



## Journal of Multidisciplinary and Translational Research (JMTR)

journal homepage: <https://journals.kln.ac.lk/jmtr/>



# Challenges faced by library staff of academic libraries during the Covid-19 pandemic: University of Sri Jayewardenepura library experience

Nishaya Nirmani Pathirana<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Library, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Colombo, Sri Lanka

## Abstract

This study attempted to examine the role of the academic libraries and how the libraries handle crises and other related problems during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the study is aimed at investigating the challenges that the library staff of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJ) faced when providing services to its users amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Accordingly, the main objectives of this research were to examine whether the USJ library performed all routine activities, and whether it provided all facilities at usual times during the pandemic. Further, the study aimed to identify how work scheduling during the pandemic affected staff behavior and to investigate whether the staff faced difficulties when providing library services online. This is a qualitative study and questionnaires and structured interviews were used for the data collection. The research population consisted of the total library staff members of the USJ. Data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2019. Based on the results of the analysis, only a few members of the staff did not engage in routine activities during the pandemic. Although a number of difficulties have been mentioned by the respondents when dealing with external parties, alternative measures were also put in place at the USJ library to carry out the routine activities without fail during the pandemic. Though there were a list of activities which could not be performed during the pandemic, some services were provided remotely. An adequate number of staff members was available in the offices during the period where employees were working on a roster, adhering to the safety regulations imposed by the government. It was revealed that the USJ library staff has successfully carried out their duties online during the pandemic with the help of the IT infrastructure. In conclusion, work is challenging during a global pandemic, nonetheless, there are ways and means to overcome these challenges. Communication media and developments in the IT play a vital role here.

**Keywords:** Academic libraries, Challenges, Covid-19 pandemic, Library staff, University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJ)

### Article info

#### Article history:

Received 27<sup>th</sup> Jul 2023

Received in revised form 04<sup>th</sup> September 2023

Accepted 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2023

Available online 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023

ISSN (E-Copy): ISSN 3051-5262

ISSN (Hard copy): ISSN 3051-5602

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.4036/jmtr.v8i2.12>

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-3371-819X>

\*Corresponding author:

E-mail address: [aditha.dissanayake@gmail.com](mailto:aditha.dissanayake@gmail.com) (A.U.Dissanayake)

[CC BY-NC-SA](#) © 2023, The Author(s)

## Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30th January, 2020 and a pandemic on 11th March, 2020 (WHO, 2022) with the spread of COVID-19 worldwide. Governments imposed social distancing at all levels to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and it resulted in an unprecedented challenge for all functioning sectors including the academic libraries. Before this period, various academic libraries around the world carried out their essential responsibilities, such as collection, processing, storage and dissemination of information, generally in physical or hybrid form. In response to this public health emergency, the academic libraries adopted the digital library environment which could transgress the boundaries of physical buildings and support e-learning. Various scholars attempted to examine the role of the academic libraries and how libraries handle crises and other related problems around the world during this pandemic period. This study, thus, investigates the challenges that the library staff of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJ) faced when providing services to its users amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 outbreak that originated in the city of Wuhan, in China, caused a significant damage to the world population and to the global economy. As of 12 June 2022, over 533 million confirmed cases and over 6.3 million deaths have been reported globally (WHO, 2022). The virus spreads from human to human via droplets or through contaminated surfaces which in turn enter the nasal mucosa, oral cavity, or mucosa of the eyes through touch (Wickramarachchi et al. 2020). The disease is characterized by cough, fever, and sore throat and may result in virus-induced pneumonia and progressive respiratory failure owing to alveolar damage caused by the virus (2020).

In Sri Lanka, the first case of COVID-19 was reported in late January 2020, was a Chinese citizen, and the first local case was identified in the second week of March (Wickramarachchi et al. 2020). Since then, the government of Sri Lanka introduced various procedures to promote social distancing, such as closure of schools and education institutes, imposing restrictions on celebrations and public gatherings, introducing work from home concept, applying for international travel bans, and imposing island-wide lockdown to safeguard the citizens.

The pandemic caused severe social and economic disruption around the world, including the largest global recession after the Great Depression (IMFBlog, 2022). Accumulation of infected patients in health care centers, widespread supply shortages including food shortages, partial or full closure of educational institutions and public areas, cancellation and postponement of international and national events and celebrations, circulation of misinformation through social media and mass media and various political strains were some of the major disruptions.

An academic library is a library that is attached to a higher educational institution which serves two purposes: to support the curriculum, and to support the research of the academics and students. The mission of any academic library is to facilitate teaching, learning and research activities of the intellectual community of the university or higher educational institution to which they are affiliated. Since the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, government authorities adopted public safety measures to lower the spread of the corona virus in their respective countries. Universities responded swiftly, and the hybrid mode became the new normal in higher

education. Academic libraries that were closing their doors, consequently began a renewed mission of digital literacy.

Though the libraries were facing many challenges, many of them were innovative enough to identify and offer services that could support e-learning. People are not only looking at the best practices in the library but also the actions and steps that their colleagues are taking in the Covid-19 pandemic (Hinchliffe and Worf-Eisenberg, 2020). Hansa (2020) points out that there is no collective information on what libraries are doing. However, libraries continue to creatively serve the interests and needs of their communities through their libraries' digital collections, despite the closure of buildings.

The corona virus pandemic forced educational institutions around the globe to rethink the delivery of learning and research services. Institution librarians, in particular, have been quick to adapt to this shifting landscape. Sharing her experience, Emily Singley, Head of Library Systems at Boston College in the US, mentions that in total, the library of the Boston College saw e-resource usage decline by 45% in March/April, 2020, compared to 2019 figures. However, for Elsevier content, e-resource usage increased by 35% over that same period. Singley states: "Because federated access had been implemented, users could just log in to Science Direct using their normal campus institutional credentials. And here's the truly amazing thing: whereas federated access to Elsevier had previously accounted for around 3 percent of Elsevier usage, in March, when we were all at home, it rose to 50 percent - that's an increase of more than 4,000 percent" (Library Connect, 2020). During the lockdown, their library has also promoted a university website page explaining the remote access routes to students to facilitate their e-learning.

Naomi Visser, Manager of E-Resources at Stellenbosch University in South Africa states that in her library around 1,700 loan laptops were delivered to students in need and there is still a monthly data package to help them access online learning material from their cellphones. Visser states, "We created a special COVID-19 LibGuide with tabs for e-books, e-journals, COVID-19 research, and additional resources, such as tools for finding and organizing course content, articles on online learning, and tips to share with students" (Library Connect, 2020). According to her, Stellenbosch's biggest success in combating information services strain in the pandemic has been to keep the users updated about the digital information arenas. Communication flow has been well maintained via social media platforms, and Visser states "and, of course, social media was used extensively. Some Instagram accounts were added to the existing Facebook and Twitter accounts, and some faculty librarians started WhatsApp groups to communicate with their students and lecturers" (Library Connect, 2020). Naomi adds: "Faculty librarians also remained in contact with their faculties via email and used MS Teams for individual meetings. Ask a Librarian, the online reference service, continued to be available and there was a marked increase in the number of questions asked compared to the same period in 2019" (Library Connect, 2020).

