



## Users' perceptions about e-resources and information services in a public library: a study of Kerala State Central Library

P. Suman Barath<sup>a</sup> and K.G. Sudhier<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Library & Information Science, Central University of Tamil Nadu,  
Thiruvurur - 610 005, Tamil Nadu, E-mail: sumanbarath47@gmail.com

<sup>b</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Library & Information Science, Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvurur – 610 005,  
Tamil Nadu, E-mail: kgsudhier@cutn.ac.in

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A questionnaire survey was conducted to obtain user feedback on various aspects of resources and information services provided by the Kerala State Central Library (KSCL), Thiruvananthapuram. The findings revealed that 43.2% of the respondents were aware of the reading circle and book display services available in the library. The study also found that only a few users (9.1%) are highly-satisfied with the e-resources provided by the library. The users are aware about the quiz programs (40.9%) conducted by the library. The study found that the primary barriers for library users are the lack of computers and internet services. About 34.1% of the respondents adhered to the hygiene guidelines provided by the library during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study suggests that the library should conduct conferences, workshops, and training programs for its users to enable them to use e-resources and ICT services effectively and efficiently.

**Keywords:** Public library, User perception, Information services, E-resources, State Central Library, Kerala

### Introduction

Public library, financed by public funds such as taxes and library cess, plays a vital role in gathering, organising, and delivering information, as well as giving access to a wide range of information sources as a free public service. The primary goal of a public library is to provide resources, including e-resources and services, to suit educational, employment and personal development, as well as for recreation and leisure based on the requirements of individuals and the community. To meet the ever-increasing needs in the digital environment, libraries must find methods to bring digital services and resources to the user community<sup>1</sup>.

The Kerala State Central Library (KSCL) in Thiruvananthapuram is one of the oldest libraries in India and the first public library in Kerala, established in 1829 during the reign of Sri Swathi Thirunal Maharaja of Travancore. In 1958, the government declared this library as the State Central Library of Kerala<sup>2</sup>. This study covers the results of the user perception on electronic resources and information services of the KSCL.

### Review of literature

Varghese and Thirunavukkarasu<sup>3</sup> studied the Valapattanam Library and showed it as example of how libraries in Kerala should adopt and mobilise

services for users. The library encourages children, teenagers and adults to engage in educational, cultural and social activities. Prabhakaran and Periyasamy<sup>4</sup> discussed the historical significance of public libraries and the current situation in Kerala. The social, cultural, and educational development of the rural areas in the state is actively aided by libraries. The study concluded that the future of public libraries in the state is promising.

Ajithakumari and Francis<sup>5</sup> examined the role of the Kerala State Central Library in the growth of society with the study focussing only on the status of document collections, human resources and services offered by the KSCL. The authors did not focus on the user perspectives of the extension services, information services, and special programs offered by the KSCL. Vilgi and George<sup>6</sup> analysed the value of the resources and services of the public libraries in the Thrissur district of Kerala. The study analyses that the prime institution to build a strong society is the public library, which is also known as the people's University. It states that libraries provide access to resources and ICT services regardless of the age, sex, and socio-economic status of the people.

Abumandour<sup>7</sup> believed that public libraries could provide a new path to online education. The study

suggested that public libraries should establish reliable connections with state and central educational institutions to succeed in giving the best e-learning content. Thanuskodi<sup>8</sup> evaluated the district libraries in Tamil Nadu. The study points out that frequent usage of libraries improves the knowledge and skills of the users.

Arindam<sup>9</sup> observed the present situation of public libraries in West Bengal. The study states that library users are steadily falling off in West Bengal compared to other states in India. Nzivo<sup>10</sup> studied how users perceive Kenya National Library Services (KNLS) and reported that public libraries are in a better position than the college library in offering information services to the users. Jeevan and Nair<sup>11</sup> examined the adoption of information technology in eighteen libraries in Kerala. The study proposes that furnishing the ICT facilities in the library will enhance library services.

Users' perception of the information sources and services in public libraries is not a well explored area. Hence, the present study is conducted taking KSCL as the case.

### Objectives of the study

- To identify the extension services and special programs offered by the library;
- To assess user satisfaction with ICT services and e-resources;
- To find out the barriers faced by users in using ICT and e-resources; and
- To know the information services provided by the library during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Methodology

The study employed a descriptive research method and a random sampling technique. The data were acquired from library users using a structured questionnaire that was distributed individually in April 2022. The investigator received 132 questionnaires from 180 respondents with a response rate of 73.33 percent. The current versions of MS Excel and SPSS were used for statistical analysis and data description.

