Relevance of Nigerian Libraries in the Dissemination of Information in Post COVID–19 Era

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Abstract

. This study aims at investigating the relevance of library services in dissemination of information during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria. There were changes in mode of teaching and learning, libraries also changed too to meet up with online provision and dissemination of information resources for students. The work captured the overview of the infection, COVID-19 as a global illness that started from Wuhan, China, the symptoms of the infection, how the virus can likely to be spread on a close contact with the victim or on any infected object. It also explained on how to prevent the spread of the infection like: washing hands regularly, maintain social distancing and strategies on how to curb the high risk of spread of the infection. This study shows how the virus got to Nigeria, which led to the closure of all social gathering and the alarming closure of schools, quarantine all students at home. The author discussed on the e-learning and libraries amidst pandemic, how possible they were able to exist. It also discussed some impacts of e-learning in academic libraries. The online provision of resources and services relevance to academic pursuit was also discussed. Relevance of library and its services, such as mobile learning, blogs, wikis were captured.

Keywords: COVID–19 Pandemic, Library, Information services, Libraries' relevance,
                Dissemination

Introduction

Coronavirus disease (COVID – 19) is described as a novel illness, which has turn global world in a though salvaging state that none has ever experienced before. It is a syndrome caused by a virus that can spread from one individual to another, usually after close contact with an infected person, object or infected surfaces. Adhikari *et al.* (2020) described Coronavirus as family of viruses that may cause various symptoms such as pneumonia, fever, difficulty in breathing and lung infection, which is common in animals and likely humans. Ahmed (2020) emphasizes that this said virus are widely distributed in many different species of animals, including bats, cattle, cats and camels, which causes respiratory tract infection in individuals.

This acute respiratory syndrome of unknown illness was reported to be for the first time in Wuhan city in China in December, 2019, this deadly virus continued to demonstrate a fast growing and spreading nature in various communities, cities and countries. Ozdemir, (2020) opined that this coronavirus family has significant human and animal pathogens, it has quickly widespread, resulting to a pandemic, an increasing number of cases in various countries throughout the World. As days went by, the virus made an alarming advancement that warrants lots of scientists and researchers to deep inside researching in search for a remedy to it or a cure, which till 2021 has not been found a particular drug or vaccine for it, until mid-2022. That undetected COVID-19 virus infections pose an immediate health *challenge* to the individual globally and till date, there is no overall accepted specific treatment or vaccine available for COVID-19, including anti-retroviral zinc (Chandra-Kapata; Kapata and Zumla, 2020). As at early 2020, it has spread outside China, with confirmed infection index cases of 37364 in 113 countries. Gennaro *et al.* (2020) declared that it was a significant community transmission occurring in several countries worldwide, then was tagged a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) because of the advances in the spread.

The impact of COVID–19 Pandemic spread

The spread of COVID–19 pandemics has been noticed to occur when there is close contact with an infected person. The risk of being infected is mostly when there is close contact with the victim of the disease. MacIntyre, (2020) noted that most significantly, the transmission of COVID-19 is that extensive transmission is possible with slight or no symptoms, that can last 5-9 days before

people notice serious fever and tend to seek for medical attention, which is a risk period for transmission and possible spread of the viruses. Unfortunately, some countries with weak health systems and poor diagnostic capacity may be prone to large epidemics, while some countries will manage to contain the spread better than others.

Health experts had their thought that warmer weather conditions could slow down or rather halt the coronavirus spread. The spread of viruses can be affected by many impending factors, such as climatic conditions like temperature and humidity, population density and medical care quality (Ahmadi, Sharifi and Ghanbari, 2020). People can become infected either through secretions being directly transferred into the mouth or noses of people who are close or could be inhaled into the lungs; touching a surface or object that has been contaminated by the infected, since it can stay active between 2-4 days and in contact with the infected droplets.

