

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN: EMERGING ROLE FOR 21st CENTURY LIBRARIANS**By****Ordu, Innocent Iwezor, Ph.D**

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Abstract

This study examines the role of librarians in the current COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in Nigeria. It also, x-rays the necessary digital skills, abilities, and competencies required by librarians to navigate the process of providing necessary information to library patrons in spite of the lockdown and strategies for information dissemination. The implication of this study is that librarians must provide information without boundaries, and restrictions despite the lockdown and restrictions, Information provision has gone beyond the level of physical gathering as libraries now have more online users. Digital skills and competencies are crucial for librarians in discharging their duties to library clientele and maintaining their relevance in the profession. Digital platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, WhatsApp and other social platforms have been recommended for teaching and learning, and also provide access to other digital content and databases.

Keywords: Covid-19, Librarians Role, Digital Skills.

Introduction

The COVID-19 virus is having a significant impact on library operations and services. This has put librarians in a state of trying to figure out how to provide services to users and as well as work remotely to satisfy prospective patrons. As the World Health Organization (WHO) has

set out, most people are infected with the COVID-19 virus, the disease it causes and how it spreads.

The COVID-19 virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Meanwhile, many libraries around the country are closed while some are semi-closed. Of course, this is worrisome to the profession. It is on this premise that the creative mind of the librarian becomes necessary to figure out what should be done in the face of these challenges. So many questions have arisen on the role of the librarian. How can librarians leverage this crisis to create new and innovative collections and services to improve their libraries? How can the library be relevant in the face of this lockdown? What skills are relevant to the librarian to be able to remain relevant to users and the profession? What kind of services should libraries and librarians provide to their users? Through which channels should library products and services be made available to users? These and many other pertinent questions are the focus of 21st-century librarians in the face covid-19 pandemic. Fortunately, the year 2020 is a year of organizing digital content.

Providing multiple opportunities for researchers, providing scholarly interaction and collaborations, developing robust search interfaces and web interaction among others are the perceived advantages of this transition. For most librarians, COVID-19 lockdown brought with it opportunities. Inventions, innovations and possibilities. Meanwhile, with plans and discussions about reopening of schools, campuses, and libraries, academic libraries face a paradigm shift in information management. Provisions, and services. Instead of returning to normal, libraries will be returning to a “new normal” which is the new order a situation where personal classes and service interactions may be impossible or no longer fashionable or preferred, whereas collections in physical format may be a barrier to access by users, and where collaborative study is shunned in favor of social distancing in buildings that can only safely house half of the people. The lockdown experienced and still experience across the globe as a result of covid-19 pandemic provided impetus for a new way of providing library services and operations to patrons. This approach explains the creative and innovative nature of the librarian to serve humanity and remain relevant.

Brief Overview of COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

The level of severity of the new Coronavirus pandemic in 2019 leaves much anxiety to worry about and desperate measures have been taken to curb the pandemic. Such measures according to WHO including hygiene hand washing, isolation and social distancing. It was observed that

the gathering of people is a major catalyst in the spread of coronavirus, while social distancing is suggested as therefore an important tool for its control. But compliance with this measure has remained a concern, especially In Nigeria. The risk associated with failure to comply with social distancing as a result of ignorance or total defiance is enormous. Human society has often been threatened by diverse plagues and diseases since creation. One such recent threat is an infectious disease, known as the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), The first case of the Coronavirus was reported in Wuhan, Hubei province in China on November 17, 2019, according to the South Morning China Post (Live Science, 2020) and since then, there has been a worldwide increase in the number of infections and casualties COVID- 19 is an infectious disease that causes a respiratory illness with symptoms of cough, fever, and in more severe cases, difficulty in breathing This disease spreads primarily through contact when an infected person either coughs or sneezes openly when a person touches a surface or object and then touches the eyes, nose, or mouth. There is currently no standard vaccine or cure for COVID-19, hence, its prevention is strongly recommended.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), preventive measures against this virus include frequent hand-washing for at least 20 seconds, with soap and running water using alcohol-based hand sanitizer, covering the nose and mouth with a disposable tissue or flexed elbow when coughing or sneezing; avoid touching the eyes, nose and mouth if hands are not clean and, avoiding close physical contact (1 meter or 3 feet) also known as social distancing (WHO, 2020). People who are sick are encouraged to self-isolate to avoid infecting others or being infected as the immunity of a sick person is usually compromised and can be contagious. In the case of Nigeria, the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Nigeria was announced on February 27, 2020, when an Italian citizen arrived in Nigeria through the Lagos Airport and tested positive for the virus (NCDC, 2020). Similarly, on March 9, 2020, a second case of the virus was reported in Ogun State, a Nigerian citizen in transit from Milan to Lagos had contact with an Italian citizen who had tested positive. Afterwards, the Nigerian government's Health Minister announced that 60 persons who had contact with the index Italian patient were under isolation, 40 persons in Ogun State and 20 in Lagos State.

