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Strategies for Improving Library Services and User Engagement at Kerala University Library

Joyal K Varghese*, Subin R S, Anjusha T and J R Satluj

Department of Library & Information Science,
University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram

***Corresponding Author**

Joyal K Varghese, Department of Library & Information Science, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram.

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Abstract

This paper explored the current state of library services at Kerala University Library in enhancing user engagement. This study examines strategies for revitalizing library services, integration of digital tools and then suggests alternative revenue generation models. Analyze the library usage of Kerala university library from 2015 to 2022. The goal is to suggest a framework that can reverse the decline in library usage, modernization of library services, and development of new user engagement initiatives and to increase user satisfaction. Furthermore, the paper explores potential revenue generation strategies, including partnerships, grants, and innovative library services that can sustain long-term operations. By analyzing current trends and adapting them to the Kerala University context, this paper aims to propose a practical roadmap for transforming the library into a vibrant, sustainable resource hub and how the Kerala University Library can innovate to meet the evolving needs of the users in the digital age.

Keywords: Revitalizing Library, Library Services, User Engagement, Revenue Generation, Kerala University Library

1. Introduction

Kerala University library play a pivotal role in supporting the academic and research endeavors of both students and faculty members. The Kerala University Library (KUL), established in 1942, is the oldest and biggest university library in Kerala and is situated adjacent to the University Senate Hall campus in the Thiruvananthapuram city. It stocks over 3, 50,000 books (growing at 5000 titles annually) and subscribes to nearly 500 journals/ periodicals/ magazines. It also offers digital information services such as UGC Info net. Among its special collections, the Kerala Studies is a unique one. The special collections also include Women's Studies, Government Publications, General Biographies, UN and World Bank Publications, bound volumes of newspapers and journals and rare books. It is the only library in Kerala which serves as a depository of UN and World Bank publications. In an increasingly digital and dynamic educational environment, academic libraries are facing substantial challenges to remain relevant, accessible, and financially sustainable. The Kerala University Library, like many academic libraries, must navigate the pressures of shrinking budgets, evolving user needs,

and rapid technological advancements. To maintain its critical role as a resource hub for learning and research, the Kerala University Library must adapt by revitalizing its services, enhancing user engagement, and exploring sustainable funding models.

1.1. Challenges Faced

With the increasing availability of digital resources many people now prefer online resources reducing the need for physical library. Younger generations show preference for digital media and online entertainment which leads to less frequent use of traditional libraries. The COVID-19 pandemic led to library closure and shift to online services as people adjusted to virtual resources. Some surveys suggest that libraries may not be keeping up with the changing demands of users, such as offering more engaging digital tools or community-centered programs.

1.2. Revitalizing Library Services

Involves not only modernizing physical infrastructure but also embracing digital transformation. With an increasing number of users accessing information remotely, the library must leverage

digital resources, such as e-books, online journals, and digital archives, to meet the growing demand for access to information. Furthermore, libraries must become vibrant centers for learning and collaboration, offering not just books but also technology-driven services, workshops, and support for research activities.

1.3. Enhancing User Engagement

It is another crucial aspect of revitalizing library services. Universities today consist of a diverse group of students and faculty, each with unique needs and expectations from library services. Engaging these users through personalized experiences, effective communication, and active involvement in library governance can ensure that the library remains a vital part of their academic lives. It is essential to move beyond traditional transactional relationships to a more interactive and community-centered approach.

1.4. Sustainable Funding Models / Revenue Mobilization

These are vital for ensuring the long-term survival and growth of the library. With traditional funding sources like government grants and institutional budgets under pressure, libraries must explore alternative revenue streams. These could include establishing partnerships with publishers, creating endowment funds, offering paid services such as workshops and training, and leveraging alumni donations. A combination of internal revenue generation and external funding can help the Kerala University Library develop a sustainable financial model that ensures continued access to resources and services.

2. Review of Literature

This review of literature synthesizes key research findings from various contexts. A great deal of research has focused on understanding and implementing best practices in libraries, but the emphasis has now shifted towards their essentialization.

Awotola and Olowolagba (2018) suggest that the effectiveness and quality of academic libraries are closely linked to several key factors, including staffing, resources, facilities, and physical space. According to their research, these elements play a crucial role in determining how well a library serves its academic community [1].

