

## Online Services of Academic Libraries During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Practice and Reflection—A Case Study of University Libraries in Jilin Province (Postprint)

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### Abstract

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### Full Text

## Exploration and Reflection on Online Service Practice of University Libraries During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of University Libraries in Jilin Province

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## Abstract

**[Purpose/Significance]** Exploring innovative online service practices during the pandemic prevention and control period can provide references for the improvement and continuous innovation of university library online services.

**[Method/Process]** By investigating the content, forms, and practical data of online services provided by university libraries in Jilin Province during the pandemic, this study summarizes the characteristics and problems of current regional online services and analyzes the status quo of university library online services.

**[Result/Conclusion]** Practice demonstrates that university libraries possess relatively professional service capabilities and rapid response efficiency in online service innovation, showcasing the significant role and effectiveness of online services. However, problems remain in resource guarantee systems, service platforms, and team construction. Active efforts are needed in promoting smart library construction, improving digital resource security, building online service platforms, strengthening librarian teams, and advancing service transformation.

**Keywords:** online service; online teaching; epidemic prevention and control; university library; practice analysis; service transformation

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Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the Party Central Committee and the State Council have attached great importance to the crisis. The Ministry of Education successively issued a series of prevention and control measures and deployments, prompting universities across the country to actively respond to new situations such as delayed school openings, “suspending classes without stopping learning,” and online teaching. University libraries consequently faced unprecedented challenges in online services and resource guarantee.

As the literature information centers and primary venues for cultural construction, university libraries in Jilin Province focused on the learning and research needs of teachers and students during the pandemic, issuing the call: “Epidemic prevention and control is a command, technology is the battlefield, and information resources are the ammunition.” They strove to ensure that “digital resources provide escort, cultural leadership charges forward, technical support stays online, and information consultation never stops,” launching a vigorous campaign in the field of library and information emergency service and management. During the pandemic, these libraries conscientiously implemented the series of notices and work deployments from central, provincial, municipal, and university authorities regarding pandemic prevention and control. They formulated emergency implementation plans, rapidly transformed service models, and provided multi-faceted support—including resources, software, and platforms—for university online teaching. To meet the swiftly shifting service demands of teachers and students, they quickly changed service forms and launched various online services to fully ensure the normal conduct of teaching and research activities.

This sudden battle tested not only libraries' emergency service and management capabilities but also their ability to provide online services—such as resource guarantee, teaching and research support, literacy education, and cultural dissemination—when offline services were suspended. This article investigates the content and forms of online services carried out by university libraries in Jilin Province during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through statistical analysis of online service data, it summarizes how these libraries responded to the emergency, analyzes their current online service capabilities and exposed problems, and proposes recommendations for promoting regional development and improving online services.

## 2. Research on Online Services of University Libraries During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Foreign research on library online services began in the 1970s, reaching its peak in 2006. The research scope is broad and practice types are rich, covering development and implementation of online service systems, application of intelligent technologies in libraries, online service practice and challenges for librarians, online service technologies, and online service evaluation [1,2]. However, searches of the Scopus database show that foreign research on library service models for responding to global health crises is relatively scarce. Currently, only M. Dipti et al. have introduced the practices of university libraries providing online services for teaching staff and students during the COVID-19 pandemic and discussed the challenges faced by such services [3].

Research on library online services in China started later than abroad, gradually increasing since the beginning of this century. Studies have mainly consisted of individual scholars' work, focusing on service innovation, construction of service models, case analysis, and problems and countermeasures [4-7]. After the COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020, the Jilin Provincial University Library Committee required all university libraries to effectively improve their political stance, thoroughly study and comprehensively implement the spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping's important speeches, and regard special legal education and publicity actions related to pandemic prevention and control as the most important legal popularization tasks, demonstrating strong political guarantee for major public emergency management.

Various university libraries responded efficiently, highlighting their educational guidance role by fully utilizing online platforms to carry out publicity work and actively popularizing pandemic prevention knowledge while providing psychological counseling for readers. Online service forms included WeChat public platforms, library homepages, QQ consultation platforms, and information service groups. Service content comprised forwarding official pandemic-related documents and requirements issued by higher authorities; pushing pandemic-related laws and regulations, information updates, and popular prevention knowledge; publicizing touching deeds during the pandemic; recommending books with humanistic care; and promoting online psychological counseling courses. The pan-

ademic prevention publicity and guidance work was timely, comprehensive, and powerful, featuring rich forms and rapid push notifications that demonstrated both political height and humanistic care.

