

New normal and library services in Indonesia: a case study of university libraries

New normal
and library
services

Arda Putri Winata and Raisa Fadelina

Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Bantul, Indonesia, and

Sulistyo Basuki

*Department of Library and Information Sciences, Universitas Indonesia,
Depok, Indonesia*

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to share the activities of library services in the new-normal era. The paper describes libraries' circumstances since their reopening in early June 2020. Furthermore, it provides details on how libraries have adopted several most appropriate practices changing physical to online services.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper describes various university library services in Indonesia in the new-normal era by using literature and documentary reviews as the approaches. The data were primarily collected from webpages, blogs, social media, newsletters and specific journals organized by university libraries. The survey was carried out by involving 126 university librarians incorporated in the University Libraries Forum. It highlighted the current conditions of university libraries and the most appropriate practices of library services in the new-normal era.

Findings – The most appropriate practices of university library services in the new-normal era are provided. Libraries in Indonesia have experienced a service transformation implementing the COVID-19 health protocols. Likewise, almost all university library services became virtual. Accordingly, there were several challenges faced by librarians and users in carrying out virtual activities in the library.

Originality/value – This paper provides a great value for libraries in responding to COVID-19 and those starting to reopen. It reveals the most appropriate library service practices and challenges in the new-normal era, which are useful for current and future insight development.

Keywords Library services, Academic libraries, Indonesia, COVID-19

Paper type Case study

Introduction

Coronavirus (2020) diseases strain 19 (hereafter called COVID-19) was announced by the Indonesian Government on March 2, 2020. The announcement was followed by a large-scale social restrictions policy in certain areas and a large-scale restriction policy, which includes the implementation of work-from-home policy for all sectors with some exceptions (transportation, banking and hospital). Accordingly, people changed their lifestyles, behaviors and relations with the community, starting with a prohibition on holding large gatherings and an order to stay at home. To cut the spread of the virus through droplets, people must keep a safe distance of 1 m in public places, such as streets, public transport, department stores and schools (CDC, 2020). Moreover, in public places, people must wear masks, wash hands frequently and use hand sanitizers to keep their hands clean (Shukman, 2020). Consequently, most of the daily activities from physical-oriented remarkably change to contactless-oriented.



To support the contactless-oriented changes, government and company stakeholders, such as libraries, began to shift their physical activities to the online platform. Social networking was used extensively for the first time, but merely to transfer information and to communicate with societies. Virtual conferences, several games, lectures, writing contests and libraries engaged with participatory audiences for the first time (Tammaro, 2020). Hence, all tasks, services and projects were organized by employees through a virtual screen. The virtual screen activities consisted of online meetings, online discussions, virtual conferences, live streaming and others to avoid physical mass gatherings in one place. Hence, the availability of equipment and large internet networks, and the ability to use information technology, were much needed. Unfortunately, several librarians were unfamiliar with conducting online activities in the library. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, most Indonesian libraries offered traditional services physically. Previously, users had to come to the reading room if they wanted to read books and head to the circulation desk if they wanted to borrow them. Moreover, the agendas in the library, such as seminars, book reviews, storytelling, assisting of research and information literacy training were held in the venue. However, there is a massive change in library services and its agendas in this pandemic era.

Owing to this pandemic, most people in Indonesia have come up with the idea that librarians must create a gorgeous library presenting splendid services to online users. This service provides not only its e-resources but also all its collections, circulation activities, information and research supporting system. To build this marvelous library is not easy. Nevertheless, in this new normal era, libraries must prioritize their new form to provide the most appropriate practice to face the new-normal era. Therefore, the primary aim of this paper is to discuss innovations of library services to face the new-normal era in Indonesia.

Methodology

Data for this study were collected using literature and documentary reviews from webpages, blogs, social media, newsletters and specific journals discussing libraries in the new-normal era.

A survey was conducted by a random selection of Indonesian academic libraries yielding 126 respondents participating in the University Library Forum. These respondents delivered their answers through Google Forms issued in early June 2020 concerning their current library services in the pandemic.

The three main objectives of library services during the pandemic are as follows:

- (1) to understand the current library activities during the new-normal era, especially in reopening libraries;
- (2) to determine the most appropriate practices of library services during the new-normal era; and
- (3) to describe the challenges faced by librarians and users in library services during the new-normal era.