Atuase and Malukeka (2022) emphasizes the importance of marketing library resources as a key strategy for effective service delivery. According to them, the ability of libraries to provide comprehensive and targeted services to specific user groups plays a central role in determining their relevance and importance. Marketing efforts by libraries are aimed at showcasing the value and quality of the services they offer, ultimately enticing users to engage with the library's resources and services [2].

Asemi et al. (2020) conducted a review of prior studies, highlighting the utility of intelligent systems, particularly expert systems, in libraries. Expert systems are AI-driven technologies designed to mimic the decision-making and problem-solving behaviors of

expert librarians which can assist in areas such as cataloging, user queries, resource management, and decision-making processes within the library and information sector [3].

Schrettenbrunner (2020), suggests that organizations that rapidly adopt and utilize emerging technologies, particularly through the integration of AI into their products and processes, are more likely to succeed. On the other hand, those that fail to accelerate the virtualization of their operations and adopt AI technologies may struggle or face a bleak future [4].

Bell and Goulding (2022) highlight best practices, such as mobile libraries offering a wide range of digitally inclusive services, which enhance user and librarian engagement [5].

3. Objectives

1. Analyze library usage of Kerala university library from 2015 to 2022.
2. To examine the current state of library services at Kerala University Library.
3. To explore strategies for modernizing library services.
4. To analyze methods for enhancing user engagement.
5. To provide strategies and recommendations for the revitalization of Kerala University Library.
6. To investigate sustainable funding models for Kerala University Library.

4. Data Source and Methodology

Data for the study of user engagement were obtained from the library usage reports of the annual report books from the reference section of the Kerala university library and remaining data from university of Kerala's official website, for a period of 8 years from 2015 to 2022 [6].

Copies of a self- designed questionnaire were distributed amongst a randomly selected sample of 200 users of Kerala university library. The questionnaire comprises 11 close-ended questions which focus on understanding user's needs, preferences and ideas for enhancing library experience and one open-ended question used to elicit more in-depth ideas. Understanding the requirement of enhancing library services, user engagement and exploring sustainable funding models was the major goal of questionnaire. Data were gathered in the month of November 2024. The data was analyzed using Microsoft Office Excel.

5. Data Analysis

5.1. Year Wise Statistics of Book Issuance (2015-2022)

Table 1 and Graph 1 shows the yearly book issuance status from 2015 to 2022 which reveals a significant decline over the eight-year period. The data shows that in 2015 the book issuance was about 68289 but after the COVID-19 pandemic the issuance of books went down by 26772 in 2022 which is far below the half of the issuance in 2015.

Year	Total no. of Books Issued
2015	68289
2016	71447
2017	60889
2018	48269
2019	45790
2020	12861
2021	17127
2022	26772

Table 1: Year Wise Issuance of Books

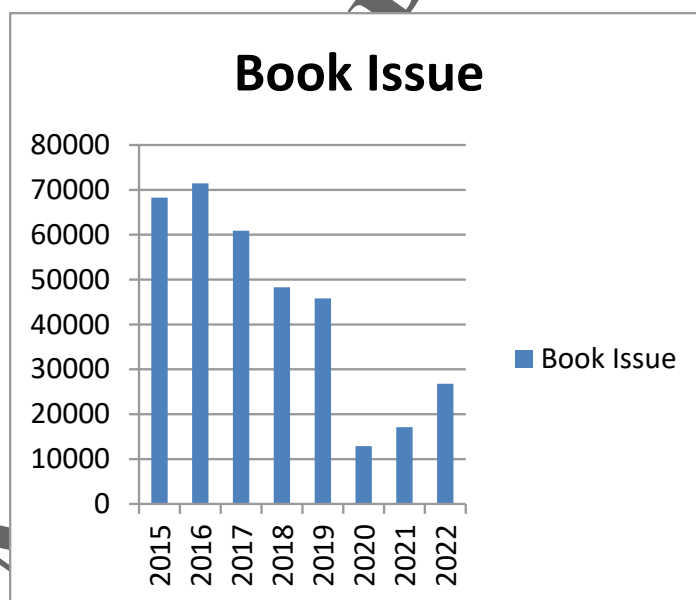


Figure 1: Annual Book Issuance

5.2. Year Wise Data for New Memberships

Table 2 and Figure 2 shows library membership trends from 2015 to 2022 and reveals a gradual decrease in new memberships.

This shows the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and the increased competition of online resources in the digital era.

