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Research support services of Panjab University library during lockdown period due to COVID-19: A survey

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the problems and prospects of newly introduced service “RemoteXs” by the A.C. Joshi library for the faculty of Panjab University during the lockdown due to COVID-19. The paper discusses expectations and experiences of users, advantages of new research support services, challenges faced by faculty while accessing literature through RemoteXs service. An online survey was carried out; framed questionnaire was sent to 650 academicians through Whatsapp and e-mail. 148 respondents submitted their views on access and usage of e-resources through RemoteXs service of University Library. Data on most frequently used resources and documents type has been analysed. Some of the problems while accessing e-resources through RemoteXs have also been discussed in the paper. Some of the suggestions and remarks on faculty members have been included in the study to know the user’s perception and requirements.

Keywords: Remote access, RemoteXs service, Library services during COVID-19, Research support service, E-resources.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Pandemic situation due to COVID-19 has created a big challenge to the library users to get desired learning material and also to the librarians to provide efficient virtual services to the users. University Libraries subscribe various types of e-resources such as e-journals, e-books, subject-specific databases, which are largely accessed inside the campus as the vendor provides IP based access to the resources. Due to prevailing deadly crisis, providing off campus access of these resources to the affiliated users has become a challenge for the librarians. Since, users expect uninterrupted access to all the subscribed e-resources, librarians have started using some IT based solutions to provide remote access of e-resources to its users. As per the policies and agreements of the company, providing access to library resources using remote login will not breach any license agreement of e-resource providing vendor. By adopting such new IT based initiatives, librarians are able to connect with its users and they are allowed to give access to all the e-resources to its users. The current paper discusses one of such Remote Access service “RemoteXs” provided by AC Joshi Library of Panjab University to its faculty members for fulfilling research and academic purposes during ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic situation.

1.1 COVID-19

COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered Corona virus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. COVID-19 is now a pandemic affecting many countries globally. (Source: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers->

[hub/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses](#)). In India, the nationwide lockdown period has been observed in four intervals.

- Phase 1: 25 March 2020 – 14 April 2020 (21 days)
- Phase 2: 15 April 2020 – 3 May 2020 (19 days)
- Phase 3: 4 May 2020 – 17 May 2020 (14 days)
- Phase 4: 18 May 2020 – 31 May 2020 (14 days)

But the educational institutions are still closed due to pandemic situation and academic activities are being carried out online. Similarly academic libraries are also offering their services and resources in online mode using remote access system.

1.2 RemoteXs

The US based company “Business Expert Press LLC” provides the RemoteXs cloud-based software that enables academic and research institutions to provide remote access to subscribed e-resources to cater the academic requirements of students, researchers and faculty members. RemoteXs provides secured 24x7 access to institution’s subscribed e-resources from anywhere. Besides providing a single digital platform, RemoteXs also enables institution to download the e-resource usage and statistics reports, which further helps librarians to subscribe or unsubscribe e-contents. RemoteXs has an ability to provide secured access to scattered eResources of the institution, bringing them under one umbrella, along with subscribed E-journals, E-books and all other E-content, that too anytime and from anywhere. (Source: <https://www.remotexs.co/>)

1.3 About AC Joshi Library and subscribed E-resources

AC Joshi library of Panjab University is acknowledged as one of the richest libraries of the northern region of India. The five storied impressive Library building in red stone and concrete is based on modern principles of architecture. Besides the comfortable seating and reading environment, the library is well equipped with modern facilities such as access to internet and web resources including online journals and ebooks. The library is providing a growing range of databases on the campus network. Now in period of lockdown library has started providing access to subscribed e-resources to off-campus faculty in Phase -1. All the library services have been automated. The library has fully computerized its collection, which could be accessible through web OPAC. (Source: <https://library.puchd.ac.in/>)

Table 1.3: E-Resource subscribed by the AC Joshi Library

Taylor & Francis Journals	Wiley Journals	Nature Journals	Royal Society of Chemistry	Sage Online	Science collection	CMIE Economic outlook
EBSCO Business Source Ultimate	Emerald E-journal collection	EMIS Intelligence	EPWRF	SciFinder	Lexis India Legal Database	IEEE Xplore Digital Library
J-Gate Engineering & Technology	J-Gate Social & Management Science	EBSCO Engineering & Technology E-books	EBSCOHost Online Database	ASME Digital Library	Districts of India	IMF E-Library Data
Lecture Notes in Computer Science	MathScinet	ACM Digital Library	Proquest Indian Journals	Web of Science	Science Direct	Sage Journals
Lecture Notes in Mathematics	SCOPUS Citation Database	Westlaw International Online	Proquest Dissertations and Theses Database	Emerald Management First	Wiley Chemistry E-books	Pearson Engineering & Management E-books

