

Towards enhancing online services: The academic library services during the Covid-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to share the academic librarian's experiences providing consultation services to library users during Indonesia's Covid-19 pandemic since March 2020. Further, it describes the academic librarian's challenges in developing countries to meet the academic community's demands. The approach used is the author's personal experiences as an academic librarian. The data were taken from students' questions on personal communication by WhatsApp and Email, then reviewed by the author to find solutions. A review of current literature about the topic deals with issues presented scientifically. This paper's results explain academic librarians' efforts in carrying out their roles during the Covid-19 pandemic. The attempts implemented in the central library of Universitas Sebelas Maret enhance library website content and online consultation services. This article is expected to contribute valuable insight and practical solutions regarding virtual assistance to help students develop their skills and become self-learners during the pandemic.

Keywords: *academic librarian's challenges, Covid-19 pandemic, developing country, library website, online consultation services*

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk berbagi pengalaman pustakawan akademik dalam memberikan layanan konsultasi kepada pengguna perpustakaan selama pandemi Covid-19 di Indonesia sejak Maret 2020. Lebih lanjut,

artikel ini menjelaskan tantangan pustakawan akademik di negara berkembang untuk memenuhi tuntutan civitas akademika. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah pengalaman pribadi penulis sebagai pustakawan akademik. Data diambil dari pertanyaan mahasiswa tentang komunikasi personal melalui WhatsApp dan Email, kemudian ditelaah oleh penulis untuk dicari solusinya dengan tinjauan literatur tentang topik yang berkaitan dengan masalah yang disajikan secara ilmiah. Hasil makalah ini memaparkan upaya pustakawan akademik dalam menjalankan perannya di masa pandemi Covid-19. Upaya yang dilakukan di perpustakaan pusat Universitas Sebelas Maret yaitu dengan meningkatkan konten website perpustakaan dan layanan konsultasi online. Artikel ini diharapkan dapat menyumbangkan wawasan berharga dan solusi praktis terkait layanan virtual untuk membantu mahasiswa mengembangkan keterampilan mereka dan menjadi pembelajar mandiri selama pandemi.

Kata Kunci: tantangan pustakawan akademik, pandemi Covid-19, negara berkembang, website perpustakaan, layanan konsultasi online

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the Covid-19 outbreak is alarming for all countries because it has become a concern for the world and affects many aspects. The spread of this virus originated in Wuhan City, China, in mid-December 2019. Then in early January, a Centre for Health Protection informed that forty-four pneumonia cases had been detected in eleven serious conditions cases ("44 Wuhan-related cases detected," 2020). Indonesia, as a developing country, was also included in the list of countries affected by the coronavirus after announced on March 2, 2020. The World Health Organization (WHO) official statement reports that Covid-19 is a global pandemic. The Minister of Administrative Reform and Bureaucracy Reform (PAN-RB) issued a circular letter 19 in 2020 concerning changing the state civil service's work system to avoid the spread of Covid-19 within government agencies. Work From Home

(WFH) policy is officially announced by the government and is valid from March 16, 2020. However, the government decided to enforce Work From Home (WFH) for longer after evaluating the Covid-19 pandemic conditions in the country.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, universities, as a public service within government agencies, turn to apply online learning. Seminars, workshops, conferences, teaching and learning activities, final project exams, and graduations are conducted online. The academic library has been taking various actions to provide and keep support in teaching and learning. In response, Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS) Library, one of the academic libraries in Indonesia that were previously active in providing information literacy and consultation services, continues to offer online services. Several questions relating to information searching and publication emerged via WhatsApp and email. Those questions often arise since research publication is one of the performance university indicators. Searching for information is essential to scientific writing, then published in reputable journals. Therefore, accommodating the demands and adapting the policy during the pandemic, the service activity previously carried out by the librarian physically (face-to-face) now turns to running online.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, libraries in developed and developing countries are forced to make rapid changes in how to keep providing online services. In developed countries, for example, the University of Toronto's library has taken two approaches to leverage and extend existing online resources and electronic collections, and to acquire or create new research tools to be implemented by scholars (Walsh & Rana, 2020). Furthermore, The National Library of Medicine stated that Academic Health Sciences Libraries (Colorado) provide government information on the proper procedure for manufacturing PPE through 3-D printers, ensure continued access to research, facilitate medical students with a variety of appropriate tools, provide recent Covid-19 study results with specifics, and also provide them with tools to help them learn how to better communicate with patients (Daly, 2020). Department of the Access services of the academic library at Georgia Southern University,