Year	Students	Research scholars	Teachers	Institutional members	Non-teaching staff	University staff	Eminent scholar	Graduate public	Total	Membership renewal	Membership Cancellation
2015	2307	590	187	5	15	2	2	1654	4762	2352	3850
2016	2223	194	81	4	21	2	0	1082	3607		
2017	3396	191	54	15	147	60	0	829	4692	1922	2549
2018	3172	211	41	0	92	1	1	862	4387	1783	3670
2019	2643	234	53	0	47	3	1	788	3769	1862	3679
2020	429	52	17	0	21	4	4	223	750	722	2854
2021	2396	166	35	2	37	2	3	362	3003	996	2482
2022	2520	142	24	1	41	2	1	793	3523	1055	1649

Table 2: Year Wise New Memberships, Renewal and Cancellation

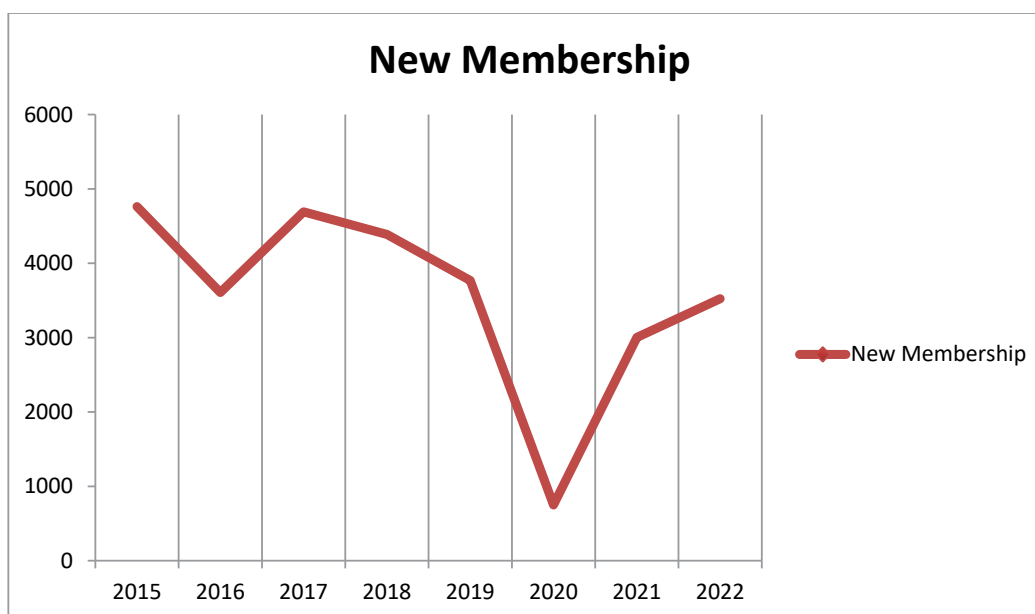


Figure 2: Status of New Memberships from 2015 to 2022

5.3. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 3 provides the age and gender demographics of respondents. Age demographics typically help identify the primary user groups and their distinct needs. An analysis was made into the age-wise distribution of the respondents as it affects the information seeking behavior among the users in digital era. As many as 72 (36%)

respondents belonged to 18-24. The number of respondents aged above 35+ was only 15 (7.5%). The majority 113 (56.5%) of the respondents at the Kerala university library belong to age group between 24-30. Even though both male and female user engagement is nearly similar but numbers show a higher engagement of female users with 54% to the 46% of male users.

Age group	No. of Respondents	Percentage
18-24	72	36.00%
24-30	113	56.50%
35+	15	7.50%
Total	200	100.00%

Gender	Respondent	Percentage
Male	92	46.00%
Female	108	54.00%
Total	200	100.00%

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

5.4. Library Usage (Frequency of Library Visits)

Table 4 describes the frequency of Respondent's library visit. The analysis shows that 61% of the users visit library weekly that shows a sign of nearly good engagement. Only 13% users visit the

library on daily basis and about 26% of the users visit occasionally or rarely which suggest the need to improve the awareness of services provided.