(Source: <https://library.puchd.ac.in/digital-library.php>)

1.4 Remote access of e-resources

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, a complete nation-wide lockdown was declared by government as a precautionary measure to limit the spread of CORONA virus. All public places including educational institutions were closed till the situation becomes normal. Now the challenge before the university was to make available its subscribed e-resources to the users (faculty and students) who were at their homes or other living places. After scrutiny of various solutions, the university library planning committee decided to go with RemoteXs which is remote access software for accessing subscribing contents of the university. In the month of April 2020, AC Joshi Library of Panjab University set up off-campus accessibility for almost all its e-resources, which could be accessed earlier in the university campus only. Academicians may open the link <https://puchdlibrary.remotexs.in/user/login> and after entering the personal credentials, they can access all the e-resources subscribed by university library. In the first instance, the remote login was provided only to faculty members of the university. Subsequently, the facility would be extended to research scholars. (Source: <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/chandigarh/pu-library-starts-remote-login-73093>)

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

It is essential to know the faculty's information requirements and how these can be fulfilled by an academic library during the lockdown period due to COVID-19. Further, it is more essential to know the teacher's perceptions and understanding when library services and resources are being offered remotely. Therefore a study is needed to achieve following objectives;

- To understand and assess teachers' awareness about RemoteXs service of AC Joshi Library of Panjab University.
- To know the academic and research purposes for using RemoteXs service by faculty members.
- To identify mostly used resources by faculty members during lockdown period.
- To categorize the frequently used electronic documents by the faculty members.
- To identify problems faced by faculty members while accessing E-resources through RemoteXs.
- To analyse the satisfaction level of faculty members with the use of RemoteXs service of AC Joshi Library.

3. METHODOLOGY

An online questionnaire made with Google Forms was used to carry out the survey and collect data from faculty members of Panjab University, Chandigarh. The questionnaire was administered by sending the link of online questionnaire to the user's mail accounts and also through instant messaging service (Whatsapp). Data was collected in the month of May 2020. The questionnaire links were sent to 650 faculty members, out of which 145 responses were received, making a response rate of 22.30%.

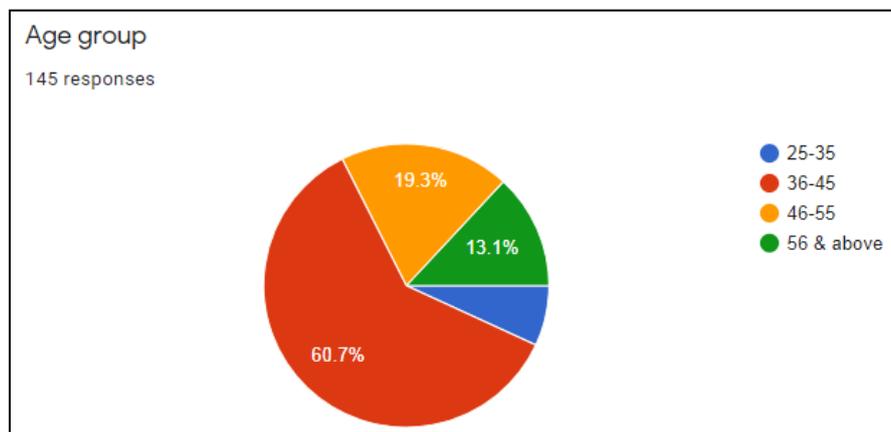
4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

4.1 Distribution of responses on the basis of age group

Graph 4.1 shows that 60.7% (n=145) respondents are in the age group of 36-45 years followed by 19.3% respondents in 46-55 and 13.1% respondents in age group of 56 & above years. Only 6.9% respondents found to be in the age group of 25-35 years.

