

Empowering Communities through Webinars: a Case Study of University Library Outreach at Wayamba University Library Network

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This case study explores the use of webinars as a strategic research support service at the Wayamba University Library Network (WULN), with particular emphasis on their implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study aims to examine how WULN adapted its library and outreach services to support academic research and knowledge dissemination among diverse communities through web-based seminars. Specifically, the study evaluates participation and engagement across a variety of webinar topics, considering key factors such as accessibility, digital literacy, inclusivity, user satisfaction, and ethnographic insights. The research analyzed data collected from webinars conducted by WULN from November 2021 and March 2024. The sessions were designed to enhance academic and research skills among participants and were structured to facilitate easy access and high levels of engagement. A mixed-method approach was adopted, integrating quantitative attendance data with qualitative feedback from participants to gain a comprehensive understanding of webinar effectiveness. A total of 1676 individuals participated in these webinars. Findings from the study indicated that webinars can significantly contribute to the transformation of library services by extending traditional service boundaries and fostering digital confidence and engaged learning. Many participants highlighted the accessibility and convenience of webinars, which allowed them to benefit from academic content without geographical constraints. However, the study also identified several limitations, including inconsistent attendance, technological barriers, and the need for better planning and delivery mechanisms. In response to these challenges, the study recommends the systematic collection of user feedback, the development of librarian training programs focused on online content delivery, and the removal of language-related access barriers to broaden the audience base. These improvements would support the sustained and effective use of webinars as an innovative tool for academic and community outreach. The WULN case study ultimately demonstrates that when thoughtfully implemented, webinars have the potential to overcome physical limitations and reposition university libraries as agile, responsive partners in education, research, and community engagement.

Keywords: *Community empowerment; Digital learning; Library outreach; University library; Webinars*