

STRATEGIES ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA CAN ADOPT TO CURB THE SPREAD OF POST-COVID-19 AND REMAIN RELEVANT IN POST-COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

BY

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the strategies the Academic libraries can employ to help curb the spread of covid-19 and remain relevant in Past-Covid-19 pandemic with a specific focus on State libraries in South- Eastern Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study. The descriptive survey design was adopted for study. The population of the study is three hundred and sixty-six (366) which is also the sample size of the study. Census sampling technique was used. The study revealed that challenges such as Inadequate funding, Poor technological infrastructure. Lack of skilled personnel, Lack of Technological Gadget, Lack of internet as things that may affect the effective implementation of the strategies. Consequently, it was concluded that librarians in Nigeria should, as a matter of urgency, develop new skill sets tailored towards providing and redirecting library service delivery in support of learning in a virtual environment. It was recommended among others that strategies such as creation of functional library websites, use of social media networks, social distancing, managing remote working, limiting users numbers, promoting hygiene were identified as ways in which academic libraries can adopt to help curb the spread of Covid-19 pandemic. Also Academic libraries in Nigeria should be given their pride of place as academic hubs, through adequate funding to be able to meet up with global best practices.

Keywords: Covid-19, Library, Relevant, Strategies.

Introduction

The novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic started in Wuhan, China in December 2019 (WHO, 2019). In the onset of the pandemic, most countries as well as Nigeria focused their

response on either bringing back or sending support to their students who were grounded or better still trapped in the Wuhan pandemic. This reaction was altered, due to the spreading of the pandemic into other countries with Nigeria inclusive. On February 27, 2020, Nigeria confirmed its first case of COVID-19; the first case was an Italian who had just arrived in Nigeria from his home country. From the initial cases of imported transmission, Nigeria recorded community- transmission cases. This led to thousands of confirmed cases of covid-19 Nigeria. In a bid to curb the situation by arresting the spread of the virus, the initial response of the Nigerian Government was the shutting down of all schools, including the tertiary institutions beginning in March 2020. As a result, all students ranging from undergraduate to postgraduate students had to leave their campuses, putting a sudden end to academic activities in the country and thereby distorting academic calendars across various institutions in the country.

This however has affected the academic activities in the country negatively, this has been amplified by the near lack of e-learning platforms in various institutions in Nigeria to aid academic activities continue unhindered. Ifijeh et al. (2015) found that very few Nigerian tertiary institutions manage e-learning platforms or learning management systems, which simply allowed for upload and download of lecture materials, as well as giving and submission of students' homework. As a result, the methods of information dissemination by libraries in most Nigerian tertiary institutions have been conventional with universities like National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) exempted from the group; these entail the acquisition and dissemination of information resources to members of the university community in furtherance of the attainment of institutional objectives. Information resources are acquired, organized and reserved in different segments of the library building. Even though some of the academic libraries also provide access to electronic information resources using IP addresses or remotely through login details like usernames and passwords, services like reference and information literacy services are achieved mainly by traditional methods (face-to-face interactions). Taking a holistic view of the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, one can vividly see that these traditional methods utilized by tertiary institutions and most libraries in Nigeria have lost effectiveness since students left their schools as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. (WSN, 2020).

Consequently, university libraries' traditional methods (which necessitate physical interaction between the library and library users) of meeting the information needs of users have become superfluous during the current pandemic and may continue so after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tertiary libraries are being confronted to conform to new paradigm shifts as the government strives to curb the pandemic. This paper focuses on the strategies Academic libraries can employ to help curb the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic with a specific focus on State libraries in South-Eastern Nigeria.

Literature Review

The development of Nigerian libraries has come a long way, writers on the history of Nigeria libraries generally take the year 1948 as a beginning of modern libraries, not because they are unaware of the existence of libraries before that historic date but because it was with the establishment of the University of Library at Ibadan that Nigeria acquired a library in the fullest sense, equipped for reference and research, permanently established, professionally directed and staffed and provided with an absurd budget and an appropriate building. It must be realized that university libraries, being vital academic parts of the universities, usually emerged at the same time as their parent institutions. Therefore there are as many university libraries as there are universities in Nigeria. Categorizing the Universities shows that 43 are owned by the Federal Government, 52 are owned by various State Governments and 79 are owned by private individuals and bodies. It is important to note these Universities were established along with libraries to meet the information needs of lecturers, students and other members of the University communities.