Table 4.1: Distribution of responses on the basis of Age Group

Age group	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
25-35	10	6.9%
36-45	88	60.7%
46-55	28	19.3%
56 & above	19	13.1%
Total	145	100%



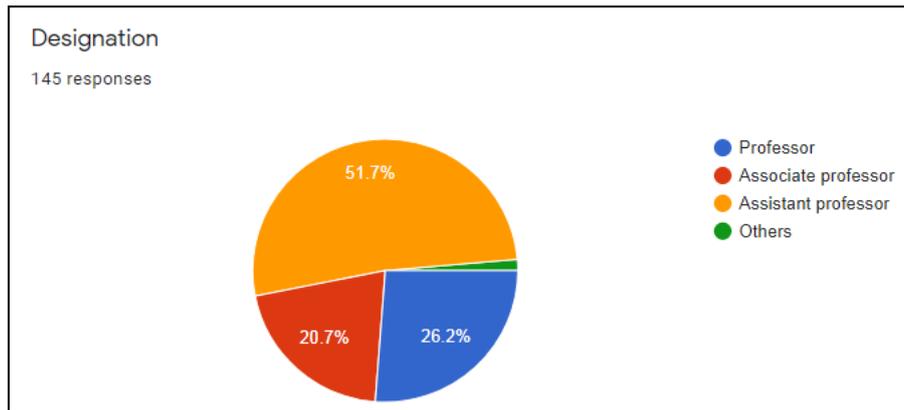
Graph 4.1: Distribution of responses on the basis of Age Group

4.2 Distribution of responses on the basis of Designation

Table and Graph 4.2 illustrate the designation of respondents. It shows that 51.7% (n=145) respondents are designated as Assistant Professor in Panjab University, Chandigarh, Whereas 28.7% and 26.2% respondents are designated as Associate Professor and Professor respectively. Only 1.4% respondents have mentioned as “Other”. So it is found that maximum number of respondents is designated as Assistant Professor in Panjab University who responded for the questionnaire.

Table 4.2: Distribution of responses on the basis of Designation

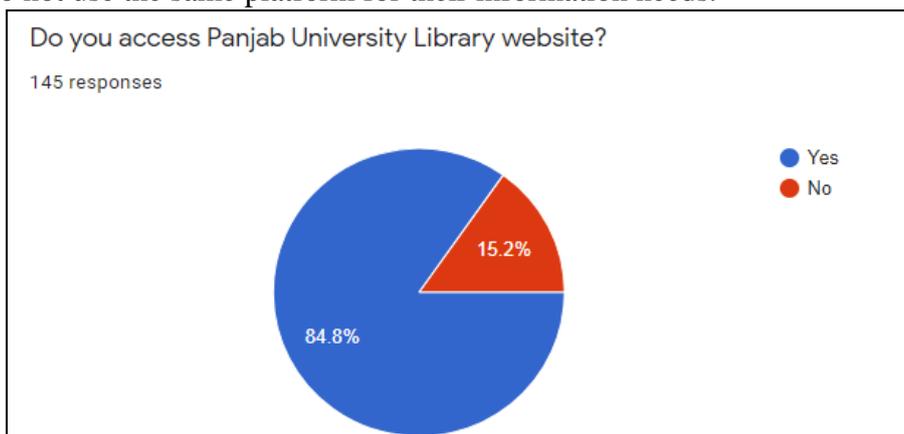
Designation	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Professor	38	26.2%
Associate Prof.	30	20.7%
Assistant Prof.	75	51.7%
Others	02	1.4%
Total	145	100%



Graph 4.2: Distribution of responses on the basis of Designation

4.3 Use of Panjab University Library website

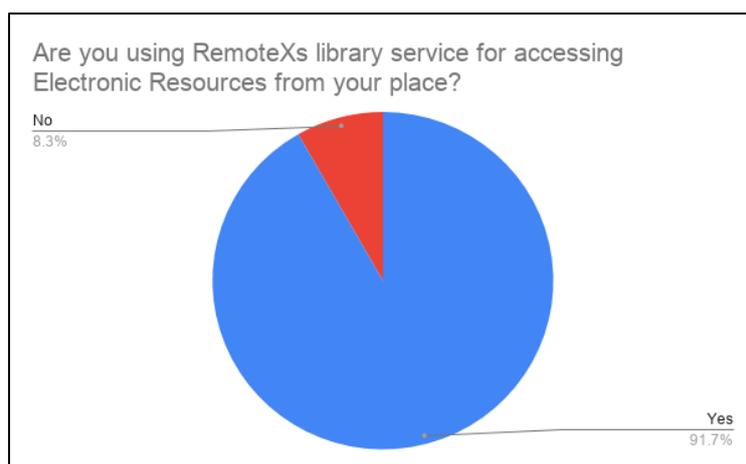
Graph 4.3 demonstrate that 84.8% (n=145) faculty members (123) are using University Library website and they access it to fulfil their information requirements, whereas 15.2% respondents (22) mentioned that they do not use library website. It is good to know that most of the faculty members use Library website and its' subscribed resources to search and browse the required information. But again a question arises that why some of the faculty members do not use the same platform for their information needs.