Nigeria became a victim like other countries with some infected cases in most cities like Lagos and FCT, Abuja, this has kept the country in an unsteady state for a long time. The first COVID–19 cases in Nigeria were confirmed on 27th February, 2020 in Lagos, as time went on, it increases and penetrated other states in Nigeria in its salvaging uncontrollable nature. Kalu (2020) inferred that the first official case of COVID-19 in Nigeria was noticed and announced, it was an Italian citizen, who recently arrived Lagos from Europe, including another patient in Ogun State that have been in contact with the first patient. Since then, in Nigeria, the situation developed into more occurring cases regardless of so many measures indicated by both Government and individuals to combat the virus and return to normalcy. Trying to manage the situation, there were restrictions to social gathering, religious worship, businesses, market buying and selling, schools' attendances, universities opening in order to curb the spread of the said virus. Maintaining social distancing, isolation of suspected individual and quarantine practices was also used as suggestive measures to none spread of the virus. As at May 2020 globally, the confirmed cases were 4139794, confirmed deaths are 285328 around 215 countries.

E–learning and Libraries amidst Pandemic

The issue is how can students especially university learners stay idle at home for such a long time as it was moving then, without any form of learning. Online learning is the answer to this situation, which is the kind of instruction that is highly needed and can be used to still push education and

learning forward till date. Huang; Liu; Tlili; Yang; Wang *et al*. (2020) opined that COVID-19 continues spreading in many countries of the world and how to keep learning in a free disruption state has become a major challenge to the global education community. In a bid to slow the spread of COVID-19, there was discontinuity in education caused by global issues that affect almost every continent of the world and as a result of that there was a total lockdown nationwide (Oyeniran, *et al*. 2020). Through several suggestions, they initiated and provided the practice of flexible online learning to still keep the students going, though not all the institutions practice it in Nigeria.

Most institutions are adopting different online learning strategies with different software for blended learning, such as massive open online courses (MOOC), video-based one-on-one tutoring as an alternative form of learning in this pandemic. Zayapragassarazan (2020) inferred that it is time to think of a learner-centered approach that offers rich learning choices to the student, whereby they are provided with a variety of choices for their learning and allows them to take more responsibility for their own learning. More so, there is need for group-based students discussions with the use of ZOOM platform, so that all participants may connect and interact with each other more conveniently. Viner, *et al.* (2020) alternatively supported some countries that instituted class suspensions rather than school closures, facilitated by keeping students in a homeroom class with a core teacher and having other teachers routinely moving round the classes, which is an effective social distancing measure in this pandemic, to reduce school disruption.

It is of great value to support skills in school activities, because it is not possible to take part in the originally intended learning programms in this pandemic season. It is imperative to adopt more flexible and effective e- learning that suits this time, as such more specialized skills are needed for the unique interaction with the e- instructions and e- resources that can be mostly employed in this season. Reimers, Schleicher, Saavedra and Tuominen (2020) noted that it is quite understandable that though students with access to ICT and digital devices, including internet may not be the majority in most countries in order to support government for the available effective online education. It is quite important for students to engage and be exposed to certain skill acquisition for the e-learning to improve upon a plan for education continuity. Technology (ICT) and its useful facilities ought to be put in place in order to enhance the activities of the e-learning and the access of the needed electronic resources for the learning program. In Nigeria, such recent developments and awareness of the government on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have

opened an opportunity for the adoption of e learning in delivering distance education (DE) for educating a vast mass of uneducated or less educated Nigerians (Ajadi, Adey and Oyeyinka, 2018).

Impact of E-learning in Academic Libraries

Academic institutions are increasingly using e-Learning as their primary means of teaching, training and research, likewise educational institutions embrace the Internet for the delivery of lectures in the COVID-19 pandemic period, both on and off-campus. However, organisations and institutions realized that employing e-learning brings significant benefits to both the students and the institutions in order to build-up tangible learning outcome. Some benefits include:

1. E-learning takes place irrespective of time zones, location and distance, which are not hindrances to e-learning, as in the case of physical learning. In asynchronous e-learning for example, students can simultaneously access online materials, while synchronous e-learning allows for real-time interaction between students and the instructor.

2. E-learners can use the internet to access electronic learning materials and communicate with experts in the field in which they are studying.