providing seamless access to resources, also stayed open on campus to accommodate users. For the LibApps spaces app, the library has created an appointment scheme. The result was an online scheduling system that allowed users and staff to see how many room reservation locations were available during each time block (Garner & Logue, 2020).

Nigeria, for example, is a developing country that implements online access through library websites and social networks. Academic librarians still need new skills in using technology where the relevant ICT infrastructure is also required in a virtual environment to facilitate teaching and learning (Ifijeh & Yusuf, 2020). The National University of Lesotho Library in Africa has continued to analyze ways to improve access to the digital library, committed to finding new methods for the university community to make digital information discoverable by registering for remote automation (Mbambo-Thata, 2020). A case study of the universities in Indonesia describes internet networks have become the most common issue in online services and fewer librarians' skills (Winata et al., 2020). Some African countries also have similar problems regarding the availability of ICT infrastructure, electricity sources, expensive bandwidth and ICT equipment costs, and a scarcity of strategic experience to handle technological cycles (Boachie, 2018).

Responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, all academic libraries in developed and developing countries have made a change to online services. In developed countries, the skills of librarians and ICT infrastructure are well available. They were carried out online library services long before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Elaborating on digital content, developing digital services, and creating or developing research tools and other library applications have become their current challenges. On the contrary, librarians in developing countries face common problems due to inadequate ICT infrastructure and technical librarian skills. It is a challenge for librarians to respond to students' needs regarding information searching and concerning publications.

What challenges are faced by librarians at Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS) in providing services during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Therefore, this paper intends to describe the challenge of academic librarians in one of the developing countries (Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia) by limiting the discussion to the enhancement of website content as a trusted source and online consultation services during the Covid-19 pandemic. Those are important because the ending of the Covid-19 pandemic is unpredictable. Meanwhile, libraries are dealing with the new demand for digital resources to support online services and research publications. This paper aims to share the academic librarian's experiences regardless of inadequate technical skills and ICT infrastructure in giving online services during the Covid-19 pandemic and to motivate other librarians to exist in developing countries.

METHOD

The approach used is the author's personal experiences as an academic librarian related to the responses of online services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data were taken from students as library users through personal communication (WhatsApp and email). The author further reviewed several questions related to information searching and matters relating to publication to find a solution. A review of current literature on the topic that deals with issues was performed and presented scientifically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

ICT Infrastructure and Librarians' skill

Developing countries have similar issues and challenges to ICT infrastructure and librarian skills (Boachie, 2018; Ifijeh & Yusuf, 2020; Mbambo-Thata, 2020; Winata et al., 2020). Infrastructure plays an important role, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Using information and communication technology (ICT) and skilled librarians will ensure better and more effective library services. Unfortunately, UNS Library still needs to provide EZproxy. The librarian facilitates communication between the IT e-journal database and IT UNS in setup (Single Sign On) SSO that allows users to access the databases. In this study, the user logs in on the web page. Furthermore, there is an