However, there has been an increase in confirmed cases and consequent deaths across the states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Meanwhile, on March 9, 2020, the Nigerian President in a proactive measure to curtail the spread of this virus declared national border closures, State of emergency in the health sector and restriction of all movements in the FCT, Lagos State and Ogun State for an initial period of 14 days. Consequently, other states followed suit and

initiated partial lockdowns with each closing their respective borders. During this period, businesses, markets, religious centers, schools and other public institutions and spaces were temporarily shut down. All forms of corporate, social and religious gatherings were prohibited. Nevertheless, strict adherence to social distancing was imposed. Unfortunately, compliance with the directives has become a challenge as many failed to comply or adhere to these important directives either due to ignorance or complete defiance. It is imperative to note that, when appropriate physical distancing is maintained, the potential to contract and spread the virus is reduced (NHW, 2020).

Although, this lockdown crippled our educational system of which the library is inclusive. It is important to point out that, the Nigerian state and institutions were not prepared for this as it had a serious negative impact on the activities and operations of our schools and indeed the library in particular. It is on this premise that this research is conceived to examine the emerging roles of librarians in the face of covid-19 pandemic. Libraries cannot continue to be under lock and key, of course, no, new roles must emerge. Librarianship is a call to serve humanity and this is the time to save the time of library users as postulated in Ranganathan's law.

Librarians' abilities, skills and Competencies

- The ability to think analytically and to develop new procedures and workflow
- Desire to meet and serve the library's community
- Ability to exercise initiative and independent judgment
- Knowledge of computers, the internet. And library software
- Knowledge of the philosophy and techniques of library service
- Ability to motivate, establish and maintain effective working relationships with associates, supervisors, volunteers and the public.
- Ability to make administrative decisions, interpret policies, and supervise staff.
- Ability to prepare comprehensive reports and present ideas clearly and concisely in written and oral form.
- Knowledge of a foreign language for communities with non-English speaking populations.
- Ability to organize job duties and work independently
- Creativity to develop and implement library programs and services
- Demonstrated knowledge of library materials and resources
- Creativity to develop and implement library programs and services
- Develop a positive attitude towards library users with special needs

- Ability to communicate both orally and in writing.
- Accuracy and skills in typing ability to promote reading
 - Strong level of customer service skills
 - Public speaking skills
 - Ability to present information clearly and in an interesting way
 - Being friendly
 - Good ability with numbers
 - Strong organizational skills
 - Broad knowledge of life and the world
 - Love for books
 - Desire to work around people
 - Love of knowledge and learning
 - Computer skills
- Ability to adapt to new tools, systems, and situations as they come like the Coronavirus lockdown. Libraries and information technology are constantly evolving and shifting, and librarians must be able to evolve along with it.

Impact of covid-19 pandemic on libraries

Due to the situation of things about protecting the lives of library users by maintaining social distancing which is the core approach of curtailing the spread of the Virus. The following are the effects of Coronavirus on the library:

- The libraries are closed for physical services and open for virtual services
- There are restrictions for public gatherings but open access for online connectivity.
- Libraries are providing remote access, to databases which is typically restricted to onsite use and promoting cases on digital content.
- There is increased spending on digital collection development to enable more patrons to take advantage of the online collection services.
- Act as agents of advocacy, and creation of awareness on prevention of spread of Coronavirus in society.
- The covid-19 pandemic situation has opened doors of opportunities for librarians to realize their full potentials and think outside the box as to ways they can remotely attend to the needs of their numerous users.
- Librarians now realize the importance of digital content, skills and its utilization.

- The COVID-19 pandemic made librarians see opportunities instead of problems and are providing modalities on how to provide digital services to the various library users and to remain relevant in the information business.
- Through online workshops, webinars and conferences, most professionals, students and other library users are been taught digital skills to able to remain relevant since the restriction on physical gatherings.
- There are online lectures through Zoom. Google Meet, Google Classroom among other platforms can provide teaching and learning in our educational system.
- Librarianship is all about serving humanity and that is what covid-19 pandemic has brought to the knowledge of librarians. There is increased information sharing cooperation and collaboration among libraries.
- There is increased use of online information resources by library users more than ever in this period of COVID-19.
- This is the best time to brand and promote library products services and librarianship.

