

THE CONSORTIUM OF TANZANIA UNIVERSITY AND RESEARCH LIBRARIES (COTUL)



PROCEEDINGS OF THE 5TH COTUL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

**HELD ON 6TH - 10TH NOVEMBER
2023 AT JALNIMI TOURIST HOTEL,
IN SINGIDA, TANZANIA**

THEME
“LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES IN THE DIGITAL ERA”

ISSN: 2953-2566

eISSN: 2953-2574

Edited by

**Sydney E. Msonde, Kelefa T. Mwantimwa, Vincent T. Msonge
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Published by

Dar es Salaam University Press (DUP)

P. O. Box 35182

Dar es Salaam

Tanzania

@ COTUL, 2024

ISSN 2953-2566

eISSN 2953-2574

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DEPLOYMENT OF MY LIBRARY ON FINGER TIPS APPLICATION AT MZUMBE UNIVERSITY: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the deployment of My Library On Finger Tips (MyLOFT) at Mzumbe University (MU). Specifically, it investigates users' awareness and perception of MyLOFT, its promotion, challenges, and strategies to maximise usage of the MyLOFT application. The study employed a blended methodology, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, to analyse 67 academic staff members' experiences with the MyLOFT application at the selected University. Sample size determination utilised PPS and purposive sampling methods. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 20 and presented in graphs and tables, while qualitative data underwent content analysis and were presented in quoted statements. The study reveals that e-resource usage at MU was low before MyLOFT deployment, but increased after deployment. Word of mouth and email were effective in creating awareness and MyLOFT Student Ambassadors promoted the application. Users found features like Multiple Access and Save Content Off and Online as the most appealing. Challenges identified include technical issues, navigation difficulties, unclear instructions, mobile compatibility, and security. To maximise the MyLOFT utilisation, the application should include personalised content, resolve technical issues, utilising student ambassadors for promotion, incentivising usage, and improving the interface. The University should add relevant databases. Effective communication, user feedback, and impact measurement are essential for continual optimisation. This study therefore explores e-resources remote access applications in Tanzanian academic libraries, filling a research gap and providing valuable insights for future developments.

Keywords: *Off-campus access, remote access to e-resources, MyLOFT, electronic resources, remote authentication, Single Sign On, information discovery tools*

1 Introduction

Accessing electronic resources remotely has gained significant importance, particularly within academic and research environments, facilitating individuals to retrieve extensive information and scholarly materials from any location globally. Remote access to library electronic resources has its origins dating back to 1980 (DeSakar, 2015). Initially, remote access relied on technologies such as proxy servers, VPN, Athens authentication and Shibboleth authentication (Bracke, 2001). In 1997, the University of Arizona pioneered the creation of EZproxy to cater to the needs of off-campus students (Bunton, 2017). The significance of these tools was further emphasised during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to universities' closures in early 2020, prompting libraries to seek solutions to support remote users (Zhou, 2022). The pandemic played a vital role in accelerating the adoption of remote access tools for electronic resources. As highlighted by Raghavaiah and Srikanth (2022), libraries transitioned to online access platforms to provide resources to their members, with subscribed resources being made available through virtual private network (VPN) systems. In response, libraries turned to proxy technologies like Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), and EzProxy to connect with their users, as noted by Babbar et al. (2022). A recent study by Duragappa and Chandrashekara (2022) identified various software solutions created for remote access, including EZproxy, remote CC Proxy, Squid Proxy, RHN proxy, Kinimbus, Remotelog, Open Athens and the newly introduced MyLOFT.

The utilisation of remote access applications in accessing e-resources holds substantial significance in enhancing the accessibility of library e-resources for off-campus students and faculty members alike. The e-resource remote access applications effectively eliminate previous access constraints, encompassing methods such as Internet Protocol (IP) address-based entry, password and username requisites, URL tokens, and Organisation Access Numbers (OANs).

The implementation of MyLOFT at Mzumbe University (MU) commenced with a trial period of 20 days for the library staff, followed by positive feedback leading to a subscription. The off-campus access was introduced in August 2022, with 2240 registered users and a 26% adoption rate. To raise awareness of the application, monthly training sessions and usage guides were provided.

The decision to adopt MyLOFT at MU was influenced by the low usage of subscribed e-resources, an increase in the number of off-campus students and the relocation of the Faculty of Law to areas without library services. These factors prompted the University to enhance e-resource accessibility, aligning with recommendations from the MU Internal Audit report. This paper explores the deployment of the MyLOFT application at MU, exploring the challenges and prospects associated with this endeavour.

2 Statement of the Problem

In the contemporary university setting, the reliance on e-resources by both students and lecturers has become paramount. A challenge arises because many university members, including students, researchers and lecturers, are not physically on campus, where access to resources is usually based on IP addresses (Nagi & Parmar, 2021). This separation restricts access to e-resources, primarily due to subscription limitations tied to the institution's IP address (Punchihewa et al., 2014). Several scholars have identified reasons for the deployment of remote access tools, including Awoyemi & Awoyemi (2021) who noted that such applications allow users to access e-resources from anywhere by eliminating the need for physical visits to libraries. Nyakweba (2016) noted that the remote access tool facilitates quicker and more efficient searching and retrieval of information, saving users valuable time in their research processes. Mufungulwa (2022) suggests that remote access tools for e-resources have become increasingly essential due to the rising popularity of remote learning and research, particularly in response to global events like the COVID-19 pandemic. Chandrashekara (2022) highlights the cost-effectiveness of remote access, which diminishes the financial burden of procuring and upkeeping physical books and journals. Chidambaram (2021) noted that e-resources remote tools allow users to customise their search preferences, save searches, and set up alerts for new publications. This application provides a unified interface, granting users access to all library-subscribed e-resources, whether on- or off-campus.

So far MU has adopted the MyLOFT application for one year, offering convenient access to a wide array of library e-resources, including databases, e-journals, and e-Books. The full deployment took place in August 2022, and in August 2023, the University initiated an assessment of the deployment process with a focus on achieving Value for Money (VFM) and Return on Investment (ROI). The significance of this study lies in its examination of the MyLOFT application deployment, the identification of associated challenges, and the proposal of a

strategic way forward. Ultimately, the study aims to demonstrate that effective management of MyLOFT can profoundly impact the day-to-day academic activities of both students and academic staff.

3 Study Objectives

The general objective of this study is to assess the effectiveness of MyLOFT at MU, encompassing the identification of challenges and the proposal of potential solutions. The specific objectives are:

RO1: To establish users' awareness of the MyLOFT application at MU.

RO2: To ascertain users' perceptions of the MyLOFT application at MU/To determine mechanisms used by the library in promoting the MyLOFT application.

RO3: To establish challenges in the use of the MyLOFT application at MU.

RO4: To recommend strategies to be used in maximising the usage of MyLOFT at the MU Library.

4 Literature Review

4.1 Deployment of E-resources Remote Access Tools

Typically, in most libraries, access to subscribed electronic resources is provided within specific IP ranges or an intranet environment, limiting access to individuals within the campus premises (Dixit, 2018). MyLOFT access simplifies the process for users by providing convenient access to multiple resources that the library has subscribed to. It functions as an intermediary server, bridging the gap between users and the library's e-resources databases. When users connect to MyLOFT, it subsequently establishes connections on their behalf to the library's licensed databases, retrieving web pages and delivering them back to the users. This system also performs a verification check when users click on links to online library resources, determining whether the user's computer is located on- or off-campus.