authentication process for the username and password entered by the user with the account data stored in the active directory. The user authentication process is successful, then the process of making cookies occurs, which functions as a register that is stored on the web browser and shows that the user is active. After this stage, the user will be directed to the intended web page and can access the required databases. The library also implements online services such as book reservations and room reservations. While the application does not yet support the library system, the UNS academic librarians use Google forms. Indeed this is less practical, but this is what we can do. Consultations deal with various publication issues that were carried out physically; switch to WhatsApp and email because there is no web-based online consultation application (online chat). Technology implementation helps librarians more effectively serve online, for those librarians have to adapt to innovations in learning and research (Wenborn, 2018). During the Covid-19 pandemic, providing online services in developing countries requires much adjustment for students and librarians. Students may have various levels of familiarity with technologies, as is with some librarians. Some are familiar, some are not, and those librarians need to understand this phenomenon in providing good service. Overcoming this problem is through online information literacy activities.

The author and two other academic librarians train other librarians who need to become more familiar with technology to adapt and appear virtually. Training materials include Google search strategies, information searches through a library website, evaluating results to get quality sources, and how to trace the OA Scopus journal for the enrichment of library website content. This training is essential to minimize the skill gap between librarians because, later, they will assist students in providing services online. Another alternative for librarians who have difficulty attending training is to upload preprints to the repository (<https://digilib.uns.ac.id>). Librarians do this activity because there is no independent upload yet.

Librarians and Users' Needs

In developing countries, the role of academic librarians is still the capacity to serve the needs of both printed and electronic literature. Librarians need to carry out their duties optimally. Librarians have yet to have a bargaining position in their environment. If academic librarians made their publications and research work more accessible, they could make themselves visible as scholars and educate about information literacy (Eva & Shea, 2015). The author has conducted collaborative research with doctoral program students and lecturers in library science. With these competencies, librarians' existence and credibility as partners in the academic community will be more recognized. Collaboration with academics on research also helps librarians develop their image. Another significant value is the benefit of librarians' professional careers. Just as the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) did in 2010, it issued the Oakleaf report *The Value of Academic Libraries*, which calls on academic librarians to "provide evidence of their value." Librarians must be an essential component of higher education in the landscape of the learning process (Folk, 2014, p. 81). For that, we need the 'meaningful collaboration' of librarians, students, and lecturers in changing users' perceptions that librarians are not just collection providers. Lecturers are the ones who influence the students rather than librarians. If they understand meaningful collaboration, it will improve and produce better and more efficient research.

During the Covid-19 pandemic particularly, the role of librarians is increasingly being questioned. What can academic librarians provide? It takes more effort for academic librarians, especially in developing countries, to keep providing online services. Even with limitations, library services must continue. The example of questions regarding information searching and publications are as follows: According to undergraduate student A (personal communication, May 22, 2020), accessing e-resources as references takes much time but does not get the result needed; According to master student B (personal communication, July 14, 2020), it is difficult to find good literature as a reference for scientific writing; According to doctoral student C (personal communication, August 18, 2020), how to determine the target journal for publication.

In 2014, Worlock found that searching for information requires around half of the overall working hours, and the other half evaluates and uses the search results (D'Couto & Rosenhan, 2015). The choice of information is overwhelming and increasingly mixed with poor-quality online content, making the need to recognize information access and engagement behavior even more urgent (Head, 2018). The source of information that is diverse on the internet is not reliable in the absence of filters. Students with insufficient knowledge will need to be able to sort out relevant information. When students collect data, they should know what sources are best to use, when they will use them and how they will quote them. Torras & Saetre (2009) stated that a discussion between the librarian and the student helps redefine the research issue, search strategy and find relevant sources.

