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Open Access And Free Resources On The Internet: Awareness And Use During Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The Internet is a huge source of free and openly available information. However, the awareness about open source information amongst faculty and students is not known. The objective of this study is to explore the awareness and use of open access resources (OARs) by Faculty and students of Ponda Education Society's (PES's) colleges. A questionnaire-based survey method has been used in this research. A questionnaire was designed in Google Forms and was sent to 400 library users. A total of 278 (69.5%) library users filled in the form. The findings shows that 110 (39.6%) of respondents are not aware of the OARs and 132 (48.5%) of respondents were not aware of the COVID 19 open access resources provided by publishers and vendors during the COVID-19 crisis. Study recommends training on OARs to overcome the problems faced by library users in using OARs. The study also suggests librarians to increase awareness of OARs through information literacy sessions through orientation sessions.

Keywords: Open Access, DOAJ, Internet, COVID 19, Pandemic, Information Literacy, Internet, Academic Libraries, Goa, India.

INTRODUCTION

The invention of World Wide Web by Tim Berners- Lee in 1989 has revolutionized our society, our economy and our technology. Internet is a network where knowledge is shared. Internet is a worldwide collection of computer networks exchanging data. It is an encyclopedia of information. Plethora of the information on the Internet is available for free. Many academically important reference sources are available on the Internet and most of the resources are not being used by students because they are not aware of it. It is necessary to know how many people involved in research or part of academics are aware of open access resources. (Baradol, 2011)

The concept of Open Access has caused a revolution in the scholarly publishing too. The escalating cost of journal subscriptions and diminishing library budgets have caused ‘Serials Crisis’. It is impossible to subscribe all the journals of relevance by any library or individual. In order to satisfy information need of researchers without worrying about the library budget, the concept of open access came into existence. This initiative was taken at a meeting organized by Open Society Institute (OSI), at Budapest during 2002. (Acheampong et al., 2020)

Open Access Resources (OARs) have proved to be a boon for the researchers and professional during Serial Crisis. Ever since the open access concept has evolved, academicians and researchers have been using these resources for numerous works. NISCAIR Online Periodicals Repository (NOPR), Indian Academy of Science Journals, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) Directory of Open Access Repositories (DOAR), Open J – gate, Project Gutenberg, Swayam, National Digital Library of India (NDLI), National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) are some of the resources useful for the researchers and academicians.(Kurian 2018)

Open Access (OA) is new publication model that provide free online access to scholarly research. It gives researchers write to read, download and use the published work free of charge. OA is boon to institutes which face tremendous challenge maintaining and developing library collection. Knowing the importance of Open Access Resources (OARs), through this study researchers are trying to find out to what extent the academic community of Ponda Education Society is aware of the concept and how far they utilize it for their research. Researchers are also trying to know, what does academic community under study expects from the library in order to help them with OARs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Abdullah-Al-Mahmud & others (2020) has conducted a study on “Awareness and Use of Open Access Resources in Higher Education and Scholarly Research: Faculties versus Students Perspectives.” The main aim of this research study was to identify and to compare between faculties and students about awareness and the attitude towards open access resources. To get the research data a survey was conducted among faculties and students by distributing a well designed questionnaire. The major findings of the study narrated both students and faculties had positive approach towards open access resources, but faculty were having more knowledge than the students in terms of understanding on main open access concepts. This paper highlights the awareness level of faculties and students towards open access resources in higher education in scholarly research

Sheikh (2020) in his research study mentioned that around 20 percent of university libraries of Pakistan have institutional repositories that are neither accessible through the internet nor mentioned in OpenDOAR. By 2017, there were more than fifty open access resources mentioned in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), but till 2020, this ratio has gone up to 64. In a local context, the research study have identified the status of open access;

Farzand Ali, Amna & Saleem, Qurat Ul Ain (2020) through their study on “Open Access Resources as an Opportunity for Academic Libraries during Pandemic: A Study” identified the advantages of open access resources for academic libraries which had a special reference to an emergency situation like the covid – 19 pandemic. The study mainly focused on the role played by the libraries and library professionals in providing quality services during this pandemic situation. The other main reason of the study was to highlight the efforts of HEC and high ranked university libraries during this covid-19 pandemic to fulfill the needs of their patrons. The results of the research study confirmed that academic libraries used open access resources to support the research activities of their parent institute. The major purpose of using open access includes the fiscal constraints, time involved in getting the fee-based copies of journals and articles, budget cuts by parent institutes, and less involvement of authorities towards libraries.