3. Tutoring can be done at any time and from any location by the instructor, likewise accessing library resources.

4. Online resources can be changed at any time, and learners can view the changes in real time.

5. It makes it easier for instructors to directly deliver information to students based on their requirements when accessing materials on the Internet.

6. Online learning systems can be used to determine the needs of learners and provide learners with appropriate library materials from which to choose to attain the required learning goals.

7. Digitised online repository such as working papers, journal articles, academic journals, dissertations and theses, etc. are equally beneficial for remote access and use by library users globally. By doing so, we not only increase the visibility of our scholarship but also encourage collaboration and innovation.

Online provision of Information resources and services

It is always known that library is the center of any academic institution that provide learning resources for students' academic work and its excellence. Professional librarians have always been in charge of making ready for properly organized resources and make it available for use for their patrons. In the recent crisis of pandemic, that normal school attendance is not possible, rather online learning has become the order of the day. It is of paramount importance that librarians digress possible means of making resources available for patrons for learning. UNESCO (2020) stated that it is vital to develop a platform that is responsible for coordinating education challenges in COVID-19 pandemic in providing information resources for continuing education and individualized learning of children at their various homes.

Virtual resources (library without wall) became an alternative for information surfing and retrieval, such virtual resources with appropriate links are thus: E-books – www.digitalbookindex.com; www.bookbunker.biz; E- Journals e.g., JSTOR – http://www.jstor.org; E – Reference books – http://www.britannica.com/ http://dictionary.cambridge.org; E – Zine (electronic Magazine) – www.indiatoday.com/ www.musicindia.com; E – Thesis and Dissertation – www.unesco.orb/ http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/thesis. Students from their various homes make use of these links to the resources of the library for their studies. Subscribing and updating of relevant databases that will aid the access and retrieval of needed information by the users, such databases like EBSCOHOST – http://search.ebscohost.com; HINARI – http://www.who.int/hinari/training/en; AGORA – http://agorajournals.fao.org. The shift to virtual learning as a result of pandemic presents challenges to institutions in some developing countries, many university libraries not having sufficient IT facilities and financial means to put remote access in place in order to bridge the digital divide and grant students' access to subscribed e-resources from homes (Krueger, 2020).

Relevance of Libraries and its Services

As a result of the COVID-19 lockdown, which forced all educational institutions and Libraries to close their doors, numerous e-learning platforms have been meticulously organised and implemented to provide easy access to online materials and continue academic activity. These e-learning platforms have significantly impacted the educational sector, particularly tertiary institutions and Academic Libraries. This is because it enables learners to choose the most

appropriate and flexible learning mode following their preferences, commitments, or both. Rajendra (2009) gave some of the e-learning platforms which have been implemented in various academic libraries to include:

Mobile Learning: It is a kind of learning that takes place in learning environments and spaces that account for the mobility of technology, mobility of learners and mobility of learning". M-learning, is similar to e-learning but with mobile devices like iPhone, smartphones etc. According to ElHussein and Cronje (2010), m-learning is only feasible when "the technology in use is fully mobile and when the technology users are also mobile when they learn". Mobile learning would necessitate the library also to have mobile-friendly web interfaces. Many database aggregators have already adapted to the mobile environment.

Blogs: A blog (a truncation of "weblog") is a discussion or informational website published on the World Wide Web consisting of discrete, often informal diary-style text entries (posts). Posts are typically displayed in reverse chronological order so that the most recent post appears first, at the top of the web page; this allows precise information to be disseminated and accessed. Students and instructors can both utilise blogs to keep up with current events. In addition, they are useful to initiate discussions.

Wikis: Wikis are pieces of software that allow users to submit or alter content under the supervision of an editorial board. A wiki is a knowledge base website on which users collaboratively modify content and structure directly from the web browser. In a typical wiki, the text is written using simplified mark-up language and often edited with the help of a rich-text editor. A wiki is run using wiki software, otherwise known as a wiki engine. Wikis are a great place to go for knowledge and links to other websites. Wikis such as Wikipedia.