Frequency	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Weekly	122	61.00%
Daily	26	13.00%
Occasionally	52	26.00%
Total	200	100.00%

Table 4: Frequency of using Library

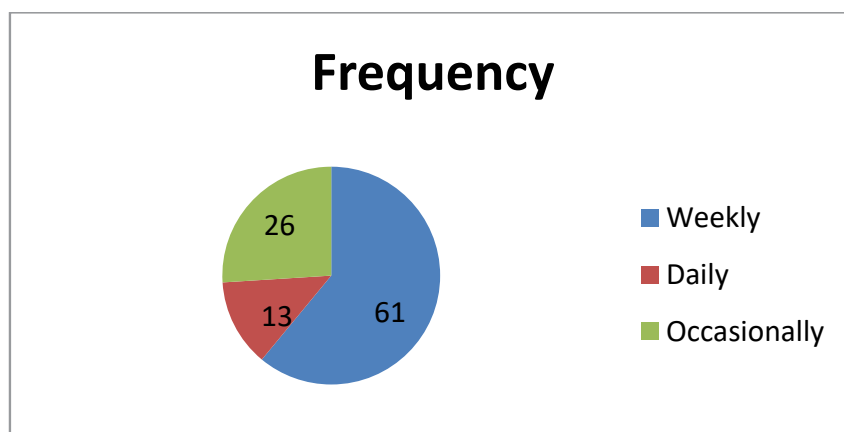


Figure 3: Frequency of Library visits by respondents

5.5. Services Used Most Frequently

Table 5 shows that 69% of respondents use printed resource like books, journals etc., as their preference but suggested for improvement in digital resources as well and 24% preferred online/digital resources like e-books, e-journals and other digital services which signals a need for further investment in digital resources and

only 7% respondents showed interest in study rooms/spaces which could indicate a need for increased visibility or better promotion of these offerings. The data shows that despite the advantages of digital media over print media, the respondents preferred physical books.

Service	Respondents	Percentage
Online Resource	48	24.00%
Printed Resource	138	69.00%
Study Rooms/Spaces	14	7.00%
Total	200	100.00%

Table 5: Services Preferred by Users

5.6. Satisfaction with Library Services

Table 6 describes to what extent the respondents feel the importance of certain resources to be excellent or good in Kerala university library. For majority of respondents printed source are the most preferred. Around 56% of user's rated printed resource is excellent and 44% rated the physical resources good. None of the users felt unsatisfied.

As the digital resource is vital nowadays nearly 35% users rated excellent for the availability of digital resources and 65% rated

good and this indicates the lack of awareness among the users about the services. 36% of users rated study spaces excellent and 64% rated good, this suggests the library may need to enhance its study environment. 58% user's rated staff assistance excellent and 42% rated good which indicates improving support systems could be an area for immediate improvement. Majority of the users are satisfied with the overall resource adequacy with 55% rated excellent and 45% rated good. But overall resource enhancement is necessary.

Service	Excellent	Percentage	Good	Percentage
Printed Resources	112	56.00%	88	44.00%
Digital Resources	70	35.00%	130	65.00%
Study Spaces	72	36.00%	128	64.00%
Staff Assistance	116	58.00%	84	42.00%
Overall Resource Adequacy	110	55.00%	90	45.00%

Table 6: User Satisfaction with Library Services

5.7. Barriers to Library Usage

Table 7 depicts that majority of the respondents about 56% highlighted the major barrier to library usage is the lack of awareness of services offered by Kerala university library. 22.5% of respondents face challenges due to the library's operating

hours and suggested to extend the hours. And 21.5% users felt uncomfortable about the study spaces, citing this as a challenge suggests an urgent need for renovation, better furniture, or more study options.

Barriers	Respondents	Percentage
Limited operating hours	45	22.50%
Uncomfortable study spaces	43	21.50%
Lack of Awareness about services	112	56.00%
Total	200	100.00%

Table 7: Barriers to Library Usage

5.8. Sustainable Funding Models

As Alternative Funding Preferences, a significant portion of Respondents around 45% showed high interest in hosting events (book sales, charity galas, or community fairs) in the library. 38% agreed for renting the library space (conference, meetings

etc) to generate additional revenue. But only a limited number of respondents 5% showed interest in paid access to premium resources (journal, database etc) whereas 12% of users highlighted the need for alumni donation programs for raising the library fund.

