



ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA'S POST COVID-19 PANDEMIC ERA

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Abstract

The emergence of the novel and contagious covid-19 pandemic has in no doubt presented unique challenges to all stakeholders of the library. This forced academic and research libraries and librarians all over the globe to ascertain new ways of providing library and information services to library and information users. This paper therefore discusses academic and research libraries in the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria with a special concern on the information services provision role. To achieve this, the paper conceptually treated the concept of library and information services and explored the role of academic and research libraries in the post Covid-19 pandemic era. The paper also presents the digital platforms availability for the academic and research libraries utilization for the fulfilment of library and information services role in the post COVID-19 pandemic era. It also identifies and discusses the skills requirements of librarians in the post COVID-19 pandemic era. The paper also highlights the challenges and made recommendations such as academic and research libraries should re-assess every existing service and re-design it to facilitate its use by library users and in view of the government COVID-19 protocols to deal with the situation.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Pandemic, Library and Information Services, Provision, Digital Platforms*

Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 marked one of the most profound global health crises of the twenty-first century. First identified on December 31, 2019, in Wuhan, Hubei Province of China, the novel coronavirus quickly drew the attention of the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) due to its highly contagious nature and alarming mortality rate. Unlike many respiratory illnesses, COVID-19 presented a wide spectrum of symptoms ranging from fever, dry cough, and shortness of breath to extreme fatigue, and in severe cases, acute respiratory distress. Vulnerable populations, particularly the elderly and individuals with underlying health conditions such as diabetes, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases, and those undergoing dialysis, were found to be at significantly greater risk of developing life-threatening complications (WHO, 2020).

The virus did not remain confined to its point of origin. Within weeks, it spread across continents, disrupting societies and economies on a scale unseen in recent history. Nigeria reported its first confirmed case on February 27, 2020, in Lagos. The patient was an Italian citizen working in Nigeria who had returned from Milan two days earlier. This single case marked the beginning of a national struggle against a pandemic that would soon test the resilience of Nigeria's public health system, governance structures, and social fabric.

As infections multiplied, the Nigerian government responded with drastic measures. On March 30, 2020, the President announced a ban on social and economic activities in Abuja, Lagos, Ogun States, and surrounding cities, initially for 14 days, in an effort to stem the spread of the virus. These restrictions soon evolved into a nationwide lockdown as the virus continued to infiltrate communities across the federation. While these measures were necessary to contain transmission, they also carried severe economic and social consequences. Businesses were shuttered, livelihoods disrupted, and social interactions curtailed, creating a climate of uncertainty and hardship.

Beyond the immediate health and economic impacts, the pandemic reshaped the way institutions functioned. The lockdowns forced organizations, service providers, and even governments to rethink how they delivered essential services. Libraries and librarians, traditionally reliant on physical spaces and face-to-face interactions, found themselves compelled to adopt digital technologies to meet the information needs of users. As Dadhe and Dubey (2020) observe, the pandemic accelerated the integration of technology into library and information services, transforming them from optional enhancements into indispensable tools for survival in both the pandemic and post-pandemic era.

Thus, COVID-19 was not merely a health crisis; it was a catalyst for systemic change. It exposed vulnerabilities in public health and governance, highlighted the fragility of economic systems, and underscored the importance of adaptability in the face of global disruption. For Nigeria, as for much of the world, the pandemic became a defining moment that demanded resilience, innovation, and a reimagining of how institutions serve society in times of crisis.

Conceptual Review

Library and information services are resources, programmes and services provided by libraries to address the information needs of users (Adomi, 2008). The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated radical changes in the provision of library and information services as strict lockdown and social distancing measures were imposed in the early phases of the pandemic (Dadhe and Dubey, 2020). The Internet and web technologies has created a new enabling

environment for libraries to enhance and strengthen its service provision in the period of COVID-19 and post COVID-19 era. Ishtiaq, Sehar and Shahid (2020) reported that, with the aid of Internet and web technology academic and research libraries use different digital platforms to provide services to users in this post pandemic era. The authors stated that the digital platforms are used to interact with library users, provide the information they required as well as answer their queries. Leo (2020) identified the digital platforms to include zoom, Google classroom, Google hangouts meet, WebEx, blog, Facebook, WhatsApp, twitter, LinkedIn to mention but a few. With these digital platforms the library can provide remote access to e-resources.

The use of digital platforms in providing library services in this post pandemic era has prompted a comprehensive review of the competencies and skills required by librarians. Ashcroft (2004) noted that the rapid introduction of new technologies implies that information professionals in Nigeria and other developing countries need to be more flexible in adapting and adopting new skills and strategies for handling library operations. The skills required by librarians in this post COVID-19 era include information technology skills, digitalization skills, skills in provision of intellectual access to information, professional skills, personal skills, skills in development of metadata and information literacy skills (Iorfa, Tondo and Kabir, 2019). All these skills are required by librarians in the provision of library and Information services in the post pandemic era.