### 3. Forms and Content of Online Services of University Libraries in Jilin Province

#### 3.1 Publicity and Guidance

During the pandemic prevention and control period, libraries' resource guarantee functions fully shifted to online resources. University libraries in Jilin Province leveraged their data resource advantages to ensure smooth access to online resources, demonstrating strong emergency service guarantee capabilities.

Resource guarantee included four main aspects: (1) ensuring normal platform operation; (2) maintaining database access; (3) guaranteeing open resource acquisition; and (4) ensuring smooth off-campus access. To comprehensively guarantee resource utilization for all teachers and students, libraries carried out various online services, including resource integration, resource promotion, document delivery, and VPN usage. For example, the Jilin Provincial University Library Committee closely monitored service dynamics of major databases, organized and coordinated hundreds of high-quality digital resource platforms and 65 publishing units to cooperate fully with libraries, and collected and organized various free resources from databases. This enabled teachers and students across Jilin Province to access diverse academic resources for free without leaving home. Libraries also implemented various forms of document delivery services, with AI-powered services achieving instant response and manual services guaranteeing responses within two hours.

#### 3.2 Resource Guarantee

The Ministry of Education advocated "suspending classes without stopping learning," causing a surge in demand for online teaching support. Universities needed not only assistance with platforms, software, and networks but also access to large quantities of electronic textbooks and teaching references. To ensure stable teaching order and guarantee teaching quality, libraries made every effort to support normal education and teaching activities. They gave full play to the function of "Internet + Education," explored networked, digital, intelligent, and personalized education, utilized online teaching advantages, promoted changes in learning methods, and assisted in "suspending classes without stopping teaching or learning."

Since the launch of online courses, Jilin University Library has provided one-on-one online teaching support through QQ groups, WeChat, email, and other channels. Services include obtaining electronic textbooks, selecting online course platforms, building online courses, and answering questions students encounter during live streaming. This granular support has been widely available to teach-

ers and students. The library also launched a series of information literacy online training courses, providing large-scale services through live streaming and recorded playback. Northeast Normal University Library produced video tutorials on teaching tools for frontline teachers and conducted online training to fully guarantee “suspending classes without stopping learning or teaching.” Major libraries also used online platforms to provide teaching resource delivery services. Online teaching support forms mainly include library websites, WeChat public accounts, and consultation service groups, covering teaching resource guarantee, online teaching training, teaching service consultation, and teaching platform support.

### 3.3 Teaching Support

In supporting research, libraries built upon their foundation of ensuring digital resource access and smooth off-campus channels to actively carry out various online services that boost research work.

Service forms included WeChat public platforms, QQ, WeChat, and email. Services comprised online sci-tech novelty searches, citation search services, online database usage training, online information literacy education, research tool support, professional database organization, special academic resource integration, and remote resource sharing. To maximize the supporting role of science and technology in pandemic prevention and control, libraries integrated and promoted various professional and authoritative pandemic-related resources to comprehensively assist scientific research efforts.

### 3.4 Research Support

During the critical period of pandemic prevention and control, university libraries consistently assumed social responsibility and adhered to correct public opinion guidance while advocating reading to support the pandemic battle. Through official websites, WeChat public platforms, QQ service groups, APPs, and other platforms, they carried out diverse digital reading activities, including book recommendations, online reading, online lectures, audiobooks, reading aloud, and sharing activities. These colorful online cultural activities met the cultural life needs of teachers and students. Jilin University Library’s “Reading Workshop” quickly transformed its activity format during the pandemic, leading students in reading exchanges and sharing through online live streaming to expand their reading horizons.

### 3.5 Reading Promotion

## 4. Data Analysis of Online Services of University Libraries in Jilin Province

After the COVID-19 outbreak, university libraries in Jilin Province actively participated in emergency information services. From January 23 to February 29,

they quickly mobilized for online service work. During the 2020 spring semester, all universities in the province remained in pandemic prevention mode, with teaching service activities conducted entirely online. Libraries explored ways to improve online service capabilities and enhance emergency service guarantees. Through investigations of WeChat public accounts, library homepages, and QQ groups of 33 university libraries in Jilin Province, this study analyzed the online service capabilities of different types of libraries based on statistical data. The surveyed institutions are shown in Table 1 .