Funding Models	Respondents	Percentage
Alumni Donation	24	12.00%
Paid Access to Premium Resources	10	5.00%
Renting Library Space	76	38.00%
Hosting Events	90	45.00%
Total	200	100.00%

Table 8: Funding Models

6. Findings

- The data on library book issuance and new memberships from 2015 to 2022 reveals a significant decline over the period and COVID -19 pandemic has affected drastically in the decline.
- The findings reveal that Kerala University Library's user base is primarily composed of 24-30 age groups, with only a minimal representation from 35+ age group members.
- While a majority of users report satisfaction with the printed resource. A gap was noted in the awareness of digital resources, indicating a need for expanding this resource.
- Improved Digital Resources: While some users are satisfied with the current offerings, there is an evident preference for more digital content, including access to more online journals, research databases, and e-books. This reflects the growing reliance on digital resources for academic research and study.
- Study Spaces and Environment: The physical space of the library has garnered mostly positive feedback. However, there is room for improvement, especially regarding the comfort and diversity of study spaces.
- Customer Service: While many users expressed satisfaction with the assistance provided by library staff, there is still room for improvement in terms of personalized research support and guidance for new students or infrequent library users.
- Limited Operating Hours: The existing operating hours were seen as restrictive by several users, who require extended hours to access resources. Many respondents expressed a preference for longer operational hours.
- Workshops and Training Programs: Many users expressed interest in more workshops aimed at improving research skills, digital literacy, and information retrieval.
- Improved Communication: Many were unaware of certain services or resources available, which indicates that more effective communication strategies (e.g., newsletters, social media, and posters) are needed.
- Alumni Donations and Sponsorships: Many users acknowledged the potential of Alumni donations.
- Paid Access to Premium Resources: Some respondents suggested that the library could offer paid access to specific resources (such as premium journals and databases).
- Willingness to Contribute Financially- A surprising finding was the relatively high willingness of users to contribute financially to the library. Many respondents indicated that they would be willing to pay for premium services.

7. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight significant insights into the usage patterns and engagement of Kerala University Library's users. A large proportion of respondents, report frequent usage of the library. However, a noticeable portion of the respondents, visit the library only occasionally or rarely. Interestingly, the study also revealed a marked preference for the online resources (e-books, journals, and digital databases). Access to online resources has become indispensable for high-quality, up-to-date education. These findings suggest that Kerala University Library's users are adapting to the evolving academic landscape, where digital tools and flexible access to resources are paramount.

Kerala University Library's physical spaces were generally well-regarded, with users appreciating the study environments provided. The satisfaction with study spaces is promising, as comfortable, conducive study environments are crucial for fostering academic productivity. This could involve expanding study zones for group work, quiet study areas, or even introducing flexible furniture arrangements that accommodate different study styles. The limited operating hours were also a significant barrier to engagement, especially among members who may require access to the library outside standard hours. Training on information literacy, research methodologies, and software tools would help users make better use of library resources. The demand for improved communication is another significant finding. Many users were unaware of certain services or resources offered by the library, such as workshops or digital databases.

One of the most promising findings of this study is the potential for Kerala University Library to diversify its funding sources. These models, often used in academic libraries worldwide, could provide a sustainable revenue stream to support the library's growth and development. The openness expressed by some respondents to contribute towards premium services signals an opportunity for the library to introduce voluntary contributions. However, the core principle of maintaining free access to essential resources for all must remain intact to avoid barriers to equity in education.

8. Strategies and Recommendations for Revitalizing Library Services, Improve User Engagement and Revenue Mobilization at Kerala University Library enhancing digital infrastructure and access

- Expand and Improve Digital Resources by increasing the acquisition of e-books, journals, audio books and online databases to meet the growing demand. Invest in digital repositories and ensure that access is seamless both on-campus and off-campus for remote learners.
- Partner with major academic publishers to secure more affordable or free access to e-books, journals, and research databases.
- Explore open-access resources and repositories to supplement existing collections.
- Introduce more specialized digital tools for research purposes (e.g., data analysis software, citation management tools).
- Integrate new technologies to enhance user experiences.

offering VR (Virtual Reality) experiences.

- Use of AI based algorithms to suggest books, research papers, and resources based on user preferences and past usage patterns.
- Implement customized alerts for upcoming events, and new acquisitions.
- Launch a library app that provides easy access to catalog searches, event calendars, and updates on library hours.

Expanding and Improving Physical Library Spaces

- Updating existing library spaces to accommodate diverse study needs, focusing on individual quiet study zones, collaborative spaces, and tech- friendly environments.
- Redesign certain sections of the library to include flexible workspaces with moveable furniture to support both individual and group work.
- Invest in better lighting, comfortable seating, and additional power outlets and ensure good ambience and attractive environment for extended study sessions.
- Add technological upgrades such as high-speed Wi-Fi, charging stations.

