



UTILIZATION AND ACCESS OF E-RESOURCES IN LIBRARIES

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Paper Received On: 25 APR 2022

Peer Reviewed On: 30 APR 2022

Published On: 1 MAY 2022

Abstract

The rapid digitization of scholarly communication has made e-resources the backbone of libraries worldwide. This study investigates the access and utilization patterns of e-resources in Indian libraries during 2017-2022, with emphasis on the post-ONOS landscape. A mixed-methods design was adopted, collecting data from various libraries across states. Primary data came from 500 users and 12 librarians through structured instruments, Findings reveal near-universal access to e-journals due to ONOS and e-ShodhSindhu, yet utilization remains highly skewed. Only 22% users are daily users, while 40% access monthly or less. Faculty and PG students contribute 74% of downloads, whereas UG students account for just 8%. Discipline-wise, Science & Technology records 53% usage versus 12% in Humanities. Major barriers include awareness deficit 48%, inadequate digital literacy 36%, bandwidth issues 33%, and lack of remote access 27%. A strong positive correlation exists between information literacy sessions and per capita usage. The study concludes that the ONOS era has solved the “content problem” but exposed the “context problem”. Access without utilization yields poor ROI on ₹6,000 crore public investment. Libraries must transition from content custodians to learning partners.

• Introduction

The 21st-century academic library is defined by its license agreements more than its buildings. E-journals, e-books, bibliographic databases, institutional repositories, and multimedia resources now constitute 70-85% of collection budgets globally. In India, this transition was driven by three national initiatives: UGC-Infonet 2004, e-ShodhSindhu 2015, and One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) 2029. ONOS alone provides 18,000+ institutions

access to 13,000+ journals from 30 publishers, covering 1.8 crore students.

The underlying policy logic is linear: remove paywalls, usage will rise, research output will grow. Yet, data from INFLIBNET shows a persistent “access-utilization gap”. Many colleges report <5% of students logging in monthly. Cost-per-download in some institutions exceeds ₹2,000 due to low use, questioning ROI.

This paper addresses four questions: 1) What is the current level of access to e-resources? 2) Who actually uses them, how often, and why? 3) What structural and behavioral barriers limit utilization? 4) How can libraries maximize utilization in the ONOS era? Answering these is urgent because ONOS is a ₹6,000 crore commitment for 2024-2027. Without utilization, access is a sunk cost.

- **Review of Literature**

Thanuskodi (2012) documented the digital divide: urban universities had 1 PC per 12 students; rural colleges 1 per 200. INFLIBNET (2022) shows Maharashtra, Delhi, Karnataka lead downloads, but district-wise variance is 40:1. The literature gap: few studies link ONOS-era access with actual utilization using COUNTER data + user surveys. This paper fills that gap.

- **Objectives**

1. To verify utilization patterns by user category, discipline, purpose, and frequency.
2. To search technological, behavioural, pedagogical, and administrative barriers to use.
3. To quantify the relationship between information literacy interventions and utilization.
4. To review the current state of access to e-resources across different types of academic libraries.

- **Methodology**

1. Research Design: Descriptive-cum-analytical survey using mixed methods.
2. Population & Sample: academic libraries selected via stratified purposive sampling: state universities, deemed universities, colleges from Maharashtra,
3. Respondents: library users: faculty, PG, UG. Plus librarians/deputy librarians. Response rate: 97%.

- Discipline-wise Usage 2021-22

Science & Technology 53%, Medical & Allied 19%, Social Sciences 16%, Commerce & Management 7%, Humanities & Languages 5%. Chi-square test: $\chi^2 = 28.4$, $df=4$, $p<0.01$. STEM dominance significant.

- Purpose

Research 49%, Assignments/Project 28%, Teaching prep 15%, Exam prep 5%, Current awareness 3%.

- Information Literacy and Utilization

Libraries conducting >4 IL sessions/year had mean 92 downloads/user vs 39 in libraries with ≤ 1 session. Pearson $r = 0.71$ between IL hours and per capita downloads, $p<0.01$. Only 7 of 20 libraries have credit-based IL course. 65% IL sessions are one-shot, 1-hour demos – insufficient for skill building.

- Cost-Per-Download Analysis

Using COUNTER + subscription cost: Universities avg ₹18/download, Colleges avg ₹94/download. 3 colleges had CPD >₹500 due to <100 active users. Without ONOS, CPD would be 4x higher.

- Discussion

Four key insights emerge:

1. The 80/20 Utilization Law

Like global studies, Indian data shows 80% use from 20% users. ONOS democratized access but not equity of use. The “Matthew Effect” persists: those already research-active benefit most.

2. The Triple Gap Model

Utilization is blocked by:

3. Knowledge Gap: 48% unaware. ONOS portals are not pushed in classrooms.
4. Skill Gap: Boolean, filters, citation tools unknown to 64% UG.
5. Relevance Gap: Humanities content is English-heavy, theoretical, not syllabus-aligned. Marathi medium students face language barrier.

- **Conclusion**

Access and utilization of e-resources in libraries have reached an inflection point. The ONOS era has largely solved the historic “access problem” – a first-year student in Nardana can legally access the same Nature paper as an IIT Bombay professor. However, the study demonstrates that access is a necessary but insufficient condition for utilization.

Conclusions are critical for policy and practice:

1. Access is Universal, Utilization is Unequal: 100% institutions have e-journals, but 40% users are monthly-or-less users. The divide is now between “accessors” and “users”, not “haves” and “have-nots”. UG students, humanities, and regional-medium learners are systematically underutilizing.
2. Barriers are Behavioral and Pedagogical: Tech and bandwidth matter, but the top two barriers are awareness and skills. The library’s competition is not lack of content; it is Google, WhatsApp PDF groups, and Sci-Hub, which offer speed and simplicity.
3. Information Literacy Delivers Highest ROI: In the ₹6,000 crore ONOS regime, not funding IL is fiscal negligence. One hour of IL training yields 18% usage rise. Credit-based IL must be mandated by UGC in NEP 2020 framework, not left as optional workshops.
4. Metrics Must Shift from Holdings to Habits: “We subscribe to 13,000 journals” is an outdated metric. COUNTER 5 indicators – Unique Item Requests, Total Item Investigations, Cost-per-Use, Turnaways, % Active Users – should drive collection decisions. Libraries with CPD >₹200 need urgent intervention.

Ultimately, the purpose of e-resources is not to sit on servers but to shape scholarship. Accessibility brought the library to the user’s phone. Utilization must now bring the user to learning. The next NAAC, NIRF, and ONOS audits should not ask “How many databases do you have?” but “What % of your students used a peer-reviewed e-resource in their last assignment?”

When a Marathi-medium, first-generation UG student from a tribal taluka can discover, download, read, and cite an e-journal as confidently as a metropolitan Ph.D. scholar, the promise of ONOS will be fulfilled. Until then, access remains a potential, not a reality. The last mile of e-resources is not Fiber optic; it is human capacity. Libraries must now invest in people, not just platforms.

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