Fasae et al in their study conducted in 2020 quote Tsakonas, the director of the university library in Patras, Greece. Tsakonas (2020) shared what the library was doing at the time when all academic institutions in Greece are closed. He states that they have decided to stop calculating fines while the libraries are closed and borrowed books can be renewed for a longer period. The staff have been given directions to set up work teams to communicate via telephone, email and social networks. Janitors had been advised to clean all surfaces within the library premises, for

that they had been issued necessary cleaning utensils. The librarians had been keen on acquiring the most reliable sources such as systematic reviews, raw data, reference maps and information from the pharmaceutical industry. (Fasae, J. K. et al, 2020).

Qatar Public Library attempted to facilitate access to the collections, with more emphasis on electronic resources. It became the main option of the Library Public Access Catalogue. It was also an open academic source accessible to all. Online resources were now more visible and were promoted in the constant need to reach out to readers. In terms of its services, the library moved to virtual mode, and users got support through LibAnswer, Lib-Chat, Library Aware and virtual research and writing consultations. Virtual support was extended as it was the only way to assist the users. (Medawar and Tabet, 2020).

Kumara and Acharya (2022) in their study have uncovered that the serious issues challenging the readers, in utilizing library facilities and services in the pandemic are the absence of current books and periodicals. An unsteady power supply, and unfavorable weather inside the library have been additionally identified. Alternative power supply, for example, solar energy and air-conditioning are suggested to overcome these challenges. It has been suggested to coordinate library programs that will make the readers aware of different services that are offered in the library.

In the survey conducted by Shastri, D.K and Chudasma, P. (2022), it has been validated that the institute or the library website is considered as a popular method to guide the users to access the digital resources. 71.43% of respondents used this method while (10.39%) LIS professionals adopted other methods such as sending e-books and articles via email and providing links to resources via social media. Majority of 68.8% respondents informed that the library patrons approached the library staff via phone calls, WhatsApp during the lockdown period.

Robinson et al. (2022) in their survey pertaining to the UK Public Library have identified 'stress' to be a major challenge for their library staff which has resulted from different causes at different levels. Primarily, those who work in library services, particularly on the front office have been under severe stress in terms of workload and being face-to-face with customers daily, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Most respondents had heavy workloads, especially with many staff members being on quarantine along with general workloads being accumulated during the pandemic period. The reactions from patrons too ranged from general frustration to outright verbal abuse of library staff, with some respondents noting that they felt distressed or deflated at having to spend all day being subjected to verbal abuse. The rise of digital platform also had some negative effects in this area, with staff being concerned over the decrease of future patrons due to the increase in e-book usage and potential budget cuts. The study also noted the enthusiasm of patrons for the re-opening of the library, the importance of the library as a social hub for the elderly, and as a resource for IT usage, and for those without ICT infrastructure at home, as well as those discovering IT use for the first time.

Lack of necessary ICT infrastructure for staff and users as well as lack of knowledge and skills in working with technology has proved to be a great barrier in providing and obtaining library services during the pandemic in an effective manner. In the survey conducted by Shastri and Chudasma (2022) on the perception of ICT skills and challenges of using technology among the library professionals of the Gujarat state during the Covid-19 pandemic, figures show that 46.75% respondents considered lack of ICT skills of users as a hurdle to access e-resources and 37.66%

mentioned lack of internet or slow connectivity as an issue. The survey further identifies lack of manpower, additional work and lack of IT infrastructure as challenges to use technology. According to Robinson et al. (2022), despite providing much needed physical and digital services during the lockdown period at the UK Public Library, it had been observed that respondents were not always able to communicate what services were available to patrons as there remains a large number of the population who do not have these facilities or are unable to use them effectively.

Literature shows that several authors who have researched on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on academic libraries have revealed several aspects. For example, studies done by Fasae et al. (2020) have found that Covid-19 has affected global educational activities and that it has changed the way people interact, associate and conduct research and studies. Furthermore, it has been found that the signs of the pandemic in libraries are permanent, as library services around the world have almost stopped since universities and other educational institutions ordered their students to leave campus and school facilities. Alternatively, Harris (2021a) states that Government and university mandate clearly the closure of impacted institutions and libraries in Jamaica.

Harris (2021b) observed that while emergency management plans were a feature of Jamaican academic libraries, library pandemic plans and library business continuity plans were nonexistent at the time. Ameen (2021) concludes that the libraries and professionals will have to become more relevant under the circumstances while facilitating all the stakeholders. He mentions that Pakistan managed to face the first phase of the pandemic well with smart lockdown strategies and 50% physical attendance at workplaces and that they have identified the importance of digital equality, digital literacy and news literacy which can be efficiently used at the academic libraries. Similarly, the other developing countries should also have their own strategies in place to face the challenges brought by Covid-19 pandemic well. Researchers believe that Sri Lanka should also have its own measures in place to face another wave of the Covid-19 pandemic or a new threat (such as Monkey pox) especially at a time when the country is facing the largest economic crisis of the century.

The objectives of the study were to examine whether USJ library performed all routine activities and provided all facilities at usual times during the pandemic period. In addition, the study aimed to understand how work scheduling during the pandemic period affected the staff behavior and to identify any difficulties faced by the USJ library staff when providing library services online to its user community during the Covid-19 pandemic. The routine activities that could performed, the facilities that could be provided by the USJ library staff during the pandemic period was assessed to determine the influence of the pandemic on the library services.

This study would be of importance as the world has still not been able to eliminate the corona virus and no proper cure has yet been found to eradicate the virus from the planet earth completely. Moreover, new viruses such as 'Monkey pox' has also come into existence in other parts of the world (especially in the African context). Given this situation, it is always advisable to be prepared to face them as and when they arise and ensure the smooth functioning of the library. By identifying the challenges, the librarians will be able to put new practices in place, train the staff to get accustomed to new-normal situations and in turn, the study would provide valuable insights to the librarians on how to successfully face the future challenges posed by

natural disasters such as pandemics as there is a greater chance that they might have to face similar situations in the future as well.

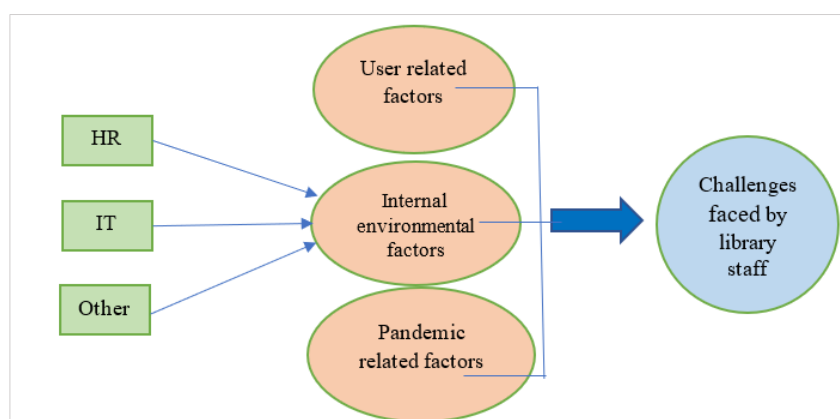
## Research methodology

This is a qualitative study which has mainly used questionnaires for the collection of data. However, according to Harris (2021a) interview method offers the possibility of obtaining detailed information and on-the-spot clarification. Therefore, this study has also used interviews for the collection of data. The research population consists of all the library staff members of the USJ library. Accordingly, the population consists of 72 library staff members (both academic and non-academic) who are employed at the USJ library. The sample consisted of 15 responses collected from the division in-charge (Deputy Librarian/Senior Assistant Librarian/Assistant Librarian) of each of the division/branch and randomly selected library information assistants and library attendants (representing each division) to represent the total population. In order to make sure that every subgroup is properly represented in the sample, the sampling method used was Stratified Random sampling.

