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EFFECTS OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC ON ACADEMIC LIBRARY SERVICES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper highlighted the effects of corona virus on activities of academic libraries in Nigeria. The impacts of this novel virus on development of librarianship were simply pinpointed in the study. The expected roles of academic libraries during epidemics, global crisis and other forms of humanitarian crisis were discussed in this paper. The study also made references to certain studies by other authors on how libraries are expected to respond to emergency situations in a bid to still keep their mandate of providing updated information and knowledge to users. Certain factors affecting provision of needed information to users by academic libraries were extensively discussed. The study concluded that the novel corona virus (Covid 19) which has shut down almost all aspect of human endeavors during its' outbreak is still in existence and that libraries must sit up to their responsibilities in order to ensure quick responses during emergency situations that hinder human interactions as well as halting the operations of libraries. The study thus recommended that academic libraries must deploy all possible means of reaching to its' users using the most relevant technologies and social media outlets to meet the needs of its users.

Keywords: Covid19 Academic Libraries, Library Services, Nigeria.

Introduction

The year 2020 will forever stand as a historical marker, drawing a line between what can be contrastively expressed as "normal" and "new normal" or "pre Covid" and "post Covid". Corona virus and/or Covid-19 has become recurring vocabularies in virtually all sectors of the society because of its devastating blow on humanity as a whole. The academia is not left out; the lockdown across the globe dealt a massive blow on educational systems around the world, and particularly that of developing countries when digitalized information and learning is yet to find its footing. The general believe is that life after the lockdown will never remain the same considering the fact that there is yet to be any known cure for Covid-19. Like every other space that accommodates human activity and interaction, the library, both as an entity and as a discipline has received its fair share of the devastating effect of the Covid-19 scourge. For example; results from the 2020 Library Survey of *IthakaS+R US Library Survey* provide a glimpse into how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed academic libraries in the United States. Similar and even more disturbing effects are felt across libraries around the world especially university libraries in developing countries where digitalization is mostly lacking. The notion of a "new normal" connotes life with the corona virus which according to studies will never remain the same. Consequently, humanity is finding ways to live with but away from the virus.

The effect of corona virus (COVID 19) pandemic on library operations and services is undoubtedly negative. Covid 19 pandemic has grounded almost all walks of human life, academic libraries inclusive. This is a great threat to most aspects of national development the world over. The operations and services of libraries especially in Nigeria were completely down tooled, This is attributed to the fact that the novel corona virus as a deadly disease with high mortality rate on daily basis does not allow for free human interaction and thus, libraries as service-oriented organizations which centers on team playing and face-to-face interaction between users and library personnel lack options but rather forced to become victims of this deadly disease by shutting down all their routine activities,

because of high level negligence, unpreparedness and unwillingness to deliver quality health care (Lawal,2020). The development of librarianship in developing countries like Nigeria was thus hampered. In Nigeria, academic libraries are on a competitive race to meet up with global standards in terms of high quality information acquisition, organization, retrieval and dissemination to enhance academic research activities and job productivity but because of the deplorable state of the academic libraries and traditional method of meeting the information needs of users have become redundant during the current pandemic and may remain so (Anasi, 2012). The global threat posed by corona virus pandemic to human activities and right to work put the libraries at the Centre of unexpected circumstance because libraries, especially in Nigeria, were either not prepared or not adequately prepared to overcome unforeseen challenges especially during global epidemics, other natural disasters or global humanitarian crisis.

Academic Library Services during Covid 19: Responses and Roles

In every academic institution, the major service of academic libraries is to support the mission and vision of the parent institution through provision of adequate, relevant and current information resources to aid teaching, learning and research. Academic libraries thus, serve as nerve centres for overall academic activities. The novel epidemic called Covid 19 played greater negative roles in the service provision by academic libraries especially between march 2020-january 2021(in case of Nigeria).