To enable remote access to e-resources, libraries must first install the necessary application on their servers (Naik & Machado, 2023). Concurrently, library users are required to install this application on their respective devices for remote access to e-resources (Shikongo, 2021). Subsequently, the remote access application's URL should be made available on the institution's website and library portal. Users will then receive the URL for the e-resources remote access application, along with a unique login ID and password, enabling them to access electronic resources remotely. To ensure user identity verification, libraries can employ various

authentication methods such as federated authentication, email domain-based access and registration ID-based access. Additionally, libraries can activate their remote access through protocols like CAS (Central Authentication Service), Shibboleth and other similar mechanisms (Breeding, 2021).

A study by Namdeo, et al. (2021) identified three primary motivations for libraries to implement remote access to e-resources. Firstly, it was emphasised that offering remote access aligns with the contemporary goals of educational institutions and libraries, serving as an effective means to optimise the utilisation of library e-resources; this is also seconded by Namdeo, et al. (2021) as quoted in (Kattimani, 2022). Secondly, the study highlighted the critical role of remote access during the COVID-19 pandemic, when governments worldwide enforced lockdowns as a precautionary measure against the spread of the coronavirus. Lastly, the study underscored that remote access to e-resources becomes especially valuable in situations characterised by geographical and temporal barriers, contributing to bridging knowledge disparities.

Baikady and Jessy (2014) noted that the increase in university enrollments has led to a shortage of on-campus accommodation facilities. Consequently, a significant proportion of students now live off-campus. To ensure that these off-campus students have access to essential library resources, the implementation of remote access tools has become imperative. Their study also identified another compelling rationale for libraries to adopt remote access tools. Universities have increasingly initiated online programmes, necessitating libraries to subscribe to such applications to fulfil the evolving information requirements of their students and faculty populations. This shift in educational delivery methods underscores the growing importance of remote access solutions in modern academic settings.

4.2 MyLOFT Services and Features

Scholarly research conducted by various authors has identified key characteristics of the library remote access platforms. According to Dixit (2018), these platforms feature a branded and customised interface tailored to meet the specific needs of the institution. Borteye et al., (2022) further emphasise that the platforms offer a user-friendly web portal and mobile application to facilitate seamless access to electronic resources.

Dhananjay (2022) observed that library remote access platforms provide a unified search interface that covers all resource types, including databases, e-books, journals, and repositories. They also integrate a Web OPAC with an A-Z listing of all digital collections and offer customised off-campus access. According to Singh and Kumar (2022), a remote access platform is available around the clock, allowing users to access e-resources from anywhere and on any device. Nalumaga et al., (2022) note that these platforms support open architecture for seamless integration with online education tools and feature robust security controls to prevent unauthorized access.

D'silva and Balasubramanian (2022) further highlighted that these remote access applications centralise user management and usage monitoring, streamlining these tasks from a single location. They also generate customised reports to cater to the specific needs of the library department. Additionally, Borteye et al. (2023) pointed out the intriguing capability of saving content and accessing it offline.

Yohannan and Balasubramanian (2021) revealed that users can directly access databases, e-books the latest journal articles subscribed by the library. They also receive daily news feeds and updates from their favourite blogs, news sites and websites. Furthermore, Nalumaga et al. (2022) described how users can tag content for easy searching, and offline reading, and organise content into folders for reference. They can also employ a text highlighter to mark, summarise, and share important notes from articles and content.

4.3 MyLOFT, Single-Sign-On a Remote Login Solution to E-resources

MyLOFT platform functions as a centralised remote access gateway, enabling users to connect seamlessly to a wide array of subscribed electronic resources provided by the library. MyLOFT simplifies the access process for off-campus and external users by requiring them to input their institution-provided usernames and passwords.

The implementation of MyLOFT Single-Sign-On as a remote login solution for accessing MU e-resources has introduced a streamlined and efficient approach for users. With this application, users only need to authenticate once, granting them access to various e-resources without the need to repeatedly enter login credentials for each service. This solution aims to enhance user convenience, reduce authentication complexities, and optimise response times, ultimately enhancing the overall experience of accessing MU's valuable e-resources.

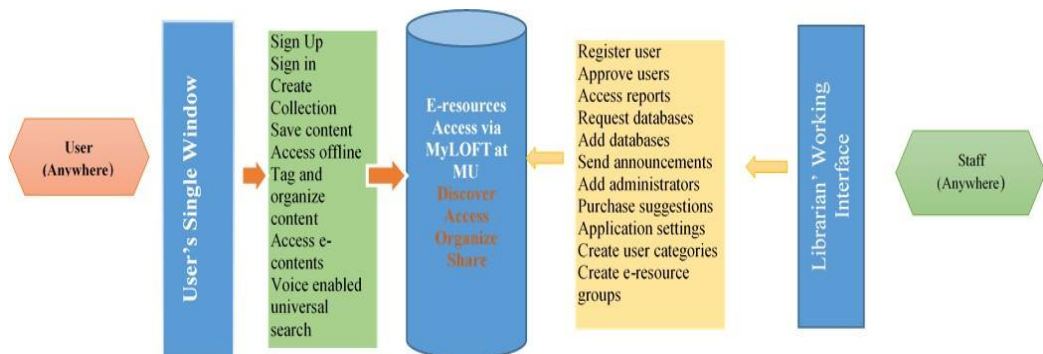


Figure 1: MyLOFT Platform: Scope and Features

Source: Researcher's Construct 2023

4.4 Users Interface

The MyLOFT user interface prioritises user workflow, enhancing their ability to discover library-subscribed resources. This streamlined interface ensures seamless access whether users are conducting searches through Google or Discovery services. Within MyLOFT, users can effortlessly register, log in, tag, organise, create collections, access content both online and offline, share resources, and synchronise data between their mobile devices and the web-based application (MyLOFT & RemoteXs, 2021). Moreover, MyLOFT offers voice-enabled universal search and provides access to user guides, Frequent Asked Questions (FAQs) and customer support for user assistance. MyLOFT is purposefully designed for smartphone usage, available on Google Play and Apple platforms, offering an intuitive design that simplifies access to all content within a single, user-friendly interface (Gulati, 2021)

4.5 Librarians' MyLOFT User Interface

On the side of the library staff or MyLOFT administrators, numerous features are available, as illustrated in Figure 1. They can register and approve users, handle requests to add new databases and disseminate announcements to users. Additional functionalities encompass creating user categories and e-resource groups as revealed in Figure 1.

4.6 Exploring Selected Remote Access Tools in Library Resources

In the realm of library resources, various commercial, open-access and remote-access software/tools have emerged. This study selected four among the widely recognised ones: Ezyproxy, Knimbus, Lib Hub Kiox and RemoteXs.

4.6.1 Ezyproxy

Ezyproxy was conceptualised by Chris Zagar in 1999, standing out as a commercial discovery tool. It operates on proxy technology, facilitating access to library electronic resources (Bhat, 2019). Often branded as a “referral server,” Ezyproxy operates on a subscription-based model. Its usage entails validation for remote users per browser session, demanding proficient IT management (Rosenfeld & Enoch, 2019). Ezyproxy serves the purpose of centralising webpages accessible to both on-site and off-site users, providing seamless access to library e-resources. Despite its intricacy, Ezyproxy ensures secure delivery of e-resources to users, ensuring accessibility regardless of their location or time.

