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Academic Library Services during and after the Covid-19 Pandemic Lockdown

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Abstract

This study analyzes relevant literature on library services in academic libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and its implications for academic library services in Nigeria. The study consulted literatures from academic libraries and databases such as Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar. Data from the selected literatures and databases were critically analyzed and the underlying or recurring ideas were reported using the narrative review technique. Results showed that many academic libraries provided virtual services, trainings, and e-resources for their users during the pandemic lockdown. To cope with the challenges of COVID-19 pandemic and the increase in demand for resources and services in the library, academic libraries will need to provide online information resources and services to suit the present realities. The study recommended that academic libraries should re-define their services to adequately provide information resources and services to support the different categories of users. This paper suggests strategies and services that academic libraries can adopt to cope with the changes in information and learning environment and sustain their services post COVID-19 era.

Keywords: Library services, Covid-19 pandemic, Coronavirus, Lockdown,

Introduction

Information is the stock in trade for information provider such as libraries. Information are facts provided or learned about something. Information materials include books, journals, handbooks & manuals, yearbooks, atlases, maps, government publications, newsletters, bulletins, electronic resources, etc. According to Merriam-webster dictionary (2020), Information is facts, data, and knowledge obtained from investigation, study, or instructions. As information providers, librarians collect, collate, process, and disseminate information to appropriate users when necessary. Aina (2004) defined a library as a place or space where information materials of different formats are systematically acquired,

organized, stored, preserved, and disseminated to users at the appropriate time to meet their information needs. Invariable, a library is a collection of books and non-book materials, systematically organized using cataloguing codes and classification schemes for the provision of information services for users. The academic library acquires and organizes relevant information materials required to support the academic programmes of its parent institution. The library exists to serve its parent community. The primary objective of a library, irrespective of type or size, is to promote the use of its resources. Library services bring together information sources and their users by instructing the users about library activities, assisting the users to solve their queries, aiding the users in selection of good works as well as promoting the library services within and outside.

The primary objective of an academic library is to provide information services that will assist the institution in achieving its functions of teaching, learning and research. Khan and Bhatti (2012) noted that academic institutions such as universities can achieve their mission of spreading knowledge and extending their research progress by enriching and enhancing library resources and services. The university library is responsible for the provision of books, journals and other information resources and services to support teaching, learning and research in consistence with the goals and objectives of the university. In addition, academic library resources and services should be sufficient in quality, quantity, and diversity to effectively support the information needs of the users. Therefore, the university library is considered the most important resource centre in the university. Services are rendered by the library to improve users' need for information. Academic libraries are facilitators of information dissemination in their various institutions and render services to achieve their missions. Such services include lending services, reference services, referral services, user education, database searches, reprographic services, inter-librarian loans, online/electronic services, Current Awareness Services (CAS), Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), indexing and abstracting services and the likes.

Methodology

This study adopted narrative review of relevant literature on academic library services during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Literatures were consulted in the library and various databases such as Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar with interests in services rendered by academic libraries around the world and what was obtainable in Nigeria during Covid 19 pandemic lockdown. Collected literatures were critically analyzed and underlying or recurring ideas were reported using the narrative review technique.

Library services during covid-19 lockdown

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic broke out in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and was confirmed in Nigeria on February 27, 2020. The virus spread through droplets like respiratory droplets when an infected person comes in close contact with others or sneezes or coughs in the public domain. The widespread and high rate of infection across continents impacted the health care systems, businesses, economy, and education. Governments around the world embarked on lockdown of all aspects of lives to curtail the spread of the deadly virus.

The Nigerian government also had to place citizens on lock down, universities in Nigeria and consequently, their libraries were shut down because we were mostly not prepared for the pandemic. Before COVID 19, only a few universities in Nigeria had adopted online learning platforms and this in most cases only allows for the upload and download of lecture notes and submission of assignments, in like manner, the university libraries have been built by face-to-face interactions. Information resources are kept in different sections of the library building, with an emphasis on hard copy.

Leo (2020) reported that in the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), staff and students continue to access e-resources subscribed to in the library remotely during the COVID-19 period. The library automatically extended loan periods and waived over-due fines, the library acquired the e-copies of titles available in the market for course reserve. The library also rolled out a new service called Zoom-with-a-librarian to provide remote support for library users on e-resources and other library services, the library included digital exhibitions on their website to increase the visibility of the library's valuable collections. In October 2020, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) developed guidelines and resources taken from best global practices to tackle the issues facing libraries during the pandemic and to reopen libraries and services (IFLA, 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many university libraries across Europe and America continued to render online services to their users during the lockdown. A good example is the University of Sussex, which did not only offer vital online services, but also provided academic materials made freely available by publishers during the lockdown. Prominent electronic resource publishers responded to the call for more electronic resources to support library users' needs during the pandemic. Examples of such publishers are:

- Elsevier Science Direct compiled a resource packet for libraries, <https://www.elsevier.com/connect/library-connect/covid-19-resources-for-librarians-and-their-library-users>.

- Springer Nature page to assist libraries in the pandemic at <https://www.springernature.com/gp/librarians/landing/covid19-library-resources>.

