

REPOSITIONING LIBRARY SERVICES IN THE MIDST OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

The Research work was on Repositioning library services in the midst of a global pandemic. The study adopted descriptive survey design, data were collected through in-depth interviews of all one hundred and seventy-four (174) Federal, Private and State University across the thirty-six (36) States in Nigeria. The interview recordings were transcribed, translated, and analyzed thematically. The majority of the university libraries were physically closed for patrons because of the pandemic but engaged with the users through online services. Libraries revamped their web pages, reassigned resources, and planned robust online offerings. The questionnaire was made up of eleven items arranged in four (4) clusters. They were validated by three experts and used for the study. Data obtained were analyzed using mean. Based on the finding that libraries provided access to Webinars & open library source, Virtual Reference service and libraries also conducted online literacy session on COVID – 19. Challenges were highlighted among which are Digitaphobia and Complexities of the E – Resources interface. The following recommendations were made that there should be retooling of library curriculum by curriculum managers or planners in the advent of disaster as in the case of COVID – 19 and as a matter of national priority all librarians should be designated as essential information bearers.

Keyword: COVID – 19, Libraries, Library Resources, Lockdown, Online Service, Pandemic, National health emergency.

INTRODUCTION

In late March 2020, COVID – 19 blindsided academic libraries. With little time to plan, we closed our library facilities at Spiritan University Nneochi to protect the safety of our patrons and employees and moved to online services and worked from home. Thankfully, years of curating digital content, providing multiple opportunities for research interaction and developing robust search interfaces and web presences served us well during this transition.

With discussions now occurring about safe reopening of campuses, libraries face a paradigm shift. Instead of returning to normal, librarians will be returning to a “new normal”, one where in-person classes and service interactions may be impossible or no longer preferred, where collections in physical format may be a barrier to access, and where collaborative study is shunned in favour of social distancing, in buildings that can only safely house half the people they used to. How can we leverage this crisis to create new and innovative collections and services to improve our campus communities.?

The coronavirus pandemic has shown how internet access has become a crucial lifeline for many. It has also highlighted a key facet of the digital divide between those who have broadband internet access and those who don't. Dealing with Covid – 19, the disease caused by the Coronavirus (SARS – CoV – 2) raises many questions for librarians. Since being designated as essential disaster, libraries have focused on the roles of providing digital services during this health emergencies. Most of the attention has gone to natural and human disasters as opposed to widespread covid 19 outbreaks. The biggest role libraries can play in a national emergency to the emerging covid – 19 threat as information specialist is as follows:

INFORMATION LITERACY AS A NONPHARMACEUTICAL INTERVENTION

The Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC) Summary on COVID – 19 is being updated constantly (get the website badge) it provides a great page of web resources on covid – 19. The overall message to citizens so far has remained the same. Don't panic and wash your hands. It really is a pity that we wasted the efficacy of the "Keep Calm and don't panic." With the vaccine out and its subsequent roll out on national level the best approach by the NCDC should be a large-scale sanitization on the efficacy of the vaccines. Other similar methods include the nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPIs).

NPIs for COVID – 19 are quite similar to those for other viral diseases like the cold flu. On a personal level they include proper hand washing and maintaining social distancing. So, when people talk about COVID – 19 being similar to the cold flu, it is certainly true in terms of current best responses. According, to(Dan 2020) COVID – 19 and the flu have gone beyond hand washing and entered the zone of conspiracy theories and misinformation. For example, it has been proposed on some websites that the Coronavirus is a hoax, nothing more than the common cold or flu being elevated for political purposes. Other sides suggest cures or preventive measures that have no medical support or that misinterpret studies.

SPREADING FACTS

One of the biggest roles that libraries can fill in national response to COVID – 19 is that of information literacy to advocate for facts in the midst of fake news. An underlying theme to much of the online discussion about COVID – 19 as seen on social media is that governments are incompetently responding to the outbreak. This leaves citizens unsure of where to turn and what news to trust. Libraries can help fill the void as trusted sources of information as well as a shield against misinformation, as seen in NLA pandemic preparedness website.