According to Gupta (1998), Academic library is the most vital appendage of a university. It aims at the realization of institutional objectives. It struggles to generate interest and eagerness among the students and faculty and assist them in making use of the reading materials. The primary objectives of an academic library are to:

- a. Support the realization of objectives of parent institution i.e. the university.
- b. Complement the curriculum taught in the institution which it is attached
- c. Give students a wider and deeper understanding of the wealth of knowledge; and
- d. Work as a self-regulating agency and encourage life-long learning beyond the prescribed syllabi so that the students can be more enlightened and knowledgeable.

From beginning to now, the accomplishment of educational objectives in the Nigerian University system has been achieved through non-electronic teaching and learning methodologies. Eze et al., (2018) posited that the conventional educational system required

having students on campus and taking lectures, seminars, examinations, and other academic assignments in classrooms in physical buildings. Other assistive services such as library operations and services are modelled around this conventional system. Therefore, most library services are built in such a way that users have to be on campus to make use of them. Asogwa et al. (2015) observed that the majority of Nigerian academic libraries offered non-internet-based/electronic services. However, the only similarity of an online service was the provision of electronic databases. They also noted that only some and very few libraries could provide access to databases because of infrastructural and maintenance challenges. Perhaps, the conventional methods adopted by universities and libraries attained some level of success in the realization of educational objectives before the breakout of COVID-19 pandemic.

UWN (2020) reported that Universities across Africa, with those in Nigeria inclusive, are shifting to online teaching and learning. However, most of these efforts are at their incubation stages of realization. Professor A. Atayero, the Vice-Chancellor of Covenant University was of the view that the closing of universities and the adoption of online teaching and learning methodologies have opened a new window of opportunities for Nigerian Universities which can be further explored by post-Covid-19 Ateyero, (2020). He also said that though the acceptance of online teaching methodologies is not new in developed countries like America, it is novel in Nigeria and has come to stay. Before now, the only similarity between out-of-campus teaching and e-learning programs was the distance education program run by a few universities in the country like the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). However, no real online teaching takes place, as students are required to visit the campus periodically and are provided with materials which they take home for further studies; they are also required to visit the library for their information needs to be met.

Atavero, (2020) believed that Nigerian Universities may adopt a mixture of conventional and online teaching methodologies like their counterparts in developed countries post-COVID-19 to help curb the spread and remain relevant. University libraries in Europe and America continued to render online services during the lockdown period. A first-class example is the University of Sussex library. Which did not only offer essential online services but also provided academic materials made freely available by publishers during the lockdown (University of Sussex Library, 2020). On the opposite, no literature ever reported that any Nigerian university library was actively involved in providing information resources online to support the online educational activities of their parent institutions during the period of the lockdown.

Strategies Academic Libraries in Nigeria can adopt to curb the spread of COVID-19 and remain relevant in post-Covid-19 pandemic.

Creation of 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 a website and even those that have, do not meet 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 the following:

- a. Providing a single point of access to library resources
- b. Allows teaching staff to direct students to useful resources more easily.
- c. Promote the resources held by the library, including subscriptions.
- d. Improve navigation of library resources.
- e. Improve access to scholarly and educational web-based resources.
- f. provide more efficient access to e-resources
- g. Improve information service delivery.
- h. Provide library services 24/7.
- i. Facilitate access to library and information services remotely.

Therefore, the starting point for libraries to remain relevant in the post-Covid-19 is in the designing and adoption of functional library websites.

Use of Social Media

So much literature has suggested that for libraries to remain relevant in the post-COVID-19 period, usage of social media is a must. Social media networks are increasing speedily as conduits of communication and interaction among individuals. One of the major advantages of social media networks is their capacity to build relationships and social interaction amongst individuals, thus if adopted by libraries will help them to connect with the information needs of their users. Social networks also help the exchange of questions and answers among librarians and library users in real-time. Some of the social networks used by most Nigerian libraries today include Facebook, YouTube, Blogging, WhatsApp, telegram, Twitter etc. University libraries in Nigeria could also leverage the opportunities provided by these networks to encourage information resources and services to online users.

Exponential Social Distancing

Setting limits on the number 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 contracting the virus, a center response has been 'social distancing, observing a safe distance between individuals 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. 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) work effectively.

Clearly, the best situation is where it has been possible to plan, 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 it is 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 network can also help, the pandemic has seen the rise of Facebook groups and virtual forums as spaces for people to share and learn.

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 one time. This makes it easier to maintain social distance. For example in China, 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 is the National Library of Serbia in its first phase of re-opening 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.