### Data analysis

#### Demographic details

The study population comprises a heterogeneous group of respondents (Table 1). The gender-wise distribution shows that 104 (78.8%) respondents are male, and 61 (46.2%) belong to the age group

Table 1 — Demographic details			
Variables	Values	Response	%
Gender	Male	104	78.8
	Female	27	20.5
	Others	1	.8
Age	Below 20	7	5.3
	20-30	61	46.2
	30-40	25	18.9
	40-50	12	9.1
	Above 50	27	20.5
Residence	Rural	63	47.7
	Urban	69	52.3
Employment	Govt. employment	12	9.1
	Private employment	27	20.5
	Self-employment	23	17.4
	Retired	13	9.8
	Unemployment	14	10.6
Qualification	Student	43	32.6
	Primary Education	3	2.3
	High School	6	4.5
	Matriculation	10	7.6
	Undergraduate	63	47.7
	Postgraduate & above	44	33.3
	Diploma	6	4.5

between 20-30 years. Nearly half of the respondents (47.7%) are undergraduates, followed by postgraduates and above (33.3%). The study revealed that there is a vast difference visible in library usage between male and female users.

#### Extension services of the library

Figure 1 represents the extension services provided by the library. About 43% of the respondents are aware about the reading circle and book display activities available in the library and 30.3% of the respondents are aware of exhibitions, seminars, conferences and webinars conducted in the library. The library users are familiar with reading circles, book displays, exhibitions, seminars and conferences and are unfamiliar with other library extension services.

#### Special Programmes of the library

Figure 2 depicts special programs conducted by the KSCL, and it is found that 54 (40.9%) users are aware of the quiz program, 51 (38.6%) are aware of public awareness programs, followed by 49 (37.1%) users about literary programs. Very few of them are aware of competitive exam guidance (18.9%) and health programs (8.3%) conducted by the library. It reveals that users are unaware of some of the potentially

beneficial programs offered by the library. The study recommends that the programmes conducted by the library should be promoted among all the regular library users to disseminate it among the concerned.

**Level of user satisfaction with ICT services**

Table 2 shows the level of user satisfaction with the ICT services of the KSCL. Very few users are

delighted with the ICT services of the library. About 35.6% of the users are satisfied with the reference service, followed by OPAC (27.3%) and websites (26.5%). While applying the non-parametric K-S test (Kruskal-Wallis test) to verify users' level of satisfaction with ICT services and qualification of the user, it is evident that the significance value is 0.85, which is higher than 0.05. Hence it is proved that