The library's role has changed rapidly due to new technologies and how information is obtained, maintained, organized, and delivered. This role increasingly challenges academic libraries' capacity to provide authentic and reliable material. Librarians are moving closer to the field of teaching, helping students to develop research strategies to save their searching time and identify sources of information to get accurate and reliable information. For this reason, the UNS library conducts information literacy training for senior librarians to assist students in searching and finding appropriate information. The impact of information literacy instruction emphasizes the value of helping students improve cognitive results by investigating issues and identifying misconceptions through good sources (Kennedy & Gruber, 2020). Academic librarians are at the forefront of facilitating students' digital literacy skills through online courses, tutorials, and electronic consultancy (Martzoukou, 2020). Information literacy workshops are crucial so students can identify, analyze, interact with, and use information from various sources depending on their information needs. UNS library has conducted information literacy held 16 times in October (trainers were senior librarians who attended the information literacy training). Mendeley training, Turnitin training, and international journal publications are

conducted once a month. Those activities are carried out through zoom media.

Librarian Challenges

Library Website

The abundance of information on the internet brings difficulties for users to determine the right choice because not all information available on the internet has good quality. The choice of information is overwhelming and increasingly mixed with a flood of poor-quality online content making the need to recognize information access and engagement behavior even more urgent (Head, et al., 2018). Librarians, as information managers, have knowledge and skill for the world, both books (library collections) and e-resources (web), as well as being able to filter out false information (Titangos, 2014). Librarians provide quality sources of information by packaging on the library website. During the Work From Home (WFH), several librarians searched for Scopus open access based on the subject. As an academic librarian, the author verified whether the journal was appropriate and recommended it as a reference. The result is the new menu on the library website, "subject guide Open Access Scopus articles." This process is essential because several open access Scopus journals are listed in predatory journals/publishers. Even some articles already indexed in Scopus could disappear (ex: Humanities and Social Sciences Reviews, Test Engineering and Management).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the website increasingly becomes a reference for academics in getting the information needed. Furthermore, the library website represents customers' main interaction path as a virtual front door. The UNS library website (<https://library.uns.ac.id>) provides several links and information to answer questions arising during the Covid-19 pandemic. The websites of university libraries can serve as potential resources for information-related education-learning for the academic community (Gomes & Dumont, 2018). Another challenge for academic librarians is how to organize the information clearly and efficiently, exceedingly when facing users who are unfamiliar with the technology. The library website has become an essential resource in the

library's interaction with users. As an academic librarian, the author learns CamtasiaStudio 2019.0 applications to create journal remote access guidance and link it to the library website. The subscription online databases journal and book can be accessed remotely using SSO and user password (one ID for all).

Online Consultation

In early 2016, UNS library provided consultation services assistance to individuals or groups as counsel students and lecturers on journal publications. "The role of the information consultant is to identify the information need of the client and to find relevant information for the solution of a task or problem" (Wormell et al., 2012, pp.1-2). These jobs are always challenging because being a librarian (an academic librarian) requisite updates the issues in scholarly publications. Of course, librarians necessity has expertise in their fields, experience, knowledge, and embedded in their skills. Being a consultant librarian is a courageous movement out of the comfort zone to show that librarians are "visible." If academic librarians made their publications and research work more accessible, they would be able to make themselves visible as scholars and therefore able to educate about information literacy (Eva & Shea, 2015).

Online library services in developing countries have been unable to provide the expected services due to the limited ICT infrastructure and librarians' skills. However, the UNS library continues to conduct consultation services through WhatsApp, email, and zoom. The consultant librarian needs to consider the complexity of the issues raised. When students need more explanation, then continue by zoom. Unfortunately, the library consultation service application has not been integrated into the library website, so it is not appropriately managed. There are difficulties when we need information about the patron, what problem, when, and how to solve it, including statistical reports and progress of consultation results. In Indonesia, virtual reference and information services already exist in academic libraries. However, they are still at the baseline using telephone and email, and questions are generally limited to libraries (Anna & Srirahayu, 2020). This virtual

reference service is similar to library consultation services. The differences in UNS library consultation service are more specific to journal publications. This service has become a peculiar phenomenon in other Indonesian universities. This differentiation product service provides added value for the library and the value point for librarians to make themselves visible and have a bargaining position in their environment. Several questions via WhatsApp and email require a consultative decision. Those questions relate to the journal publication. There are resume some questions regarding the matter of publications:

1. Questionable Scopus journals (Postgraduate student, IS, in personal communication, May 5, 2020)
2. Identifying the predatory journal (Undergraduate student, M, in personal communication, July 7, 2020)
3. The uncertainty of submitting to the recommended journal via an international conference in Indonesia (Postgraduate student, YA in personal communication, August 28, 2020)
4. The uncertainty of accepting as a journal reviewer (Postgraduate student, ET, in personal communication, Nov 4, 2020).