As a way for tertiary education to move forward during the pandemic, the Nigerian Ministry of Education asked all educational institutions to outline plans for online teaching and educational interactions to keep students engaged. Some universities adopted online teaching and learning methodologies and there was a need and emphasis for the provision of online library services during the pandemic. University libraries in Nigeria were able to provide online library services by quickly subscribing to Open access materials such as those offered by publishers and educational institutions locally and abroad. University of Lagos, Akoka on the 29th of June 2020 took delivery of robots to perform quick reference services, help users find books, enhanced book classifications, track headcounts and create a user-friendly library. Some private universities remain reasonably functional given the circumstances but offered reduced services.

A study by Fasae, Adekoya and Adegbihero-Iwari (2020) revealed that most academic libraries in Nigeria provided only online materials to their users during the lockdown while very few provided access to both print and electronic materials. To encourage usability of the electronic resources and databases during this time, academic libraries had to offer webinars on strategies and the best ways to use electronic databases and resources. One of such is a webinar organized by Kwara State University library with the theme "Optimizing the Use of Educational Electronic Resources for Qualitative Collaborative Research" to educate library users on online information services and digital means of fulfilling the research needs of students and lecturers. Many such webinars were conducted across libraries in the country, these programmes were floated online through media such as Zoom, Google Meet, Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, and so on.

Going forward it is believed that online learning platforms alongside face-to-face learning will be the new order. This combined learning methodology is believed by many that it has come to stay, and libraries need to also provide information services to support the information needs of online learners. COVID-19 has brought about changes in the libraries' mode of operations. It has greatly redefined the way information sourcing, provision and dissemination are carried out. Services are made possible using social media and by the application of ICTs to library operations.

Library services in post covid-19 lockdown

To ensure the health and safety of staff and patrons alike, it was instructed that there should be limited face-to-face assistance in libraries. The aftermath of COVID-19 has taught us a lot of devices to use to sustain our services, electronic

catalogues of libraries, electronic interlibrary messages using instant messages, electronic mail and satellite transmission which offer service at a very rapid speed and limited time are now being used. There is more emphasis on the adoption of hybrid services by libraries now where both physical and electronic materials and services are offered.

Although most university libraries in Nigeria already have websites and portals where they provide electronic information and services to their users, these services were provided along with print information resources. There is a worry if the electronic resources and services are robust enough to sustain library services at this time. Wenborn (2018) posited that students requests electronic information materials so they can access and utilise them from any physical location while making use of information communication technology tools available to them. Cox (2020) assured that although, university libraries in the United States were closed due to the novel corona virus, users were able to access the library collections online and attributed this feat to years of curating digital contents, developing robust interfaces and adequate web presence that enabled them to meet up to the expectation of their users during the COVID-19 era.

With the availability of ICT tools and the increasing demand for remote access to information resources and services, it is expected that an academic library should have a website or portal where they can provide access to various electronic resources whether through subscription or by providing links to open access journals available to them. The Electronic media has provided many possibilities and opportunities for providing faster and quicker access to information at the global level. Many virtual libraries on the Internet may require that you subscribe before you can access and use them. As a user, one need to register in a library before one can be allowed to have access to its collections.

Leung (2011) stated that library users today are persistently demanding for more electronic materials and thereby justifies the need for online information services in the library. Academic libraries in Nigeria need to add more virtual services to the existing ones. This means that academic libraries services need to exist without any regard to a physical space or location, a space where e-books, e-journals, e-newspapers and others are provided to meet the needs of all categories of library users. This space can be a computer, mobile device, or the Internet. It is a technological way to bring together the resources of libraries and their information services, both internal and external, all in one place so that users can find what they need quickly and easily without their physical presence in any structural building.

Just as the physical library is a well-organized setting so also educational electronic resources are organised to suit and guide the researchers. They are well organized

in a way that users can easily search and get the information that they want for their research. Training of librarians and library users is necessary for users to be aware of the available services. Libraries may organize online workshops to enlighten users on how to maximize the use of electronic resources to create awareness of the available e-resources, how to make the best use of them and ultimately improve our research output. Transitioning from traditional to online provision of services in support of teaching and learning, academic libraries must provide access to collections and services remotely.

COVID 19 has served as a wake-up call for libraries that do not offer online services considering the changes in the academic environment post-COVID-19 pandemic. Responsive library website design and adoption, adoption of a blended librarianship model and use of social networks among others were identified as best practices to adopt to secure a place for libraries in Nigeria in the face of the imminent change in teaching methodologies post Covid-19. Friday, Chidozie and Chukwuma (2020) noted that the adoption of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and blogs in libraries in this Covid 19 pandemic era has enhanced web-based Current Awareness Services (CAS), designed to help users keep abreast of the latest developments, issues, and activities related to selected topics in their fields through saved searches, e-mail alerts, and RSS feeds. Use of webinars and sessions to engage with users on information materials and services available to them and how to make their effective use through digital platforms such as Zoom, Google Classroom, Google Hangouts and Skype.