Results and discussion

New normal circumstance in Indonesia: reopened libraries

The Indonesian Government has been preparing to enter a new phase of new normal during this COVID-19 pandemic. The new normal is the behavior change for keeping normal activities and the application of health protocols to prevent virus transmission. Moreover, the new normal is a new habit to a healthy life, wherein people get used to washing hands, using masks in the outdoor area, keeping social distancing, and avoiding crowds. This practice must be stably implemented with commitment (Putsanra, 2020). Following this, the

government began to reopen libraries with health protocol measures. Most librarians have historically relied on the collection, and the use of the building to offer them. They have been working on design thinking to bridge this gap ([The Library Incubator, 2020](#)).

Several Indonesian libraries began to reopen and allow users to visit. Reopening libraries does not mean going back to normal circumstances, but it will change library services with new methods. This new-normal era requires library administrators and staff to rethink what they did to provide the best possible resources and services to users ([Alire, 2020](#)). For example, the libraries are open with hours varying from the usual schedule, or the library building can be accessed only through one door, while others are locked ([Mehta and Wang, 2020](#)).

In the new-normal era, librarians began to change the library regulations considering health protocols. The new regulations determine the safety of both librarians and users. The results focus on users' needs, digital resources and learning styles. Hence, librarians must fight for a new normal with library collections and buildings, but mostly, with their expertise. Librarians, by title, education or spirit, must face the new normal that is pushing the society ahead. It must minister to those seeking information. It must support better decision-making in the wake of this pandemic and in preparation for the next crisis ([Lankes, 2020](#)).

In the new-normal era, differences in library opening hours existed. Several libraries applied a for full day of open hours, and several others implemented the shift system, as visitors were still limited. Employees had to work in shifts, making communication with users. Therefore office spaces will need to be rethought as open-concept office spaces may give way to the enclosure ([Cox, 2020](#)). Moreover, social distancing regulations caused people to rarely leave the house. Therefore, libraries in Indonesia had to change their services considering the new-normal circumstances.

The most appropriate library service practices in the new-normal era

Redesigning library furniture based on health protocols. To ensure the safety of visitors and staff, libraries in Indonesia have implemented a set of rules, including face coverings, physical distancing and online booking ([NGTC, 2020](#)). People are required to make a real-name reservation on the webpage or by phone in advance, always wear a mask and follow other measures adopted by the libraries during the trial times to ensure safe and orderly resumption.

The World Health Organization announced to keep a physical distance of at least 1 m, using a mask, using hand sanitizer and washing hands frequently ([WHO, 2020](#)). In a busy library, the circulation desk area was likely to be the most crowded with visitors and staff. Keeping visitors one meter to separate those waiting to check out materials and wearing health shields with see-through windows to circulation desks to help protect staff and visitors as they interact with each other are two other recommended protocols ([Gower, 2020](#)). All libraries enforce health protocols such as physical restrictions, providing hand-washing facilities and making written rules regarding health protocols through posters posted in libraries or online ([Fakhry, 2020](#)).

Keeping hygiene and disinfectants. Managers should provide staff with training on hygiene practices and any procedural changes that have been implemented to avoid the spread of the virus. Sick staff members should not report to work. Managers should advise them to go home if they are sick. Those with symptoms such as sore throat, runny or blocked nose, coughing or sneezing should be advised not to attend activities or religious services ([Coronavirus, 2020](#)).

The most common consideration of staff having to reopen libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic was to increase cleaning efforts, both in terms of frequency and intensity. Some library systems worked with janitorial staff to perform additional cleaning measures, while smaller libraries scheduled extra cleaning times. All libraries increased the number of items they disinfected (Bowie, 2020). Moreover, cleaning and disinfection of hard, frequently touched surfaces, such as railings, doorknobs, faucets and light switches, were undertaken as those were the places where the virus could survive the longest. This was carried out regularly at least once a day (Peet, 2020).