4.6.2 Knimbus

Knimbus was conceived as a “knowledge cloud” by Rahul Agarwalla, serving as both a collaborative space and a discovery tool for researchers and scholars (Gulati, 2021). Founded in November 2010, Knimbus has experienced significant growth, currently being utilised by over 1,200 institutions across 34 countries worldwide (Naik & Machado, 2024). This platform offers a unified search interface, seamlessly connecting users to both library-subscribed and freely available e-resources, utilising real-time searching and analysis methods (Sharma et al., 2021). Knimbus boasts features like high-speed real-time search, instant project sharing to prevent duplication and advanced filtering options. Moreover, it prioritises community engagement by enabling users to establish research groups and collaborate with team members on shared projects (Naik & Machado, 2024). In addition to content discovery and sharing capabilities, Knimbus facilitates access to e-resources, articles, tagging and peer discussion forums, with the overarching goal of democratising knowledge across diverse domains (Kaushik & Kumar, 2013; Borah & Borah, 2014).

4.6.3 Lib Hub Kiox

Lib Hub Kiox, also known as Semper Tool, serves as a unified library gateway for discovering and accessing e-resources (Mtega & Benard, 2014; Jabir, & Katabalwa, 2016). It caters to both on- and off-campus users, providing 24/7 access to e-resources and sending email alerts for newly uploaded articles (Mtega & Benard, 2014). With features like customisable collections, user-friendly interfaces, and offline/online access via username and password, Lib Hub Kiox ensures seamless exploration and enjoyment of digital content for its users (Jabir & Anajoyce, 2018).

4.6.4 RemoteXs

RemoteXs stands as a cloud-based software solution designed for digital libraries, offering a centralised platform for accessing a wide array of electronic content (Cheng et al., 2019). By consolidating subscribed resources into a single portal, RemoteXs streamlines the process of accessing diverse e-content (Naik & Machado, 2024). Through a single login, this application provides remote access authentication, enabling users to seamlessly access all content (Vyas & Trivedi, 2020). Furthermore, RemoteXs offers institutions an option to allocate fixed IP addresses and provides comprehensive usage statistics for all e-resources. Compatible with various devices, including tablets and smartphones, RemoteXs aims to facilitate the discovery and utilisation of licensed e-resources by libraries or library consortia. Particularly beneficial for smaller institutions lacking IT personnel, RemoteXs serves as a user-friendly solution for enhancing access to digital library resources.

5 Awareness of the E-resources Remote Access Applications

Chitumbo and Chew (2017) revealed that the majority of students were not using remote access applications because they were not aware of their existence, had poor information search skills and poor internet connectivity in the area of location which affected the downloading of pages. Bhat (2019) noted that libraries should conduct user awareness or user education programmes from time to time in which newly inducted users are made aware of the availability of new technologies such as remote access and discovery tools. Rafiq et al., (2019) found that the library's efforts to raise awareness, combined with effective communication channels on campus, helped users become familiar with discovery tools and remote access resources. Masese et al., (2016) observed that awareness of methods of accessing e-resources using remote tools would be enhanced by regular user training, current awareness, marketing of e-resources, and the access tool.

6 Library Patrons' Perceptions of the Remote E-resource Access Applications

Chelulei (2020) emphasised the critical role of library patrons' perspectives on remote e-resource access applications, crucial for both students and lecturers in achieving academic success and conducting research. Highlighting the significance of these tools, Chitumbo and Chewa (2017) demonstrated that students enrolled in Zambia's distance learning programmes recognise their value and user-friendliness in accessing institutional e-resources. Similarly, Rao and Bhat (2018) advocated for remote access applications as essential best practices for libraries. They emphasised how these tools facilitate round-the-clock access to information, optimising the utilisation of e-resources and providing convenient access to various library materials from any location. Additionally, Singh (2021) acknowledged the importance of remote access applications, particularly in crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, as they enable libraries to maintain effective service delivery.

Gumede (2021) conducted a study highlighting the significance of remote access to library resources, particularly for off-campus students, offering them services equivalent to those available to on-campus users. Decker (2021) further accentuated the bridging function of remote access in improving customer service, observing that modern library patrons demand unrestricted access to information from any location and at any time of the day. Chandrashekara (2022) underscored the negative consequences on patrons' e-resource access when libraries lack remote access platforms.

In Tanzania, Jabil and Katabalwa (2016) emphasised the efficacy of remote access tools in facilitating e-resource access, enabling users to retrieve information from multiple databases simultaneously and assisting in resource management through usage statistics. Furthermore, Tawfeeq (2015) advocated for the implementation of Single-Sign-On (SSO) systems in academic libraries to simplify user authentication and enhance satisfaction, considering the proliferation of online services and resource types. This user-friendly approach is essential to accommodate a growing user base and promote efficient resource utilisation.

7 Promoting Access and Use of E-resources Remote Access Tools

Various studies have proposed diverse strategies for academic libraries to enhance the utilisation of e-resources remote access tools. Rao and Bhat (2018) suggested strategies such as utilising library and university websites, conducting training

sessions and employing various promotional materials. These recommendations aim to maximise the effectiveness of these tools. Moyer, Hayes, and Mittrach (2021) mention libraries' adoption of marketing tactics to increase the visibility of remote access tools. These tactics include creating instructional protocols, providing online tutorials and engaging users in both virtual and in-person training sessions. Furthermore, electronic newsletters were utilised to disseminate information within scholarly circles (Moyer, Hayes, and Mittrach, *ibid*).

Understanding the demographics and needs of library patrons is crucial for promoting e-resource remote tools, as emphasised by Zibani (2017). Target audiences may include students, faculty, researchers and community members. Haugh (2021) suggests utilising library website announcements, social media, posters and email newsletters for effective promotion. Saunders and Wong (2020) recommend offering training sessions or workshops to educate patrons on using remote access tools, including in-person sessions, webinars, or online tutorials. Libraries should also communicate the benefits of these tools, such as 24/7 access to resources and the ability to search multiple databases simultaneously (Gubbi et al., 2013).

Customising marketing materials to match the specific needs and interests of different patron groups is essential, according to Cassell and Hiremath (2023). They emphasise highlighting convenience for students accessing resources from home and time-saving benefits for busy researchers. Incorporating eye-catching visuals, such as graphics or videos, can further illustrate how remote access tools work (*ibid.*). Continuous feedback gathering from patrons helps libraries understand their experiences and areas for improvement (Zibani, 2017).

Providing ongoing support to patrons encountering difficulties with remote access tools is crucial, as noted by Saunders and Wong (2020). This support may include offering a help desk or online chat service. Finally, Yi (2016) recommends regularly monitoring usage statistics and evaluating marketing efforts to refine strategies and ensure effective promotion to patrons.

8 Challenges in the Use of the Remote E-resource Access Application

Several studies have investigated the challenges surrounding the deployment of e-resources remote access tools. Rao and Bhat (2018) highlighted network issues and difficulties in downloading full texts as significant obstacles. Similarly, Jabil and

Katabalwa (2016) identified various challenges encountered during the implementation of remote e-resources tools in Tanzania. These challenges include staff and students' reluctance to undergo training, limited computer availability, unreliable internet connections and insufficient funds for promotional activities.

Nyakwebwa (2016) observed that setting up, configuring and effectively managing these tools often requires specialised IT expertise, skills that many librarians lack. Kasella (2020) and Rahaman et al. (2023) pointed out challenges related to user authentication and access control in both discovery and remote access tools. Botta et al. (2016) noted the complexity and time-consuming nature of integrating remote access applications, especially in environments with diverse library systems and protocols.

Ali (2020) stressed the importance of adequately training researchers, students and faculty to utilise e-resources remote and discovery tools effectively, a component often overlooked in many libraries. Furthermore, Jalal and Sutradhar (2020) highlighted financial challenges associated with subscription costs or licensing fees for e-resources and discovery tools as significant setbacks. Overall, the deployment of these tools presents challenges ranging from implementation complexity and user authentication to integration with existing systems, metadata management, user training and support, as well as financial considerations.