Graph 4.3: Use of Panjab University Library website

4.4 Use of RemoteXs service of Library for accessing E-resources of Library

As per Graph 4.4, 91.7% respondents (133) said that they are using RemoteXs library service for accessing Electronic Resources of the library from their homes or place of living during the COVID-19 period, whereas 8.3% respondents (12) are not using RemoteXs service of library. It is observed that due to lockdown during pandemic a lot of faculty members are frequently and regularly using library's e-resources through RemoteXs service.



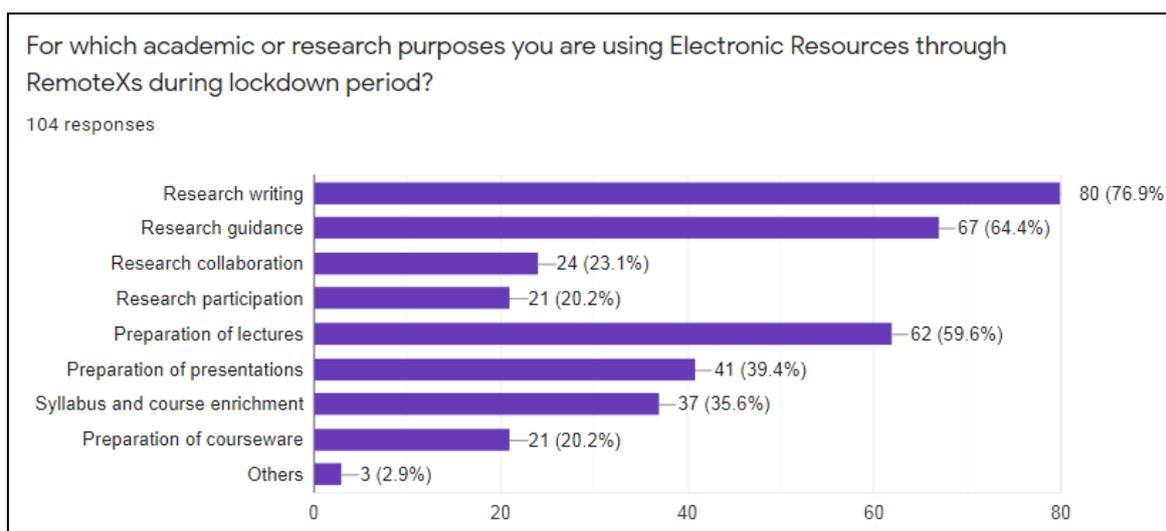
Graph 4.4: Use of RemoteXs library service for accessing E-resources

4.5 Purpose of using Electronic Resources through RemoteXs

Data in Table & Graph 4.5 represent the purpose of using Electronic Resources through RemoteXs. It shows that 76.9% (N=104) faculty members use Electronic Resources through RemoteXs for Research Writings. 64.4% faculty members use it for Research Guidance, whereas 59.6% respondents use them for Preparation of Lectures. It is good to know from the data that most of the faculty members are using RemoteXs service of Library for fulfilling their academic and research requirements during the lockdown period due to COVID-19.

Table 4.5: Purpose of using Electronic Resources through RemoteXs

Academic or Research Purpose	Number of responses (N=104)	Percentage of responses
Research writing	80	76.9%
Research guidance	67	64.4%
Research collaboration	24	23.1%
Research participation	21	20.2%
Preparation of lectures	62	59.6%
Preparation of presentations	41	39.4%
Syllabus & course enrichment	37	35.6%
Preparation of courseware	21	20.2%
Others	3	2.9%