Kassahun & Nsala (2015) in the study titled “The awareness of academic librarians towards Open Access resources to support reference services: A case of private institutions of higher learning” reported that out of 12 academic librarians, only 4 were aware of the open access resources. About 50% respondents updated their awareness on open access by reading current professional literature. Authors recommended training programme to increase awareness.

Kaba & Said (2015) in their research paper on “Open access awareness, use, and perception: A case study of AAU faculty members”. found that faculty members possess a good knowledge and a positive perception of OA resources. Faculty members with a high level of awareness or use are found to have a highly positive perception of OA resources.

Thanuskodi (2012) through his study titled “Use of E-resources by the Students and Researchers of Faculty of Arts, Annamalai University” study found that the majority of users are aware about the availability of e-resources. The result reveals that majority of respondents want to access only electronic version.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the present study are :

1. To assess the level of awareness on Open Access resources among the faculty and students.
2. To determine the extent of using scholarly open access resources.
3. To determine obstacles faced in using Open access resources.

SCOPE OF STUDY

The scope of the research study covers library users of colleges of Ponda Education Society (PES). Sample include students and faculty of PES’s Rajaram and Tarabai Bandekar college of Pharmacy, P.E.S's R.S.N College of Arts and Science and PES’s College of Education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A group comprising of faculty and students of the PES’s colleges was the sample for the study. A questionnaire was designed in Google form and was sent to 400 library users. A total of 278

(69.5%) library users filled in the form, out of which 147 were UG students, 67 PG students and 64 Faculty members. The data was collected in the month of January 2021. The data collected through the online questionnaire using Google form was analyzed and the results are presented in the form of generalizations.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

Profile of respondents

Ponda Education Society campus is in Farmagudi, Ponda- Goa. There are two professional colleges and one general education college in the campus. Campus has Pharmacy College, B. Ed College and Arts and Science College. Courses provided are: B. Pharm, M. Pharm, B. Ed, BA, BSc, MSc. The survey to assess the awareness of the faculty and students about the Open Access Resources was conducted among the students and faculty of the colleges of Ponda Education Society, Farmagudi, Goa . The survey was answered by 278 (69.5%) respondents.

Table 1: Academic status of the respondents (Gender wise)

| Academic Status | Male | Female | Total | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Under Graduate | 42 | 105 | 147 | 52.87 |
| Post Graduate | 10 | 57 | 67 | 24.10 |
| Faculty | 21 | 43 | 64 | 23.03 |
| Total | 73 | 205 | 278 | 100 |

A gender wise analysis shows that the sample consisted of 73(26.25%) male and 205 (54.67%) female respondents. It consisted of 147 (52.87%) undergraduate students, 67 (24.10%) postgraduate students and 64 (23.03%) faculty members. A structured questionnaire was administered among the students and faculty through Google form. It was found even though many of students are using the Open Access Resources, they are unaware about the major OARs.

Table 2: Preferred Source for Information (Academic Status Wise)

| Preferred Sources of Information | Academic Status | | | Total | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------|----------------|
| | Under graduate student | Post graduate students | Faculty members | | |
| Printed books in the library | 59 | 28 | 27 | 114 | 41 |
| Information available on the Internet | 79 | 38 | 37 | 154 | 55.4 |
| Friends and Teachers | 9 | 1 | 0 | 10 | 3.6 |

The analysis of the above table reveals that the Internet is the most preferred source of information by respondents. As many as 154 (55.4%) of respondents are biased towards the Internet as their preferred source of information. Books in the library are still being considered by another major group of 114 (41%) respondents. The data further shows that there is not very big difference in number of respondent using Internet and respondent using printed books as preferred source of information. This shows that in spite of the invasion of the Internet libraries still have a role to play in academics. Only 10 (3.6%) respondents prefer friends and teachers as preferred source of Information.