Personalised Librarian Services: Personalized librarian service is aimed to help researchers get the most out of the academic library. Researchers will be assigned a librarian who will:

• Send email and SMS updates about the library.

• Answer questions about the library.

• Assist in locating library resources.

• Help when they are not sure where to start with research.

• Emails, as well as e-mail-based discussion forums, are useful in delivering content as well as communications on E-learning.

Google Classroom: It is a free service available to anyone with a personal Google account. Google Classroom is a straightforward web program for creating, publishing, grading assignments and uploading pre-recorded videos and other instructional resources. It provides tailored learning, but it lacks collaborative learning.

Zoom: An academic library can acquire a zoom license or the educator has to sign up for an account for free. It is ideal for short scheduling meetings. Zoom offers a full-featured basic plan for free with unlimited meetings. The teacher can host a live class for 40 min for 100 participants. They can invite students to meetings through an invitation link sent to their Email. They can therefore join the meetings directly on the zoom application.

Google Meet: Google Meet is an instrument on the web for video conferencing. It is the business arranged form of Google's Hangouts stage. It permits clients to dial in telephone numbers to get to gatherings, subsequently empowering clients with a moderate web association with bringing in. Google Meet can be a decent choice as it is free. Personnel can welcome up to 250 members to join a class. The downside of utilising Google Meet is moderator has less self-governance like completion show, quiet and unmute all and controlled offer the screen.

Microsoft Teams: It is a hub for teamwork in Microsoft 365. If a teacher is looking for something which a combination of Zoom and Google Classroom offers, then Microsoft Teams could be the choice. However, you need to have a paid version of office 365 and a better and faster internet connection to enjoy the live class.

GoToMeeting: It's an online meeting, desktop sharing, and video conferencing software suite that lets you meet with other computer users, consumers, clients, or co-workers in real-time over the internet.

ResearchGate: ResearchGate is a social networking site for scientists and researchers to share papers, ask and answer questions, and find collaborators and fellow researchers

Skype: Free voice conference calls allow up to 50 people to participate in a video or audio group call simultaneously.

Library Website: Library services are promoted via its website. This is the primary gateway to information about all of the library's collections and services. In addition, the library website promotes access to online databases, eBooks, and other online information resources.

Flicker: Flicker is an image and video hosting service. Flicker had a total of 87 million registered members and more than 3.5 million new images uploaded daily. Photos and videos can be accessed from Flickr without registering an account, but an account must be made to upload content to the site. Registering an account also allows users to create a profile page containing photos and videos that the user has uploaded and can add another Flicker user as a contact.

Messenger: Messenger such as Yahoo Messenger, MSN Messenger can be used for synchronous interaction. Other e-learning platforms that can facilitate access to online resources in the COVID 19 lockdown and post-lockdown period are social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, Podcasts, Instant Messaging (IM), Rich Site Summary (RSS), LinkedIn, Myspace, Library thing, etc. These tools are seen as e-learning and web-based channel of information dissemination and learning which has to permeate all aspects of Education. The outbreak of COVID-19 and the influence of lockdown has really transformed e-educational institutions and forced them to the use of long-term teaching and adopting e-Learning tools that will enable remote learners to access their online resources for effective educational service delivery.

Strategies adopted by libraries for its relevancy

The pandemic transformed a lot of things in and within the library, including its chores managements and delivery. The need to provide online services because of COVID-19 pandemic has led to drastic change in the activities and operations of most libraries, even within our academic libraries. There was creation of different ways of reaching to the users for service delivery. Magut and Kiplagat (2022) opined that COVID-19 pandemic has enabled librarians to know the importance of community interaction as opposed to only shelving and providing physical services. Such enabling factors made them remain relevant all through the pandemic, such as:

1. **Designing Functional Library Websites**

A library website is designed to publicize library, information and reference services as well as enhance document delivery, most Nigerian libraries don't have website and even those that have, did not meet up to the global best practices. Gbaje and Kotso (2014) in their article on Assessing the contents of Nigeria academic library websites opined that for a library website to meet the information needs of visitors and conform to best practices, it should include single point of access to library resources, allow teaching staff to direct students to useful resources more easily, promote

the resources held by the library, improve access to educational web based resources, provide more efficient access to e-resources, improve information service delivery, facilitate access to library and information services remotely. Therefore, the starting point for libraries to still remain relevant in the post COVID-19 pandemic is in the designing and adoption of functional library websites.