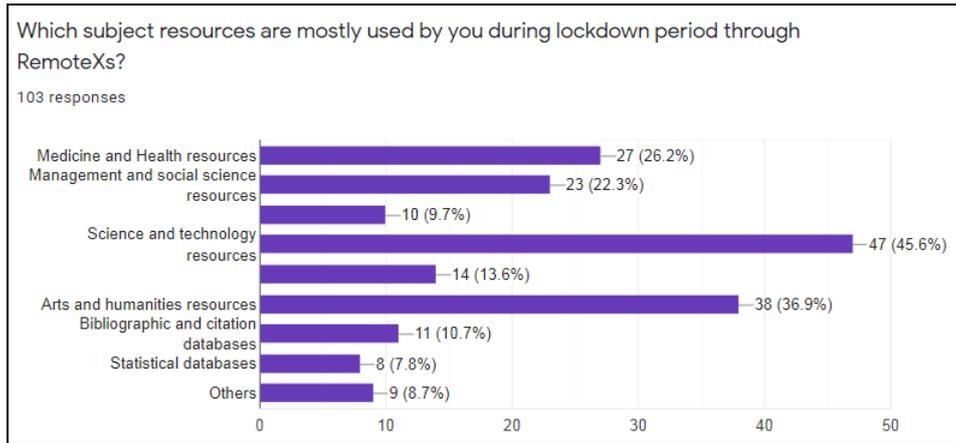
Graph 4.5: Purpose of using Electronic Resources through RemoteXs

4.6 Most frequently used subject resources/databases through RemoteXs

Table and Graph 4.6 represent the information about most frequently used subject resources or databases through RemoteXs service of University library. It is found that Science and Technology subject resources/databases are highly used by faculty members as this has highest response percentage i.e. 45.6% (n=104), followed by Arts and Humanities subject resources with 36.9% responses. Statistical databases are the least used resources with a response percentage of 7.8%. It is assumed that due to large number of respondents from engineering and science departments, Science and Technology subject resources or databases are highly used during the lockdown period.

Table 4.6: Most frequently used subject resources/databases through RemoteXs

Subject resource/Databases	Number of responses (n=104)	Percentage of responses
Medicine & health	27	26.2%
Management & Social Sc.	23	22.3%
History & geography	10	9.7%
Science & technology	47	45.6%
Language & literature	14	13.6%
Arts & humanities	38	36.9%
Bibliographic & Citation	11	10.7%
Statistical databases	8	7.8%
Others	9	8.7%



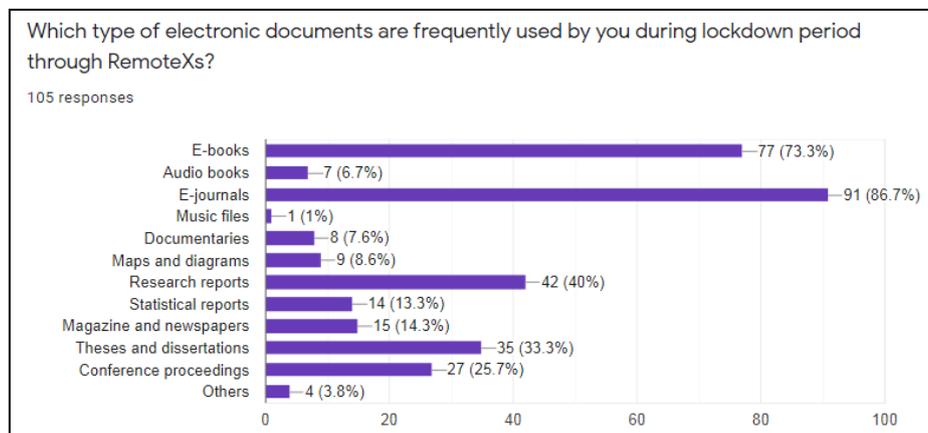
Graph 4.6: Most used subject resources/databases through RemoteXs

4.7 Most Frequently used document types through RemoteXs

Table and Graph 4.7 demonstrate the most frequently used document types by respondents. It is found that E-journals or articles are the mostly used document type with a response of 86.7% (n=105). E-books are second most frequently used document type with 73.3% response rate. It is observed that Music files are the least used document type with 1% response rate. It is suggested that a faculty orientation program is required to explain the uses and features of each document type as there is very less use of other document types.