The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 which brings about social distancing measures, visit to the library could be restricted. Therefore, provision of library services through digital platforms becomes paramount. This is because users may demand for additional digital resources in this post Pandemic era. The paper therefore, explore the types of library and information services provided in the post COVID-19 pandemic era, the skills required by librarians in the provision of library and information services provided in the post COVID-19 pandemic era and digital platforms available for the provision of library and information services provided in the post COVID-19 pandemic era.

In the education sector, online learning has emerged as an elixir to address the restrictions imposed in the wake of corona virus pandemic and considered as a feasible option to overcome the challenges. Consequently, academic and research libraries have been exploring the collection of potential e-resources and providing remote access to those which may be of interest to the fraternity in support of academic and research activities (Dadhe and Dubey 2020). The authors reported that many academic and research libraries have significant digital services; some even have introduced multi-mode access to resources in order to deal with the demand. Some of these digital and significant services in the post Covid-19 pandemic era include mobile application services, live chat, e-mail management and document delivery services to mention but a few.

Academic and Research Libraries and the Provision of Library and Information Services in the Post COVID-19 Pandemic Era

The main aim of any academic library is to enhance and strengthen the teaching, learning and research process by installing seamless document/information delivery system and around the country all libraries of higher education system have been working hard to provide services and access to collections to the users who have been displaced due to COVID-19. Many libraries have provision of remote access to subscribed e-resources, many have taken a lot of effort in leveraging and expanding existing online services. Libraries can provide various online digital platforms where users can easily access their information. These online digital platforms links to

Bhati and Kumar (2020) can be shared on organization websites as well as through social media platforms.

In response to the uncertain and difficult time, some publishers are providing expanded access to e-resources (access to additional materials than subscribed by the library) including e-books, e-journals, e-databases to mention but a few for a limited period in this post pandemic. Libraries have highlighted the links of these free and expanded resources on their portal to facilitate visibility of these options available for users. This has enhanced the possibility of users availing the virtual services and hence, visiting library portal frequently. Almost all the libraries have facilitated access point to provide digital version of the newspaper and magazines that can be read using any convenient handy digital devices (Bhati and Kumar 2020).

Beyond this, there are many scholarly freely available resources available notably repository of Electronic Thesis and Dissertation, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), AMS Free Online Books, Book Boon, Directory of Open Access Books (DOAB) and many more. Libraries have brought together all such resources onto a single page and made these available for their users in anticipation to the information need. Libraries has provided link of resources sharing initiative by International Federation of Library Association (IFLA).

Access to licensed electronic resources is subject to the terms and conditions under which they are procured. As the scientific community across the globe is racing against time to develop a definitive treatment for the disease, access to as much as and as quickly as possible published literature to accelerate the ongoing research is the need of the hour. Notably, a lot of commercial publishers and vendors have taken a significant initiative and have provided open access to materials related to COVID-19. Others have facilitated access by making it easier to log-in and access materials from outside of official networks. According to Dadhe and Dubey (2020) National Digital Library of India(NDLI) has open its services to all, by providing special COVID-19 related literature and information ranging from research writings, projects, funding, start-ups, datasets, multimedia contents under these single section 'COVID-19 Research Repository'. The library can equally create a new app with freely available e-contents to access different resources on a single platform and organize information literacy skills classes for those who are not familiar with digital tools. These could be done through open course wares, open learning resources, webinar and virtual classrooms to mention but a few.

In order to easing the stress level of users to get the required information, libraries themselves are doing great work to inform their members and support them in this difficult time. Many libraries have also taken effort in arranging webinars relating to topics starting from information literacy to research ethics to educate their users on the use of digital information in their learning and research activities (Dadhe and Dubey 2020).

Digital Platforms Available for Library and Information Services in the Post COVID-19 Pandemic Era

Digital platforms in this context are the software and technology used to provide library services with the use of information technology. However, for academic and research libraries to perform their role of library and information services in the post Covid-19 pandemic era, digital platforms are needed. Some of these include:

Google Classroom (<https://classroom.google.com>): Teaching and Learning Platform: An online teaching and learning platform Teacher can make online classrooms, upload teaching material, and conduct online quizzes.

Google Hangouts Meet (<https://meet.google.com>): Video Conferencing: Stay connected with teachers and students for teaching and learning and official academic work.

Zoom (<https://www.zoom.com>): It is a platform for organizing meetings, interactive classrooms for teaching virtual and hybrid techniques, micro learning and Video Conferencing.