Data was collected through both questionnaires as well as face-to-face interviews to obtain a more reliable responses as there may be certain employees who may not otherwise understand the questions that are presented in English language. In such instances, interviews were held to obtain the data. The librarians in-charge of each of the main division of the USJ library (Acquisition division, Reader services division, Cataloguing and classification division, IT division, Preservation and Conservation unit, Binding section and Library office) and from each branch library (Medical library, Engineering library and Technology library) and Assistant Registrar from the Library office were given the questionnaires. The non-academic staff members were interviewed to collect the responses.

The collected data were initially classified based on the responses received for each and every question. Subsequently, the main variables were identified in the responses. All the variables identified were then categorized into six main variables based on their nature and similarities. The relationship between the variables were identified to develop a conceptual framework.

The following conceptual framework can be derived from the variables, identified from the responses received from the questionnaires and interviews. It shows the relationship between the variables.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model



Data was analyzed similar to the method used by Fasaie et al. (2020) and accordingly Microsoft Excel was used as the main tool for data analysis. Data was presented using pie charts, bar charts and line diagrams. Finally, the findings of the study were presented and conclusions and recommendations for future researchers were given at the end.

## Results

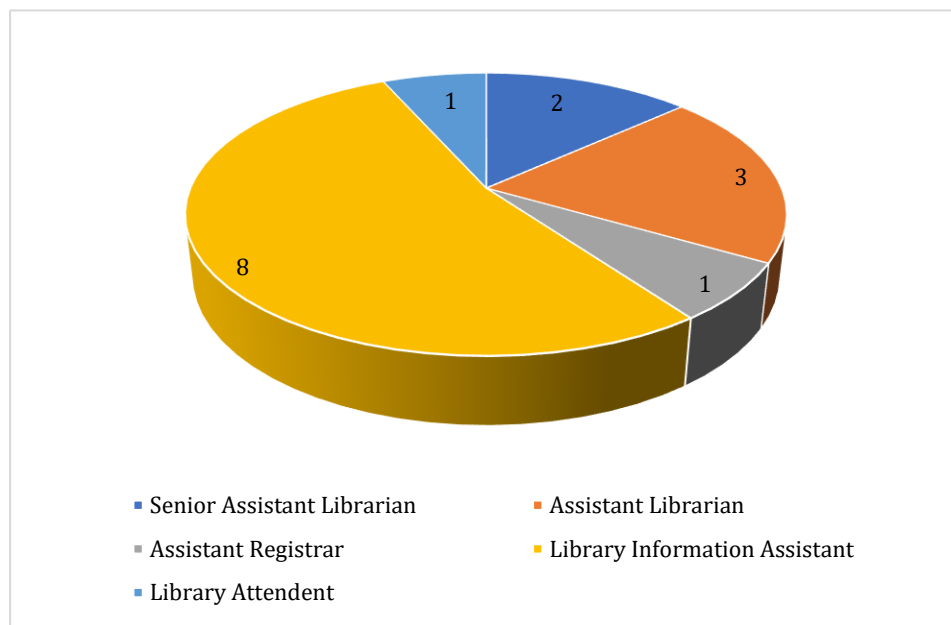
Data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2019. A thorough analysis was performed to obtain answers for each of the research questions of the study.

The number of respondents and the division to which they are attached, can be seen in the following table.

**Table 1:** Classification of respondents based on division

| Division                          | Number of respondents |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Ceylon Room                       | 1                     |
| Engineering Library               | 1                     |
| Reader Services                   | 3                     |
| IT                                | 1                     |
| Acquisitions                      | 3                     |
| Cataloguing & Processing Division | 3                     |
| Library office                    | 1                     |
| Periodicals                       | 1                     |
| Scheduled reference               | 1                     |

The respective designations of the respondents are illustrated by the following diagram.



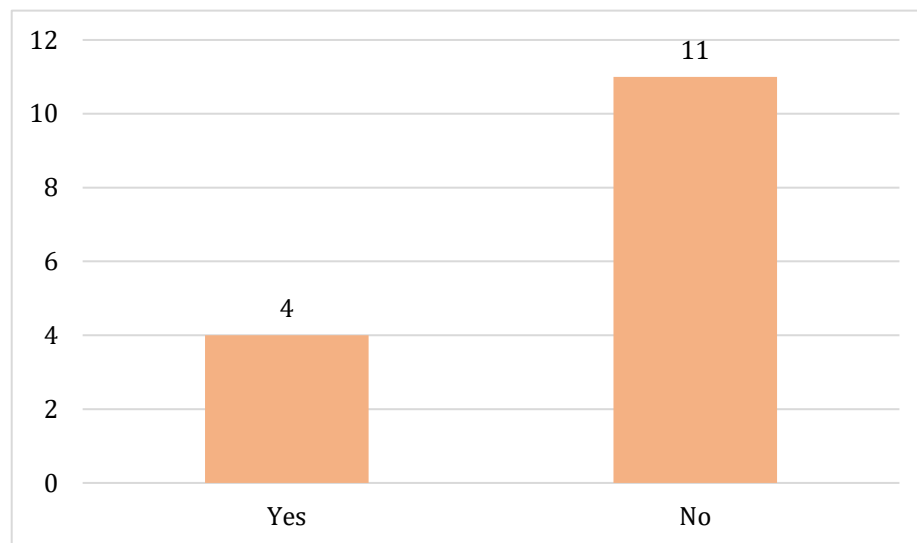
**Figure 2.** Designation of respondents

Based on the research objectives, the first research question of this study is as follows.

***RQ1: What were routine activities that the USJ library staff could perform during the pandemic period?***

**Table 2:** Variables identified for RQ1

| Variables                 | Questions                   |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Safety measures           | Q24, Q26                    |
| Work from home            | Q6, Q15, Q20, Q28, Q29, Q30 |
| Status at the institution | Q4, Q7, Q16                 |
| Support                   | Q14, Q33                    |
| Management strategies     | Q25                         |

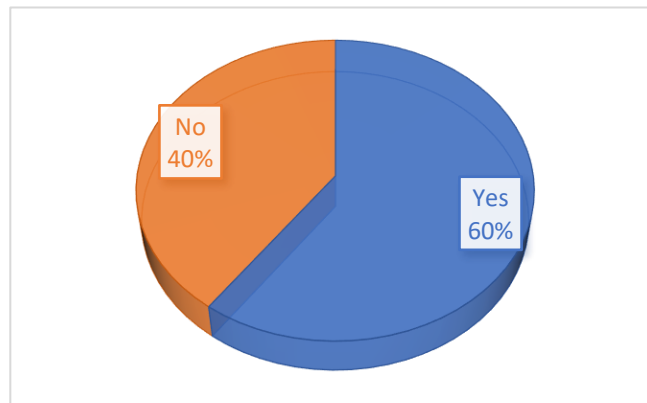


**Figure 3.** Engagement in routine activities

In identifying whether the USJ library performs all routine activities during the pandemic period, it is vital to understand the status of the USJ library during the pandemic. Based on the answers of the respondents, it was found that majority of them do not engage in the usual routine activities of their respective divisions, during the pandemic period. Only four respondents said that they did.