Table 3: Preference for Media (Gender wise)

| Preferred Media | Academic Status | | | Total | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------|----------------|
| | Under graduate student | Post graduate students | Faculty members | | |
| Print | 17 | 5 | 8 | 30 | 10.8 |
| Digital/ Electronic | 44 | 13 | 12 | 69 | 24.8 |
| Both | 86 | 49 | 44 | 179 | 64.4 |

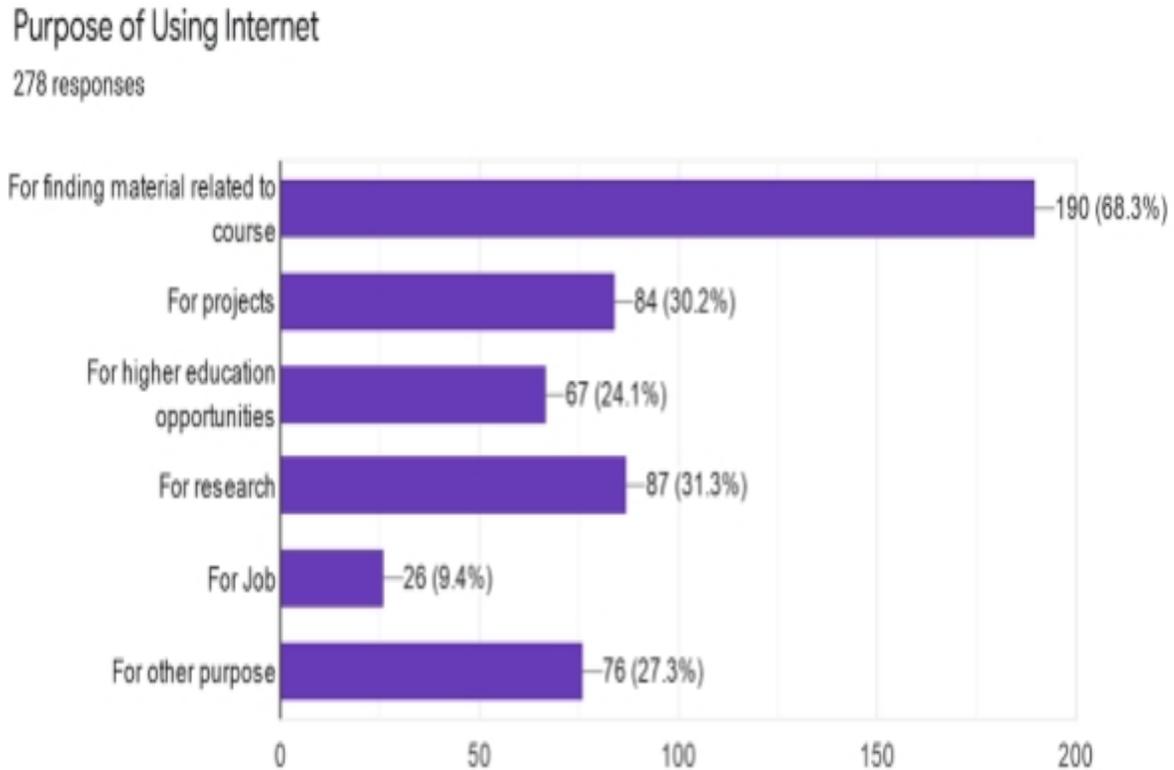
Table 3 shows that majority of the respondents 179 (64.4%) showed a marked preference for both forms of media. Followed by 69 (24.8%) respondents have given preference to the print digital media. Only 30 (10.8%) respondents have indicated their preference to print option. There is lot of transformation in the libraries due to technology and the Internet. The traditional libraries have got transformed to hybrid libraries to provide better services to library users. The data shows that in-spite of the advantages the digital media has over the print media, respondents preferred both media.

Table No. 4: Frequency of browsing the Internet (Academic Status Wise)

| Frequency of Browsing the Internet | Academic Status | | | Total | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------|----------------|
| | Under graduate student | Post graduate students | Faculty members | | |
| Daily | 128 | 63 | 62 | 253 | 91 |
| Alternate Day | 11 | 1 | 2 | 14 | 5 |
| Once a week | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1.5 |
| Rarely | 4 | 3 | 0 | 7 | 2.5 |

The table 4 reveals that majority users (91%) access the Internet every day. This data more or less reflects the usage of the Internet in academic institutions all over the world. Other 9 % consist of alternate day, once a week and rarely. The Internet has developed into a major source of information as well as an important media of communication. It has changed the world into a global village. The plethora of information available on the Internet is challenging to even computer expert person to identify the authentic information. However, we cannot avoid the use of the resources on the Internet.