WebEx (<https://www.webex.com>): Video Conferencing, collaborations, virtual classrooms: It is the leading and widely using platform for webinars, official meetings, video conferencing, and webinars. Recently many webinars are organized by INFLIBNET in this platform with support of web of science teams and others.

Go to Meeting (<https://www.gotomeeting.com>): Meeting tools and web-hosted service: It is an online meeting platform for various institutions. There are various features available in this tool like desktop sharing, and video conferencing that enables the users like customers, clients or colleagues through digital media.

Easy class (<https://www.easyclass.com>): Learning Management System: It provides a platform for educators to create online classes where they can store the study/course materials online, assessment tests, class assignments, various quizzes, and exams related documents. A feedback system and due dates facility is also available.

Blackboard (<https://www.blackboard.com>): Learning Management System: It provides a platform for educators to create online classes & Share class announcements, learning materials, and make learning accessible anywhere.

Google Form (<https://www.googleforms.com>): for online Quiz/Test: Use google form for assessment purposes and take online quizzes. It also has features like randomization, result declaration, grading, and item analysis.

Microsoft Teams (<https://teams.microsoft.com>): It is developed by Microsoft for teamwork. To update all your teams with instant chats, meetings, files, and apps together on a single platform.

Social media platforms can also be used as digital platforms to render library services during COVID-19 pandemic. These social media platforms include:

Blog: A blog also known as Weblog is an online journal style or informational website which displays information in the reverse sequential order, with latest posts or subject appearing first or at the topmost. Blog pages are social media web platforms where a writer or group of writers and readers or viewers shares their views on a subject or topic even news as it may apply, (OgiDjuraskovic and First Site Guide 2018 cited by Bakare, Yacob and Umar 2018). Blogging can be used to promote library services like library outreaching, dissemination of information, building library image, communicate both to internal and external users, and highlight new material arrival and promoting available materials in the library collection. Also Libraries can promote their library services like opening hours, special library events, online discussion and community services like festivities in their local communities, ceremonies, sports. Trending news

about issues of general interest can be posted and allows users to comment instantly and add their contribution and opinions.

Facebook: is a social media platform that facilitates social interactions between users. Facebook allows users to create group with unique identity where members can interact and share messages, pictures and even materials when they signed in. Librarians can use Facebook to promote Library service like hosting library homepage, advertise opening and closing hours, locations, website information, newly acquired materials and classmate interaction and discussion on special subjects. Research has revealed that millions of users visit the Facebook platform every hour and most of them are young people. Facebook page can serve as a connect centre to Library users and libraries can also remind user through posting of up-to-date messages and pictures of the resources available in the library, (Bakare, Yacob and Umar 2018).

WhatsApp is a social media platform with instant free messaging and voice over telephoning services. Instant text messaging, voice calls, video calls, documents and media sending serves are all available on this platform. Libraries can send instant messages to users and get instant responses. Urgent information that requires Library user's attentions can be communicated to users, even documents and materials can be send to users at any time and even outside the Library working hours, (Bakare, Yacob and Umar 2018).

Twitter: is an online real time news and social networking platform where users post and interact with messages. The ease of posting, interacting and sharing of information on this platform have made it a very vital platform for librarians to reach and interact with library users Information on the go with user's responses can be tweeted at everybody convenience. Other social media platforms that can be used to provide services to library users in this pandemic era include skype, LinkedIn, Instagram to mention but a few.

Skills Requirements of Librarians in the Provision of Library and Information Services in the Post COVID-19 Pandemic Era

It is said in every forum by every one that Library and Information Science professionals need to have various skills, competencies necessitated by technological advances and changing role of the profession itself. They have to manage information resources of varied nature, involving managerial aspects. Besides, they are required to perform several information based retrieval and dissemination activities, which range from traditional to most advanced ones viz., reference, referral, online information searching, Internet browsing, digital libraries and online cataloguing among others. It is also said that, library and information science professionals should be competent enough accepting challenges and capable of adapting themselves to changes. Library and Information Science professionals should ably show professionalism, (Warraich, 2008).

Umerah (2017) cited by Iorfa, Tondo and Kabir (2019) identified skills required by Library and Information Science professionals to include professional skills, managerial skills, personal skills and technical skills.

Professional skills

- a. Information technology skills: these include networking, library automation and digitalization, web based services, database creation and management systems including CDs, LIBSYS, content development, desktop publishing, intranet, presentation, reprography, micrographs, facsimile, video text, Teletext, hardware/software skills and relational databases including the ability to create data structures which facilitate the indexing and retrieval of

information. Others include efficient use of search engines, use of social media tools (Facebook, blogs, twitter etc.) to provide library services, web cast and search skills.