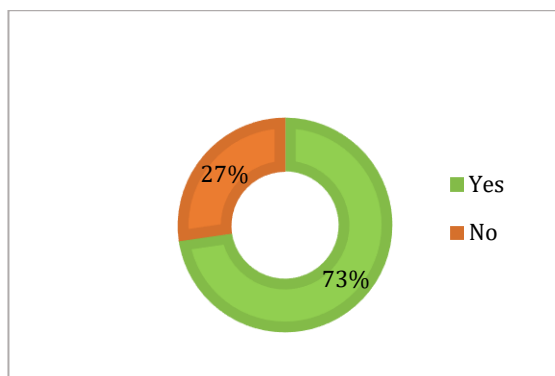
Based on Figure 4, a majority of the respondents said that they face difficulties when dealing with external parties during the pandemic period. Some of the responses include difficulties in meeting people, inability or delays in obtaining services from external service providers, non-availability of IT related materials in the market, and inefficiencies caused in communicating with external parties due to subject related employees being on quarantine or affected with Covid-19. Other difficulties were also mentioned such as problems caused in the divisions due to employees coming to work on a roster basis, health risks of meeting external parties, and hesitation of some staff to cover up the duties of another, for example accepting letters received to the division and key-duty.



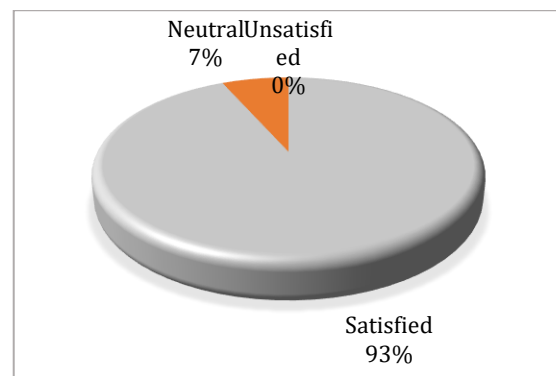


**Figure 4.** Difficulties faced when dealing with external parties

Even though a number of difficulties have been mentioned by the respondents, when dealing with external parties, alternative measures are also in place at the USJ library to carry out the routine activities of the divisions without fail during the pandemic period. This is seen in Figure 5 below, where 73% of the respondents answered 'Yes'.

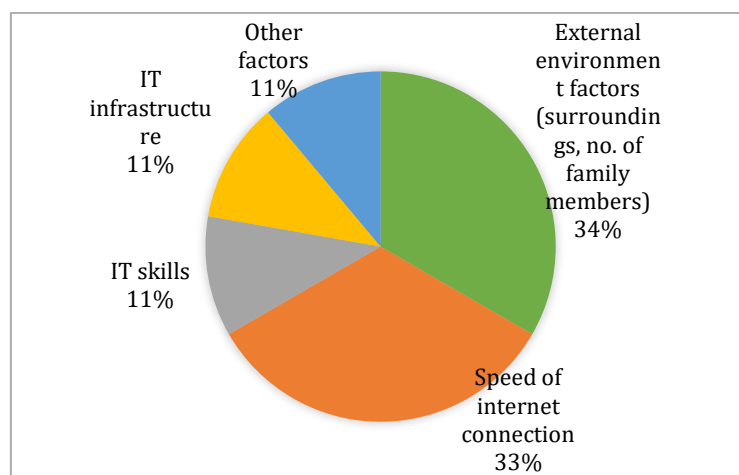


**Figure 5.** Implementation of alternative measures



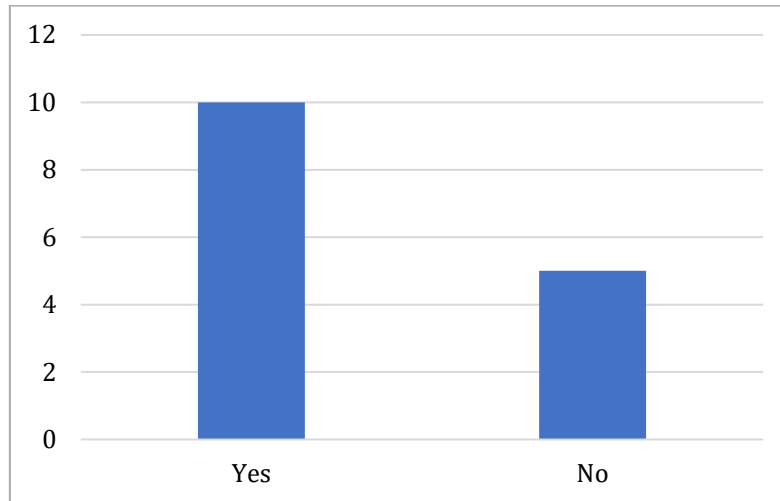
**Figure 6.** Level of satisfaction on the support received from the top-management

Based on Figure 6, 93% of the respondents mentioned that they are satisfied with the support received from the top - management to carry out library services effectively during the pandemic period. This indicates that middle-level and lower-level employees receive good support from the top management to continue activities during the pandemic.



**Figure 7.** Factors to consider when working from home

Based on the figure above, a majority of the respondents (34%) considered the external environmental factors such as number of family members in the surroundings, when working from home. The next most considerable factor is the speed of the internet connection (33%). 11% of the sample considered factors such as IT infrastructure and IT skills when working from home. Another 11% of the sample also considered other factors which are not listed above.



**Figure 8.** Staff experience on quarantine

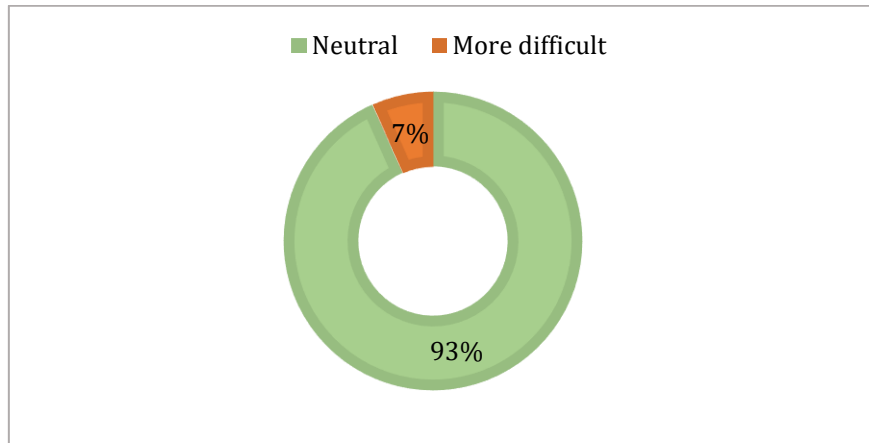
Quarantine is a safety measure that is been taken by the health officials to minimize the spread of the Covid-19 virus from one person to another. Based on Figure 8 above, 10 out of 15 experienced their colleagues on quarantine and 5 of them have no experience of it.