Figure 1: Purpose of browsing the Internet (Academic status wise)



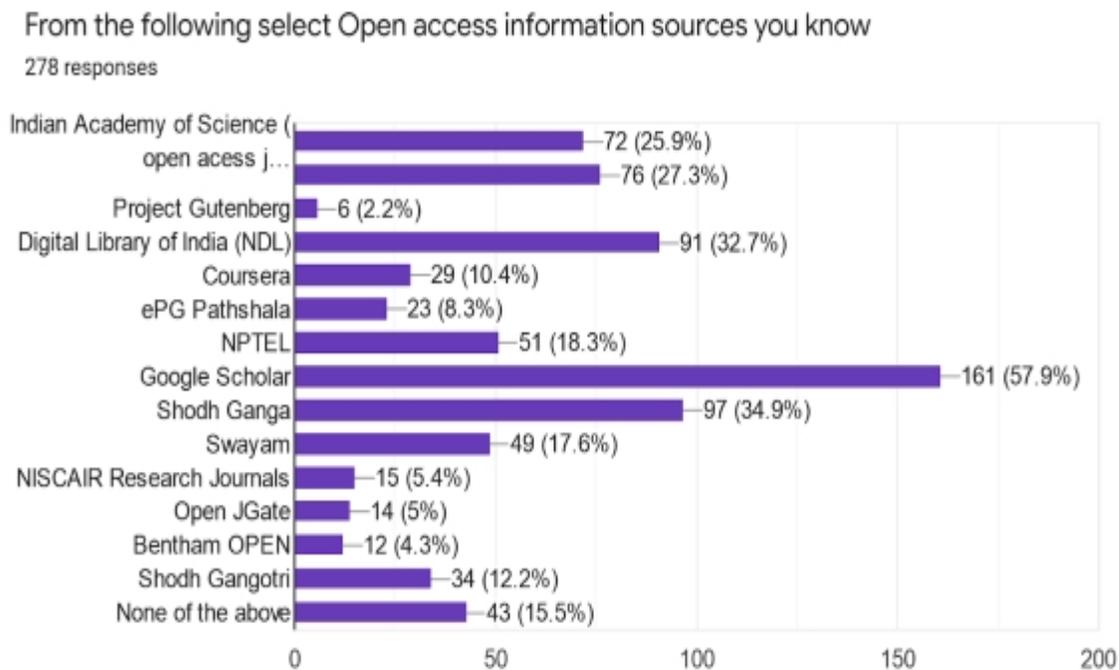
Since it is important to understand the purpose of using the Internet, the survey included a question on the purpose of use of the Internet. Respondents were allowed to select more than one purpose of using the Internet. The figure 1 shows that the majority 190 (68.3%) respondents' uses the Internet to find material related to the course. 87 (31.3%) of academic community use it for research. This includes mostly faculty members and Post graduation students. Degree students and postgraduate students browse the Internet for projects, higher education opportunities and other purposes not mentioned in the form. Very few 26 (9.4%) uses Internet to search for jobs.

Table 5: Awareness of Open Access Information Resources

| Awareness of OARs | Academic Status | | | Total | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------|----------------|
| | Under graduate student | Post graduate students | Faculty members | | |
| Yes | 66 | 41 | 61 | 168 | 60.43 |
| No | 81 | 26 | 3 | 110 | 39.57 |