When all public places were announced to be closed for the indefinite time, the libraries were also shut down in haste. As the library employees had no prior intimation about the temporary but immediate shut down, no plans could be made for meeting the challenges of the times. The books had been issued to the users for definite time, but now those books could not be returned. There were books, periodicals and other items which were yet to be placed appropriately. Now, due to the unannounced and indefinite shut down, the cleanliness and maintenance of hygiene of the libraries was not possible. More worryingly, the needs of the users or the information seekers could not be fulfilled, which further meant that libraries could be perceived as non-existent during the times of pandemic. Till date, it has been huge challenge for the librarians and other library staff to maintain the relevance of libraries during these times of crisis(Navneet and Khushpreet (2021).

However, in some other part of the globe academic libraries are still faced with challenges of rendering services to users successfully especially where virtual or digitalized library services have not been put in place. Many academic libraries in Nigeria and some other developing countries were completely handicapped in a bid to respond to threat posed by Covid '19 in terms of providing information services to their numerous clients. The inadequacy of or non-compliance to adoption of ICTs to library operations and services have kept many Nigerian academic libraries stagnant in terms of development. Moreover, in this dynamic world where computers and related technologies are of development. The developed libraries found it easier to cope or respond to any taking up human responsibilities, the developed libraries found it easier to cope or respond to any disease outbreak or natural disaster that can hinder free movement of human from one place to another by switching to any alternative technology-driven services. Ali and Gatti (2020) gave insight into what many libraries in Pakistan managed to provide virtual support to their users which include providing them with reference service, document delivery, and literature searches, systematic reviews, others libraries initiated online seminar(webinar) sessions using web platforms like goggle classroom, goggle hangouts, Skype or zoom during the lockdown. For any library to be successful in its services, it must adopt the most important ways of reaching out to ever-changing needs of its numerous clients. "Successful libraries will determine what platforms most effectively reach their target audience and build sustainable presence there" (Bizzle, 2017).

Audience of social networking tools is essential to the global visibility of library operations and services. It is exclusively a dependable tool for curtailing the menace of lost access to information especially during epidemics, global crisis or natural disasters. Social networking is a range of web-based software programs through which people interacts and collaborates with other people. It is a based software programs through which people interacts and collaborates with other people. It is a networked environment where a user can surf, create personal profiles, invite and connect with other

people called social friends. In social media, a user interact, share views, comments, form discussion groups and sub-groups, share audio and video files, text messages, graphics and performs a range of other mutual interaction on the Internet (Kasim, Mohammed and Garba, 2018).

Kasa and Yusuf (2020) posit that use of social media is among the new platforms that facilitate dissemination and interactive services of the new normal during the COVID-19 era. Institutions of learning and research needed to be salvaged, and organs such as academic libraries are failing in their statutory responsibilities which should not be allowed to persist. This study is our shared experience of an academic library during the covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Several opinions were made researchers at to what measures libraries are expected to be deployed in the midst of global crisis or epidemics. A comprehensive list of approaches or responses that libraries need to put in place in the event of global emergencies is the ones outlined by Mabe& Ashley (2017). The authors mainly highlighted a number of roles of libraries during emergency which are discussed as follows.

Being a Safe Haven: Due to the architect and the safety measures taken during the process of the constructions of the buildings, libraries are comparatively very safe. Therefore, whenever any natural calamities such as earthquake, hurricanes or floods etc. Occur, libraries can be used as the shelters for the nearby community. The basic facility such as shelter, water, toilets and electricity can be provided within the premises of libraries.

Offering Normal Services:Libraries should endeavour to provide consistent services to the users without any delay during crisis situations. The teachers, students and especially researchers should be provided maximum support so that they can accomplish their assignments without any hindrances.

Operating as Information Hubs: Library staff is always trained and hence, expert in accumulating relevant information and communicating the same to various seekers of the information. In the case of emergency, the library staff can spread out in public the information about adopting various precautions to prevent the ill-effects of emergency. In case of getting struck in any emergency situation, the escape routes and the remedies can also be disseminated by the library staff.

Improvising: The library staff has a formal training as well as availability of sources in keeping the community engaged in positive activities. In case of emergency, the library staff can contribute in boosting the morale of vulnerable and effected groups and communities by sharing with them positive case studies, stories and motivational talks through various online and web sources.