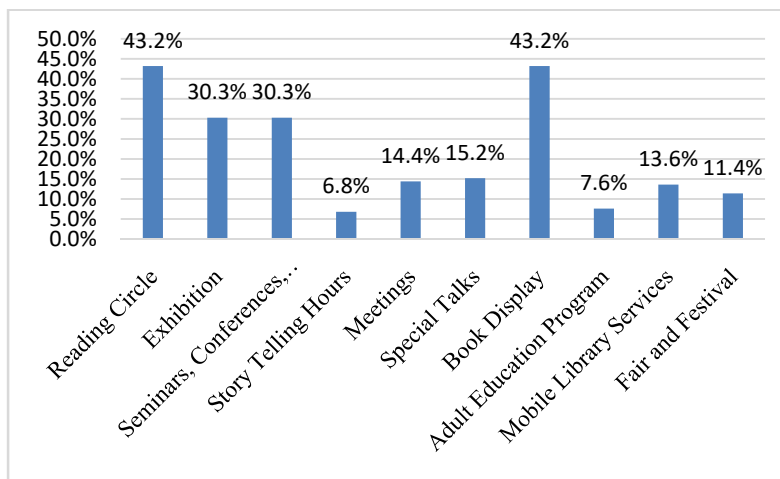


Fig. 1 — Extension services of libraries

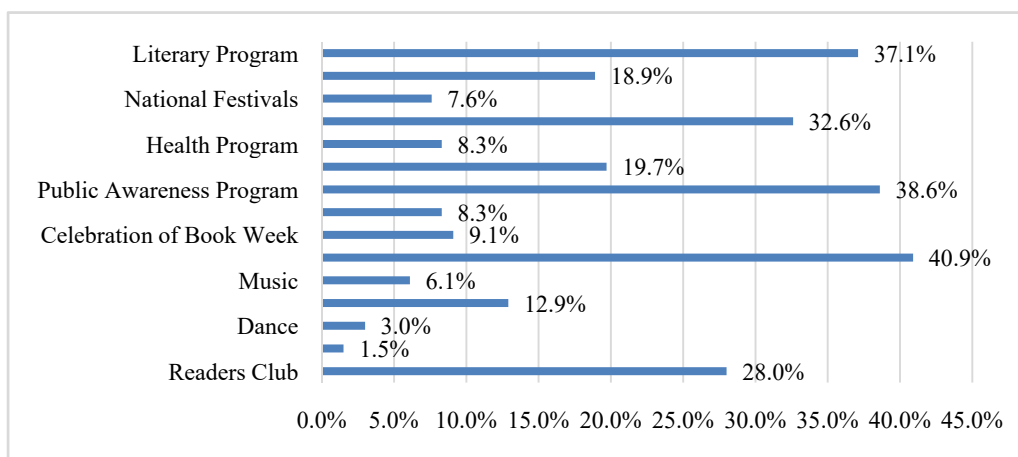


Fig. 2 — Special programs of the library

Table 2 — Level of user satisfaction with ICT services

Sl. no	ICT Services	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied
1.	Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)	14 (10.6%)	36 (27.3%)	14 (10.6%)	1 (0.8%)	5 (3.8%)
2.	Reference Service	17 (12.9%)	47 (35.6%)	9 (6.8%)	4 (3.0%)	1 (0.8%)
3.	Bibliographic Service	10 (7.6%)	33 (25.0%)	11 (8.3%)	4 (3.0%)	3 (2.3%)
4.	Audio-visual Service	4 (3.0%)	16 (12.1%)	18 (13.6%)	7 (5.3%)	6 (4.5%)
5.	Websites	6 (4.5%)	35 (26.5%)	11 (8.3%)	6 (4.5%)	6 (4.5%)
6.	Reprographic Service	4 (3.0%)	16 (12.1%)	19 (14.4%)	5 (3.8%)	6 (4.5%)
7.	Digital Archives	9 (6.8%)	27 (20.5%)	11 (8.3%)	5 (3.8%)	5 (3.8%)
8.	Library Forum	8 (6.1%)	28 (21.2%)	11 (8.3%)	5 (3.8%)	3 (2.3%)
9.	Resource Sharing Services	5 (3.8%)	27 (20.5%)	14 (10.6%)	6 (4.5%)	5 (3.8%)
10.	Translation Services	5 (3.8%)	18 (13.6%)	15 (11.4%)	7 (5.3%)	6 (4.5%)

there is no relationship between user satisfaction with ICT services and users' qualifications.

**User satisfaction level of e-resources**

The KSCL has a valuable collection of ancient and rare documents unavailable in other libraries. These are made available in the digital archive of the KSCL. Table 3 shows the user satisfaction level of e-resources in the library. From the analysis, it is evident that very few users are highly-satisfied with e-journals (9.1%), followed by e-books (6.1%) and e-magazines (5.3%). Most of the users are satisfied, but some are neutral about the satisfaction of e-resources in the library.

**Library services during the pandemic**

Figure 3 shows the services of the library during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that 34.1% of the users appreciated the hygiene-related guidance given by the library. About 29.5% of the users received information about the virus, and 17.4% of

the users could find reliable information from the library. It is revealed that 24.2% of the users have availed of emergency information services from the library, 15.9% of the users have accessed digital resource services, and 14.4% of the users availed of volunteer services. Hence, it is clear that the KSCL played a crucial role in providing COVID-19 related information and services to its clientele during the pandemic.

**Barriers in using e-resources and ICT**

Table 4 gives the barriers faced by users in using e-resources and ICT services in the library. Lack of internet connectivity at home (7.6%), followed by their economic status (6.8%) and lack of computers with internet connection in the library (6.8%) are the major reasons for the usage barrier. While applying the K-S test, the results show that some of the barriers are associated with the respondent's age. It is proved that the lack of computers with internet connection in

Table 3 — User satisfaction level of e-resources

Sl. no.	E-Resources	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied
1.	E-Journals	12 (9.1%)	19 (14.4%)	12 (9.1%)	7 (5.3%)	4 (3.0%)
2.	E-Books	8 (6.1%)	18 (13.6%)	14 (10.6%)	6 (4.5%)	4 (3.0%)
3.	E-Newspapers	5 (3.8%)	16 (12.1%)	12 (9.1%)	8 (6.1%)	4 (3.0%)
4.	E-Magazines	7 (5.3%)	15 (11.4%)	11 (8.3%)	8 (6.1%)	4 (3.0%)
5.	E-Theses & Dissertations	6 (4.5%)	15 (11.4%)	13 (9.8%)	6 (4.5%)	4 (3.0%)
6.	Electronic Databases	5 (3.8%)	16 (12.1%)	13 (9.8%)	6 (4.5%)	4 (3.0%)
7.	E-Reports	5 (3.8%)	12 (9.1%)	10 (7.6%)	7 (5.3%)	5 (3.8%)
8.	Audiobooks	4 (3.0%)	11 (8.3%)	13 (9.8%)	6 (4.5%)	5 (3.8%)

