

THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS AND THE OER PLATFORM IN THE PANDEMIC LEARNING CONDITIONS

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Abstract: Seeing how the changes and restrictions of professional activity brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic hadn't essentially altered the librarian role, but rather the manner in which their professional mission is executed, this paper questions the role of academic librarians in the educational process of the faculty units in Sarajevo during the pandemic. The research encompasses a survey based on the sample of 30 fully-fledged faculty member libraries of the University of Sarajevo whose results, along with the theoretical foundations of the research subject, will serve the purpose of providing a hypothesis verification, as well as strategic recommendations. Keeping in mind the professional task of librarians as a support to the learning process and research, this paper begins with the hypothesis that the librarians of the University of Sarajevo organizational units are not involved enough in the process of teaching, learning, creating or the posting of educational material on the open educational resource (OER) platforms. The importance of these results lies in the better understanding of the possibilities which academic librarians (due to their emphasized role in the process of research and scientific work in relation to primary and high school libraries, whose funds mainly consist of obligatory textbook literature or required reading editions) can provide and improve upon when it comes to the question of professional responsibility in the pandemic learning conditions.

Keywords: academic librarian, COVID-19 pandemic, Open Educational Resources, educational process, University of Sarajevo,

Introduction

Worldwide, educational institutions were among other social actors facing the wall during the Covid 19 pandemic. Based on the individual level, the focus was on teachers, students, and parents as the actors of the educational process. In other words, the COVID 19 pandemic has spawned many problems they were dealing with in the public sphere and the need for addressing them. At the same time, pedagogues, psychologists, management teams together with librarians are left almost unnoticed.

This paper aims to validate librarians as full actors in educational processes whose role and professional mission is crucial in this context because they ensure both physical or online access to information and encourage the development of skills, knowledge and values. If we look at librarian competencies in the broadest sense, as serving and working to create a community of thinking citizens – questioning its role in educational processes, especially during a pandemic, arises like a meaningful step to improve collaborative communities of creative librarians.

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In some way, the COVID 19 pandemic examined how librarians could act in emergencies; their enthusiasm, creativity, and perseverance in finding solutions for their members when the very entrance to a preeminent school or academic institution was prohibited. The focus here is particular on academic libraries in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in which case we must consider the prevailing type of their library collections where most of them are still in physical form, while the function of the digital repository is reduced to a minimum. In such an environment, the execution of information services becomes an even more complicated process because of the difficulties to answer all the information requests without previously-stored originally digital or digitized sources. Hence, the paper also focuses on considering possible online storage methods, as it thematizes the role of librarians on open educational resource (OER) platforms during a pandemic.

Academic libraries have been chosen as the corpus of the research due to their emphasized role in more complex types of scientific work, unlike primary and secondary school libraries. However, it does not exclude the possibility that umbrella principles and work methods can be applied to lower levels of education. At this point, I understand the use of OER platforms on two levels that mutually complement each other. At the first level, they are understood as the tool, a mean for librarians to act during the pandemic. On the second level, the possibility to integrate OER platforms within existing online learning platforms is questioned as an opportunity for collaborative work of teachers, students, and librarians, which can obtain a satisfactory level of process in specific circumstances.

First, the paper elaborates on the circumstances of librarians' work during the pandemic, and consequently the importance of demythologizing their profession within the particular context of BiH in a new, but professionally required field and form of action. This form also includes the work in the context of OER platforms and more broadly understood concept of *open education*. The central part of the paper problematizes and analyses the empirical research based on a sample of 30 fully-fledged faculty libraries of the University of Sarajevo (UNSA). Together with the previously presented theoretical framework, these results will test the hypothesis of librarians' engagement on OER platforms. Finally, the attempt is to provide some strategic recommendations in order to empower the role of academic librarians and their professional responsibilities in BiH society.

From bad to worse: academic libraries in BiH during the pandemics

When considering the position of higher education librarians during the pandemic in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is necessary to keep in mind the specific local context and circumstances in which the research is placed. Except for the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina shares most of the challenges with other countries in the ex-Yugoslav region. As anywhere, the pandemic caught the libraries on the most numerous and best-ranked public academic institution in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the University of Sarajevo⁵⁴, unprepared and causing the current work process much more complicated. However, as the academic libraries at the University of Sarajevo did not base

⁵⁴ In the preliminary July edition of the 2021 Webometrics ranking, the University of Sarajevo is ranked 1505th on the world list in the overall ranking of more than 31,000 higher education institutions worldwide covered by screening, according to three criteria: impact/visibility, openness, and excellence, which ranks it in the top 4.85 percent of all universities on this list. (Business Magazine, 2021)

their collections on online resources, their organization significantly impacted the whole situation, affecting coping with the work in a state of emergency.