9 Research Methodology

This investigation is a singular case study survey rooted in the positivist paradigm, described as a research tradition that occupies the space between positivism and constructivism (Samy, & Robertson, 2017). Employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches ensured a comprehensive understanding of the research topic by allowing researchers to triangulate data from multiple perspectives (Yin, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). While quantitative methods provided numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative methods offered in-depth insights into the context, motivations and meanings underlying phenomena. By integrating both approaches, researchers enhanced the validity and reliability of their findings, captured complex phenomena, and provided a better understanding of the research subject (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The study focused on a targeted group of sixty-seven (67) academic staff members who utilised the MyLOFT application at MU. A total of six (06) respondents were purposively selected from the total of 67 to be involved in the interview session. The sample size was determined using the Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) method, which, as advocated by Alam et al. (2015), facilitates the selection of a sample that accurately represents the entire population. Additionally, purposive sampling was applied to identify interview participants who could provide relevant insights. This method was chosen for its capability to select respondents with specific characteristics aligned with the research objectives (Rai & Thapa, 2015).

9.1 Sample Size

Sample Size (n) = $\frac{\text{No.of Users in Category (n)}}{\text{Total Population}}$ x Desired Total Sample. The rounded sample size for each user category was calculated using the following given data: the total population was 281, and the desired sample size was 67. This involved dividing the number of users in a specific category by the total population and then multiplying the result by the desired total sample size (67). For example, IDS:

$${}^nIDS = \frac{10}{281} \times 67 .$$

${}^nIDS \approx 2.39$. This process was repeated for each user category to establish the rounded sample sizes for all categories.

Table 1: Study Sample Size

S/N	User Category	No. of Users (n)	Rounded Sample Size (n)
1	IDS	10	3
2	SOPAM	65	15
3	SOB	60	14
4	FSS	42	10
5	LSD (Librarians)	11	3
6	FoL	39	9
7	FST	52	12
8	MU-ICTU	2	1
Total		281	67

Source: MyLOFT MU Platform (2023)

Data collection comprised structured and unstructured questionnaire items, administered to academic staff members using the MyLOFT application to access subscribed e-resources. Additionally, some targeted respondents were interviewed due to their consistent use of the application. The collected data were subjected to analysis using the SPSS version 20 for classification. Basic statistical measures like

frequencies, pie charts and percentages were used to illustrate the gathered

information, complemented by various graphs for enhanced clarity. Furthermore, the analysis of interview data followed a content analysis approach, with findings presented in quoted form to maintain fidelity to participants’ perspectives.

10 Findings

10.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The study encompassed participants who were lecturers from seven (07) distinct academic units within MU. Researchers opted for this approach to ensure a diverse range of responses from respondents affiliated with different MU Units, thereby enhancing the breadth and depth of the study’s findings.

Table 2: Distribution of the Respondents

S/N	University Units	F	%
1	SOPAM	14	20.9
2	SoB	13	19.4
3	FSS	10	14.9
4	FoL	11	16.4
5	FST	9	13.4
6	IDS	4	6
7	MU -ICTU	0	0
8	LSD	6	9
Total		67	100

Source: Field Survey Data (2023)

Key: SOPAM = School of Public Administration and Management, SoB = School of Business, FSS Faculty of Social Sciences, FoL = Faculty of Law, FST = Faculty of Science and Technology, IDS = Institute of Development Studies, and LSD = Library Services Directorate

SOPAM represents the highest percentage of respondents at 20.9%, indicating a significant level of engagement or interest from this academic unit. SoB, with 19.4%, closely follows SOPAM, suggesting substantial participation and relevance in the context of the research. FSS contributes 14.9% of the respondents, indicating a notable presence and interest from the social science perspective. FoL accounts for 16.4% of the respondents, showcasing a considerable engagement from the legal studies domain. FST represents 13.4% of the respondents, signifying a noteworthy involvement from the science and technology faculty. IDS, while with a lower percentage (6%), still provides valuable insights. MU-ICTU reports no respondents, indicating either non-participation or minimal relevance to the research focus. LSD

contributes to 9% of the respondents, underscoring the importance of library services in the deployment of the specified application.

The distribution of respondents across various units a MU highlights a diverse representation, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and prospects associated with deploying the My Library On Finger Tips Application at MU. Further exploration of the unique perspectives from each unit is essential for a holistic assessment and informed decision-making.

10.2 E-resource Usage Statistics: MyLOFT Platform Pre- and Post-Deployment at Mzumbe

Access to e-resources at MU was facilitated through four distinct methods. Initially, users were required to be physically present on campus and utilise MU IP addresses to gain access, constituting the first method. The second method involved the use of individual usernames and passwords. The third method employed an Organisation Access Number (OAN), while the fourth method utilised URL tokens. However, it is worth noting that the last method had its limitations, applying only to SAGE Journals. Despite the availability of multiple access methods, the utilisation statistics of e-resources remained consistently low.

Below are two tables containing usage statistics for the three most popular databases: EBSCOhost, Emerald and JSTOR. These statistics cover the period from January to July 2022, which is before the deployment of MyLOFT and January to July 2023, which is seven (07) months after the deployment of the application. The metrics used for comparison are the Total Item Requests, which refer to the total number of times the full text of a content item was downloaded or viewed from the three databases (Tusa, 2020).

Table 3: Pre-Deployment Electronic Resources Usage Statistics for MyLOFT Application (January– July 2022)

Platform	Metric Type	Total	Jan-2022	Feb-2022	Mar-2022	Apr-2022	May-2022	Jun-2022	Jul-2022
EBSCOhost	Total Item Requests	976	347	77	118	101	156	108	69
Emerald	Total Item Requests	3815	259	115	309	833	1348	569	382
JSTOR	Total Item Requests	4577	685	240	1331	787	203	782	549

Sources: COUNTER Reports from Databases (2023)

Table 4: Post-Implementation E-resources Usage Statistics for MyLOFT Application (January – July 2023)

Platform	Metric Type	Total	Jan-2023	Feb-2023	Mar-2023	Apr-2023	May-2023	Jun-2023	Jul-2023
EBSCOhost	Total Item Requests	3169	867	592	599	220	412	324	155
Emerald	Total Item Requests	6625	944	526	837	897	1446	1231	744
JSTOR	Total Item Requests	23088	4685	2682	2491	3387	4203	3816	1824

Sources: COUNTER Reports from Databases (2023)

The statistics presented in Tables 3 and 4 highlight significant changes in e-resource usage at MU before and after the deployment of MyLOFT. Across all platforms, including EBSCOhost, Emerald, and JSTOR, there was a notable increase in usage post-implementation. EBSCOhost experienced a substantial rise in usage, with pre-deployment requests totalling 976, compared to post-implementation requests reaching 3169. Similarly, Emerald saw a considerable increase in usage, with pre-deployment requests at 3815, escalating to 6625 post-implementations. This growth was consistent throughout each month.

However, the most remarkable surge was witnessed in JSTOR, where pre-deployment requests stood at 4577 and skyrocketed to 23088 post-implementations. This significant increase in usage was evident across all months. Overall, the deployment of MyLOFT had a profound impact on e-resource usage at MU, with substantial increases observed across all platforms. Notably, JSTOR experienced the most significant growth, highlighting the effectiveness of the implementation in enhancing access and utilisation of electronic resources.