Table 4.7: Most Frequently used document types through RemoteXs

Document type	Number of responses (n=105)	Percentage of responses
E-books	77	73.3%
Audio books	7	6.7%
E-journals	91	86.7%
Music files	1	1%
Documentaries	8	7.6%
Maps & diagrams	9	8.6%
Research Reports	42	40%
Statistical reports	14	13.3%
Magazines & newspapers	15	14.3%
Theses & dissertations	35	33.3%
Conference proceedings	27	25.7%
Others	4	3.8%



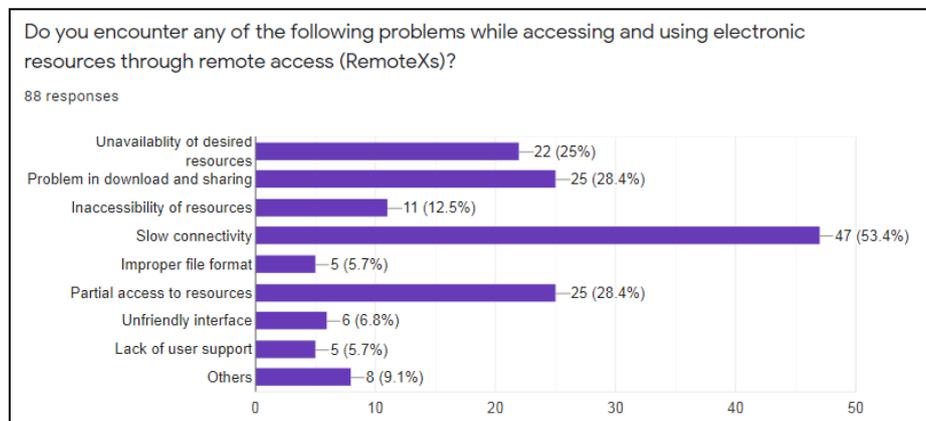
Graph 4.7: Most Frequently used document types through RemoteXs

4.8 Problems faced by faculty members while accessing E-resources through RemoteXs

This has been observed from Table and Graph 4.8 that 53.4% (n=88) faculty members have been facing problem of slow connectivity of RemoteXs service. 28.4% faculty members have also informed that there is problem in downloading and sharing of documents and there is partial access to e-resources through RemoteXs. 25% faculty members also said that there is unavailability of desired literary resources. Some of other problems have also been faced by faculty members as given in the table below.

Table 4.8: Problems faced while accessing E-resources through RemoteXs

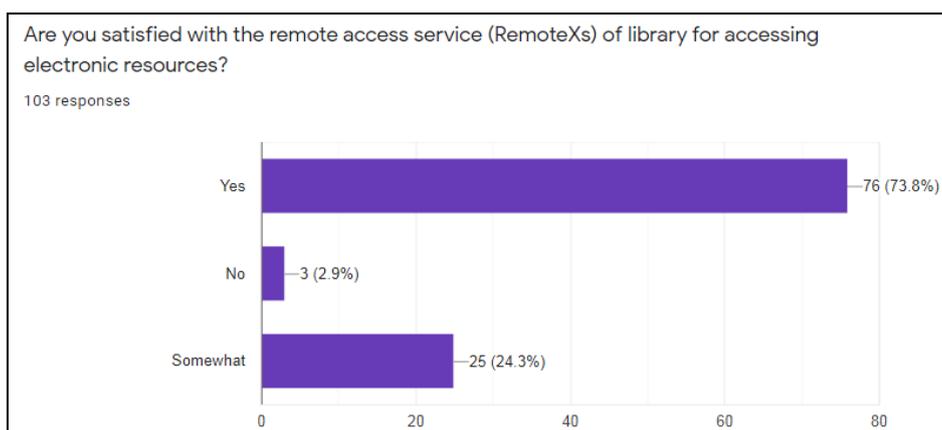
Nature of problem faced	Number of responses (n=88)	Percentage of responses
Unavailability of desired resource	22	25%
Downloading and sharing	25	28.4%
Inaccessibility of resources	11	12.5%
Slow connectivity	47	53.4%
Improper file format	5	5.7%
Partial access to resources	25	28.4%
Unfriendly interface	6	6.8%
Lack of user support	5	5.7%
Others	8	9.1%



Graph 4.8: Problems faced while accessing E-resources through RemoteXs

4.9 Level of satisfaction with RemoteXs service of University Library

Graph 4.9 demonstrates that although there are some issues while accessing e-resources through RemoteXs service but still 73.8% (n=103) faculty members are satisfied with the new service during the lockdown period due to COVID-19. 24.3% faculty members are not fully satisfied as they may have encountered some problem while using RemoteXs service. Overall a good level of satisfaction is shown in the responses.