When Mabe and Ashley (2017) discussed the main roles of public libraries in emergencies, they stated that the roles of the library in crises should include the following: '1. Being a Safe Haven; 2. Offering Normal Services; 3. Operating as Information Hubs; 4. Improvising; 5. Discussions and Findings' (p. 28) A particularly interesting role that somehow unites all the others is the second one, concerning the offering of *normal services*. Academic libraries must also act in such a role. The phenomenon of the so-called 'new normality', apparently, does not sharply divide time into 'before' and 'after' the coronavirus, but rather, by our gradual habituation and its (legal) codification simply becomes normality: normality and the new normality are 'produced simultaneously' where 'the logic of the previous state understood as normal is inscribed in the state of new normality.' (Hasanović, 2021, p. 182). Here, the context of *normal services* includes the following:

During the situations of crisis, libraries should be endeavoured to provide the consistent services to the clients or users, without any fluctuations or delays. The teachers, students and especially researchers should be provided maximum support so that they can accomplish their assignments without any hindrances. (Deol and Brar, 2021, p. 5).

Being impossible to deliver services normally, or in the way we are used to, the question arose: How will the librarian perform its services? The answer is not questionable, 'because certainly, the learning process in a digital, virtual, platform environment will be a new normal state'. (Vajzović et al., 2021, p. 260). Escaping from information and communication technologies is no longer possible because of the ongoing *forced digitalization*. It is only questionable how librarians perform their services in those new, online circumstances within digital space and how successful?

Unaccustomed to work in the new online environment, professors and students have felt the tremendous consequences most directly. Even though their problems were the most emphasized ones, at the same time, answers to those difficult positions were missing. While professors and students are overwhelmed by new roles and coping in the digital space, functions, and skills, the exact position of librarians remained partially neglected. Instead, the framework for resolving the educational crisis is trying to be found within those structures that are already overburdened; more work for professors and more tasks for students. The negligence of the academic librarian's role during the pandemic, which surely could relieve the tasks of students and teaching staff, could be seen in the plans for improving the Croatian education system when Gvozden Flego, former Minister of Science, claims that the education crisis in the pandemic requires: 'Changing the social position of teachers, modernizing the curriculum for students, full-time schooling, uniform application of pedagogical standards, helping the socially needy, and encouraging the best students, i.e., more significant national and local investment in education' (Arbutina, 2021). In addition to the focus on teachers and visible investing in the necessary material support and resources, which is often considered as the reason why something does not work within the system, solution is usually not recognized in the librarians, but only in strengthening other educational segments. Such planning does not only ignore the fact that educational institutions, such as schools and universities, consist of some elements – but at the same time ignoring the relationship(s) among them. Those

connecting strings are important, and often, in specific circumstances such as the COVID 19 pandemic, more important than focusing only on dominant elements.

Let us look at the position of a librarian as a non-dominant, but important element in a system of pandemic learning conditions. Financial support would not be the primary condition for a more purposeful use of librarian's competencies. Instead, it is necessary to work on the standardization of law in regard to the contemporary work processes and the use of already existing open online resources including the ways of their dissemination, organization, and storage. For an example, the term *library* is mentioned only six times in the *Law on Higher Education* (Official Gazette of the Sarajevo Canton, No. 33/17). Although the number does not have to reflect the level of dedication and importance that is the case here. The law mentions the library in the context of referring to the National and University Library as a part of the University's public institution. (p. 32/34). Academic libraries in Canton Sarajevo are also mentioned in the context of institutions that must submit doctoral dissertations (p. 12/34). Here, at this place, thematization of the library in this fundamental higher education law ends. Although regulations regarding the work in those libraries have been adopted in some faculties, in this way, the standardization of basic and unquestionable professional postulates at the level of the umbrella university law has been avoided, which would greatly facilitate work processes in extraordinary circumstances.