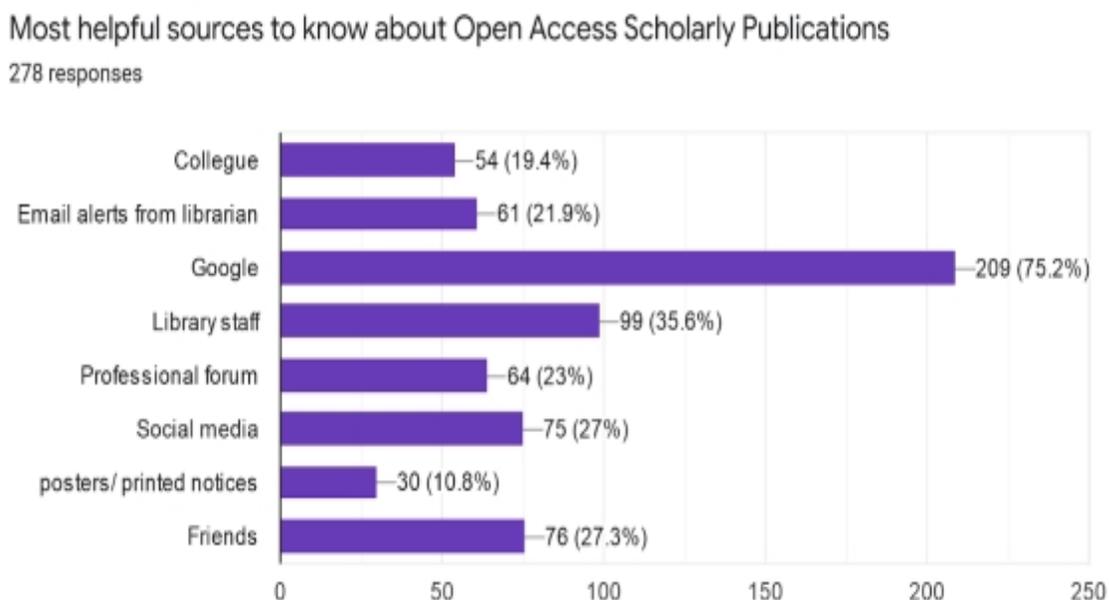
There are a large number of free and open information sources that offer huge amount of academic and research information on the Internet. But the usage depends on the awareness of this information. We have been continuously using OARs available on the Internet for our different information needs without knowing it is called as OARs. To check this, respondents were asked whether they are aware of OARs. To this 168 (60.43%) of the respondents replied positively and only 110 (39.57 %) said they are not aware of the OARs.

Figure 2: Awareness of major OARs



Further, to check which are the OARs respondents use or are aware they were asked to select the one they know. The figure 2 shows the comparative awareness of certain major Open Access Resources. The respondents were more familiar with Google Scholar. Almost 57.9% of the respondents are aware of Google Scholar. Followed by Shodh Ganga this is 34.9% of the respondents. The Digital Library of India is known to 91 (32.7%) respondents. But it is notable that the awareness about majority of the resources is below 40%, which indicates that the academic community is still oblivious of a majority of such Open and free resources. However the overall picture is that the use of the majority of OARs is below 20% and only in a few cases the use is above 30%. This shows that there is a dire need for making people aware of the availability of these information sources.

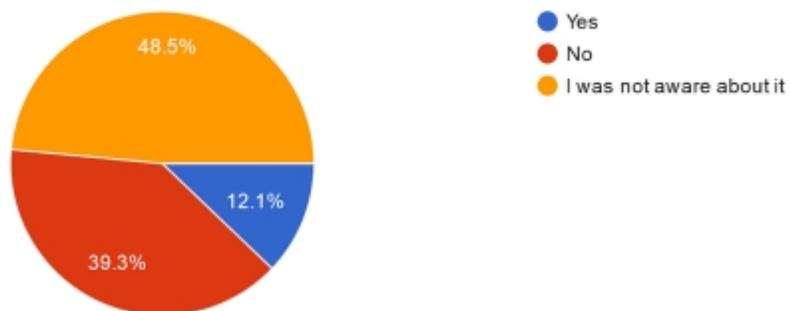
Figure 3: Most helpful sources to know about Open Access Resources



The above Figure 3 clearly shows that respondent feel Google is the most helpful source to know about OARs. About 209 (75.2%) respondents selected Google which was followed by 99 (35.6%) respondent selecting library staff. Other sources were selected by less than 30% of respondents.

Figure 4: Use of COVID 19 Open Access Resources

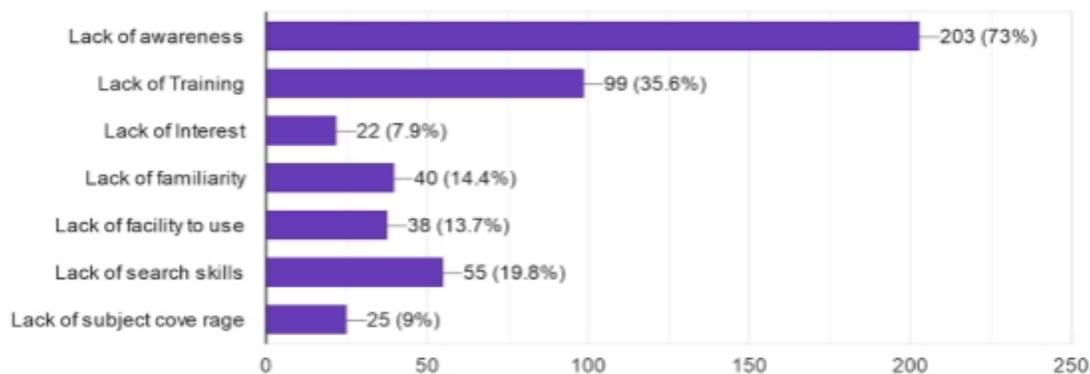
Did you use COVID 19 open access resources provided by publishers and vendors during the COVID-19 crisis
272 responses