Ifijeh and Yusuf (2020) in their work titled "Covid – 19 Pandemic and the Future of Nigeria's University System: The Quest for Libraries' Relevance" examined the role of academic libraries in the evolving paradigm shift in teaching methodologies in Nigerian universities as a result of the outbreak of Covid-19. The study identifies possible challenges libraries may be confronted with in deploying relevant ICT infrastructures geared towards transitioning from traditional to online provision of services in support of teaching and learning. Thus, they advocated for a dynamic approach to library service delivery and urgency in the acquisition of new skill sets by academic librarians in Nigeria, while also calling on relevant stakeholders to provide adequate funding for libraries in order to be able to deploy relevant ICT infrastructures needed to adequately support teaching and learning in a virtual environment. This research will focus on the way forward in the event of the inability of government (which is typical) to provide the necessary infrastructure for a digitalized library system. Thus, how can COVID-19 safety protocols be incorporated into the modalities of operation in the traditional library system?

Likewise, Mehta and Wang (2020) in their paper titled; "Covid-19 and Digital Library Services" described the library's position during the crisis and illustrated the uncharted challenges that the pandemic posed on library digital services. Their research provided practical solutions for libraries that are coping with similar challenges in digital library services. This research will pursue a similar objective but in relation to public university libraries in North-Central Nigeria which are far from being efficiently digitalized. Notwithstanding, selected libraries will be studied for new modalities

introduced to ascertain how well the traditional approach to library usage can accommodate the Covid-safety-protocols and what effect the protocols will have on library use and learning.

Hassles to Academic Library Services during Covid'19 Pandemic

There is no doubt that academic libraries were hampered by certain factors during corona virus era. The following factors were believed to be responsible for lack of roles or responses expected of the academic libraries during epidemics;

- 1- None readiness of academic libraries or parent institutions to respond to any global outbreak of diseases (epidemics), natural disaster and humanitarian crisis or insecurity in a bid to curb the menace it has on achieving the institutions' goals.
- 2- Paucity of funds emanating from insufficient national budget to ameliorate any unforeseen negativity to library services and national development.
- 3- Lack or inadequacy of academic libraries' compliance to adaption of ICTs to their operations and services. This limits the services of such libraries to traditional or manual method and therefore, cannot render services outside the library environment.
- 4- Restriction of movement due to easy contraction of covid-19 virus from public gathering, a threat to any possible skeletal services by academic libraries.
- 5- Rampant power outages-: This is a great threat to service delivery by academic libraries in providing virtual or online services.
- 6- Slow or uneasy access to the internet by library users due to power outages or unfriendly weather; rain or wind storms which has direct effect on network masts and other ICT infrastructures.
- 7- Related to the above is the inability of users to subscribe to adequate data bundles due to financial threats posed by lockdown during the epidemic.

Conclusion

The novel corona virus (Covid 19) which has shut down almost all aspect of human endeavor during its' outbreak is still in existence and that libraries must sit up to their responsibilities in order to ensure quick responses emergency situations that hinder human interactions as well as halting the operations of libraries.

Recommendations

For any academic library to meet up with the information needs of its users during pandemics and other emergency situations, it must deploy all available means especially in this era of technology-driven society such as digitization of library resources, use of online databases, use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Gmail chat, What-Sapp, Telegram, Instagram, etc., to keep users abreast of current information in all aspect of their lives during epidemics.

Digitization of libraries standouts as the most proposed measure, besides the need for a review of libraries' architecture, and compliance to World Health Organization's safety protocols. (Hinchliffe and Wolff-Eisenberg, (2020); Ifijeh and Yusuf, (2020); Mehta and Wang, (2020); Neog, (2020); Petrowicz, (2020) Previous studies on Development of Libraries and library use have consistently suggested the digitization of libraries (Esew and Ikyembe, (2012); Ikpaahindi, (2006); Marchionini& Maurer, (1995); Echezona, (2009); Gyamfi, (2005); etc.) as an effective means of maximizing library use especially in institutions of learning. The Corona virus outbreak has further justified the argument, thus, the reaffirmation of the need for an automated and digitalized library system.

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