Promoting Hygiene

As throughout the pandemic, the importance of high standards of hygiene is a key theme, for example, ensuring that staff can wash their hands frequently, access materials such as gloves

and facemasks, and that hand sanitizer is available at the entrance (and potentially next to equipment such as computers).

Keeping Staff Safe

Obviously, a priority is to ensure that staff are fit, well, and comfortable in providing services, indeed, this may also be a legal obligation. Ways of doing this include the hygiene measures as stated above (indeed. The National Library of Poland has recommended that no library should re-open until librarians can be properly equipped), as well as clear discussion and elucidation of decisions and plans, and regular briefings and reminders.

Other strategies are:

Implementing regular cleaning processes (including through short closures of the library), especially focused on surfaces where the virus appears to be able to last for longest (plastics, metals other than copper), or at least intensifying cleaning.

Developing click-and-collect or drive-through services to allow access to books without human contact

Developing protocols for how to respond if someone with symptoms is identified in the library.

Ensuring that staff have the equipment and training necessary to stay safe, including consideration of screens if necessary, limiting contact as far as possible enabling work from home for as long as possible, and providing regular updates.

Making clear when it is impossible to open safely, and otherwise ensuring that those making decisions understand the nature of library spaces, including through a gradual approach to resuming services only when each one is safe.

Continuing to promote online services and resources to limit the numbers looking to visit the library Communicate clearly about any new rules to library users, both online and onsite, and provide regular updates. Ensuring access to soap and warm water. Ensuring they have a supply of hand sanitizer.

Keeping surfaces clean, including toys and library computers. Ensuring that staff and users are encouraged to take time to recover if they are feeling ill, rather than coming into work.

Providing pages with useful links to reliable information for users on their websites and promoting media literacy faced with potential misinformation online.

Challenges that may affect the adoption of these strategies by academic libraries

inadequate 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 a 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. This is barely enough to cover recurrent expenditure.

Poor Technological Infrastructure

Nigerian library professionals are aware of the 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 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 the 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.

Lack of Skilled Personnel

Traditional methods of administering library services aimed at providing support for teaching, learning and research in higher institutions of learning have 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 to the emerging change in teaching methodologies.

Lack of Data to access the Internet

Due to the poverty level of Nigeria, many library users don't always have the required financial resources to purchase data to access library resources. Lack of Technological Gadgets Many Nigerian citizens or library users who are meant to access the library don't have technological gadgets to access the library resources remotely.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to find out strategies that can be adopted by Academic libraries to help curb the spread of Covid-19 virus in South-Eastern Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

1. To find out the strategies Academic libraries can adopt to help curb the spread of Covid-19 virus.
2. To identify the challenges that may affect the adoption of these strategies by academic libraries in South-East.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study

1. What are the strategies Academic libraries can adopt to help curb the spread of Covid-19 virus?
2. What are the challenges that may affect the adoption of these strategies by academic libraries?

Table 1: Return Rate of the Questionnaire

S/N	University Libraries	Distribution	Usable Responsible	% Usable
A	ABSU	32	24	6.56
B	EBSU	149	122	33.33
C	ESUTH	46	35	9.56
D	IMSU	42	33	9.01
E	ANSU	97	83	22.67
	Total	366	297	81.13

Analysis in Table 1: indicates that ABSU had a response rate of 24(6.56%), EBSU had 122 (33.33%), ESUTH recorded a response rate of 35(9.56%), IMSU 33(9.01%), and ANSU 97(22.67%).

4.2 Biographic Composition of the Respondents

The biographic composition of the respondents (Bio-data) covers their age, gender, academic qualifications, rank, units of the library and years of experience.

Table 2: Gender of Respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	111	37.4
Female	186	62.6
Total	297	100