Book delivery services and zero library loans during visitors' limitation. In reducing the direct circulation between staff and visitors, many libraries provided circulation service in the drive-thru. The return of books was carried out through the dropbox. Dropbox is a kind of automatic computer in which users do not need to go to the circulation desk to return the book. Nevertheless, if the library does not have any dropbox, the librarians should quarantine the returned books for four days to prevent the virus transmission from the books (Lara, 2020). The measures included arrangements for returned books to be stored separately for 72 h, a new cleaning regime and physical measures such as screens and signs (Rogers, 2020). For example, Library of universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta have new rules not to solve the returned books before four days. It aims to safeguard the librarians and follow the health protocols during the new-normal era. Besides, several libraries have the policy to add the book-lending period, providing the payment of late penalties through bank transfers or application transactions. Several of provided zero library loan services during the pandemic (ITS, 2020).

Empowering e-resources for a research assistant in social restriction. To help researchers during the social restriction, libraries have empowered electronic resources (e-resources) containing e-journals, e-books, links of journal publishers (national and international) and other supported databases. For example, the National Library of Indonesia provided e-resources to online users in accessing specific journals or publishers. Many publishers, such as SAGE, EBSCO Host, ALA, Cambridge University Press, Balai Pustaka, cooperated with the national library. This service was also conducted in several other countries, such as Italy, where the libraries continued to offer online services while being closed by giving users access to digital libraries and references (Tammaro, 2020). Kuwait University also mostly used the e-resources for writing research papers, and databases and e-journals were their most preferred resources (Hendal, 2020).

In assessing e-resources, the libraries offered software and website pages that could be accessed through a smartphone. Users could download the software from the Play Store (for Android phones) or App Store (for iPhones) and use it freely and easily. To access the official website anywhere and anytime, users could write the address from the library. For example, Universitas Gadjah Mada presented database e-resources through its library website. Therefore, online users willing to access these e-resources could visit the library website address and access it widely. The e-resources consisted of prestigious publishers, e-journals, e-books and other quality papers. Thus, users did not have to physically come to the library.

Engaging users through social media. To connect with users, libraries used social media, which was widely used during this pandemic. Billions of people turned to connected devices to help them cope with life and work under lockdown because social media were more appropriate for marketing information and delivering personalized information resources to groups of people or individuals (Okike, 2020). There was a

demand for librarians to increase their social media accounts. Several ideas were taken from several libraries that were successful in organizing social media. For instance, the National Library of Indonesia provided online service consultation through social media (Oktaviani, 2020). This service covered reference consultation, information literacy, application reference manager, copyright and thesis consultation with librarians. The platforms used were e-mail and social media such as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook. Moreover, librarians could post informative content, including research activity, tool reference management, how to use it, information literacy and how to access it and reuse it. Hence, users could access media research, and schedule of research training through social media.

Keeping direct communication using the “ask librarians” form. Libraries in Indonesia provided a platform to support costumers called “ask librarians.” All questions concerning the library services could be asked to librarians, such as the availability of books, library services during the pandemic, literacy information, latest journals and other library information. Reference staff members started working remotely, a schedule needed to be created to answer reference questions virtually (Mehta and Wang, 2020). For example, academic librarians divided tasks in implementing Ask Librarians, some dealt with book collection and others focused on journals. Librarians could complement each other to answer the questions.

Activating webinar for organizing events. Using webinars for library activities has been a new trend during this pandemic. A webinar is an online meeting or presentation held in real time. To put it simply, it is an online event connecting individuals with viewers across the world. Webinars are convenient for both presenters and attendees. It is why the format is becoming more and more popular every year. Webinars make holding conferences and meetings possible anytime and anyplace. Anyone can participate without leaving work or while staying at home, on a business trip or even on a vacation (Alscher, 2020).

Previously, events or seminars in Indonesia required a physical meeting room. However, it has changed to online meetings. To follow social restrictions, using a webinar has been very common. For example, the National Library of Indonesia reached up ten times a month in holding the webinars. In another library, it could reach twice a month. Most current webinars in Indonesia used Zoom (Aries, 2020) because it is easy to use and accepted by most people in Indonesia.

Webinars can be used for organizing seminars and sharing information and motivation during this pandemic. Besides, they are also used for supporting people in self-development and sharing motivation, tricks and tips. For example, the National Library of Indonesia held a webinar on “How to be productive during COVID-19.” Another library also held virtual storytelling and online competition through Zoom. All people, especially librarians, could participate in such agendas to improve self-development during this pandemic.