The marginalization of library institution could also be seen in the decisions and regulations by the UNSA during the COVID 19 pandemic. At the same time, libraries separately (or not) had to adopt and implement those regulations. The very first such decision by Senate of the University of Sarajevo concerned mainly 'the online form of taking exams' and 'make ups of classes that cannot be realized immediately.' (UNSA, 2020, under 'II' and 'III'). Not understood as 'the heart of the university'⁵⁵, it is seen again how libraries and librarians' competencies are being systematically ignored, especially when it comes to a more active involvement in online teaching processes.

If we look at the situation on a global level, at least from the perspective of developed, Western countries, what is being taken into account is the fact that almost all libraries in today's digital era are aware about the recent developments in the field of information science and have developed several kinds of web or online sources of information and knowledge (Doel and Brar, 2021, p. 6). In contrast, as I noticed in the research, almost all libraries at the University of Sarajevo have developed only few ways to disseminate online information and assist students in their research. While writing about libraries in pandemic learning conditions, Cox (2020) elaborates how the academic libraries are changing now in terms of collections, services, spaces, and operations: 'the rise of open content and open education resources, support for online teaching, support for online research' etc. The previous, stated as universally examples of good practice, although commendable, in the context of BiH is still unattainable.

⁵⁵ Statement of Harvard President Charles W. Eliot (1834-1926). Later, it became established as the motto of many academic and university libraries. However, although it is valid for an established and inviolable opinion, its function has been called into question. Murray and Ireland (2018) state that 'academic libraries are no longer the symbolic 'heart of the university'; instead, they must provide evidence to support funding requests that support the priorities of the institution as a whole. (p. 359). This way of understanding is nothing but the demythologization of petrified principles that no longer produce any progress due to the opinion that the symbolic function is sufficient.

Speaking of the possibilities that digital collections and online space offer in situations where physical access is not available - platforms of digital, open educational resources appear as the most acceptable option if the environment, but most importantly librarians themselves, demythologize their profession.

Demythologization of librarianship during the COVID virus pandemic 19

The five laws of librarianship⁵⁶ by the Indian librarian and mathematician Ranganathan, ninety years after being published, are still valid as postulates later problematized, considered, and supplemented by other authors following the development of theoretical thoughts on the role and function of the library.

Joseph Nitecki recounts some of the examples: 'Danton (1934) criticized Ranganathan's five laws as not providing open-ended inquiry into the validity of functions and activities; he claimed that library philosophy should start with the philosophy of a society and its role in democracy' (Nitecki, 1993, p. 110). Regardless of whether the degree of library development depends on the socio-economic factor, opinion, or action guided by the principle that the library's role is primarily democratizing becomes mandatory to maintain professional responsibilities. If we go back to the simple and common understanding of librarian, its mission is to inform, as the right to information is one of the fundamental human rights.

Although speaking about the position of libraries in the current Law on Higher Education of the Sarajevo Canton (2017) advocated standardization, the universality of specific provisions for all organizational units of the University of Sarajevo, such an interpretation should not be understood briefly. However, some provisions should remain in the responsibilities of the faculties, but the framework guidelines for more active participation in online teaching activities need to be defined on the juridical level of the Canton, or either University and the National and University Library, as the umbrella institution for all faculty libraries at the University of Sarajevo.

When it comes to understanding human rights as universal, it is necessary to take them into account differently. The starting point could be read through the universalization of human rights as equal for all state systems and universally applicable to all diverse state systems and contexts, in which case the principle of equality is initiated from the centre of Western hegemony and human rights will be an instrument of what is called 'globalization from above' as something imposed by the West on the rest of the world and will fuel clashes of civilizations. (Mouffe, 2005, p. 125). In other words, *where we stand depends on where we sit*, and local contexts need to be considered. According to the European Convention on Human Rights (1952), although fundamental human rights include, among others, the 'right to receive and impart information' (under Article 10), the link between human rights and librarians' views of the information mission needs to be further explained. In practice, it has been noticed that it is not given as much attention to this statement as necessary. As Samek notes, in cases when the librarian is thoroughly acquainted with human rights in his profession, the lack of their 'abstraction in current realities' was noticed. (Samek, 2007, p. 34)

Academic librarians within the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina are not excluded from following something that could be called a professional oath, Article 19 of Universal

⁵⁶ 1. Books are here for use. 2. Every reader his or her book. 3. Every book its reader. 4. Save the time of the reader. 5. A library is a growing organism.