Respondents' Sources of Awareness about the MyLOFT Platform at MU

Respondents were presented with a questionnaire containing various options to select the sources through which they became aware of the MyLOFT platform at MU. The summarised results of their responses are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Sources of Awareness about the MyLOFT Application

Sample Size N =67	Awareness of the MyLOFT App	Yes		No	
		F	%	F	%
	Library Webpage	9	13.4	58	86.6
	Posters and Flyers	6	9	61	91
	Email	30	44.8	37	55.2
	Word of Mouth	44	65.7	23	34.3

Sources: Field Survey Data (2023)

The findings summarised in Table 5 show the number of respondents who are aware of the MyLOFT application and those who are not. Through, the Library Webpage/Social Media, nine (9) respondents (13.4%) became aware of MyLOFT, while 58 (86.6%) did not. Through Posters and Flyers, 6 (9%) were aware of MyLOFT, while 61 respondents (91%) were not. Moreover, 30 respondents (44.8%) found out about MyLOFT through Email and Newsletters, whereas 37 (55.2%) did not. In addition, 44 respondents (65.7%) learned about MyLOFT through the Word of Mouth, while 23 (34.3%) did not.

The most common source of awareness about the MyLOFT application at MU was Word of Mouth, with 65.7% of respondents having learned about it through this method. Email and Newsletter are the second most significant sources, with 44.8% of respondents becoming aware of MyLOFT through the channel. Library Webpages seem to be less effective in creating awareness, with only 9 (13.4%) of respondents, respectively, using these sources. A higher percentage of respondents (65.7%) became aware of MyLOFT through the Word of Mouth which suggests that personal recommendations and informal communication play a significant role in spreading awareness about the platform. This may indicate a strong sense of trust among peers or colleagues. Email is also a notable source of awareness (44.8%), suggesting that official university communication channels are effective in reaching a substantial portion of the target audience. The Library Webpage and Posters and Flyers have limited effect in raising awareness about MyLOFT. This could indicate a need for improvement in the visibility and accessibility of information on these platforms or a need for more engaging promotional materials. The data suggests that institutions should consider leveraging word-of-mouth marketing strategies, as they seem to be highly effective in creating awareness about educational platforms like MyLOFT. Encouraging satisfied users to recommend the platform to their peers could be beneficial.

Respondents were also provided with an option of stating other sources of awareness apart from those which were provided.

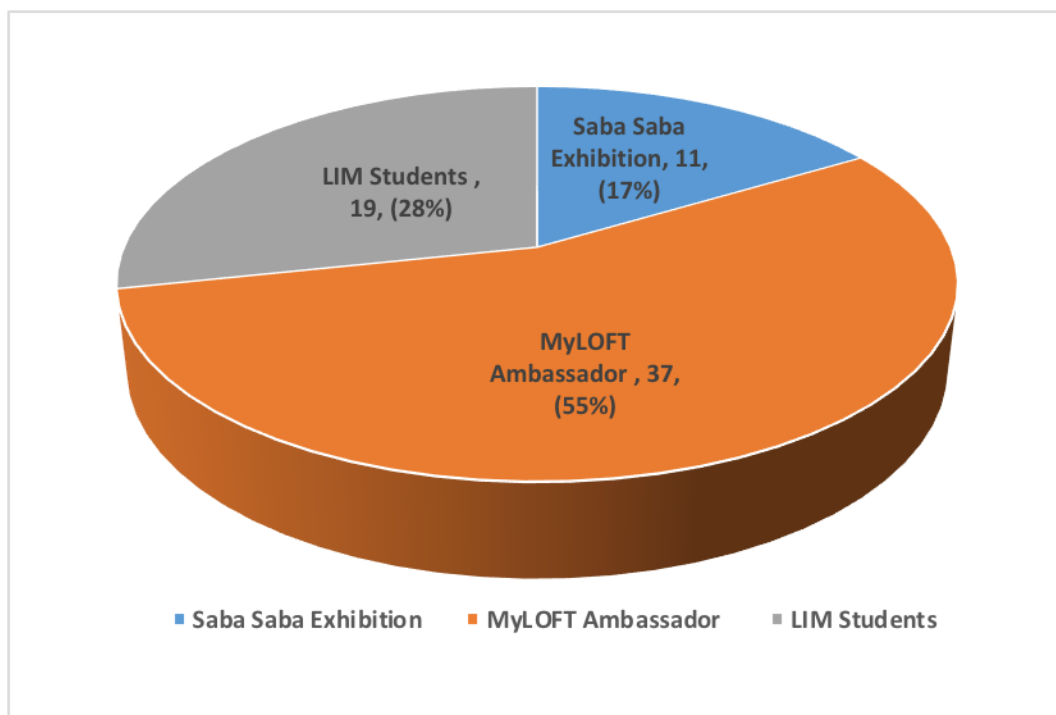


Figure 2: Sources of Awareness on the MyLOFT Platform
Source Field Survey Data (2023)

The findings presented in Figure 2 indicate that the most prominent source of awareness about the MyLOFT platform is MyLOFT Student Ambassador, with 37 (55.2%) of respondents having learned about it through this method. LIM Students is the second most significant source, with 19 (28.4%). Saba Saba Exhibition contributed to awareness but was less significant in comparison to other methods, with 11 (16.4%) of the respondents using this source.

During an in-depth interview with a senior lecturer, the discussion centred on identifying effective methods for promoting awareness about the MyLOFT platform. The senior lecturer made the following remarks:

It has become evident that students possess the potential to excel in promoting newly deployed learning platforms, particularly in raising awareness among their peers. Their ability to effectively communicate with fellow students surpasses that of librarians. Therefore, I recommend the utilisation of Library Student Ambassadors as a means of enhancing awareness and dissemination of information about MyLOFT.

10.3 Perceptions of Users Regarding the MyLOFT Application

The researchers sought to gather insights into respondents’ interactions with the MyLOFT platform. The respondents were presented with various options to express their perceptions of the platform. The perception of each MyLOFT feature was assessed by calculating the percentage of respondents who answered “Yes” or “No” to whether they found the feature interesting. By analysing these percentages, researchers gauged the overall perception of each feature among the respondents and identified which features were more favoured or disfavoured by the user community. The summarised findings are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: The Respondents’ Perception of MyLOFT Features

Sample Size = 67	Interesting Feature of the MyLOFT App	Yes		No	
		F	%	F	%
	Multiple Access	44	65.7	23	34.3
	Multiple Logins	32	47.8	35	52.2
	Voice Enabled Search	16	23.6	51	76.1
	Tag & Organise	28	41.8	39	58.2
	Save Content Off and Online	45	67.2	21	31.3
	No Password	22	32.8	45	67.2
	Not Affiliated with Institutions IP Addresses	22	32.8	45	67.2

Source: Field Survey Data (2023)

The findings suggest that Multiple Access and Save Content Off and Online are perceived as attractive features by a significant number of the majority of the respondents, with approximately 65.7% and 67.2% finding them interesting, respectively. On the contrary, the Voice Enabled Search appears to be less appealing, with only 23.6% of respondents finding it interesting. This could indicate that the voice search feature might need improvement or better promotion to gain user interest. Multiple Logins and Tag & Organise features received mixed perceptions, with roughly equal proportions of respondents finding them interesting and not interesting. The No Password and Not Affiliated with Institutions IP Addresses features also seem to generate mixed responses, but a slight majority of the respondents did not find them interesting.

An academic librarian who participated in the in-depth interview concerning the findings mentioned the following concerns:

Developers and marketers of the MyLOFT application should focus on highlighting and enhancing features like Multiple Access and Save Content Off and Online to cater to the preferences of a substantial portion of the

users. The Voice-Enabled Search feature may require further investigation to understand why it is not resonating with users and whether improvements can be made.