Transforming final project services into online. Several academic libraries demand students to submit their final projects to the library repository. Before COVID-19, many university libraries required a hard file of the final project submitted to the library. It was one of the requirements to graduate from the university. After this pandemic, students were not allowed to come to campus. Therefore, libraries provided online final project services for graduate students to upload their final projects.

The final service was carried out online through a library management system. A computerized system with modern techniques, such as a library management system, would help users quickly access information and services, thus reducing physical labor

and complexity of the manual system (Nyuusirni, 2019). Uploading the final task was carried out independently by students, and then validation was performed by librarians. Therefore, this service supports social restrictions, as students could conduct it remotely.

Challenges faced by librarians and users in library services during the new normal

The instability of internet networks. In this new-normal era, libraries emphasized their online activities. However, several problems were perceived by both librarians and users. The survey from librarians in Indonesia revealed that the most prevalent problem in online activities was internet networks. Even though Indonesia had a great internet connection, online activities required more internet speed for implementation. For example, during the webinar, most participants felt a lack of internet in the middle of the meeting. Moreover, it spent many gigabytes of internet data, resulting in money wasting.

Retraining librarians in new shapes of library services. Facing the new library management in the new-normal era required a new skill and new shape for librarians to be experts. Undoubtedly, it required more training, workshops and other learning discussing libraries in the new normal.

Service limitation in working hours. The next challenge came from the reference staff. Since being closed until the reopening, library services have transformed into e-resources where the staff should communicate with users looking for e-resources from the library. However, it was not covered all information.

Book delivery services. Students could no longer visit the library to access textbook reserves, and many of them left the campus (MacGregor, 2020). Therefore, book delivery services have become standard. However, it required expedition services and more people to be involved. Furthermore, this service needed a cloud-based system delivery order using drop-off facilities, such as go-box, go-send and the post. Many libraries in Indonesia have implemented this service, but have not completely covered. For example, *Jogja Library for All* is an interlibrary service providing book delivery loans around 35 libraries in Yogyakarta, eg. Gadjah Mada University, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta and public libraries. The practice was users from Library "A" borrowed the book from library "B." They should go to library B to borrow and return it. However, it was ineffective. During this pandemic, the lack of readiness for book circulation made book delivery service the standard.

Managing budget during the new normal. Company stakeholders also perceived these challenges. They needed to manage the budget for handling company services in the new-normal era and postpone agendas. For example, several libraries postponed their events and took over the budget to new-normal services or changed their agendas to online meetings. As a result, the company needed to carefully manage the budget and think about how to work smart during this pandemic. Work smart means providing the best services with the smallest budget.

The challenges in the new-normal services can be reduced if people can carry out online activities at the right time and in the right place. Generally they update news immediately due to the speed of information. They update news immediately due to the speed of information. Furthermore, in carrying out online activities, they should wear decent clothes and put themselves in a safe position (far from wind, noise and people). These online activities required people to purchase more internet data.

Conclusions

Facing the new-normal era, libraries in Indonesia have new shapes of services supporting large-scale society restrictions. These services can benefit both users and librarians. The most appropriate practice carried out by Indonesian libraries was the implementation of health protocols in all aspects, such as furniture and library programs changing to online. These innovations can reduce COVID-19 dissemination and support the Indonesian Government in overcoming this pandemic.

There were still many disruptions both from librarians and users. Many obstacles came, such as substandard internet networks and internet wastage. The high risk of COVID-19 transmission in the library must also be considered. Therefore, choosing the right time and place is much needed. The institute organizing online activities in library services must think of managing the budget for new-normal activities.

Suggestions

Librarian must establish excellent communication and cooperation with distance learning actors to meet their information resource needs. Libraries are also expected to have solid cooperation with fellow university libraries and other types of libraries to meet the required information. Librarians should think about innovation and creativity in providing services in this new era to maintain engagement with users and maximize the role of libraries.

In the future, libraries must build a marvelous digital library, making it easy for users to access it. Besides, they should save the data and library database to avoid losses due to disasters. These disasters somehow come from viruses or other damages such as earthquakes, flood, volcanic eruption. Therefore, librarians must consider how to reach a gorgeous digital library from a management perspective and its budget. Accordingly, library services can run appropriately despite being attacked by the disaster.

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Corresponding author

Arda Putri Winata can be contacted at: arda@umy.ac.id

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