Declaration of Human Rights (2015): 'Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.' (p. 40) Librarians now days also need to follow Ranganathan's five laws. However, even as the Hippocratic Oath needs some refinement or modification from a modern perspective and ethical point of view, Ranganathan's five laws need to be amended in order to crystallize the professional mission image. Nitecki (1993) summarizes the author's reflections and points out the critics of Ranganathan's laws: 'Both Danton and Reece added the sixth basic law to Ranganathan's list, the library's role as an educational, scientific, and cultural institution.' (p. 110).

If we link the *educational* and *scientific* role of libraries in accordance to the Article 19, it appears how disseminating information *by any means - and regardless of borders*, finding standardized, creative, and thoughtful solutions for performing a professional mission of information and support in the scientific and research process during the COVID 19 pandemic – becomes an obligation. It proves that the changes and limitations of professional activity brought about by the pandemic's state of emergency did not substantially change the roles of librarians but how they carry out their professional mission.

Working on OER platforms as a tool of librarians' engagement within the academic and broader community should not focus blindly on changing the paradigm from human to technology -which use is inevitable, but to the use of technology with awareness of its human function, When the possibilities of information and communication technologies are considered in the light of offering free and open space for organizing, storage, hyperlinks between existing digital or digitized sources, and OER platforms, the work of academic librarians on their creation and maintenance is opening up as a new field of work relocated from the space in which librarians primarily resided.

So, when it comes to advancing paradigms and demythologizing the profession in the context of inclusion levels, librarians in primary and secondary schools do not go as far as those in academic libraries. In contrast to primary schools, a large amount of complex material is not needed due the fact that the curricula are simpler. Moreover, such an approach can have a counter-effect on learning outcomes. 'Librarians and instructional designers have particular expertise in finding and helping educators teach with OER and can assist educators in this process (Katz and Van Allen, 2020; Morgan, 2020; Smith and Lee, 2017). In higher education, OER Librarian positions have been developed to help faculty find and teach with existing OER, as well as create and publish their own OER.' (Larson, 2019 in Van Allen and Katz, 2020, p. 213) Of course, this does not exclude the possibility that primary and secondary school librarians also participate in creating and maintaining OER. Even when they do, such processes are not as complex as those at the university level, especially given the plurality of different scientific fields, the multitude of platforms on which teaching takes place, and more complicated methodologies. Therefore, academic librarians in Bosnia and Herzegovina are the ones who need to change and adapt their work habits the most – they have to accept that they are no exception in the needs of lifelong education of functional literacy, i.e., media and information literacy being important for promoting and doing their activities in this digital era. Adopting the digital skillsets necessary to organize and maintain OER platforms for different study programs on particular faculty, an already complicated administrative system and abundance of resources, especially at faculties with many study groups, requires

a high level of organization. Finally, although it may imply a much higher level of library staff organization, OER in higher education institutions are undoubtedly needed to promote open access and open education.

Open platforms for open (emergency) education

Given the ever-present budgetary limitations for the purchase of recent literature and journals, and given that students increasingly resort to electronic sources without recognizing the library as the primary source of professional literature, it seems that the existence of higher education libraries is losing importance and valuation. Addressed primarily to users, the text *Five reasons to value academic library*, enumerates the following: *Heart of the University; Improved student experience; Time well spent; Support from the experts; Digital resources 24/7* (Owen, 2021). Library's missions such as *the heart of the university, time well spent*, and *support from experts* address the predicament of recognizing the importance of libraries in accessing information. It is no longer a question of whether the user has access to information yet can he or she navigate through complex (online and digital) information systems and databases or quickly access search results. Even if the library has access to specific databases and students (*digital natives*) total confidence in the correctness of their Internet search, it is necessary to work with them on advanced ways of using sources like information systems, digital collections and databases the faculties have created and or to which they are subscribed.

Many academic libraries in BiH, although members of the COBBIS⁵⁷ library information system, still have and rely on catalogues in printed form. In this way, visibility and search are disabled, which will not have physical access and online reservation barriers.

Working with information and communication technologies, librarians face themselves with doubts regarding the process of serving and using digital resources. One of them concerns the opposition of freedom of access as an inviolable professional task and obligation of copyright protection. Simplified, this concern is present most transparently through the question: If the requested book does not exist in the library or is not available at that time and will not be within the time frame required by the user, can the librarian offer an information source on the Internet, for example, located in a shadow library⁵⁸? All abovementioned, along with the context of open and free access to information, follow librarians' old-new competencies.