Extending Library Operating Hours

- Extend operating hours and Introduce self-service stations for library checkouts during extended hours, with necessary security measures.

Developing Comprehensive User Training and Support Services

- Provide more robust training programs on using library resources effectively, particularly for new students and researchers.
- Organize information literacy workshops that teach students how to efficiently search, evaluate, and use academic resources (e.g., databases, e-books, and journals).
- Offer specialized workshops on research methodologies, citation management, and data analysis tools to support advanced users.

Improving Communication and Awareness

- Develop a stronger online presence that includes digital channels (social media, email newsletters, and website) and physical communication (posters, flyers, and in-library signage).
- Libraries can organize events that attract people from diverse age groups and backgrounds. These might include author talks, educational workshops, coding classes, or after-school programs for children. These programs can help build long-term user loyalty and attract new audiences.
- Collaborative efforts with educational institutions can help introduce students to libraries as vital research and resource hubs. By integrating library services into academic curricula and offering students incentives, libraries can cultivate a new generation of library users.
- Specialized programs for niche interests, like book clubs or hobbyist groups, can also create deeper connections with users.

Exploring New and Sustainable Funding Models

- Launch an alumni membership program that encourages contributing to the library's development.

- Partner with academic publishers to provide discounted or institutional access to journals and databases in exchange for collaborations on special events or workshops.
- Library should actively research grant opportunities and submit proposals to funding bodies. Grants for digital literacy programs, innovation in education, or community building could provide significant financial support for library upgrades.
- Apply for grants from government agencies dedicated to promoting library infrastructure and resource development.
- Research Grants: Actively pursue research grants from governmental bodies, NGOs, and academic institutions to fund library services that support research and innovation.
- Crowd funding: Run crowd funding campaigns for specific library initiatives (e.g., refurbishing study spaces, purchasing new research tools, or expanding the digital collection).
- Expanding the membership to public from matriculation level.
- Paid Access to premium resources like specialized journals or research databases for users willing to pay a subscription fee. This should be offered alongside core services that remain free for students.
- Offer library spaces for conferences, academic events, and meetings as a source of revenue.
- Libraries can host events like book sales, silent auctions, charity galas, or community fairs to raise funds. These events not only generate revenue but also raise awareness about the library's programs and initiatives. Hosting themed events (e.g., "Library Innovation Day" or "Tech Talk Night") can attract more attendees and make it easier to promote library projects.
- Assistance for automation of library in institutions by providing new library trainees that will generate revenue as well as experience to the new trainee.

Monitoring and Evaluating Library Services and Feedback

- Establish clear performance indicators for library services (e.g., usage rates of digital resources, number of users attending workshops, satisfaction ratings).
- Use data analytics to monitor trends in library resource usage, helping to identify which resources are most utilized and which require expansion or improvement.
- Conduct annual reviews of library services, collecting input from students, faculty, and staff to ensure the library is evolving in line with user expectations.
- Implement suggestion boxes both digitally and physically in the library.
- Introduce regular surveys and feedback forms to gather users' opinions on library services, resource availability, and space usage to ensure the library is evolving in line with user expectations.

9. Conclusion

The state of Kerala has seen increasing digital literacy, and libraries must cater to the demands for digital resources while also ensuring access to physical collections. The integration of mobile access, cloud storage, and the digitization of local resources are critical areas for Kerala University Library's growth. Additionally, building partnerships with local educational institutions and publishers can provide new avenues for collaboration and revenue generation. This study has provided valuable insights into the current state of Kerala University Library and its role in supporting academic excellence. The findings reveal that while the library is an essential resource for many students and researchers, there are significant opportunities for improvement in user engagement, service delivery, and revenue mobilization. Similarly, although the library offers a range of digital resources, users expressed the need for greater access to specialized materials and more user-friendly online services.

The research also highlighted the importance of adapting library services to meet the evolving needs of its users. By implementing the strategies identified in this study will contribute to the library's financial sustainability, ensuring that it remains a central hub for learning, research, and academic support in the future. Revitalizing Kerala University Library is not only about enhancing its services but also about embracing a broader vision of accessibility, user engagement, and sustainable growth. The library has the potential to become an even more integral part of the academic experience. The findings and recommendations from this research provide a solid foundation for ongoing development and offer a roadmap for ensuring that the library continues to evolve in response to the changing landscape of users need.

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