**Table 1** List of Surveyed University Libraries in Jilin Province

**Undergraduate Universities (14):** Beihua University, Northeast Electric Power University, Northeast Normal University, Jilin University of Finance and Economics, Jilin University, Jilin Business and Technology College, Jilin Agricultural Science and Technology College, Jilin Normal University, Jilin Medical College, Changchun University, Changchun University of Technology, Changchun University of Science and Technology, Changchun Normal University, Changchun University of Chinese Medicine

**Higher Vocational Colleges (13):** Baicheng Medical College, Jilin Provincial Institute of Education, Jilin Provincial Economic Management Cadre College, Jilin Water Conservancy and Electric Power Vocational College, Jilin Railway Vocational and Technical College, Liaoyuan Vocational and Technical College, Yanbian Vocational and Technical College, Changbai Mountain Vocational and Technical College, Changchun Finance College, Changchun Automobile Industry College, Changchun Information Technology Vocational College, Changchun Medical College, Changchun Vocational and Technical College

**Private and Independent Colleges (6):** Northeast Normal University Humanities College, Changchun University of Finance and Economics, Changchun University of Technology Humanities and Information College, Changguang College, Changchun Architecture College

#### 4.1 Data Analysis Based on Service Content

Our investigation of WeChat public accounts and library homepages revealed that during the pandemic, online service activities mainly included: remote sharing of digital resources, document delivery, special service recommendations, COVID-19 science popularization, online teaching support, online lecture training, and reading promotion activities.

In this survey, remote shared resources counted only databases and resources available for remote access; document delivery counted teaching and research literature delivered; special service recommendations included integrated resources and usage guidance in special topic forms, counted by published articles; COVID-19 science popularization covered safety publicity, psychological counseling, and policies directly related to pandemic control; online teaching support counted only publicly released content on teaching resources, training, and platform support; online lecture training was counted by actual sessions; reading promotion counted only publicly released content. Other announcements were

categorized as “other.” The data are shown in Table 2 .

### **Table 2** Statistics of Online Service Activities

The data show that during the pandemic, the main online service activities were document delivery and online teaching support. Document delivery reached 282,735 articles (average 56,547/month, 8,568/library), while online teaching support reached 67,616 articles (average 13,523/month, 2,049/library).

Document delivery is a long-standing library service. During the pandemic, it ensured literature access for teachers and students through more intensive and flexible forms. Its stable, efficient operation reflects the solid online service foundation accumulated over time and demonstrates libraries’ online service and emergency response capabilities. Online teaching support was launched immediately after the outbreak, starting with 11,078 articles and growing steadily each month. This shows libraries’ basic capability to continuously support university teaching activities online.

During the pandemic, libraries added new services such as COVID-19 science popularization, remote resource sharing, and special recommendations while quickly transforming lecture and training formats and widely carrying out research support. This reflects their ability to rapidly transform service content and forms in emergency management.

## **4.2 Data Analysis Based on University Type**

Analyzing emergency information services by library type reveals differences in online service capabilities. Details are shown in Table 3 .

### **Table 3** Statistics of Online Service Activities by Library Type

All three library types focused on document delivery. Undergraduate university libraries’ services mainly comprised document delivery and online teaching support—the latter being highest among the three types at 4,804 articles per library—plus a certain proportion of remote shared digital resources. Higher vocational college libraries’ main services besides document delivery included special recommendations, COVID-19 science popularization, and reading promotion. Private and independent college libraries had the highest document delivery volume (16,464 articles/library) with relatively large proportions of COVID-19 science popularization.

In terms of total article volume, private and independent college libraries published most, followed by undergraduate university libraries, then higher vocational college libraries. Monthly changes show undergraduate libraries published over 100 articles in the first month and maintained stable output thereafter, demonstrating prominent emergency response capabilities. Private and independent college libraries started with lower volume but increased rapidly, showing strong adaptability. Higher vocational college libraries were relatively weaker in quantity.