While open access is defined as 'free, unrestricted online access to digital (scientific) information that allows reading, storing, distributing, searching, retrieving, indexing, and / or

⁵⁷ 'COBISS represents an organisational model of joining libraries into a national library information system with shared cataloguing, the COBIB union bibliographic/catalogue database and local bibliographic databases of participating libraries, the COLIB database on libraries, the CONOR authority database, and with a number of other functions. COBISS.SI, COBISS.SR, COBISS.MK, COBISS.BH+COBISS.RS, COBISS.CG, COBISS.BG, COBISS.AL and COBISS.KS are designations for the autonomous library information systems that are being built in individual countries (Slovenia, Serbia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Albania and Kosovo).' (COBISS, under 'Introduction').

⁵⁸ 'Shadow libraries, sometimes called pirate libraries, consist of texts (in this case, scholarly texts) aggregated outside the legal framework of copyright.' (Young, 2019)

other lawful use' (Vajzović and Hibert, 2021, p. 39), open-access content organized on digital (OER) platforms, is a term that refers to:

teaching, learning and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. Open licensing is built within the existing framework of intellectual property rights as defined by relevant international conventions and respects the authorship of the work. (UNESCO, 2012, p. 1).

Open access implies the legal use of digital scientific information, which may be an answer and a substitute for directing users to illegal sources. The Internet and digital space are filled with open educational resources, but unidentified, they have no purpose. Their location, selection, organization, and archiving are that what makes them searchable, usable, and accessible. Otherwise, if librarians rely on the pure existence of digital resources that they will find and pass on to users in large quantities when access to physical facilities in emergencies is not possible, it seems like a disorganized approach. It is necessary to work continuously on OER platforms so that these digital collections are ready to *welcome* moments such as the coronavirus crisis education. As stated in the book *Learning's growing Up: Society, Culture, Religion in the Digital Age*:

Construction i.e., the establishment of digital repositories (storage of digital, electronic material; collection of digital educational materials that enables systematic management of the processes of publishing, access, and storage of teaching / educational content) is a fundamental postulation for inclusion in the processes of (collaborative) knowledge production. Advocating and promoting open access, building information infrastructure, designing sustainable models, and adopting principled goals and concrete incentives for open access in the Bosnian academic community has no systemic character. (Vajzović and Hibert, 2021, p. 40)

Organized, systemic, and pre-planned character of the OER platforms in academic libraries is missing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the University of Sarajevo. Systemic character implies functioning at the system level, where cooperation of all stakeholders is needed for open educational resources platforms to become an implicit segment of library business and academic habits in the research process. It is clear that librarians, with the interest to serve students, also focus on academic staff, assisting in their research processes, consultations on required and additional literature, and participating in the teaching and educational activities of the institution at all levels. However, the relationship between librarians and teaching staff needs to be worked out at another level - that librarians and teaching staff accept the need to involve librarians in the teaching process where their presence and work seem seemingly unnecessary due to outdated principles. In *The Indispensable Academic Librarian: Teaching and Collaborating for Change*, Michelle Reale (2018) states: 'Historically, however, an academic librarian's role followed an evolutionary path similar to that of the faculty as the position progressed from a stationary data organizer into a dynamic and multifaceted university role'(p.18). This multifaceted university role also concerns teaching library members to use OER and working on integration of such platforms into existing online teaching systems during the current pandemic. Teaching is becoming a place of discussion because it is a common opinion that teachers and professors are responsible for teaching

in educational institutions. However, the librarian's role is also one that teaches how to systematize, organize, and direct the research process.

Methodology

The research undertaken in this paper encompasses a survey based on the sample of 30 fully-fledged faculty member libraries of the University of Sarajevo whose responses, along with the theoretical foundations of the research problem will serve the purpose of providing a hypothesis verification, as well as strategic recommendations. Keeping in mind the professional task of librarians as a support to the learning process and research, this paper begins with the hypothesis that the librarians of the University of Sarajevo organizational units are not enough involved in the process of teaching, learning in general, as well as in creating or posting of educational material on the open educational resource (OER) platforms.

Selecting the University of Sarajevo and its 30 full members was based due to its position, being thus the best-ranked university in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the Webometrics ranking list.⁵⁹ The second criteria concerning selecting faculties and academies within the University of Sarajevo did not include associate members and centers, but those institutions where lectures were held on digital platforms during the COVID 19 pandemic.