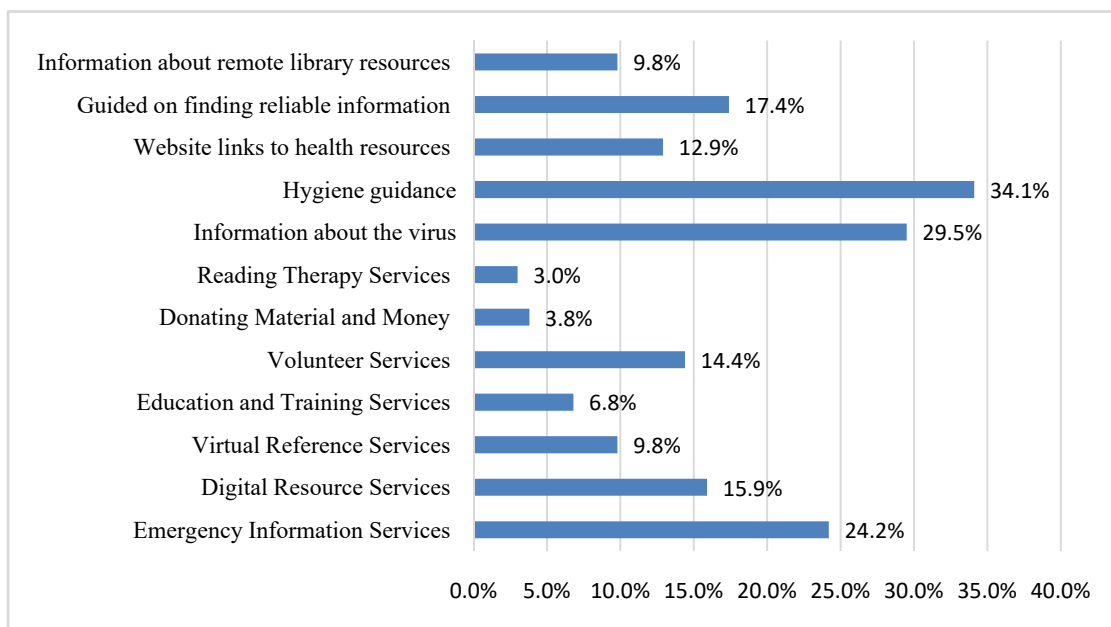


Fig. 3 — Library services during the pandemic

Table 4 — Barriers in using e-resources and ICT services

Sl. no.	Barriers	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Sig.
1.	Lack of support from parents	5 (3.8%)	14 (10.6%)	8 (6.1%)	13 (9.8%)	21 (15.9%)	0.181
2.	Economic status	9 (6.8%)	13 (9.8%)	9 (6.8%)	11 (8.3%)	19 (14.4%)	0.155
3.	No internet connection at home	10 (7.6%)	18 (13.6%)	8 (6.1%)	13 (9.8%)	13 (9.8%)	0.635
4.	Restrictions to using the internet at home	5 (3.8%)	7 (5.3%)	13 (9.8%)	15 (11.4%)	21 (15.9%)	0.589
5.	Restrictions to using the internet in the library	4 (3.0%)	9 (6.8%)	14 (10.6%)	18 (13.6%)	16 (12.1%)	0.081
6.	Lack of computers with internet connection in the library	9 (6.8%)	18 (13.6%)	16 (12.1%)	12 (9.1%)	8 (6.1%)	<b>0.045</b>
7.	The complexity of new technologies	7 (5.3%)	13 (9.8%)	13 (9.8%)	16 (12.1%)	7 (5.3%)	<b>0.047</b>
8.	Lack of training	9 (6.8%)	21 (15.9%)	13 (9.8%)	10 (7.6%)	4 (3.0%)	0.207
9.	Lack of knowledge (For searching, browsing, downloading, etc.)	5 (3.8%)	15 (11.4%)	16 (12.1%)	13 (9.8%)	9 (6.8%)	0.125
10.	Time constraints	6 (4.5%)	17 (12.9%)	13 (9.8%)	12 (9.1%)	11 (8.3%)	0.061
11.	Uninterested	5 (3.8%)	11 (8.3%)	14 (10.6%)	14 (10.6%)	12 (9.1%)	<b>0.032</b>
12.	Language barrier	3 (2.3%)	6 (4.5%)	15 (11.4%)	14 (10.6%)	15 (11.4%)	0.376

the library (0.045), the complexity of new technologies (0.047) and uninterest (0.032) are the primary barriers associated with users' age and usage of e-resources and ICT services.

### Conclusion

The study revealed that the KSCL is providing an average level of services to its users, and it can strengthen its existing resources and services with the help of the wider application of ICT. It must popularise and extend its activities and services to the entire state with the help of the Kerala State Library Council. The KSCL can improve its services to a broader spectrum of users by conducting awareness programmes and extension activities. Hence, it can not only facilitate the users' information needs but also acts as a catalyst for the societal development in the state of Kerala.

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