For features with mixed perceptions, user feedback and additional research could help determine areas of improvement or adjustments. The MyLOFT team needs to consider these insights when prioritising feature development and marketing efforts to align with user preferences and needs.

10.4 The Respondents’ Levels of Satisfaction with the MyLOFT Platform

The findings in Figure 3 provide a summary and explanation of the satisfaction levels of respondents concerning MyLOFT offerings and interactivity. The respondents were given Likert scales to indicate their chosen level of satisfaction.

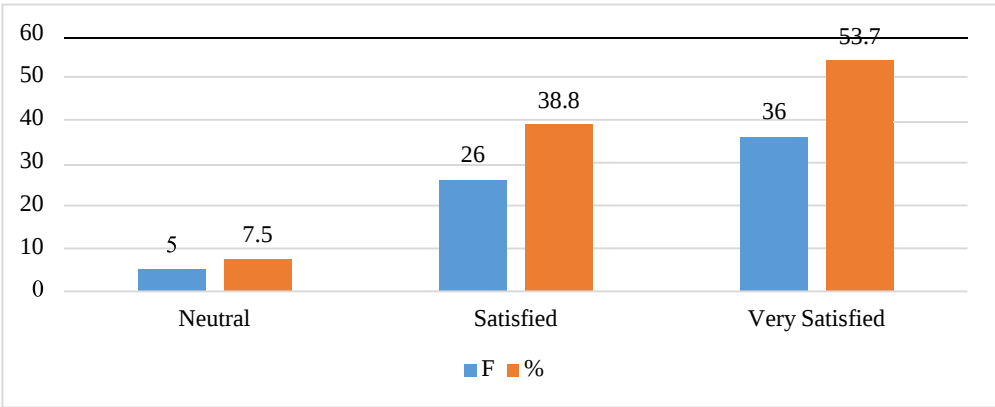


Figure 3: The Respondents’ Level of Satisfaction with the MyLOFT Platform
Source: Field Survey Data (2023)

The findings represent respondents’ perceptions of MyLOFT, categorised into three satisfaction levels: Neutral, Satisfied, and Very Satisfied. A small proportion of the respondents (7.5%) reported feeling neutral about MyLOFT. This suggests that a minority of the users neither strongly like nor dislike the platform. A significant portion of the respondents (38.8%) expressed satisfaction with MyLOFT. This indicates that a substantial number of users were satisfied with the platform. The majority of the respondents (53.7%) reported being very satisfied with MyLOFT. This suggests that the platform has garnered a high level of approval and positive feedback among users.

The findings reveal that the combined percentage of respondents who are satisfied or very satisfied with MyLOFT is approximately 92.5%. This indicates a strong overall positive sentiment among users. The fact that more than half of the respondents fall into the “Very Satisfied” category suggests that MyLOFT has successfully met or exceeded the expectations of a significant portion of its user base. While there is a small percentage of the respondents who feel neutral, this group might benefit from additional features or improvements to enhance their experience. Overall, the data reflects a positive perception of MyLOFT among the surveyed users, which can be seen as a testament to the platform’s effectiveness and user satisfaction.

MyLOFT should continue to prioritise and build upon the features and aspects that have garnered high levels of satisfaction among users to maintain and potentially increase user engagement and satisfaction. For users in the “Neutral” category, it would be beneficial to gather further feedback through surveys or interviews to understand their specific concerns or areas where the platform can be improved.

The platform can use the positive sentiment among its users as a valuable marketing tool and a source of credibility to attract new users or retain existing ones. Continual monitoring and assessment of user satisfaction should be an ongoing practice to ensure that MyLOFT remains aligned with user-evolving expectations and needs.

In a comprehensive interview with a senior lecturer, on their satisfaction with the MyLOFT application. The interview revealed a compelling justification for their positive assessment:

*Before the deployment of the MyLOFT application, I encountered numerous challenges in accessing MU-subscribed e-resources. At one point, I almost lost hope of ever being able to access and utilise these valuable resources. However, with the introduction of MyLOFT, I can now conveniently access these resources from the comfort of my home and virtually anywhere, 24/7. It's safe to say that the advent of MyLOFT as a remote access solution will undoubtedly enhance my teaching, learning, research, and publications.
(Senior Lecturer-MU)*

10.5 The Respondents’ Perceptions of the MyLOFT Interface and Design

The findings regarding the perceptions of the MyLOFT interface and its design are summarised and presented in Figure 4. The majority of the survey participants, comprising 39 individuals (58.2%) of the total respondents, expressed a very positive

assessment of the MyLOFT interface and its design. Additionally, 16 respondents (23.9%) rated it as good, while 10 individuals (14.9%) found the platform’s interface and design acceptable. Only one (1) respondent (1.5%) ranked it as poor, and there were no responses from a similar proportion of respondents.

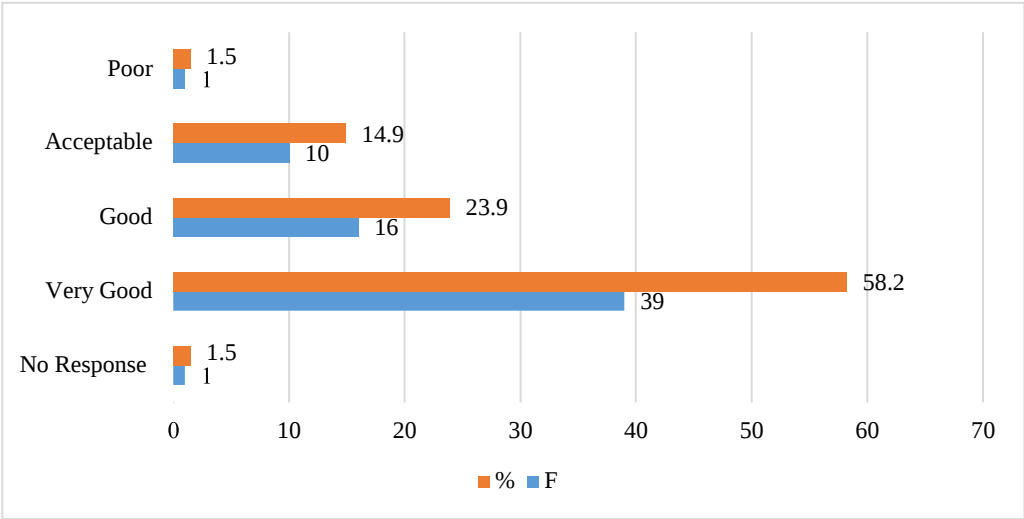


Figure 4: Respondents’ Perceptions on the MyLOFT Interface and Design
Source: Field Survey Data (2023)

The findings show that the majority of the respondents, 58.2%, had a very good perception of the MyLOFT interface and design, indicating a high level of satisfaction. Additionally, 23.9% rated it as good, signifying overall satisfaction. A smaller group, 14.9%, found it acceptable, meeting their minimum requirements, while only 1.5% ranked it as poor, suggesting areas for improvement. The “No Responses” category highlights the need for improved feedback collection methods to capture a more comprehensive range of user insights.

The results highlight that the majority of the users have a positive view of the MyLOFT interface and design, validating the development team’s efforts and indicating alignment with the user expectations. However, it is crucial not to overlook the 1.5% of the respondents who rated it poor; their feedback should be thoroughly examined to pinpoint areas for enhancement, possibly through usability testing or targeted surveys. For the 14.9% who found it merely acceptable, there is an opportunity to identify improvements that could elevate their perception. Additionally, addressing the issue of “No Responses” indicates the need for refining

survey methods to ensure comprehensive feedback collection. In essence, while the MyLOFT interface enjoys overall positive feedback, there is room for improvement to further enhance user satisfaction and cater to the concerns of a minority who expressed dissatisfaction.