Academic libraries will have to look beyond the provision of just physical services to the provision of hybrid services by leveraging the wide reach of social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs, wikis and so on, for information and knowledge dissemination and sharing, libraries can perform better in the area of user access to library resources at their respective location and also establish the library's visibility on social media space and facilitate online learning. Otulugbu (2019) stated that libraries are extending information services to social media platforms by providing information about available materials in the library, rendering reference services, user education and even sharing multimedia files on the facilities in the library and their uses. A study by Oche (2021) in universities in North-Central Nigeria in the last quarter of 2020 discovered that services like, Ask Librarian virtual reference service, electronic delivery service, providing access to e-books, providing access to e-journals, providing OPAC as a tool for browsing and searching the library collection, providing access to students' electronic thesis and dissertation, electronic Newspaper Clipping Depository, providing health information on COVID-19 and providing online library instructions and promoting media literacy were poorly provided in the State University libraries in North Central, Nigeria during COVID-19 lockdown.

A study by Bakti et al. (2020) on the use of social networking services in the library post-COVID 19, emphasized the need for change in the role of libraries and librarians. A change in mindset and working patterns of traditional librarians into creators of information to create new products to meet the users' needs, and to advance skills set in digital literacy. COVID 19 pandemic has reiterated the need for libraries to take seriously various digital media for delivering information to users and provide them with online support services for their information needs. These services may include:

- Provision of electronic resources - Katambur (2018) gave five proven online tools that support e-learning which are discussion boards, email lists, blogs, videos, and digital libraries. The author pointed out that the digital library includes audios, videos, courses on e-learning sites and electronic information resources such as e-books, e-journals, e-dissertation/thesis, and e-past examination papers. These materials may be compiled from the best resource contents from reputable publishers locally and abroad and links to these contents are made available on the library's website with a search engine within the database for easy retrieval.
- Information delivery services - libraries can leverage social media, e-mail lists for selective information dissemination and current awareness services. Ali and Gatiti (2020) noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, libraries managed to offer virtual services to patrons through document delivery, literature searches and online reference services, libraries were able to provide access to electronic resources, which are key to research, teaching and learning in academic institutions.
- Dispatching of books was also practiced by different types of libraries across the globe as a way of delivering books and other print resources to users during the pandemic just as in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, America, Australia and parts of Africa where some sort of pick-up and delivery services occurred. This service may adopt using the Library Management Software and automated self-lending machines placed strategically (along with hostels, cafes, and student recreational areas) across the university campus so that students can more conveniently check-in and out a book. The library may also scan upon request, chapters of a book to users and deliver it online through email and the likes.
- Provision of remote reference services - The library website will now serve as the front door to usher in users and will need to be more user-friendly, responsive, and flexible. Online reference services could be carried out by leveraging social media tools and linked to their library websites. Users can get social media handles that users can query and get an instant response by taking advantage of social media to provide virtual reference services and engage with users.

- Reassigning roles to libraries - University librarians must strategically position themselves in supporting e-learning. The emergence of technology and new systems of learning such as open and online learning has transformed libraries' services, especially with electronic learning and management software such as Blackboard, Classroom Board, Moodle, etc. Libraries need to integrate and expose their services and content into e-learning management systems. Furthermore, libraries need to create more content and platforms enabling access to digital resources and services (Mtega and Benard, 2014).

Digital libraries need to become active in providing online information services to the users to support learning with the changes in information service expectations. Librarians need to be well skilled to effectively meet users' information needs. Librarians will have to repackage information sources and services to suit the current needs of users by learning new skills, reacting to webinars and web content, Update library websites with dynamic contents and useful tutorials.

- User education - Video conferencing Apps such as Zoom, YouTube can be used to promote user awareness and user education of library resources and services. Promotion of e-books on library instructions, articles on topical issues that are relevant to users (for example, issues on COVID 19, scholarships, among others), identify and promote credible information sources, etc.

Tsekea and Chigwada (2020), studied the role of digital library services in supporting learning in universities in Zimbabwe, the study revealed that posting news and updates on the library website, checking for free resources from publishers and sharing with users are some of the services enjoyed by academic library users in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

COVID-19 is still around, even though some restrictions on social gatherings have been removed, Librarians must look forward, to discovering new services and opportunities to build a stronger library-user interface in the future. To achieve these goals, libraries need to be equipped with the latest infrastructure, information communication technologies and skilled manpower.

Recommendations

To deal with the inevitable changes in the learning environment, which have been catalyzed by COVID 19 pandemic, academic libraries in Nigeria need to respond to the evolving information needs of their users. COVID-19 has provided a unique opportunity for academic to re-evaluate their key roles and core values to support the teaching, learning and research objectives of their institutions. Libraries and librarians should always be ready to enhance their capabilities to remain at the

forefront of the battle for information provision after COVID-19 and adopt the new ways of acquiring, processing, interpreting, repackaging, and disseminating relevant and up-to-date information to support the teaching and learning of their institutions. Libraries must provide services suited for the realities of today, such services may include, online references services (chat, email, text), online resources provision, online research appointment, online databases and resources, online Inter-library collaborations, etc.

Higher institutions need to set aside adequate resources for the acquisition of electronic resources and ICT tools to meet the information needs of their community. There is also a need to give priority to staff training, and user education on technology-based resources and services.

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