2. Use of social media

Social media is of vital importance, especially for the librarian's services delivery. It is imperative for the libraries to remain relevant always, especially during post COVID-19 period. Social media networks are increasing speedily as channels of communication and interaction among individuals. One of the major advantages of social media networks are their capacity to build relationships and social interaction amongst individuals, as such, if adopted by libraries will help them to connect with the information needs of its users. Social networks also help the exchange of questions and answers among librarians and library users in real time. Social networks used by most Nigerian libraries today include Facebook, YouTube, Blogging, WhatsApp, telegram, twitter etc. University libraries in Nigeria could also leverage on the opportunities provided by these networks to encourage information resources and services to online users.

3. Maintain Social Distancing

Setting limits on numbers of people using the library at any one time, and establishing how to enforce these (for example through advanced booking, ticketing, or using other means of counting numbers of users), as well as preventing situations where people may gather closely together, for example using one-way systems, limiting furniture, keeping reading rooms closed, or continuing to postpone programming, and keeping toilets closed. Given that close bodily contact seems to be the key means of contacting the virus, a center response has been 'social distancing' observing a safe distance between individuals in order to trim down the risks of the virus passing from one person to another. Coughing, sneezing, and even talking means that potentially infectious droplets are released into the air. The suggested distance varies from country to country but seems not to be below 1m (3-4ft), and is mostly more.

4. Managing remote working

With libraries and library associations closing offices, many in the library field are facing challenges on how to manage remote (or isolated) working effectively. Clearly the best situation

is where it has been possible to plan in advance, making sure that all staff have the equipment and training necessary to work efficiently and safely from home, and that you can stay in touch easily. With many in the same situation, there are lots of materials available on the internet already, with a strong focus on regular contacts and maintaining good spirits and motivation. Yet with it unclear how long restrictions will last; it is always worth having plans in place for how to cope with longer-term impacts. Strong contact between libraries within a network can also help, the pandemic has seen the rise of Facebook groups and virtual forums as spaces for people to share and learn.

5. **Limiting numbers in the library**

One step that can be taken to lessen risks is to limit the number of people in the library at any point in time. This makes it easier to maintain social distance. For example, in China, the public libraries are making use of a ticketing system to limit numbers in the library, this can also be used to reduce the virus. Another example, the National Library of Serbia in its first phase of reopening permitted only 5 people into its reading room, while some school libraries in Geneva, where they have opened, are letting just one pupil in at a time.

6. **Promoting hygiene**

As throughout the pandemic, the importance of high standards of hygiene is a key theme, for example ensuring that staff have the possibility to wash their hands frequently, access to materials such as gloves and facemasks, and hand sanitiser is available at the entrance (possibly next to equipment such as computers).

7. **Keeping Staff Safe**

It is very obviously and recommended that a priority is to ensure that staff are fit, well, and comfortable in providing services, indeed, this may also be a legal obligation. Some library management has recommended and insisted that no library should reopen unless both librarians and users are properly equipped with needed resources. Other strategies are:

8. Digital resources creation
9. Increasing demand and application of digital and specialized skills
10. Partnership and collaboration to bridge knowledge, skills and resource gap
11. Demand for specialized user-centric library services
12. The urgent need to redesign library spaces

13. Embedded librarianship

14. Support for online retrieval

15. Support for online research

16. Email Marketing

17. Content marketing driven library services

18. Digital retrieving Skills

Challenges that Affected Library Services in Post COVID–19 Pandemic

1. **Paucity of funding**

Any attempt that involves the deployment of ICTs is capital intensive; libraries are not excused from these costs. It has however been recognized that academic libraries in Nigeria are poorly funded. Daniel (2013) observed that lack of financial resources is the major reason for the underdevelopment of libraries in Nigeria. University libraries get their funding mainly from the 10% recurrent budgetary allocation of their parent institutions as stipulated by the government.