During an in-depth interview, a respondent who rated the MyLOFT interface design poor made the following remarks:

MyLOFT interface poses several challenges, particularly in the aspect of content saving within user-created collections. Some saved content inexplicably ends up in the general collection instead of the intended specific collection, necessitating users to manually transfer the content to the correct collection.

10.6 Mechanisms Used by the Library in Promoting the MyLOFT Platform

The respondents were presented with various choices to identify the predominant strategies for promoting the MyLOFT application at MU. The outcome of their research is succinctly presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Mechanisms Used by the Library in Promoting MyLOFT Platform

Sample Size = 67	MyLOFT Training & Promotion	Yes		No	
		F	%	F	%
	Training on MyLOFT	59	88.1	8	11.9
	MyLOFT Promotion	38	56.7	29	43.3

Source: Field Survey Data (2023)

The findings reveal that a significant majority of respondents, 88.1%, have benefited from training on the MyLOFT platform, showcasing the library’s proactive commitment to user education. This is a positive sign as it enhances user engagement and satisfaction with MyLOFT. However, there is room for improvement in the MyLOFT promotion efforts, with only 56.7% of respondents being aware of these promotions, leaving 43.3% unaware. This suggests an opportunity to enhance awareness and utilisation of the platform.

To address this, the library should consider reinforcing promotional activities through email campaigns, posters, workshops, or social media outreach to inform users about MyLOFT features and benefits. Additionally, given the success of training initiatives, the library can continue providing training sessions while tailoring them to address specific user needs, ensuring that users maximise the platform’s capabilities. Gathering feedback from both trained and untrained users

can further refine these strategies and improve the overall user experience with MyLOFT. While the library has excelled in providing MyLOFT training, there is a need for more comprehensive promotional efforts to fully harness the platform’s potential within the library community.

10.7 Library’s Success in Promoting the MyLOFT Application

One of the specific objectives of this study was to gain insight into the library’s efforts to promote the utilisation of MyLOFT within the MU community. The respondents were presented with Likert scale items to express their sentiments and the findings are presented in Figure 5.

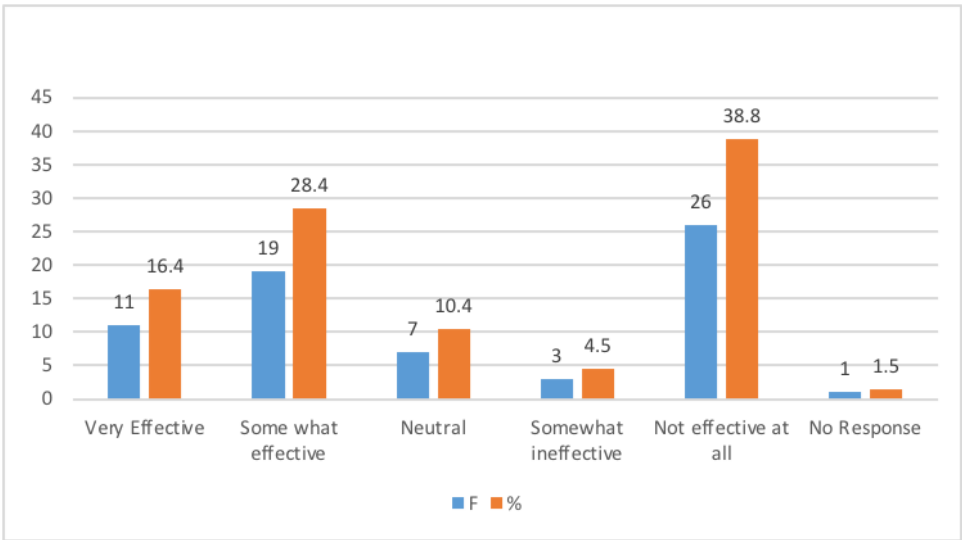


Figure 5: Library’s Success in Promoting the MyLOFT Application
Source: Field Survey Data (2023)

The summarised survey in Figure 5 shows a range of perceptions among respondents regarding the library’s effectiveness in promoting the MyLOFT application. Some users, comprising 16.4%, highly appreciate the library’s efforts, finding them very effective. A larger segment, 28.4%, views the library’s promotional initiatives as somewhat effective. Additionally, 10.4% remain neutral in their assessment, indicating an opportunity for the library to sway opinions positively with targeted improvements. Lastly, better communication and education can help to address the lack of response from a small fraction of users, ensuring a more informed and engaged user base. These findings underscore the importance of data-

driven improvements in the library’s promotional strategies to better serve its user base effectively.

10.8 Influence of Promotional Effectiveness on MyLOFT Application Usage

The researchers sought to ascertain whether effective promotion and marketing of the MyLOFT platform would lead to increased usage. Respondents were presented with alternative Likert scale items for selection, as depicted and summarised in Figure 6.

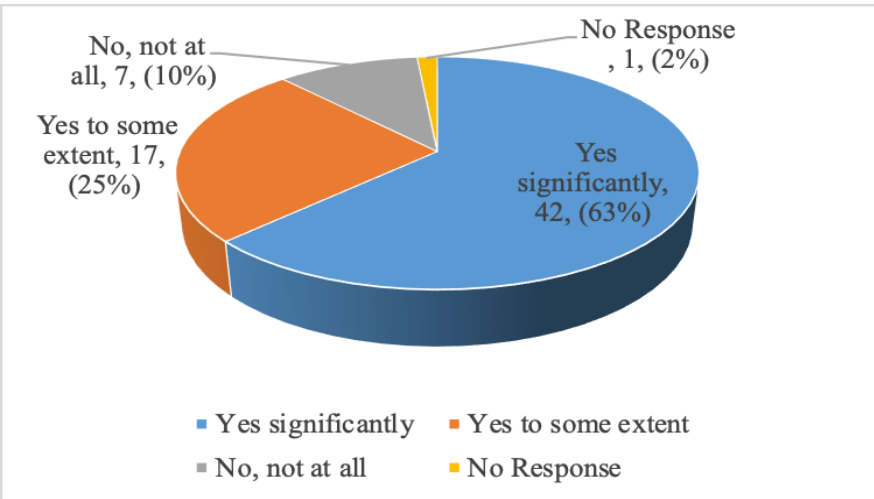


Figure 6: The Impact of Promotional Effectiveness on MyLOFT Application
Source: Field Survey Data (2023)

The provided data in Figure 6 pertains to a survey evaluating the influence of marketing and promotion efforts on the usage of MyLOFT as a product or service. The responses were categorised into different levels of impact: yes significantly, yes to some extent, no, not at all. The findings indicate that the majority of the respondents, comprising 60.1%, believe that marketing and promotion would positively affect MyLOFT usage. This suggests the potential for increased adoption if effective marketing strategies are deployed. Conversely, 10.5% of respondents hold a belief that marketing efforts would not impact MyLOFT usage at all, indicating a small negative perception. Additionally, 1.5% did not respond, possibly indicating uncertainty or lack of awareness about the product’s marketing potential.

In light of these findings, it is encouraging to observe a predominantly positive outlook towards marketing and promotion potential to boost MyLOFT usage. This

underscores the importance of investing in marketing strategies to harness this perceived positive impact. However, it is essential to address the concerns of the small proportion of the respondents with negative perceptions. Understanding their reasons and potentially dispelling any misconceptions should be considered. Furthermore, engaging with the uncertain respondents to gather their insights can help refine marketing approaches. Overall, the data support a favourable outlook regarding marketing’s role in increasing MyLOFT usage, suggesting opportunities for further research and targeted marketing efforts to maximise product adoption.