Ironically, the spread of information and disinformation is quite similar to the spread of the virus being discussed in this situation. As noted by(Edmund,2019) models use for tracking the spread of disinformation were models using viral infection methodologies. As with diseases of the body, the mind can be inoculated against disinformation through early repeated introduction of facts.

One example of addressing information confusion is the question on masks. The NCDC recommends the use of masks or respirators as an optional additional layer to be used in addition to other measures such as physical distancing, hand washing and maintaining appropriate respiratory hygiene. Therefore, the library reserves all prerogative to gather information resources from trusted and accurate sources like Medline Plus that are easily understood by patrons. Resources like the NCDC summary page for COVID – 19 are great, but the require a deeper level of understanding for the layman to understand it.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Library functions, duties and roles have been gravely altered by the advent of COVID – 19 with its resultant stay at home. Physical library buildings have been under lockdown along with other academic institutions. Services offered by this essential organ of tertiary institutions were halted and it became uncertain when this pandemic will be over. In any global health emergencies, libraries have a definite role to play. Firstly, promotion of health awareness so as to disseminate information relating to preventive measures. Secondly, provide information regarding to the latest developments, research and literature for supporting such research works. Finally, meeting the core needs of its clientele or patrons. This work is borne out of our shared experience during this national health emergency.

Objectives of the study

This study essentially seek to reposition library services in the midst of a global pandemic. Specific objectives are:

- I. Determine E – Resources that are available in Libraries during national health emergency.
- II. Ascertain the problems militating against the integration of E – Resources in Libraries during period of national health emergency.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The need to reposition library services in the midst of a global pandemic should not be overemphasized. This is because the present day new normal has shown how unprepared the global communities are in terms of pandemic preparedness. The outcome of this study would be beneficial to the government, being the policy maker and highest decision-making organ of any nation. The study will reveal to the government the appropriate strategies needed for improving library services during COVID – 19 with the aim of providing better and more efficient services to its patrons in times of national health uncertainties.

Research Question

These constitute the question which this study attempts to answer:

1. What are the E – Resources that are available in Libraries during national health emergency.?
2. What are the problems militating against the integration of E – Resources in Libraries during period of national health emergency.?

SCOPE

For the purpose of this study all one hundred and seventy-four (174) Federal, State and Private Universities in Nigeria were adequately represented.

REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

Libraries have to meet global academic standards and promote universal academic values, update their services, skills, resources through the latest network so clientele can access the library resources from their offices or house of residence whether the library is physically closed or not. Library supports their user communities through providing diverse, authoritative and up-to-date online and offline study material such as (textbooks, references, research articles, audio visual information resources etc) this can't be feasible without trained professional staff. Furthermore, (Mohammadi & Yegane 2018) noted that the strength and weaknesses of the Internet in libraries, is that technologies can be deployed for collection management, online services, education, and providing access to spaces and equipment, gathering, analyzing, storing, and sharing information.

(Mahadevan & Kumar 2020) highlights that the 21st century, different components of providing digital information services abounds, but the print media dominance is still a major source of information in libraries. However, the situation is changing, and library professionals should be ready for everything especially during this season in which the pandemic has ushered us into the new normal. Most libraries have good ICT facilities to discard the old obsolete practices of library services but the fear of the unknown and technophobia are hampering librarians from providing service through LAN, Web based integrated library services. Therefore, a call has being made for developing countries need to review their policies, instead of heavily depending on traditional information resources, should set aside adequate resources for collecting digital information. Priority should also be given to staff training and user education in regard to ICT-based resources and services. Thus, to deal with the rapidly changing outbreak of COVID - 19 libraries and librarian should respond to rapidly evolving information, and guidelines should be provided for acquiring, processing, interpreting, repackaging,

and disseminating relevant, up-to-date information, thereby enhancing its capabilities and move away from traditional services and adopt virtual services.