Strategies taken by the management of the USJ library to manage the staff members on quarantine are, as follows:

- Maintaining an effective communication with the staff
- Allowing 14 days of sick leave
- Regularly educating staff on the guidelines taken by the Covid-19 prevention committee of USJ

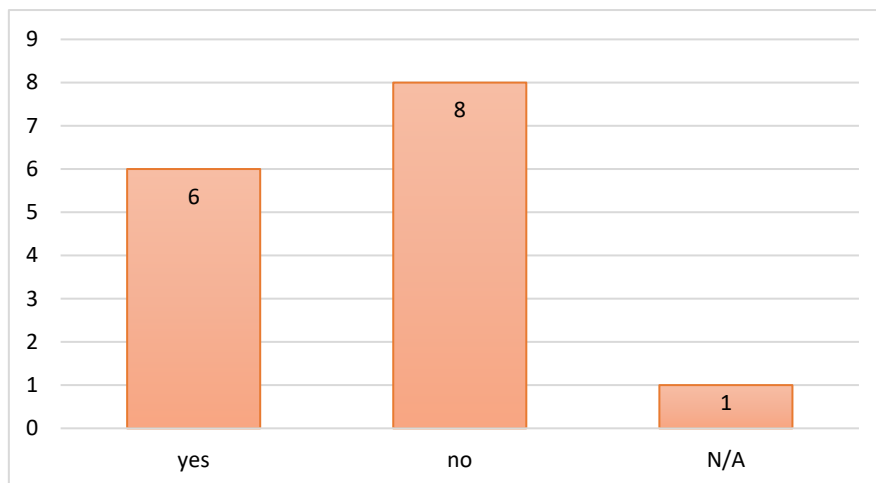
In addition to that, the management of the university has taken key safety measures to ensure the safety of all staff members. They are listed, as follows:

- Bringing staff to work on a roaster basis, to minimize the risk of spreading the disease among all staff.
- Taking necessary action to get the staff vaccinated.
- Providing hand washing facilities at the entrance and making hand sanitizers freely available for use in several places inside the library.
- Providing transport facilities to staff when commuting to work, free of charge by the university.
- Daily temperature checks at the entrance gates.
- Covering the main counters with cellophane to ensure the safety of staff working at counters.
- Providing face shields to staff at the counters.



**Figure 9.** Level of convenience of working online

Based on the figure above, the majority of the respondents (93%) have answered 'neutral' when asked about the convenience of working online from home. Only 07% have said it is more difficult than working in the office.

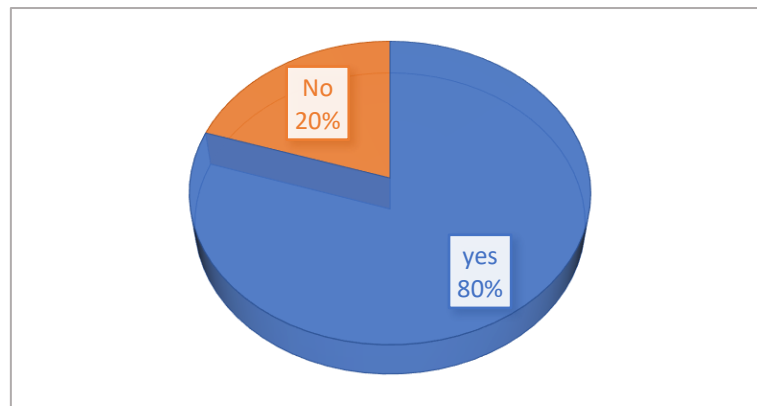


**Figure 10.** Difficulties faced when performing routine work online

When asked about the difficulties in performing routine work activities online, the majority of the respondents said 'No', while six of them said 'Yes'.

As explained by the respondents of the study, difficulties faced when working online are, as follows:

- Unable to provide the laptop lending service even though there are requests for that.
- Difficulties in the collection of student registration applications.
- Unable to perform filing work.
- Unfavorable atmosphere at home when working (e.g., due to small children, a sick person to be taken care at home, noisy surroundings, etc.)
- Lack of IT knowledge of staff to work online.
- Unnecessary waste of resources due to the inefficiencies in working online, wasting more paper for printouts (e.g., students send the same application several times).



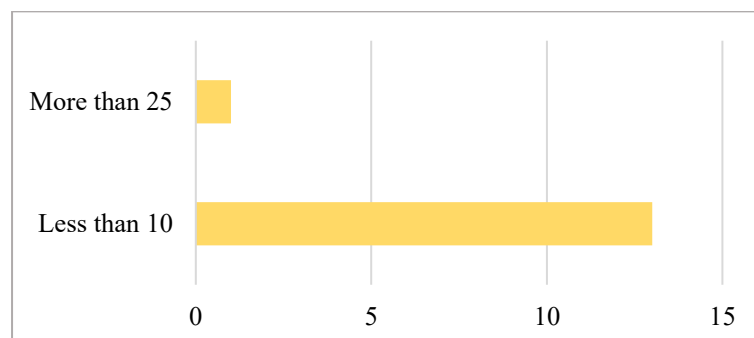
**Figure 11.** Support provided by colleagues to work electronically

Most of the respondents (80%) said that their peers and subordinates support working online during the pandemic period.

**RQ2: What were the facilities that the USJ library staff could provide the USJ library during the pandemic period?**

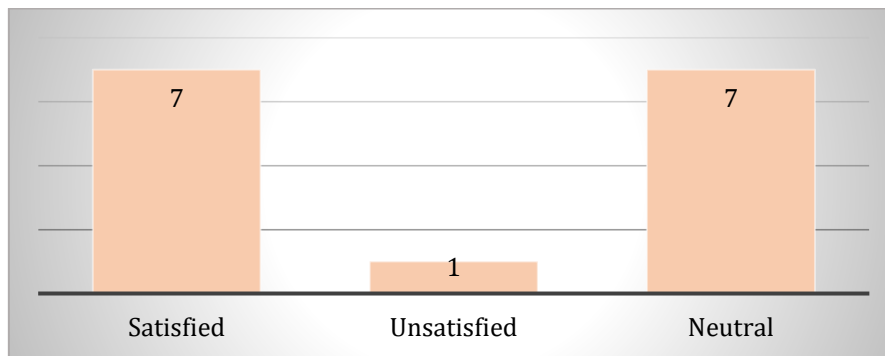
**Table 3:** Variables identified for RQ02

| Variables                               | Questions      |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------|
| No. of user requests                    | Q11            |
| User satisfaction                       | Q13            |
| Frequency in responding to user queries | Q12            |
| Library services                        | Q5, Q7, Q8, Q9 |