The survey questionnaire was developed on Google Forms platform due to its accessibility and commitment to open-source tools during research. The survey questionnaire composed of 16 semi-structured questions was sent to 30 e-mail addresses of academic libraries at the University of Sarajevo on April 21, 2021. Respondents were given until June 30 to answer questions posed that thematized their understanding of OER platforms, use, creation, and collaboration with academic and teaching staff in creating these platforms.

Academic librarians and OER at the University of Sarajevo during the pandemic

Although the survey questionnaire was submitted to 30 e-mail addresses, only eight librarians gave answers: Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Political Science, Catholic Faculty of Theology, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Faculty of Health Studies, and Institute for History. The low level of response also indicates the general condition of libraries, habits and attitudes of using information and communication technologies, as well as their interest in thinking and then answering questions about (non) fulfilment of professional responsibilities.

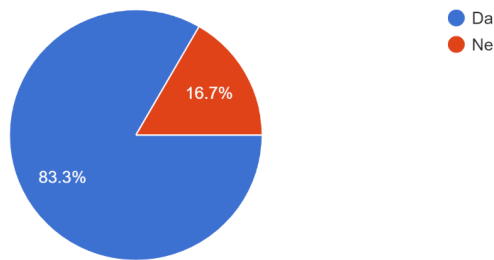
According to this survey, the librarians identified problems related to access and communication as the main most common problems for their working conditions during the coronavirus pandemic: *physical access to the material, as well as its quarantine, inability to contact users directly / difficult communication, and inability to maintain user education.*

On the other side, when it comes to the fund itself and its capacities, librarians underlined their limitations and lack of 'everything needed in e-form (inability to scan and distribute due to copyright restrictions that we approach with due care).' In this context, it is interesting to see how librarians are aware of the insufficiency of the physical fund and recognized the impossibility of direct contact with users as the main obstacle in carrying out their professional mission. When it comes to the question of, *how did the*

⁵⁹ This university is ranked on 1506 place. (Webometrics, 2021)

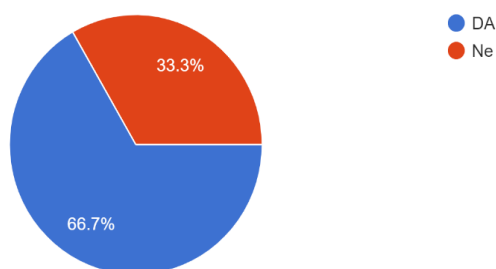
changes and limitations of professional activity during the COVID 19 pandemic change the way you carry out your professional mission? The answers both reflected the link between working conditions in a pandemic and librarian's actions, but unlike the previous question – the focus was more on the emergency conditions, and the responses towards them: *focusing on electronic resources, more frequent use of online forms, inquiries, chat, e-mail correspondence, as well as greater digitalization of services.* When it comes to communicating with users, the most apparent change that librarians have introduced is that they have increased communication through synchronous and asynchronous digital communication channels. Also, focusing on electronic resources for librarians who know the possibilities of information and communication technologies is quite the next move. However, referring to resources in different ways and through different platforms is not the same as systematizing and organizing within pre-existing online learning platforms. The lack of a sufficient number of digital databases, as seen, hence could help librarians not feel - as they felt - incompetent, excluded, and detached from their workplace. Having difficulties in communicating with the customers and having poor access to materials while, as seen, relying on hard-copy sources - the particular problem of librarians has to be seen in the context as becoming a difficulty concerning the academic community and society.

When asked *whether before the COVID 19 pandemic they used open educational resources (OER) in user information processes*, 16.7 percent of librarians said no, while 83.3 percent said they used OER. (Graph 1).



Graph 1: OER in serving academic libraries users before the COVID pandemic 19.

The term OER is not entirely unknown to academic librarians at the University of Sarajevo. Moreover, most of them used open educational resources before the COVID 19 pandemic to expand the range of information sources they could offer to students and faculty. Nevertheless, it is interesting if we compare the results in Graph 1 with Graph 2, showing the librarian's answer to the question *Did you take into account the use of open educational resources (OER) in the process of redefining services during the COVID 19 pandemic?* 33.3 percent of librarians stated that they did not consider open educational resources as an option. In comparison, 66.7 percent of librarians stated that they continued to use open educational resources platforms during the pandemic (Graph 2). In short, there has been a noticeable decline in the use of open educational resources during a pandemic. Such results cannot be attributed simply to the fact that librarians are unaware of the need to use digital resources, but the real reasons have not yet been examined.