Role of libraries and library association in disseminating information during covid- 19 pandemic.

UNESCO press release on COVID-19 dated back to 24th March 2020 stated that the number of students affected by the school and university closures in 138 countries has nearly quadrupled to 1.37 billion, representing more than 3 out of 4 children and youth worldwide. In addition, nearly 60.2 million teachers are no longer in the classrooms (UNESCO, 2020). These challenges have significantly affected library roles of facilitation and support to their institutions in attaining their academic objectives, even though the libraries are closed for physical contact, it does not mean that they are not providing services through online, virtual and remote approaches (Mathias & Abdulsalam 2020). However, these measures have drastically affected libraries in the world.

Libraries have experienced closure or restricted their services. Public services have been paralyzed, academic activities and classes have been restricted to online due to closure of colleges. Community need information on how to cure themselves against coronavirus, scientist and researchers are highly engaged to control the situation. In this time, libraries have a role to play in the provision of access to information resources and services. On 23rd March 2020, the president of IFLA announced that “Libraries around the world are being affected by the emergence and spread of the coronavirus. To this end libraries around the globe have to mobilize and provide a collection of valuable and reliable information on coronavirus in order to give people a source they can trust”.

Libraries can strengthen online services to provide access to their resources. Recently, National Digital Library of India (NDLI) has initiated a specially designed collections of e-resources for specific group of students to help the student community in the difficult situation arising out of the suspension of physical classes and closure of physical libraries arising out of COVID-19 lockdown. The services are provided through the library social networking pages.

The roles of the Nigerian libraries and library associations are more crucial in the face of the prevailing global pandemic. It is apparent that fake news and misinformation have created confusion and subsequently, posed greater challenge to every effort to curtail the spread of the virus. In this regard, academic, special and public libraries in Nigeria can provide and share information quickly, efficiently and in real- time as strategies in response to COVID- 19 pandemic through their social networking pages like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. They can provide a platform for gathering and disseminating information to promote awareness of the current situation.

A. Academic Libraries: Academic libraries have a vital role to play in the provision and dissemination of genuine information in the fight against coronavirus to their respective users through social media. However, the closure of academic activities necessitates most classes to operate online. Libraries also can provide online services to assist students with access to materials for assignments, selection and dissemination of information resources on COVID-19 to researchers, virtual research help, virtual instruction, online reference services, access to e-books and e-journal, linking users to health institutions and organization on information relating to coronavirus, publish a pamphlet and handbills for safety measures against coronavirus. Recently, Information Technology (IT) and internet companies such as Google, Microsoft have provided free teaching and learning tools to support students, teachers and lecturers learning at home. For example, Google launched its “Teach from

Home Hub” to aid teachers and learners across the world who are unable to attend schools. Libraries in Nigeria can facilitate access to those tools.

B. Special Libraries: Special libraries especially those at health centers and research centers can work extensively with medical professional to enlighten their communities via social media about coronavirus and self-protection measures. They can provide access to databases, websites, e-books, e-journal and repositories to health workers, scientists and health agencies on how to tackle this coronavirus. They can also work with public health agencies and research centers, and in the broader health sector, thereby helping to manage information and support efforts to strengthen understanding of this novel virus.

Promoting virtual services.

Libraries play a vital role in keeping our patrons and clientele educated, connected and entertained. Librarians nationwide have been working round the clock to find ways to keep services going despite being closed to our academic community. For we in Spiritan University Nneochi (SUN) this means providing remote access to databases typically restricted to onsite use, promoting ease of access to digital content. On the financial aspect this has increased our spending on digital collection development in order to enable patrons to take advantage of our overdrive and e-collections.

If staff are working remotely, which is based on NCDC recommendations for social distancing, is safer than reporting to a closed building, this has led us to introduce chat services or increased promotion of existing virtual clientele service techniques. At a time when patrons are in greater need of access to reliable information than ever, maintaining a connection even virtually can make a difference.