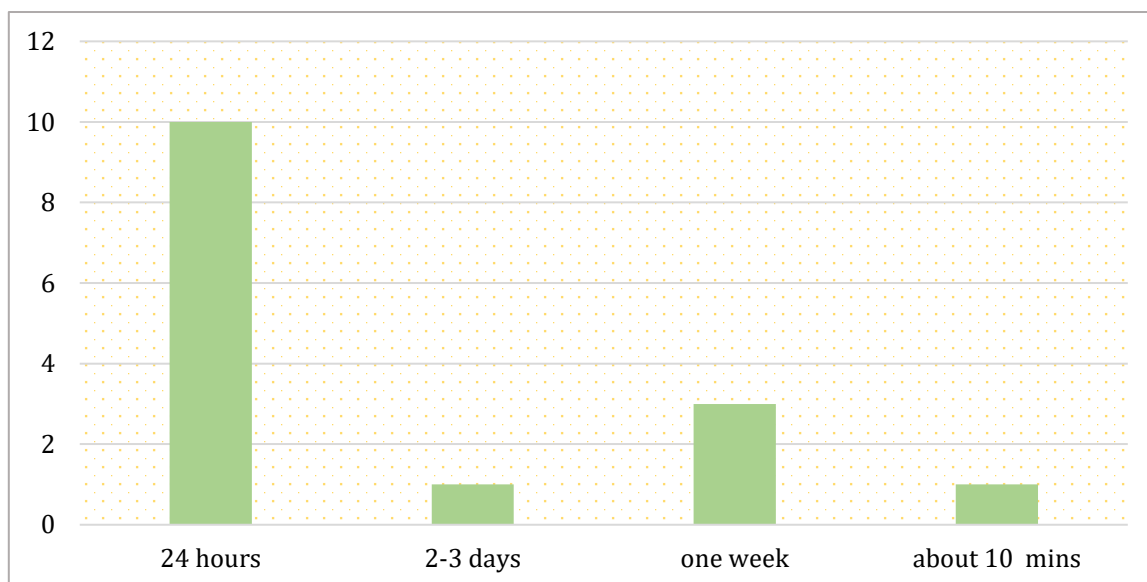
**Figure 12.** Average work requests received per week during the pandemic period

As seen in Figure 12 above, when asked how many user requests that they received per week during the pandemic period, most of them answered that it is less than 10. Only one respondent said that it is more than 25.



**Figure 13.** Level of satisfaction of the users

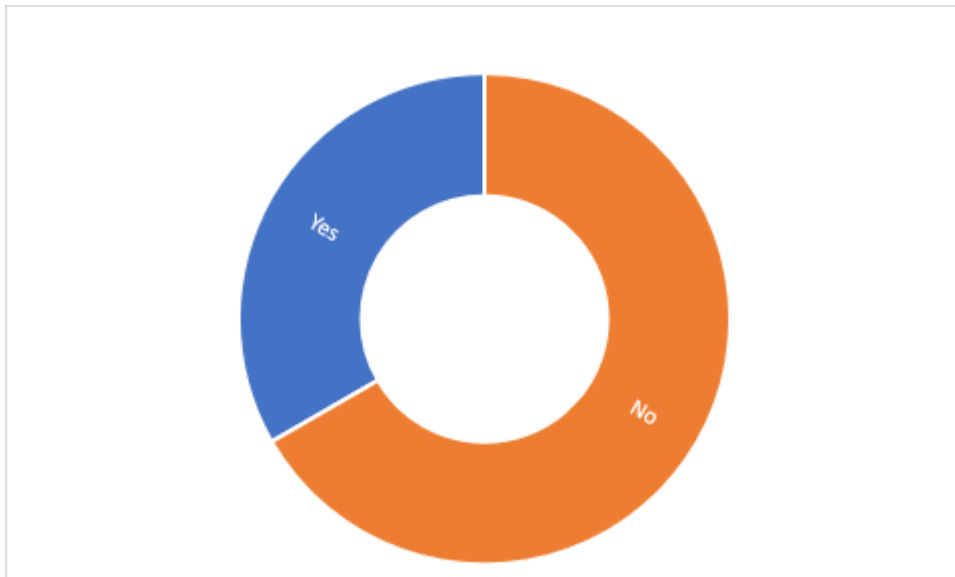
As illustrated in Figure 13 above, the level of satisfaction of the users on the services received by each of the divisions during the pandemic period, differs from person to person. Because results show that some people are satisfied and some have a neutral opinion on that. In a situation like this, it is difficult for the researchers to come to a clear conclusion about this aspect.



**Figure 14.** Average time taken to respond to a user query

According to Figure 14 above, most of the time user queries are answered within 24 hours. Few said that it takes a week to respond to the user queries. One person said it takes 2-3 days and another 01 person said that it takes only 10 minutes to answer the user queries during the pandemic period.

Based on the responses received, people commented that they were unable to perform certain library services during the pandemic period: namely, circulation of books, classification of books, developing the paper article index, referencing services, receiving and processing of book orders, etc.



**Figure 15.** Facilities provided to users during the pandemic period

Figure 15 above illustrates the results obtained, when the respondents were asked whether the same facilities are provided to users during the pandemic period as usual days. Two thirds of the sample said 'No' and one third said 'Yes'.

According to the respondents' views, these are the facilities that the staff of the library were unable to provide: laptop lending service, reader services, multimedia room access facility, wi-fi access facility, quotation opening, classification of books, circulation of books, Information literacy (IL) services, referencing facility, and orientation programs.

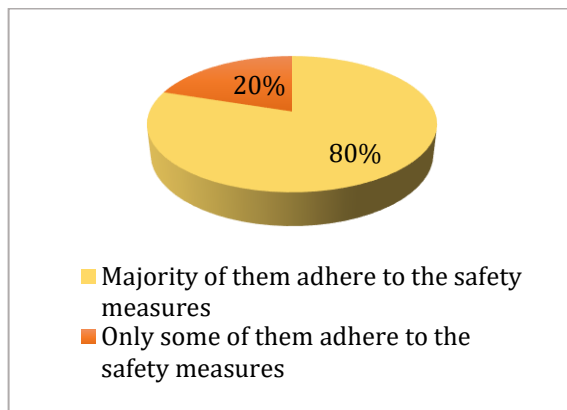
Alternatively, the USJ library allowed its users remote (online) access to library resources, LMS uploads of past papers, uploading of scanned copies of subject materials to LMS, online orientation and IL programs, and lending laptops for students during the examination periods based on the request of the Dean.

***RQ3: How did work scheduling during the pandemic period affect the staff behavior at USJ library?***

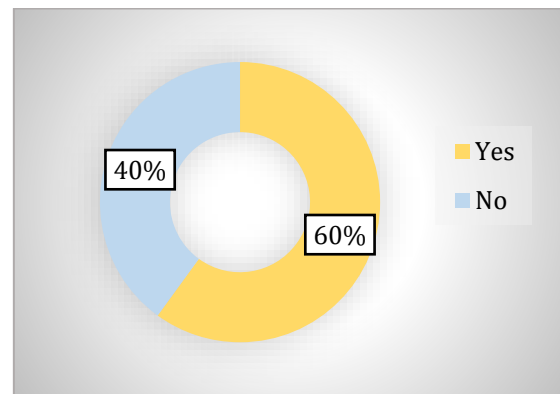
**Table 4:** Variables identified for RQ03

| Variables          | Questions |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Staff behavior     | Q23, Q27  |
| Staff availability | Q18, Q21  |
| Staff attendance   | Q17, Q22  |

All the respondents stated that they inform their respective division in-charge when taking leave.