Graph 2: OER in serving academic libraries users before the COVID pandemic 19.

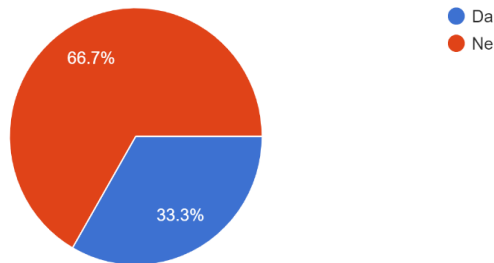
So, hence the librarians are aware of the need to use open educational resources, examining *how they disseminated open educational resources to professors, associates, and students during the COVID 19 pandemic* is necessary. As seen from the response, half of them used email as a digital information model. This type of service is defined as an asynchronous model⁶⁰ that, when there are many information requests, can slow down the execution of the entire process. E-mail opens an opportunity for asking the user to clarify his information request, but this prolongs resolving the information request. At the same time, the possibility of user feedback is reduced, which is a phenomenon called 'disappearing patron' in information services.⁶¹ In addition to asynchronous information services, the other half used synchronous models of digital information services such as *chat* via Messenger, Viber, or WhatsApp to disseminate OER during the pandemic. Of course, chat is initially a good tool for exchanging information that does not require more profound research (Kodrić Zaimović, 2010), and since the essential missions of academic librarian include assistance in complex research processes, chat is set as a temporary solution. Such a solution, as well as asynchronous models however, cannot independently support the scope of information services during a pandemic because there is no systematic and organized approach when it comes to storing and offering a pre-prepared digital catalogue to users who will navigate through the recommended literature. A small number of librarians (3 percent) said they used the *cloud* option, such as Google Drive, as an online storage space for organization of digital information sources. Finally, the smallest number of librarians cited *web forms, social media profiles, and a library website* (2 percent) for the content they created themselves as forms of information dissemination. It follows that librarians use different forms of social media, platforms, and digital communication models with users, where some of them are more or less organized.

In this regard, in addition to general ways of disseminating information, to examine librarian's participation in online learning platforms such as Moodle and Canvas, a review and comparison of the situation before and during the pandemic was made (Graph 3 and Graph 4). When asked *whether before the COVID 19 pandemic they were involved in the learning*

⁶⁰ Simply put, asynchronous communication is communication that doesn't happen in real-time.

⁶¹ The *disappearing patron* is defined as the sudden withdrawal of a library user who responded with an information request and subsequently withdrew from further research. This often happens when librarians request more information from the user himself.

management systems of their library's academic institution (Moodle, Canvas, etc.), 33.3 percent of librarians answered that they were, and 66.7 percent that they were not (Graph 3).



Graph 3: Involvement of UNSA academic librarians in learning management systems

Speaking of their involvement on these platforms during the pandemic, when asked *whether during the pandemic COVID 19 used the learning management systems of their library's academic education institution (Moodle, Canvas, etc.) as a platform for customer service and content placement*, also 66, 7 percent of librarians answered that they had no contact with these platforms, and 33.3% did. These results show that although the COVID 19 pandemic brought forced digitalization, specific ways of doing librarian work did not bring changes. In other words, more librarians use open educational resources and various digital tools, while they work less on online learning platforms as a space for organizing resources and disseminating them.

Based on those insights and the aim to examine the reasons why librarians participate or do not participate in online education systems, they were asked *whether there were any initiatives of teachers and/or librarians within their higher education institution during the COVID 19 pandemic* to set up and organize OER within the existing online teaching system. All librarians who participated in the survey stated that there was no such initiative which could explain why online education systems such as Moodle did not serve as a space for open educational resources platforms. As a matter of fact, it is that the University of Bolton Library proposes a Moodle open-source learning platform 'that can be used to create learning resources using text, images, video, and interactive elements like quizzes and discussion boards. (University of Bolton, n.d.) On the other hand, it is to take account that online teaching and learning management systems at the University of Sarajevo are also organized in the Moodle system. Therefore, it seems like a sensible and justified step in organizing the OER platform as part of each faculty's existing online learning systems individually.