- b. Information literacy skills: this has to do with the ability to locate information efficiently and effectively, evaluate information critically and competently and using information accurately and creatively. Also included here is the economics and marketing of information products and services, information resource management, information processing and organising, e-mail operation skills, multimedia perspectives and video conferencing. Information literacy form the basis for lifelong learning and enables learners to master content and extend their investigations to become more self-directed thus, assuming greater control over their own learning.
- c. Knowledge management skills: this is required for managing organizational knowledge to solve the organizational problems.

Managerial skills

This is the business management skills such as marketing, financing, accounting, control, planning and goal setting, decision making, human relations and managing growth, they are essential in launching and growing a new venture, (Umerah, 2017).

- a. *Personal entrepreneurial skills*: This skill includes inner control/discipline, risk taking, innovative, change oriented and ability to manage change, persisted, visionary leadership.
- b. *Technical skills*: writing oral communication, interpersonal, monitoring environment, ability to organise and network building. These skills form the basis of the modular approach to an educational curriculum, (Umerah, 2017). Now that ICT convergence changes the nature of information creation, storage and communication, information provision appears in a variety of contexts. Library and Information Science graduates need to understand the effect of new technology on labour market and demand for information services and how any changes in the way library provide services will affect all stakeholders.

Challenges facing libraries and information services in the post-covid-19 era

The challenges facing libraries and information services in the post-COVID-19 era are multifaceted and deeply entrenched in both structural and systemic limitations. One of the most pressing concerns is the lack of re-assessment of existing library and information services. Many institutions continue to operate under frameworks designed for pre-pandemic realities, without critically evaluating whether these systems remain relevant in a world where digital access and remote service delivery have become indispensable (Dadhe & Dubey, 2020). This absence of reassessment has left libraries struggling to meet the evolving needs of users, thereby undermining their role as central hubs of knowledge dissemination.

Closely related to this is the lack of re-designation of services to facilitate easier information use. The pandemic highlighted the importance of user-centered design, yet many libraries have not restructured their services to ensure accessibility, efficiency, and relevance in a digital-first environment. Users often encounter difficulties navigating resources, which diminishes the effectiveness of libraries as gateways to information (Anyim & Mbah, 2011).

Another significant challenge lies in the inadequate skills among library staff to reassess and redesign services for the post-pandemic era. The sudden shift to digital platforms demanded competencies in information technology, digital literacy, and online resource management, including skills that many librarians had not been trained to master. This skills gap has hindered innovation and limited the ability of libraries to provide seamless services in a context where virtual access is no longer optional but essential (Aliyu, 2024).

The problem is compounded by the inadequate provision of ICT facilities. Robust technological infrastructure—computers, internet connectivity, digital databases, and software tools, is critical for modern information services, yet many libraries, particularly in developing economies, remain under-equipped. This lack of ICT resources not only restricts service delivery but also exacerbates the digital divide, leaving many users without access to critical information (Efuk, Etuk, & Baghebo, 2024).

Government support, which should ideally serve as a backbone for institutional resilience, has also been insufficient. The inability of governments to provide new equipment and materials has left libraries struggling to fulfill their roles during and after the pandemic. This neglect reflects broader systemic issues in public sector management and undermines the capacity of libraries to adapt to crises (OECD, 2024; World Bank, 2022).

Finally, even where training initiatives have been introduced, there is often no effective system of evaluation to measure the performance of library staff after such training. Without mechanisms to assess outcomes, training risks becoming a perfunctory exercise rather than a transformative process. Evaluation systems are critical not only for accountability but also for continuous improvement, ensuring that staff can translate new knowledge into practical, impactful service delivery (Bolanle & Akinade, 2023).

Taken together, these challenges illustrate the precarious position of libraries in the post-COVID-19 era. They highlight the urgent need for reassessment, redesign, skill development, technological investment, government support, and rigorous evaluation. Only through such holistic reforms can libraries fulfill their mandate as dynamic institutions capable of meeting the information needs of society in both crisis and recovery.

Conclusion

A lot has to be learnt about library and information services in the new normal through the exploration of all possibilities and flexibilities in order to better serve our users. No doubt academic and research libraries in different countries and regions have different strategies to support their users in the best way they can. To end on a positive note, however, COVID-19 provides a unique opportunity for librarians to rethink their key roles and core values in providing the needed information to library users during and after this very challenging time.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the identified challenges.

1. There should be reassessment of the existing library and information services
2. There should be re-designation of the existing library and information services to facilitate easy information retrieval and use

3. Academic and research libraries should adequately train and retrain library professionals to reassess and redesign existing library and information services in the post Covid-19 pandemic era
4. There should be provision of the needed ICT facilities for the provision of library and information services by the academic and research libraries in the post Covid-19 pandemic era
5. Government should make provision for new equipment and materials for the provision of better information services role in the pandemic era
6. There should also be an evaluating system which checks the performance of library staff after training.

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