Graph 4.9: Level of satisfaction with RemoteXs service of University Library

4.10 Suggestions/remarks submitted by faculty members

Some of the suggestions/remarks received from faculty members are given Table 4.10. In a nutshell they have demanded a user friendly interface, more number of valuable resources, and some tutorial on using the RemoteXs service more efficiently. The remarks show that faculty members are thankful to university library for providing such service during lockdown period due to COVID-19 and want this service to be continued even after this period. The suggestions are good ones and will be forwarded to university librarian for taking prompt actions to provide better services to the teachers.

Table 4.10: Suggestions/remarks submitted by faculty members

Sr. No	Suggestion/Remarks
1.	More clear it should have been
2.	Access to more databases like CEIC, CMIE States of India, making interface more effective, classification e-resources subject/faculty wise
3.	Very good initiative. It is must be continued after lockdown also.
4.	Police and security related literature should also be added
5.	The access to Digital copy of text books may be provided.
6.	Keeping in view the need of the present hour, every teaching/research connected material/activities should be available/performed using electronic/internet mode for better understanding and communication.
7.	RemoteXs should be user friendly
8.	Some time difficulty in accessing bigger file so my suggestion is to make network support more strong and the speed higher
9.	Incorporate more research e journals in Punjabi and Sikh studies
10.	It should be continued even after lockdown is lifted
11.	It must be more user friendly, many time the data is not uploading in my computer, searching the desired data seems difficult sometime. It will be great if the user interface maybe designed simple with all the detail off the content inside. Thank you for giving this access. I am using this for my student and writing for my own research. It is extremely helpful.
12.	In such a time of crisis this is a real help and support.
13.	RemoteXs should be continued.
14.	Good effort. Internet speed should be increased or more bandwidth will do better
15.	Commendable
16.	Conduct some online workshops or at least upload some more videos on library portal regarding facilities and usage of library
17.	Dedicated Covid19 Library webpage

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18. Appreciable work
 19. Pubmed central should be embedded with university remote login page so that any free journals available on science direct, nature journal or anything else that is subscribed by university becomes readily available. Pubmed central gives more option to play with key words and can thus allow the access to the relevant research papers in biomedical and life science in a more convenient and effective manner.
 20. Great idea, must be developed further.
 21. Some tutorials and a ready reckoner of resources may be helpful
 22. There should be material for other languages like Punjabi Hindi etc.
 23. Federated search for all subscribed databases should be provided
 24. Please arrange more e books on law
 25. I need to go to specific resource and then download the related article. Once I login, we should be able to access the material from direct click. There are such platforms available.
 26. Latest eBooks' are unavailable. Please purchase those as well
 27. It would be a great help if there is some unique link for the digital Ph.D. and M.Phil. theses submitted to the University. Also most of the time I tried to access statistical database (e.g. Indiastat.com), it gives the message that required number of users are already logged in, wait for some time. Kindly fix that, if possible. Thank you.
 28. This is the best practice by our Library personnel which helped me in survival of my research
 29. Please organise a lecture wherein optimum usage of website and resources of the eLibrary are guided through. I would also request library to organise a tutorial seminar where online teaching, video shooting, and other online content creation is taught.
 30. It's a great help for me while sitting at home
 31. Make it more user friendly
 32. Although this portal is good as it is enabling to work during this tough time still it needs security improvements as there are frequent redirections to other advertising websites
 33. Full access to important journals and user friendly interface needed
 34. Please provide password for accessing journals, online documents / documentaries / books and worldcat.
-

5. Summary

Due to COVID-19, nearly all the academic institutions in the world are facing a pause in conducting teaching, learning and research activities as most of them are closed during the complete lockdown. Thanks to computing facilities and fast internet which has enabled the academic community to access electronic contents and cater their information needs. The technology is providing an opportunity to libraries as well to stay connected with their users during the lockdown period. As discussed in the study AC Joshi Library of Panjab University has facilitated faculty members with RemoteXs service to remotely provide the access to its' services and resources. The study has collected the data from the teachers and other academicians who are using RemoteXs service and analysed it. It is found that faculty members are frequently using this new service from their homes and acknowledge the efforts of university library.

Conclusion

In a lockdown period, it is a challenge for every academic library to provide the valuable resources and services to the users. Many libraries have taken the advantage of computers and fast internet services to provide resources and services to their users. RemoteXs is one of the remote access services which enable users to remotely access the library resources from a distant place. The teachers of Panjab University are effectively making use of this service and

using many online contents such as electronic journals, e-books, conference proceedings, theses, research reports and other library collections in the lockdown period due to COVID-19.

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