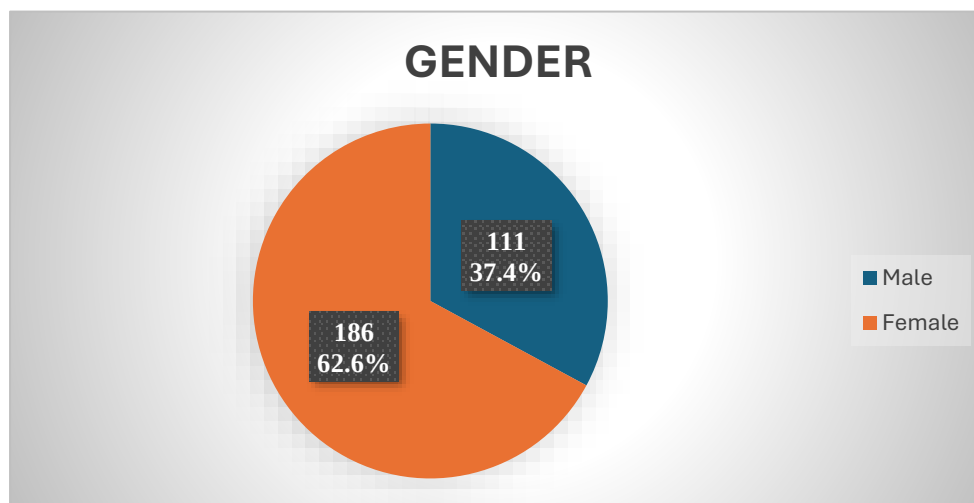


Figure 1: Pie Chart Representation of Respondents' Gender

Table 3: Age of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-29	34	11.48
30-39	114	38.37
40-49	104	36.19
50-65	41	13.95
Total	297	100

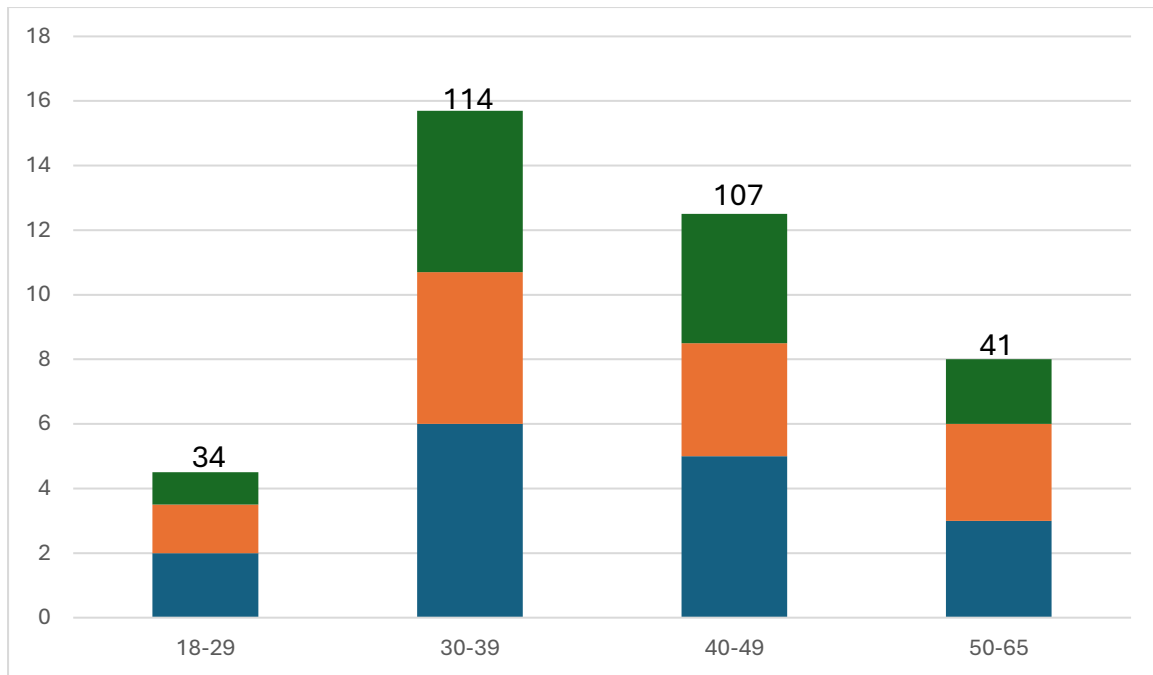


Figure 2: Chart Representation of Respondents Age

Table 4: Respondents Qualification

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
FSLC	10	3.34
SSCE	9	3.20
ND	31	10.47
HND	41	13.81
BLS/BSc	98	32.85
MLS/MSc	89	30.09
Ph.D	19	6.25
Total	297	100