### 4.3 Data Analysis on Regularization of Online Services

During the pandemic, libraries' online services increased rapidly, presenting new challenges in content, forms, and capabilities. Online services are becoming regular items rather than temporary emergency measures. Analysis of service quantities in the first half of 2020 reveals temporal evolution and regularization capabilities.

Document delivery and online teaching support show steady growth and stable numbers, demonstrating continuous development capability. Other services started in February, peaked in March, then declined slightly. COVID-19 science popularization remained the main content with nearly 1,000 articles/month, reflecting the pandemic situation. Remote resource sharing and special recommendations decreased monthly but remained at about 600 and over 300 articles/month respectively, showing they have become relatively regular services. Reading promotion peaked in April then continued steadily, demonstrating adaptive transformation and regularization capability.

Notably, online lecture training, though small in quantity, increased gradually in the first three months, gradually forming scale. This shows libraries' determination and capability for regular service transformation, with training being launched within three months and continuously promoted thereafter. Online lectures and training can achieve cross-regional coverage and meet teachers' and students' needs for anytime, anywhere access through playback functions.

## 5. Problems in Online Services of University Libraries in Jilin Province

During the pandemic, university libraries in Jilin Province complied with higher authorities' requirements and their institutions' overall pandemic arrangements, providing strong literature and information resource support for teaching and research, quickly transforming service models, and comprehensively launching online services. They successfully completed phased tasks, demonstrating professional capabilities and rapid response efficiency. However, analysis reveals the following problems:

### 5.1 Incomplete Resource Guarantee System and Imperfect Functions

Although resource guarantee work was completed, problems emerged: scattered data resources, low guarantee rates in some libraries, insufficient electronic textbooks, and duplicate services. Resource procurement is unbalanced among libraries, lacking regional sharing cooperation. Each library's resources are scattered with too many access paths, lacking centralized integration and unified retrieval platforms, which greatly limits effective utilization. Additionally, without good inter-school cooperation platforms, resource integration and push notifications were repeated, and numerous consultations and document deliveries

caused excessive human consumption due to the lack of a unified service platform.

### **5.2 Non-unified Online Service Platforms and Non-intelligent Forms**

Libraries lack a unified online service platform. Current services mainly use WeChat public platforms, QQ groups, WeChat, email, and various teaching/live streaming platforms. Although these met suddenly increased demands in the short term, they suffer from scattered service windows, non-centralized information, low efficiency, and heavy manual reliance. Meanwhile, universities developed their own service systems lacking connectivity with each other and with library platforms, causing information blockages and repeated organization. This heavy manual operation makes it difficult to delineate service categories and personnel, affecting efficiency, preventing full-time response, and generating duplicate work. Too many service forms also limit coverage and affect precision.

### **5.3 Weak Personalized and Precise Service Capabilities**

The concentrated online service practice revealed that different user groups have different needs that cannot be simply divided into teachers/students or teaching/research, as significant differences exist between disciplines, making needs quite personalized. However, personalized services mainly consisted of one-on-one librarian-user connections. While one-on-one services meet individual needs, they are passive processes with limited coverage. Additionally, actively pushed personalized services only involved subjectively integrated resources by discipline or theme, lacking depth, user behavior data support, and precision.

### **5.4 Insufficient Construction of Teaching and Research Software**

University users have large demands for online teaching and research software tools. Libraries usually provide good support for literature management software like EndNote and NoteExpress but lack sufficient support for professional software such as SPSS, AutoCAD, and MatLab for data processing and drawing. They cannot provide effective downloads and training. During the pandemic, use of platforms like Xuexitong and DingTalk increased dramatically, but library support was very limited, with only some libraries providing usage and course-building guidance. Software support and training need strengthening.

### **5.5 Team Construction Needs Improvement**

Online services require librarians to have strong service awareness and capabilities. The pandemic caused rapid increases in online service work covering consultation, resource integration, guarantee, and technical support, requiring strong computer technology, information literacy, and quick learning abilities. However, practices show relatively concentrated service personnel, with team organization focusing on librarians with higher education, better information

literacy, and stronger learning capabilities. Some librarians have weaker knowledge and skills and cannot adapt to requirements. The pandemic exposed serious stratification and disconnection problems in team construction, inhibiting overall service improvement and long-term development.