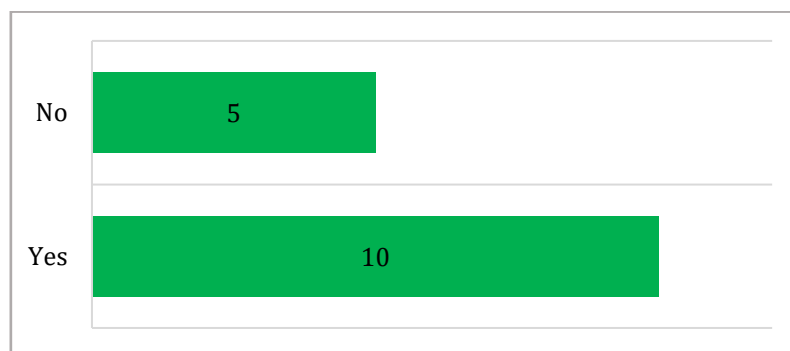
**Figure 16.** Adherence to safety measures in place



**Figure 17.** Working From Home (WFH) during the off-days of the week

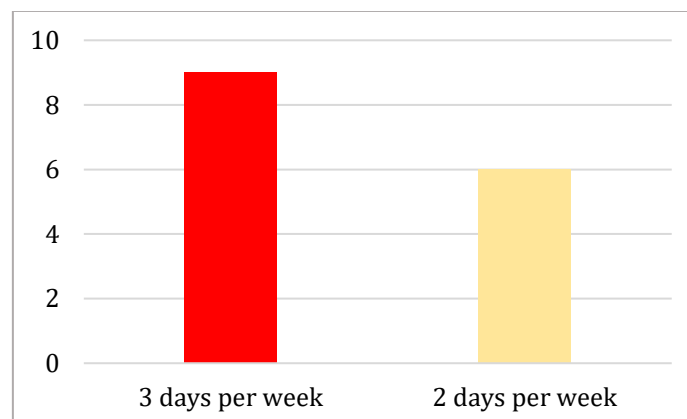
Based on Figure 17 above, it can be seen that most of the staff members adhered to the safety measures that have been imposed in the library during the pandemic.

According to Figure 18 above, 60% of the respondents mentioned that they were WFH during the days that they did not report to work and 40% of them said 'No'.



**Figure 18.** Staff availability at divisions

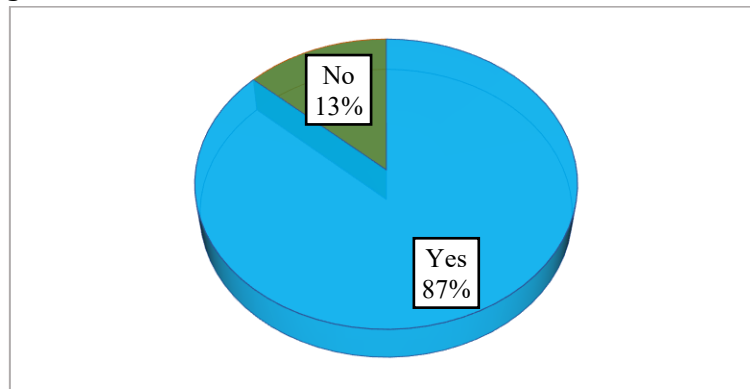
As shown in Figure 19 above, two thirds of the respondents said that there were adequate staff members available in their division when they were working on a roster.



**Figure 19.** No. of days staff reported to work during the pandemic



As shown in Figure 20 above, most of the respondents reported to work 03 days per week, when they were working on a roster basis.



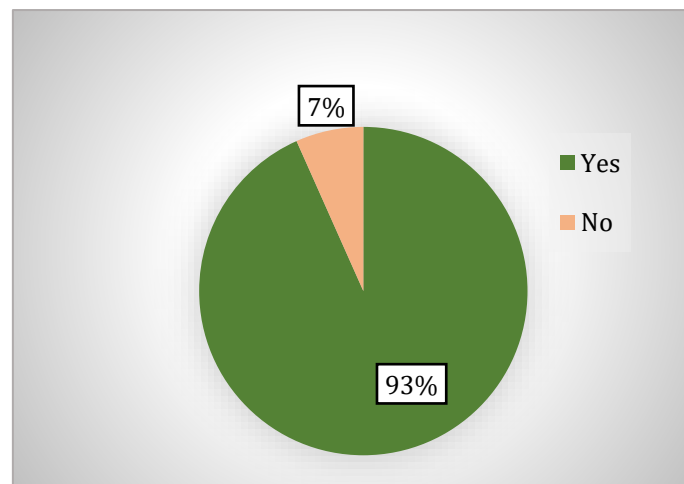
**Figure 20.** Attending to work on the roaster

According to Figure 21, 87% of the staff said that they were present for work according to their roster and only 13% of them said 'No'.

**RQ4: What were the difficulties that the USJ library staff faced, when providing library services online?**

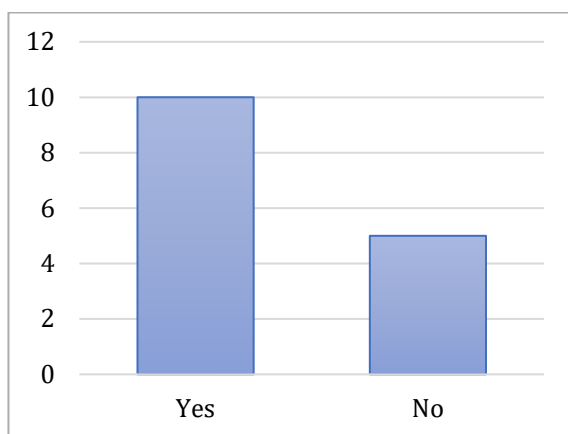
**Table 5:** Variables identified for RQ04

| Variables           | Questions |
|---------------------|-----------|
| IT Literacy         | Q31       |
| IT infrastructure   | Q32       |
| Communication media | Q 10, Q19 |

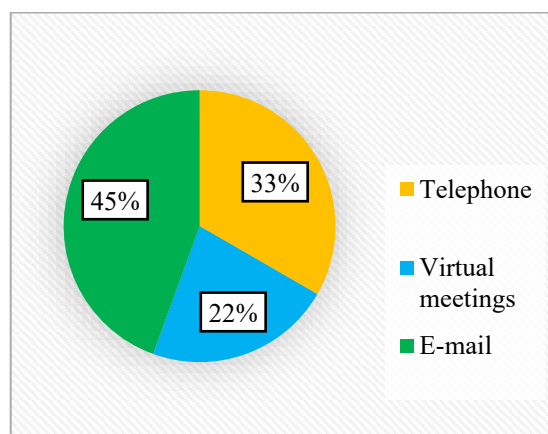


**Figure 21.** Data on computer literacy

Figure 22 shows that most of the staff (93%) have adequate computer literacy to carry out their duties electronically. Only a smaller proportion (07%) did not possess adequate computer literacy.



**Figure 22.** Adequacy of IT infrastructure



**Figure 23.** Communication media used for working

According to Figure 23, the majority of the respondents have said that they possess adequate IT infrastructure to carry out work online. Email, social media platforms (such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber), telephone, SMS and virtual meetings were used during as electronic means to carry out work during the pandemic period.

As shown in Figure 24, the USJ library mostly used email as a means of communication at work during the pandemic with a proportion of 45%. It also used telephone communication (33%) and virtual meetings (22%) to perform library operations during the pandemic period.