2. Lack of technological infrastructure

Nigerian library professionals are aware of benefits of ICT and it is evident that they are positively disposed to introducing ICT to their traditional services. Library services can better support teaching and learning by leveraging on the benefits of ICT. This awareness has prompted libraries to propose several ICT projects; however technological infrastructural challenges seem to be the major barriers to execution of such projects. It has been observed by Davies et al. (2013) that technological infrastructure that could facilitate projects in Nigeria and other developing countries, has not received the required attention from relevant authorities.

3. **Inadequate skilled personnel**

Traditional methods of administering library services aimed at providing support for teaching, learning and research in higher institutions of learning has experienced tremendous change as a result of ICT. Libraries now operate beyond the walls of their buildings tilting more towards the virtual environment (Thanuskodi,2015). The need for librarians in Nigeria to improve their ICT skills with the urgency it deserves therefore cannot be overemphasized. No matter the level of sophistication of ICT infrastructure deployment in the library, librarians must possess relevant ICT

skills to be able to maximize their use in meeting the dynamic information needs of users and to contribute meaningfully in the emerging change in teaching methodologies.

4. Lack of internet connectivity and data usage

Due to the poverty level of Nigeria, most of the students cannot afford to purchase internet data and the personal computer to access resources online. Even to login for the online learning during that pandemic, such is a great challenge.

5. Lack of Technological Gadget

Many of the Nigerian citizens or library users who are meant to access the library don't have technological gadgets to access the library resources remotely.

6. Adjusting of online resources for the deaf and hard of hearing students

It is highly challenging for deaf and hard of hearing students to be able to adjust quickly to online access to electronic resources, because they are not used to such.

7. Lack of data privacy

Since the closure of schools, teachers are trying to use several platforms for e-learning. Such platform like ZOOM for remote conference services, which stores video conference recordings on storage space without a password easy to be tampered with, no data privacy.

8. Increase in cybercrimes (No security)

COVID-19 outbreak paved way for cyber-criminal acts. The possibility of keeping some sensitive data from being stolen is number one priority for the digital tools that assist in delivering services electronically.

9. Isolation (No communication between the librarians and the students)

Students got used to visiting the library with an eye-to-eye communication, complete isolating from both the library and the librarians will highly be a challenging factor to cope with.

10. Lack of Interactions

In online contact there is no face- to- face, which increases understanding. It is impossible to keep users active engaged without the physical presence, now that pandemic separated the physical contact of both the librarians and the users, they may likely not do wonderfully well in all activities in electronic services and retrieval.

With the above, it is important to observe some certain factors for enhancing electronic/online service delivery and retrieval during the compulsory stay-at-home (COVID-19 pandemic), as thus:

1. Use of needed technologies and its facilities for service delivery and access.
2. Ensuring reliable network.
3. Adopting relevant digital learning resources.
4. Organizing and facilitating online activities towards a justifiable accessibility of resources.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a complete sudden reliance on the use of online learning and resources, which paved way for enhanced teaching and learning that requires careful attention to ensure online platforms and information resources for students at home. To ensure enhancement, it requires packaged and repackaged online delivery and services. Adopting relevant technologies and skills is an advantage to ensure learners full participation in the online retrieval.

Recommendation (Way Forward)

The study suggested the following for a way forward:

1. There should be electronic resources readily available for use by patrons.
2. Provision of fund for the library to create additional avenue/ access for all users to avail the opportunity to access resources from their locations with ease.
3. There should be reliable internet connectivity for accessibility.
4. Librarians should engage in some relevant platforms for information retrieval if needed.
5. The library and school authority should consider the benefits of all students, both rich and poor, to access the resources.
6. The government of the state capital should create a free channel in the local radio and organise routine teaching, where all can listen to teachers, irrespective of your location.

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