With Covid- 19 and accompanying national lockdown, people got confined to their homes, academic institutions were shut down and professionals were asked to work from home, Internet became the new institution for academic community. To help teaching, learning and research some publishers and vendor provide open access resources during pandemic. The figure 4 shows that 48.5% of the academic community was not aware of the COVID 19 OARs. 39.3% did not use though they were aware and only 12.1% made use of these freely available resources.

Figure 5: Obstacles faced in using open Access Resources

Obstacles you face to use open access resources (More than one option can be selected)
278 responses



The respondents were asked about the major obstacles in the use of these websites. An analysis of the data shows that the major obstacle in the use of these open and free resources is the lack of awareness as well as lack of training. Majority 203 (73%) responded lack of awareness followed by 99 (35.6%) responded lack of training as obstacles faced to use OARs. It shows very clearly that we need to have a clear mechanism to provide information about OARs to academic community. Librarian need to think about activities such as library orientation programme, workshops, guest lecturers to promote awareness and usage of OARs.

Table 6: Training for Using Open Access Resources

| Training required for using OARs | Academic Status | | | Total | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------|----------------|
| | Under graduate student | Post graduate students | Faculty members | | |
| Yes | 106 | 63 | 49 | 218 | 78.4 |
| No | 41 | 4 | 15 | 60 | 21.6 |

Table 6 shows very clearly that majority 218 (78.4%) respondent requested for using OARs. This shows that academic community was not aware of the OARs available on the Internet. These resources are very helpful during literature review done for the projects and dissertation. Students joining degree colleges or even post graduation are not trained to use library resources. Sometimes students are not confident in using Internet too. It is necessary to provide training to students for better utilization of library services and also to increase awareness about different information sources. Other 60 (21.6%) responded do not need training.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Major findings of the study are:

- The Internet is the most preferred first source of information.
- Majority of the respondents (64.4%) showed a marked preference for both print as well as digital forms of media for getting information.
- Majority 190 (68.3%) respondents uses the Internet to find material related to the course.

- 60.4% of the respondents are aware of the OARs.
- The use of the majority of OARs is below 20% and only in a few cases the use is above 30%.
- Academic community feel Google is the most helpful source to know about OARs.
- 48.5% of the academic community was not aware of the COVID 19 OARs. 39.3% did not use though they were aware and only 12.1% made use of these freely available resources.
- The major obstacle of the research study faced by users was lack of training and guidance on using OARs.

RECOMMENDATIONS & SUGGESTIONS

- It will be very helpful, if the librarian lets inform about the Internet facilities available for post graduation students, as they are quite unaware about it. Students just go to library to refer books, and have zero knowledge about internet access. Librarian should have an online or physical mode session, making them aware of all the important resources on their subject available on internet platform.
- Academic community should be informed about library web services and should be directed towards library website
- Librarian should conduct an online session to brief students about the open access resources on the internet and how to use them for users benefit. Organizing a training or orientation programme would be really helpful.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this research study was to explore the awareness and use of open access resources (OARs) by faculty and students. The survey reveals that Librarians need to consider seriously the Open and Free resources available online. During COVID- 19 lockdown, when everyone was locked at home, Internet became new college, new workplace, new market, etc. To aid teaching learning process, some publishers made their resources OA. It was great help to the researchers and students community too. But full academic community was not aware about it. Some part of the academic community found it difficult to work and manage during this tough time. It is clear from this study that 60.4% of the respondents were not aware of OARs. Only 30% of the respondents are aware of good OARs, though other 70% are eager to know about

OARs, their source of such information is largely casual. Most users prefer Google searches to seek information and perhaps believe that Google leads them to the information that they seek which is not true always. Not all information available on the Internet is authentic.

It is a duty of librarians to spread awareness of OARs through different library activities. Also links to various OARs can be given on the library website. There are so many platforms like WordPress, Weebly to create free website. Academic community should be informed about library web services and should be directed towards library website.

Future study: The librarians can do further study on important E-resources sites available freely on internet platform which can be helpful to users.

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