## Discussion

### Routine activities that the USJ library staff could perform during the pandemic period

Based on the results of the data analysis, only a few staff members did not engage in routine activities during the pandemic period. The reason may be because some of the major routine tasks of the library (such as referencing facility) could be provided when it is not open for its users. The online access was provided for the e-resources even during the pandemic, but usually, only the academic staff and the IT related staff such as Assistant Network Manager and ICT Technical Officer were engaged in those duties, whereas majority of the other staff did not attend to them directly. Therefore, it can be assumed that the academic staff of the library attended to duties remotely when it was closed to the users during the pandemic.

Even though number of difficulties were mentioned by the respondents when dealing with external parties, alternative measures were also in place at the USJ library to carry out the routine activities of the divisions without fail during the pandemic period. It can be assumed that middle-level and lower-level employees received enough support from the top management to carry out activities during the pandemic. It can be noted that there were several factors to consider when working from home. Other than the factors explicitly stated in the study, there were other factors which were considered by the respondents. It was found that most of the staff met their colleagues during quarantine and that there were several strategies taken by the management to ensure the safety of the staff. It is important to note that a considerable number of respondents did not directly answer questions about the convenience of working from home. Therefore, more

research needs to be conducted in the future to find answers for that. The study also found that peers support each other when working online during the pandemic period.

### **Facilities USJ library staff could provide the USJ library during the pandemic period**

The average number of user requests received weekly were at a low level during the pandemic period. It is difficult for the researchers to arrive at a clear conclusion about the level of satisfaction of the users with the results obtained by this study. Moreover, this study only addresses the opinion of the staff on the user satisfaction. More measures will have to be imposed in assessing the user satisfaction from the users' end. Most of the user queries were answered within 01 day (24 hours). Even though there are a list of activities which cannot be performed during the pandemic period, the USJ library provides number of its services online.

### **Effect of work scheduling during the pandemic period on the staff behavior at the USJ library**

The majority of the staff adhere to the safety measures imposed by the management. As shown by the survey results, a high percentage of staff did not work from home during the pandemic period.. Though they did not work from home, they received their monthly salaries as usual. In other words, it also means that there was no value addition to the Gross National Product of the country by these employees during this period, but the usual cost (for salaries) is incurred by the government. This study shows that there is an adequate number of staff available in the offices during the period where employees were working on a roster basis, adhering to the safety regulations imposed by the government. However, it can be argued that this is the true scenario of the offices as most of the sectional heads seem to complain that they cannot perform the work properly, when working on a roster basis due to lack of staff in place.

### **Difficulties faced by the USJ library staff when providing library services online**

The majority of the staff possess adequate IT literacy to perform their duties electronically. In terms of the IT infrastructure, it can be noted that USJ library possess sufficient IT infrastructure to carry out their work smoothly. Communication media played a vital role during the pandemic period. The latest developments in the telecommunication industry and advanced technology must have contributed significantly to the higher usage of these media. With the use of these media, working during a pandemic was no longer a challenge, not only to the library of the USJ, but also to any other organization.

## **Conclusions**

When considering the findings of this study, it can be said that, even though it is challenging to work during a period when the entire world is affected by a pandemic, there are ways and means to overcome those challenges. Communication media and developments in the IT sector play a vital role here. There are measures already put in place at the USJ library to offer the usual facilities online. It would be useful to identify whether these facilities can be improved or enhanced. Though the study identified several other factors which the users seem to encounter while working online, it is equally important to identify whether these are challenging the work of the staff. Furthermore, as a list of difficulties has been stated by the respondents about working

online, it would be important to find answers to manage these difficulties. Moreover, it can be argued that user satisfaction is an aspect that should be measured from the side of the user (students and mainly academic staff) rather than taking the opinion of the staff. Since this study is not conducted in a usual work setting where users visit the library premises physically, the researchers were not able to get their feedback from the questionnaires.

Based on the above data and findings, identifying the challenges faced by the library staff when working online, finding solutions to the challenges and difficulties faced by the library staff when working online can be recommended to improve efficiency of library activities during a pandemic, and to be prepared to face health hazards that we may experience in the future. In addition, this survey should be extended to the users as well to obtain a better understanding of the user satisfaction.

## References

- Ameen, K. (2021). COVID-19 pandemic and role of libraries. *Library Management*, 42(4/5), 302–304. <https://doi.org/10.1108/lm-01-2021-0008>
- Arapasopo, E. A., & Adekoya, C. O. (2021). Library leadership in Nigeria and COVID-19 pandemic. *Information Discovery and Delivery*, 50(2), 235–244. <https://doi.org/10.1108/idd-03-2021-0027>
- COVID-19 Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) Global research and innovation forum. (2020). WHO. [https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/covid-19-public-health-emergency-of-international-concern-\(pheic\)-global-research-and-innovation-forum](https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/covid-19-public-health-emergency-of-international-concern-(pheic)-global-research-and-innovation-forum)
- Fasae, J. K., Adekoya, C. O., & Adegbihero-Iwari, I. (2020). Academic libraries' response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. *Library Hi Tech*, 39(3), 696–710. <https://doi.org/10.1108/lht-07-2020-0166>
- Hansa, D. B. (2020). Coronavirus history. Available at: <https://www.webmd.com> (accessed 14.06.2022)
- Harris, S. Y. (2021a). Covid-19 impact on the Caribbean academic library: Jamaica's preliminary response to people, place, product and services. *Library Management*, 42 (6/7), 340–361. <https://doi.org/10.1108/lm-10-2020-0144>
- Harris, S. Y. (2021b). The coronavirus pandemic in the Caribbean academic library: Jamaica's initial interpretation of strengths, biggest impact, lessons and plans. *Library Management*, 42(6/7), 362–375. <https://doi.org/10.1108/lm-10-2020-0149>
- IMFBlog (APRIL 14, 2020). *Insights and Analysis on Economics and Finance*. Retrieved from <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/04/14/the-great-lockdown-worst-economic-downturn-since-the-great-depression/>
- Kumara BM. P, and Acharya, S. (2022). Evaluation of Library Services and Facilities by the Students of BLDE (DU) during the Pandemic COVID-19: A Study. *Library Philosophy and Practice* (e-journal). Winter 1-16-2022. Retried from <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/6847>
- Library Connect (2020). *Maintaining access to library resources in a COVID-19 world*. Elsevier Connect. <https://www.elsevier.com/connect/library-connect/maintaining-access-to-library-resources-in-a-covid-19-world>
- Medawar, K., & Tabet, M. (2021). Library collections and services during Covid-19: Qatar National Library experience. *SAGE*, 30 (2–3), 178–190.

- Robinson, E., Ruthven, I., McMenemy, D. (2022) Delivering services in the new normal: Recording the experiences of UK public library staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, May 7, 2022. Retried from <https://doi.org/10.1177/09610006221093371>
- Shastri, D. K., & Chudasma, P. (2021). The perception of ICT skills and challenges of usage of technologies among the library professionals of the Gujarat State during the COVID 19: a comprehensive study. *Quality & Quantity*, 56(3), 1093–1120. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01167-x>
- Wickramaarachchi, W. P. T. M., Perera, S. S. N., & Jayasinghe, S. (2020). COVID-19 Epidemic in Sri Lanka: A Mathematical and Computational Modelling Approach to Control. *Computational and Mathematical Methods in Medicine*, 2020, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2020/4045064>