Quoting the reasons why the initiative of teaching staff or librarians for the participation of information professionals in online education systems was not realized, the respondents gave several reasons which can be summed to three.

1. *For the time being, everything they need is made available to students via e-mail.* Librarians believe that an asynchronous model of communication is still sufficient to meet user needs. However, such considerations lack the initiative to organize all work processes better. Time savings and reducing the confusion of an already

confusing online learning platform could be addressed by consolidating different open-source clouds into a single platform representing both OER and the online education system.

2. *Not all learning management initiatives were considered necessary by the administration.* In addition to the aforementioned, this response shows that it is not necessary to work only on the consciousness of librarians to perform their professional mission. Often, the library initiative is not enough to get involved in new fields of work, but the entire school and faculty administration need to recognize the importance of such actions. (Khain-Gabbay, 2017) Open educational resource platforms should be understood as a product of cooperation between teaching staff and librarians as Biscay partners with a common goal: learning, education, and informing students.
3. *Professors and the Faculty Board considered that given the small number of students and the time and expenditure they need to invest to be informed and learn to use it, they are not currently needed; FFUNSA used multiple learning management systems, so it was clear that the library could not be on Pearl and Teams and all other systems as well as various applications.* Since the 'old normality', as seen, is penetrating into the 'new normality', becoming, simply – 'normality', numerous irregularities came to the fore with the outbreak of the coronavirus, being the consequences of the lack of standardization at the high education level in general, or at least – in Canton of Sarajevo as in particular. Given that there is no standardization of online education platforms, not only among different faculties, but even within the same Institution – as it was, and somewhere still is, the case that students in one study program listen to lectures on several online platforms such as Moodle, Zoom and Microsoft Teams, it is impossible to require librarians to be present on all platforms (especially having in mind the capacities of the working staff). Hence, it is necessary to satisfy organizational requests at higher levels of decision-making about the choice of an e-learning platform.

Conclusion

The changes and restrictions of librarians' professional activities brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, in general, did not alter the librarian role but rather how their profession is executed. The research confirms the hypothesis given in the paper that the librarians at the University of Sarajevo are not involved enough in teaching, learning, creating, or posting educational material on the open educational resource (OER) platforms. Hence, to examine in more detail the reasons why the use of OER sources decreased during the pandemic while we needed the exact opposite, a focus group study is presented as a proposal. Focus groups allow a more detailed thematization of individual segments that have remained unclear here. This paper also showed that it is impossible to talk about the educational process during a pandemic without looking back at how it was before. The state in which the pandemic found us dramatically affects how we will deal with it.

Appearing as a field of collaborative action of professors, librarians and students, open educational resource platforms can only as such have useful and beneficial effects. The

reasons why OER platforms were not used must be sought in their dependence of different conditions of individual environments. As we can see, in Bosnia and Herzegovina it is a matter of not recognizing them as a possible consolidated resource. It is also considered that the results of the OER are not alike with the effort invested in their creation and maintenance. Most of the academic libraries at the University of Sarajevo are part of already public passive institutions which are more or less waiting to be used. While decision-makers in solving problems with an online teaching focus on exhausting the capacity of teachers, librarians are generally silent and take a neutral position. In other words, they are unlikely to refuse access to OER platforms if required to do so, but they are also unlikely to initiate participation. Such a perception leads to the derogation of the library for the digital age and the academic institution itself.

Strategic thinking is needed to avoid such a derogation. That includes cooperation with the Ministry of Science, Higher Education and Youth (Canton Sarajevo) in decision-making. Also, Strategy for the Development of Media and Information Literacy in Educational Systems of Canton Sarajevo, which is currently being drafted, should elaborate in more detail the engagement on OER platforms. In addition to legal regulations, it is necessary to cooperate with the faculties' information experts and IT administrators who would support librarians in such processes. When it comes to strengthening the collaborative work of teachers, librarians, and students, it is also helpful to consider trying and introducing new teaching methods based more on constructivist learning theories. For example, the model of *guided inquiry design* encourages student research that strengthens media and information literacy skills. That same media and information literacy implies the use and utilization of OER platforms. Finally, we need to keep in mind the collaboration aspect in all parts of the OER platforms' engagement. Although this could be considered as primarily a librarian's commitment, it depends on many elements that must work together, collaborate and complement each other in order for such an endeavour to benefit all participants in the educational process.

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