### **5.6 Uneven Capabilities in Online Service Activities**

Online service activities have extensive content and diverse forms. Data analysis reveals uneven and differentiated capabilities. In terms of content, libraries have higher capabilities for regular services like document delivery with good results. In contrast, new services like online lecture training developed slowly with small quantities. Libraries need to increase efforts to promote new service projects and actively transform. By library type, capabilities are uneven with differentiated content. Undergraduate libraries show balanced capabilities and emergency response, while higher vocational college libraries are relatively weaker.

## **6. Reflections and Prospects**

After the COVID-19 outbreak, university libraries in Jilin Province demonstrated rapid response and strong emergency service and management capabilities. Almost all libraries adjusted work immediately, overcoming resource reserves, service model, and personnel allocation problems. They quickly transformed strategies and ensured smooth resource utilization, teaching support, and training through online services, providing strong information resource guarantee for teaching, research, and campus culture.

Practice summaries also exposed difficulties and problems. Advancing online services, improving capabilities, and enhancing systems remain long-term tasks. Based on Jilin's practices, we propose the following suggestions for domestic university libraries:

### **6.1 Promote Smart Library Construction and Strengthen Smart Service Means**

Smart libraries are school resource sharing centers. Through IoT, cloud computing, and AI, they can integrate heterogeneous, scattered resources, mine user behavior, and provide smarter, more precise online experiences. Smart library construction can effectively improve problems in service forms, precision, coverage, and human resources.

### **6.2 Improve Digital Resource Guarantee Capability and Strengthen Electronic Textbook Systems**

Improving the data resource guarantee system, optimizing subject resource allocation, and supplementing scarce digital resources are foundations for online services. Regional alliance-based electronic textbook and teaching reference system construction can improve electronic textbook guarantee rates, address cur-

rent insufficiencies, enhance relevance to curricula, and achieve co-construction and sharing.

### **6.3 Build Online Service Platforms to Improve Efficiency and Coverage**

Improve existing online service systems by organically integrating multi-level, multi-path dispersed modules. Construct multi-level network service pathways covering teachers, researchers, students, and administrators, strengthening functions like information push, document delivery, and precise subject services. Ultimately build a one-stop, intelligent platform achieving cross-departmental sharing, intelligent demand feedback, improved efficiency, reduced information repetition, and enhanced precision.

### **6.4 Build Shared Cooperation Platforms to Promote Inter-school and Inter-library Cooperation**

Current online services exist as information islands without direct connections between schools and libraries or among libraries, causing repeated construction and fragmented services. Building shared cooperation platforms between schools and libraries, among regional libraries, and among national university libraries can avoid isolation, reduce repeated construction, minimize duplication, and maximize information sharing and service co-construction. Regional sharing platforms also help address uneven capabilities, narrow service gaps, reduce human capital, and improve efficiency.

### **6.5 Improve Librarian Service Capabilities and Optimize Personnel Structure**

Librarian capabilities guarantee service levels and affect long-term development. The pandemic exposed gaps in online service capabilities and talent construction problems. The current librarian structure has gaps, with a portion of capable librarians bearing most online service work. Libraries must emphasize team construction and comprehensively improve skills to adapt to changing service situations.

### **6.6 Promote New Online Service Models and Expand Content**

During the pandemic, libraries actively responded and shifted service positions. However, forms and content haven't achieved complete transformation. Services still focus on document delivery and resource recommendation. Libraries should take online lecture training and reading promotion as breakthrough points for expanding service space, upgrading and promoting new online service models in terms of forms and technical platforms.

The sudden pandemic gave university libraries an opportunity to test service and management capabilities. They successfully completed resource guarantee

and service support, but this is only a current victory. COVID-19 won't be humanity's last crisis; we must prepare for more global challenges by strengthening library and information service management measures and comprehensively improving emergency capabilities. New forms of smart, innovative, digital, and online services have arrived. University libraries must adapt to new era requirements, actively reflect, forge ahead, promote smart library construction, improve resource guarantee, build service platforms, construct organic teams, and enhance service capabilities.

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## Author Contributions

**Yu Ping:** Coordinated work, designed propositions, guided ideas;

**Ge Lin:** Data acquisition, material organization;

**Diao Yunmei:** Data acquisition, material organization, paper drafting;

**Han Shuang:** Data analysis, paper writing.

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*Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.*

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