respondents, 39% and 17% were satisfied and highly satisfied respectively with the Library's lending service. Only 12% and 2% respectively were dissatisfied and highly dissatisfied with the service. In the case of Inter Library Loan (ILL), 35% researchers were unaware of the service. 37% researchers were satisfied with the Document Delivery Service (DDS)/ Article Request service of the library. 34% of respondents marked themselves as being unaware of Indexing/Abstracting service in the library. Regarding bibliographies service, 29% researchers mentioned being satisfied, while another 24% mentioned being unaware of the service. 29% researchers were satisfied with Table of Contents service, while 24% were unaware. 35% of researchers were satisfied with the List of additions service. Library's press clipping service found 29% satisfied researchers, and a 29% unaware researchers. 33% respondents were unaware of what Current Awareness Service (CAS) was. Similarly, 35% researchers were unaware of what Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) service was. An overwhelming majority of 67% and 70% researchers were unaware of what Bibliometrics and Research Data Management (RDM) services were respectively. A great majority of the researchers were not aware of what Research Data Management and bibliometric service were.

Those who were highly dissatisfied with the information services were in the extreme minority, with the numbers in the 1-2% range for each service.

7.8 Satisfaction with Library Website Research Support

Library Website Research Support _____ Satisfaction/ Awareness	Availability of resources	Interaction and advice	Contact with librarian	Spcl guides for researchers	Support to your research
Highly Satisfied	17%	4%	4%	5%	14%
Satisfied	58%	24%	28%	25%	46%
Neutral	11%	28%	20%	24%	22%
Dissatisfied	4%	13%	17%	12%	8%
Highly Dissatisfied	1%	2%	2%	2%	1%
Not Aware	10%	29%	29%	31%	8%

Table 4: Satisfaction and Awareness on Library Website Research Support

Table 4 revealed that 58% of researchers were satisfied with the availability of resources over the library website. 29% were unaware of any interaction or advice provided through library website. Any feature of contacting librarian was also found to be not known to 29% of the researchers surveyed. 31% of the researchers were unaware of any special guides for researchers on the library website. But 46% of the respondents were satisfied with the support the library website provided to their research. Majority were satisfied with the availability of resources on the library website.

7.9 Satisfaction with Library Staff Research Support

Staff Support ———————— Satisfaction/ Awareness	Research Consultation	Solutions to research queries	Personal assistance when needed	In organizing research	In data analysis	Literature search	In publishing research
Highly Satisfied	6%	5%	10%	6%	4%	7%	5%
Satisfied	34%	46%	51%	20%	18%	39%	20%
Neutral	29%	24%	19%	23%	27%	19%	25%
Dissatisfied	12%	13%	8%	18%	18%	16%	18%
Highly Dissatisfied	4%	1%	4%	6%	7%	4%	5%
Not Aware	16%	11%	8%	27%	27%	16%	27%

Table 5: Satisfaction and Awareness on Staff Support for researchers

34% of the researchers were satisfied with the research consultation provided by the library staff. 46% were satisfied with the solutions to research queries provided by the staff. 51% were satisfied with the personal assistance staff provided to them. When asked whether they were satisfied with the support library provided in organizing research (reference management etc.), only 20% said they were satisfied, and 27% were unaware of any such service. Support in data analysis saw even less satisfaction (18%). 39% of the respondents mentioned they were satisfied with the literature search support provided by library staff. 20% were satisfied with the support in publishing research (the where and how), whereas 27% were unaware of the service. Most were satisfied with the personal assistance library staff provided when required by the researchers.

7.10 Satisfaction with Space and Working Hours of Library

Space and working hours ———————— Satisfaction	Space for researchers	Library working hours
Highly Satisfied	22%	19%
Satisfied	59%	54%
Neutral	17%	13%
Dissatisfied	0%	11%
Highly Dissatisfied	2%	3%

Table 6: Satisfaction on space and working hours of library

A majority of 59% were satisfied with the space provided by library for researchers, and 22% were highly satisfied; whereas a negligible 2% stated being highly dissatisfied. A majority of 54% were satisfied and 19% highly satisfied with the working hours of the library, whereas only 3% were highly dissatisfied. Majority of researchers were found to be satisfied with the space and working hours of the library.

7.11 Needs of the researcher regarding Library Research Support

When asked about what they would like to see in their library, many comments were regarding wanting the library to acquire more research related resources. The suggestions included "more case related books and easy access to them", "more research journals", and so on. Other areas of suggestions included, "I need a digitized library"; "more library working hours". They also mentioned requiring staff personnel who would be could guide them on searches regarding their topic. Some comments were specifically about wanting the library to provide orientation to researchers regarding library services. There were a couple of remarks from researchers mentioning "staff is helpful", "services are useful". Need for researcher spaces within library was also raised.

The objective of survey studies is to gauge the needs of the target audience, in order to serve them better. From the requirements mentioned by the researchers for this study, the authors were able to identify a spectrum on researcher needs. The study helped understand how LRS can be designed. If we do not account for the needs of the users, no library service can be successful.

8. Conclusion

The study examined researchers' satisfaction regarding the Library Research Support available to them, and whether they visited the library or depended on the library website without physically going to the library, what they wanted to see in their library. It was evident in the number of researchers visiting the library in person for research related requirements, that they preferred using the library website for meeting their needs, rather than visiting the library. The study found that compared to the awareness and satisfaction researchers had with the traditional library services, there was a distinct unawareness concerning what RDM and bibliometric services were. This can be addressed through discreet marketing of library's services via website, and library itself. There is a gap found in researcher needs and Research Support provision from Library.

From the findings the conclusion can be drawn that through increasing participation of researchers in library's researcher training programmes and orientation programmes, researchers can be benefited by library in the long run. Competent marketing of available services of library, and proactive research support for the target audience is the need of the day. Library needs to take more than responsive measures, and need to be actively involved with the research process in order to understand researcher needs. Thus, librarians can figure out where they stand in the equation, and how best they can support researchers and in which capacity this can be achieved.

The level of satisfaction of researchers regarding the various aspects of Library Research Support guides us to understand what is lacking and is sufficient in our provision. Librarians can definitely plan a more significant role in the support provided to researchers. The study revealed that close to none consulted the library in relation to research related doubts. If library is to play an active role in research support, they need to build an image regarding the same among researchers. Library has the tools and resources to serve researchers and help them navigate through their knowledge pursuit, but they need to work ground up towards establishment of RS services and market them accordingly.

As LRS has not been clearly defined in Indian academic setups yet, librarians are thus far not equipped with the skills or readiness to take on this new challenge. Professional development of librarians, identifying research needs before designing services, combined with effective marketing of the services to the researchers will help establish research support in Indian academic libraries for the benefit of researchers and research productivity across India, and ultimately research ranking of the nation globally. In order to realize the above vision, the proactive role of librarians is needed in universities.

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