In the words of Gretchen (2020) libraries are looking to enter the world of chat service for the first time, it is possible to do so on a budget. Recently MyLibrary rolled out a plugin from Pure Chat on its website, and the response so far has been positive. In this era of uncertainties coupled with COVID – 19 pandemic libraries are delving into the world of virtual programming. Offering children events such as story times through virtual outlets like Facebook Live, Zoom or Instagram IGTV can also provide kids not only with a fun and enriching experience but also the comfort of seeing a familiar face during an otherwise scary and isolating times.

Other ideas for virtual programming across various age groups can also include book clubs, discussion groups and collaborative projects such as crafts using common household items and technology tutorials. She further posited that many libraries have also promoted services from existing connections, such as virtual exhibits from their museum partners or local businesses. One complicating factor throughout the current crisis has been the lack of formal pandemic policies for libraries. Because the COVID – 19 phenomena, is an uncharted territory in terms of its level of imminent danger to staff and patrons and the uncertain duration, resulting library closings, few libraries possess codified procedures for how to deal with a situation of this magnitude.

When thinking about repositioning your library during this pandemic, some basic useful information should be given outmost consideration to:

- A basic chain of command.
- How staff will be compensated during any closures.
- What telecommuting looks like for your library, including communication channels.
- Records management and preservation.
- Safety measures for staff and patrons, including emergency supplies to keep on-site in the library building.

Challenges of libraries in dealing with covid-19 in Nigeria.

The following are among the challenges in dealing with corona virus pandemic in Nigeria:

A. Fake News and Conspiracy Theories.

We now depend on various alternative source of information that may not be verifiable, such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram etc since, this information sources are not verified the propagate Lies, falsehoods and disinformation. Someone may misinform the public, that the want to vaccinate you because the want to reduce your population, as in the case with most African countries such fake news garners attention and goes viral, a person with pre-existing conditions may reject the vaccines as a result of the fake news and might be in a serious health problem. Therefore, librarian as information specialist may critically evaluate the authenticity of the information from reliable source and disseminate to the right users through (Online) available means of communication.

B. Population and Hunger

Nigeria has high population density, especially in poor rural areas. However, poor people will not be able to stockpile food for a month or two, to sit out the virus. Unlike in the UK, US and other industrialized nations that citizens receive stimulus checks from the government. The realization that you are all alone in this pandemic and the need for you to provide food, clothing, shelter and also pay bills without any government help is enough to drive you out of the house in search of greener pastures with little or no attention paid to the ravaging COVID – 19. Many people will have to go to farm, go to market. In this process, they may get the virus.

C. Religion.

Religious leaders in Nigeria are well regarded by their follower but, due to misinformation and personal interest, some of the religious leaders has failed to accept the realities of coronavirus. They believed that COVID - 19 is an invention by China to archive their political and economic gain and to depopulate Africans with Nigeria in mind as the world most populous black nation on earth. It was reported that some of the leader called the attention of their followers to ignore any restrictions being placed by the government.

Methodology

Descriptive survey was employed for carrying out this study. This choice was made after carefully weighing the time available to the researcher, as well as, the population and geographical spread of the study area. Structured questionnaire were mailed to librarians of the institutions under study through E-mails, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Telegram. The collected data were scrutinized, tabulated and analyzed using mean.