In dealing with those problems, the engagement of academic librarians in those issues demands the ability to evaluate information, think critically, and use technological tools to support research. "Research support can be defined as services that enable researchers to spend more time on research and working more efficiently" (Hidle, 2016, p. 24).

Based on UNS Rector Regulations Regarding Management and Implementation of Education in the Master Program and Doctoral Program, the students must publish research in reputable international journals or proceedings (Scopus as an indicator for reputed international journals in Indonesia). Unfortunately, some of them need to familiarize themselves with scholarly publications. In this case, the academic librarian must understand about Scopus, such as impact factor, coverage metadata, discontinued journal, predatory journals in Scopus, hijacked journals in Scopus, and title re-evaluation. Tattersall (2017) said: Citations, impact scores, and h indexes, among others, remain the essential benchmarks for academic rigor, be it the paper, the publication,

or the person. They could be better, but they offer insight into how a piece of research is being received, the quality of the journal, and the citation impact of the researcher (p.29). The H-index is constructed to calculate a researcher's performance and productivity.

In responding to those questions, the librarian has to evaluate journals/publishers first, Using Beall's list (<https://beallslist.net/>), predatory report criteria (<https://blog.cabells.com/2019/03/20/predatoryreport-criteria-v1-1/>), and think.check.submit (<https://thinkchecksubmit.org/>). According to Macháček & Srholec (2019), Among the top 20 countries, Indonesia is in the second category of contributors in predatory journals. As an academic librarian, the author also provides an online guide on the library website about finding the journal target, checking whether the journal is predatory, and submitting to international journals (<https://library.uns.ac.id/access-submit-international-journal/> / and <https://library.uns.ac.id/uns-library-seminar/>). The author also guides YouTube to help students who do not understand journal publications. The evaluation of the journal target is essential to maintain the credibility of the institution and the authors. Thus, submission to predatory journals or hijacked journals can be avoided. The published papers in predatory journals circumvent in-depth peer review and standardization that undermine the reputation of authors and organizations. If such works are used to gain knowledge, there will be less qualitative learning that could not stand the test of time, particularly in scholarly contexts (Ayeni, Adetoro, 2017). Since 2016, the UNS library has provided library consultation services to avoid publication in predatory journals. This service will raise the ability to grasp information literacy and apply critical thinking skills (Wiratningsih, 2018). The ability in searching for information, evaluate the results, and communicate new knowledge requires a set of skills and knowledge that must be owned by a librarian.

CONCLUSION

During the Covid-19 pandemic, libraries were forced to make rapid changes in how to keep providing online services. In developed countries, ICT infrastructure and librarians' skills are better prepared beforehand. On the other hand, in developing countries, problems arise due to a lack of ICT infrastructure and librarian skills. It takes a challenge and needs rigorous effort for academic libraries to keep providing online services.

Responding to the problem of limited ICT infrastructure and librarians' skills, UNS librarians use ready-made applications available on the internet. Information literacy training was conducted to overcome the lack of librarians' skills so librarians can assist students in an online platform. After being ready with the applications on the internet and upgrading librarian skills, the next step is spreading the information and knowledge learned by librarians to students. Two activities are carried out by librarians: library website and online consultation. Library websites become essential as they provide products, trusted information sources, and tutorials for students. Online library consultation services by WhatsApp, email, and zoom to overcome problems related to information searching and scholarly publication.

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