10.9 Challenges and Barriers to the Use of the MyLOFT Platform at MU

The fourth specific objective of this investigation was to delineate and analyse the challenges and barriers experienced by respondents when utilising the MyLOFT platform for accessing electronic resources. The resultant responses have been collated and are presented in Table 8 for reference and analysis.

Table 8: Challenges to Using MyLOFT

Sample Size N = 67	Challenges of Using MyLOFT	Yes		No	
		F	%	F	%
	Technical Issues	38	56.7	29	43.3
	Difficulty in Navigating the Application Features	22	32.8	45	67.2
	MyLOFT Unclear Instructions	20	29.5	47	70.1
	Slow App Performance	16	23.9	51	76.1
	MyLOFT Compatibility with Mobile Phone	30	44.8	37	55.2
	Private/Security Issues	16	23.9	51	76.1

Source: Field Survey Data (2023)

The findings in Table 8 above shed light on several key challenges faced by MyLOFT users. Firstly, a significant majority of the respondents, accounting for 56.7%, reported encountering technical issues during their interactions with MyLOFT. Secondly, approximately one-third of the respondents, constituting 32.8%, expressed difficulty in navigating the features of the application. These findings suggest the need for improvements in the user interface and an enhanced provision of user guidance within the platform, as such challenges can impede users’ ability to effectively utilise MyLOFT. Another substantial concern emerged from the data, with 29.5% of respondents reporting unclear instructions within the MyLOFT platform. This emphasises the critical importance of providing comprehensive and user-friendly guidance to ensure user satisfaction and successful adoption of the platform. Furthermore, roughly one-fourth of the respondents,

23.9%, reported experiencing slow application performance. This issue may be linked to technical optimisations that are required to enhance the speed and efficiency of the MyLOFT application. Regarding mobile phone usage, 44.8% of respondents indicated compatibility issues between MyLOFT and mobile phones. This finding suggests the necessity for improvements in mobile user experience to cater to a broader user base effectively.

Lastly, a substantial number, 76.1%, of the respondents expressed concerns about private and security-related issues associated with MyLOFT. This high level of apprehension underscores the urgent need to implement robust security measures and prioritise privacy protection within the MyLOFT platform to instil and maintain user trust.

The identified challenges within the MyLOFT platform, encompassing technical issues, navigation difficulties, unclear instructions, slow app performance, compatibility issues with mobile devices and security concerns, collectively underscore the imperative for addressing these issues promptly. By doing so, MyLOFT can enhance its usability and overall effectiveness, ultimately delivering greater value to users accessing electronic resources.

The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with respondents who reported encountering technical issues while using the MyLOFT application. The subsequent section highlights the following complaints voiced by these respondents:

This application exclusively operates with Microsoft Edge and Chrome browsers. Furthermore, users are required to install numerous extensions for the application to function optimally. On the mobile front, users may need to modify their devices to enable application usage. For instance, users may be prompted to change their Defense Service Network (DSN) settings. Additionally, some older phones may not be compatible with the application.

10.10 Strategies to Maximise the Usage of MyLOFT at the MU Library

The last objective of this study pertained to the identification of strategies aimed at enhancing the utilisation of the MyLOFT platform within the context of MU. To obtain insights into these strategies, the respondents were presented with a selection of alternative options, utilising a Likert scale format for their choices. The resultant findings are succinctly presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Strategies to Maximise Usage of MyLOFT at MU Library

S/n	Categories of Responses	SA		A		N		D		SD	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
i	MyLOFT Should Offer Personalised Content	41	61.2	22	32.8	2	3	2	3	0	0
ii	Regular Improvement of the MyLOFT App	38	56.7	25	37.3	4	6	0	0	0	0
iii	Engaging Students in Promoting MyLOFT - (Knowledge Ambassadors (KA's))	44	65.7	17	25.4	6	9	0	0	0	0
iv	Provide Incentives to Regular Users	39	58.3	16	23.9	8	11.9	3	4.5	1	1.5
v	Improving MyLOFT Interface	42	62.7	16	23.9	7	10.4	1	1.5	1	1.5
vi	Adding/Subscribing to More Databases	47	70.1	18	26.9	2	3	0	0	0	0
v	MyLOFT Promotion Increases Usage	44	65.7	22	32.8	1	1.5	0	0	0	0
vi	If the Suggested Recommendations Are Implemented, Usage Will Rise	43	64.2	19	28.4	4	6	1	1.5	0	0
vii	Provide More Training to Users	47	70.1	18	26.9	2	3	0	0	0	0

Source: Field Survey Data (2023)

Key: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, and SD = Strongly Disagree.

Table 9 presents data on strategies to optimise the MyLOFT usage at the MU Library, categorised by different approaches and assessed using the Likert scale. Notably, respondents strongly supported key strategies such as offering personalised content (61.2%) and enhancing the MyLOFT interface (62.7%). These findings underscore the importance of tailoring content to individual preferences and maintaining user-friendly design to boost platform engagement. Additionally, engaging students in promoting MyLOFT (65.7%) and providing more user training (70.1%) are viewed as favourable approaches, indicating the potential for leveraging student advocacy and educational initiatives to empower users.

Furthermore, the data reflect a consensus (64.2%) on the positive impact of implementing suggested recommendations in increasing the MyLOFT usage. The overwhelming support for expanding the MU Library database offerings (70.1%) highlights the significance of diversifying resources to attract and retain users.

Effective promotion efforts (65.7%) are considered vital for increasing platform adoption. In summary, prioritising these strategies, aligned with user preferences, holds the potential to enhance engagement and satisfaction among MyLOFT users at the MU Library.

The findings demonstrate that aligning strategies with user preferences and needs is essential for enhancing engagement and satisfaction among MyLOFT users at the MU Library. Prioritising personalised content, interface improvements, student involvement, training, expanding resources and effective promotion can collectively contribute to a more vibrant and user-centric library experience. These findings provide valuable guidance for the MU Library's efforts to optimise MyLOFT usage and meet the evolving needs of its users.

11 Conclusion

This study provided valuable insights into the usage, awareness, perceptions and challenges related to the MyLOFT application at MU. Before the implementation of MyLOFT, the University relied on various methods to access electronic resources, with some limitations in terms of accessibility. The study indicates relatively low download figures considering the University population, highlighting the need for improvement. The study suggests that while MyLOFT has been generally well-received, there are areas for improvement in promotion, user training, technical aspects and interface design to further enhance its usability and impact at MU.

12 Recommendations

These recommendations offer a strategic roadmap for enhancing the effectiveness and user experience of MyLOFT, a digital platform aimed at providing academic resources to users. Key suggestions include personalising content to cater to individual user preferences, addressing technical issues through regular updates and improvements, and leveraging student ambassadors for promotion within the university community. Additionally, incentivising regular usage, improving the platform interface and expanding the range of available databases are highlighted as essential steps to attract and retain users with diverse research needs. Furthermore, the importance of effective communication, user feedback mechanisms and measuring the impact of implemented strategies are emphasised to ensure continual enhancement and optimisation of the platform.

The recommendations underscore the significance of a multifaceted approach that combines user-centric strategies, technical enhancements, promotional efforts and ongoing assessment to maximise the utility and user engagement of MyLOFT. By incorporating these suggestions, the MyLOFT vendor and the MU Library can effectively address user needs, improve platform functionality and foster a supportive as well as engaging academic environment within the University community.

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