Section A:**1. What are the E – Resources that are available in Libraries during national health emergency.?**

S/N	Items	SA	A	UD	D	SD	N	T	X
1.	We offer VPN access.	123 615	29 116	13 39	5 10	4 4	174	784	4.5
2.	Mobile e-mail & social application service.	137 685	21 84	9 27	6 12	1 1	174	809	4.6

3.	Provides access to E – Books, E – Journals & Hathi Trust.	102 510	50 200	14 42	3 6	5 5	174	763	4.3
4.	Virtual Reference service.	117 585	43 172	10 30	2 4	2 2	174	793	4.5
5.	Access to Webinars & open library source.	22 110	129 516	17 51	6 12	- -	174	689	3.9
6.	Conducting online literacy session on COVID – 19.	108 540	40 160	14 42	8 16	4 4	174	762	4.3

$$\text{Grand mean} = 4.5+4.6+4.3+4.5+4.5+3.9+4.3 = \frac{26.1}{6} = 4.3$$

DISUSSION

Libraries around the world provide access to collections and services remotely, often investing time and effort in updating websites and computer systems to deal with demand. While many libraries already had a strong digital presence, many others have moved to create one to continue serving their clientele.

Table 1:

Resources that are available in Libraries during national health emergency.

It is now a common truism that education is a lifelong process, therefore teaching and learning are no longer constrained to the four walls of classroom or a formal setting. Hence, it can follow informal setting like while taking a road walk, during jogging, field plays, at the stadium, market squares and places ordinarily that we wouldn't have taught possible before which are now possible because of digitization, networking and advent of information and communication mediums.

The findings of this study with the grand mean of 4.3 reveals that that Institutions are providing document delivery services according to their nature of discipline and patron's demand, all universities such as Spiritan University Nneochi Library, Prof. Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library NAU, Nnamdi Azikiwe Library UNN, Kashim Ibrahim Library ABU, Kenneth Dike Library UI, John Harris Library Uniben and Donald E. U. Ekong Library Uniport are providing E-books and E-Journal articles to its teeming clientele during this COVID – 19 Pandemic. Besides this, Spiritan University Nneochi Library provides access to Electronic Manuscript Archives while, Nnamdi Azikiwe Library UNN also gives access to databases through VPN. Similarly, in another study by (Ishtiaq etal 2020) stated that universities such as Barrett Hodgson University, Iqra University, Karachi, Pakistan Air Force Karachi Institute of Economics and Technology (PAF-KIET), Indus University, Karachi, Commecs Institute of Business and Emerging Sciences (CIBES), Greenwich University Karachi, Mohammad Ali Jinnah University, Karachi and Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science & Technology (SZABIST), Karachi, Isra University, Hyderabad, Jinnah University for Women, Karachi, ILMA University Karachi Formerly Institute of Business & Technology BIZTEK, Karachi, Karachi, DHA Suffa University, Karachi, and Textile Institute of Pakistan, Karachi, Newport's Institute of Communications and Economics, Karachi, Dadabhoy Institute of Higher Education is providing E-books and E-Journal articles to its patrons during this COVID -19 Pandemic. Also, in another study IFLA (2020) posited that the National Library of Morocco is providing free eBooks, New York Public Library is running online book clubs, Public Library in Aarhus, Denmark, provides website, Granby library in Quebec, Canada focused on learning new skills. On Conducting

online literacy session on COVID – 19, Private Universities in Nigeria is taking the lead in providing online literacy programmes to frontline workers this includes Covenant University Ota, Babcock University Ile-Ife and Spiritan University Nneochi Library provided access to health workers in the midst of this pandemic through providing access to timely and accurate information and webinars. This is in consonance with University of Mustansiriyah, Iraq electronic thesis deposit service, and webinars are provided during COVID - 19. Al-Abbas Holy Shrine library is providing a remote lending service for researchers giving access to electronic resources. The Library of Congress USA is providing virtual transcription to engage people at distance. National Library of Norway is encouraging users to access its podcasts and other audio materials. Similarly, in university libraries, there are ongoing efforts to provide remote access, for example through an online article request service at Rhodes University, South Africa, East West University in Bangladesh, Agricultural University Library of Colombia Veracruz University in Mexico, there are through call-in hours. while Abgu Papazian University library in Armenia and Central Library of the Al Ameen University in Iraq, Diyala University Iraq virtual library and is making use of email to provide access to resources and respond to questions from students during this COVID – 19 pandemic, national health emergencies.