Role of librarians

The information professionals are saddled with enormous responsibilities of disseminating information to library patrons, especially at this period of the coronavirus. Bello & Aghadiuno (2019) suggested in a study that librarians must be adaptive and knowledgeable in all fields of human endeavour and proficient in using print and digital options for information dissemination. Shonhe & Jain (2017) noted that publishers presently provide a wide range of e-resources that are accessible through mobile technology. In other words, looking at Okiy (2010), present a good example of a study that revealed that, students and lecturers in higher institutions increasingly demand and prefer access to electronic sources and networked information from their respective libraries. Okike (2020) was of the view that technology has impacted the way librarians' access and handle information resources, thereby improving quality of information at their disposal. In the quest to meet the needs of library users.

Shonhe (2017) suggested that libraries can use various information dissemination techniques such as personalized collections, SMS/text notifications, QR codes, online reference services, social networks, websites, mailing lists among others. Here are some of the roles and strategies required and used by librarians to disseminate information to library users through;

- Text/SMS notifications: through the use of mobile devices librarians can disseminate information and multimedia content such as videos, images and audio files. Librarians can

use this service to alert patrons regarding the latest information on happenings around COVID-19 how to stay safe or other related information. In a study conducted by Shonhe & Jain (2017), most respondents prefer to access library collections or resources through mobile devices.

- Social media platforms; are more appropriate for use in marketing information and delivering personalized information resources to groups of people or individuals. Librarians can use this medium to showcase and brand the library. Other content on COVID-19 prevention can be utilized.
- Quick response (QR) code is a two- dimensional barcode that directs users to desired websites, this can be used by libraries and librarians on a certain topic or subject area, either for the library or for Covid-19 pandemic. Verma & Verma (2014), observed that QR codes are akin to mobile tagging.
- Online Reference Services can be used by librarians for research outreach. According to Barnhart & Pierce (2011), online platforms allow librarians to create a relationship with users and improve their efficiency through the provision of 24-hour reference and information service. Librarians to effectively share information.
- Library websites can be used by links, share updates and announce news to users,
- Mailing lists to targeted users can be used by libraries to receive personalized information at the same time.
- Librarians have had to switch from supporting classroom-based instruction online instruction, which implies getting students and faculty members' access to quality digital material and content as quickly, efficiently, and affordably.
- Personal collection space: here library users manage their personalized accounts with custom-made collections Also, users can set up and manage their profile, preferences for searching library collections, receive alerts on reserved items, check their records, track interlibrary loan requests and renew borrowed items and document delivery requests (Saxena& Yadav, 2013. Verma & Verma 2014). By this, librarians will be able to send customized scanned documents, images, audiobooks and e-books to library users through their personalized accounts.
- Librarians play advocacy roles in the face of coved-19 pandemic not just for library users but to the public in general.

- Librarians play a trainer role to students and library professionals on how to use digital devices and platforms to fit into the digital world acquiring digital skills. (Up Skills for Librarians (2020), Digital Skills for Students, (2020).
- Librarians play a humanitarian role in society. What this means is that librarianship serves humanity through Information provisions and management.

Implications of COVID-19 pandemic lockdown for Librarians

Librarians should see themselves as catalysts for the effective dissemination of information to promote true knowledge and healthy living among library users and the general public. The covid-19 lockdown provides opportunity for librarians to proffer solutions to the Physical lockdown through access to digital collections and varieties of digital content. It provided impetus for the acquisition of digital skills and abilities among students and library professionals. COVID-19 brought restrictions to the physical use of libraries both increased the use of online and digital, it increased the responsibilities of librarians as they struggle to reach out to the needs of numerous patrons remotely. Similarly, the lockdown gave impetus to a new model of teaching and learning through Zoom, Google Classroom, Google Meet among other mediums.

Recommendation and Conclusion

As the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown persists in 2020, people must adhere to restrictions on public gatherings, maintain social distancing, wear face masks, and maintain hand washing and other healthy hygiene necessary for healthy living Students and professionals should endeavour to acquire digital skills necessary to access digital collections and contents Librarians should ensure and devise strategies to always be in touch with their patrons and use the digital platforms to brand and promote the library, as this will help to put librarianship at the front burner as an information hub and repository. Digital platforms like Zoom Google Meet, Google Classroom WhatsApp and other social platforms should be used for teaching and learning and also provide access to other digital content and database.

Conclusively, librarianship is a profession that is poised to serve humanity and it is on this premise that its responsibility of disseminating information becomes sacrosanct. The prevalence of covid-19 pandemic in our society is everybody's responsibility to create awareness and prevent further spread of the virus, librarians are playing greater roles in information dissemination, Although, it created an opportunity for librarians to realize their full potential in the place of the digital world of information provision and strategies Therefore, for

libraries and librarians to remain relevant in the face of covid-19 lockdown in Nigeria, digital skills, competence and abilities are essential requisite needed, hence the awareness of the dreaded disease called Coronavirus

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