2. What are the problems militating against the integration of E – Resources in Libraries during period of national health emergency.?

S/N	Items	SA	A	UD	D	SD	N	T	X
7.	Digitaphobia.	85 425	54 216	26 78	5 10	4 4	174	733	4.2
8.	Fear of change.	61 305	77 308	19 57	7 14	10 10	174	694	3.9
9.	Complexities of the E – Resources interface.	55 275	83 332	16 48	6 12	14 14	174	681	3.9
10.	Poor bandwidth.	47 235	70 280	24 72	15 30	18 18	174	635	3.6
11.	Anxieties due to stress from my spouse.	53 265	67 268	29 87	12 24	13 13	174	657	3.7

$$\text{Grand mean} = 4.2 + 3.9 + 3.9 + 3.6 + 3.7 = \frac{19.3}{5} = 3.8$$

Table 2:
problems militating against the integration of E – Resources in Libraries during period of national health emergency.

The findings of this study indicate the problems militating against the integration of E -Resources in Libraries during period of national health emergency. Digitaphobia and the fear of change is one of the greatest problems faced by librarians in the cause of integration of these emerging technologies in libraries. The mean score of 4.2 shows that librarians has a phobia to new technologies this means that the lack formal training in these technologies or the preferred to rather continue in there analog, old and backward status quo. The exponential leap into these technologies has almost disrupted library services.Fabunmi, Paris and Fabunmi (2006) noted that the major problems faced by librarians in this digital age is lack of technical-know-how this in turns brings its dread and phobia to acquisition of such digital skills.Furthermore, Kasa & Yusuf (2020) stated thatthe “new

normal” therefore necessitated a drastic change in the library services. The fall out was caused by the fact that the library employees were not equipped with technologies at home to be able to effectively and efficiently work from there. It brought about challenges because working remotely was never envisaged and no previous provisions was readily available because of the locked down that regrettably made the library not effective with service delivery. Item 11 with the mean score of 3.7 shows that many librarians reported anxiety and stress at home this might be due to self-isolation or quarrelsome attitude of their spouse which might hinder them from carrying out their official engagement. Some even reported lack of personal space to carry out inward self-appraisal. This were corroborated by Kasa&Yusuf (2020) who noted that negative emotions that prevailed include staff isolation, anxiety, uncertainty and stress Some complain of not having a private working space at home. The library retooling effort was also affected in terms of sustaining the confidence and ability of library staff to explore and use the right tools to provide virtual services efficiently, confidently and comfortably during the pandemic period. In the process of learning to do their work from home, some library staff have experienced frustration due to various problems such as inconsistent internet services, timelines variations and in most cases these library staff pay for data and bandwidth from their own salaries.

CONCLUSION

The global pandemic has been a curse and a blessing in disguise to most libraries and librarians. This is because those librarians who is apathetic to learning new techniques and technologies has little or no option than to follow the train of the new norm which is digitization of library resources which is brought about by social distancing. The challenges have created an opportunity for libraries to integrate, learn and acquire these materials for its common good and survival. It also solicits for collaboration in order to sail past this problem that is created by the pandemic, which carries a large array of e-content in its wake. In the words of Cox (2020) to thrive in this new reality, libraries need to be nimbler and more responsive than ever before. We have learned and grown during our time in quarantine.

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are made from the findings of the study:

1. There should be retooling of library curriculum by curriculum managers or planners in the advent of disaster as in the case of COVID – 19 Pandemic in which the world where caught without any contingency plan or disaster management system.
2. Training and retraining of librarians on pandemic and disaster management.
3. As a matter of national priority all librarians should be designated as essential information bearers.
4. Institutional heads need to brainstorm and come out with workable policies on digitization and countering of fake news in this era of information explosion.
5. In view of the diminishing value of print collections librarians should embrace Electronic access to library resource.

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