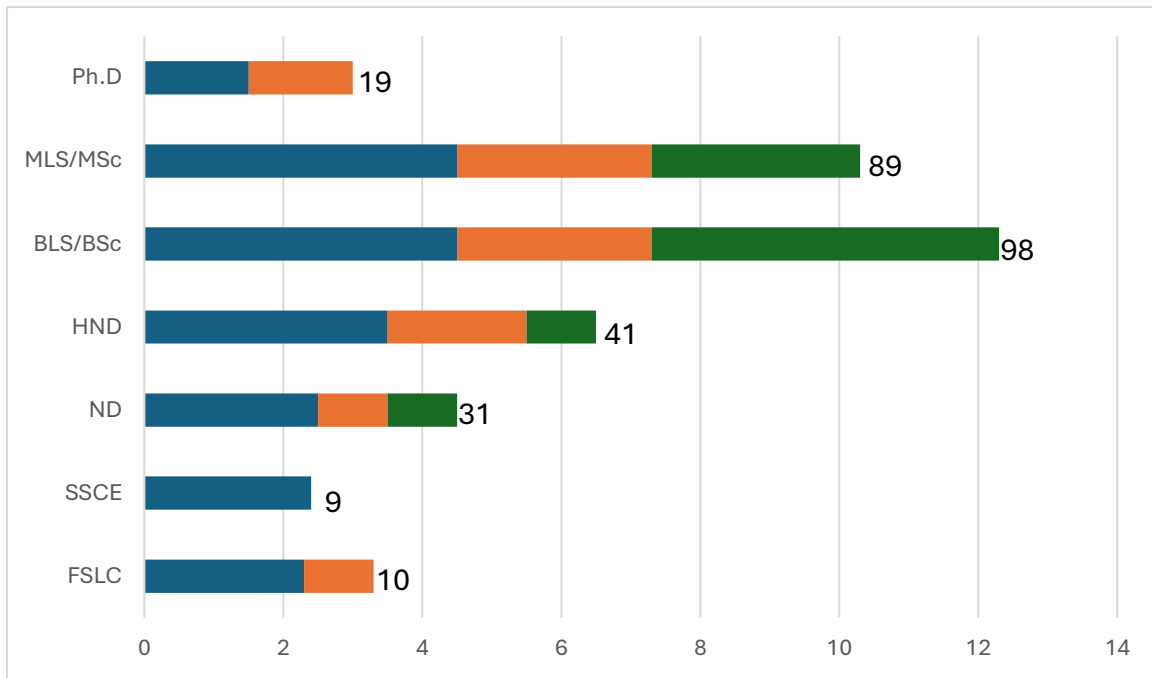


Figure 3: Representation of Respondents Qualification

Table 5: Ranking of Respondents

Ranking	Frequency	Percentage
Professional	63	21.1
Non-professional	234	78.9
Total	297	100

Figure 4: Chart Representation of Respondents' Ranking

Table 6: Library Unit

Library Unit	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Research	116	38.5
Technical	72	24.13
ICT	49	16.42
Serial	31	10.32
Acquisition	30	10.17
Total	297	100

Table 7: Year of Experience

Year of experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-8yrs	146	49.27
9-18yrs	116	39.10
19-27yrs	4	1.31
28-35yrs	31	10.32
Total	297	100

The respondents consist of 186 females (62.6%) and 111 males (37.4%) as shown in Table 1. This implies that more of the library staff are females.

The age of the respondents showed that 38.4% belonged to the age range of 30- 39; those in the age range of 46-49 were 36.2% While those in the age groups of 18-29 years and 50-65 years and above were 11.5% and 13.9% respectively.

On the qualifications of the respondents, a good number of the library staff had a first degree (32.9%) and Master (30.1%). This may be because of possession of a higher degree in librarianship, B.sc, BLS. MLs, qualify the person to be an academic staff which is the official/qualification for a librarian or professional. Another high qualification possessed by the library staff was Ph.D which had 6.3% response rate. Other members of the library had HND (41 or 13.8%), ND (31 or 10.5%) and SSCE/NECO and First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) 3.2%, and 3.3% respectively. Data collected showed that there are 63 (21.1%) non-professional and 234 (78.9%) professional staff members among the respondents.

Majority of the workers 39.0% worked in the Readers Services unit, followed by Technical Services with 24.1%, ICT Services had 16.4% while serials and acquisitions Units recorded 10.3% and 10.2% respectively. 49.3% of the library staff had worked for 1-8 years, 39.1% worked for 9-18 years, 10.1% worked for 19-27years while those with 28-30 years of experience in the library had 1.3%. Overall, this shows that the research touched every section of the libraries studied as their bio-data could explain. This could be a justifiable basis for drawing inferences at the end of the day.

Research Question 1: What are the strategies Academic libraries can adopt to help curb the spread of Covid-19 virus?

Table 8: strategies academic libraries can adopt to help curb the spread of COVID-19 virus.

Item	Strategies	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
A	Creation of functional library websites	3.07	0.86	Significant
B	Use of social media	3.05	0.89	Significant
C	Exponential social distancing	3.02	0.91	Significant
D	Managing remote working	3.00	0.95	Significant
E	Limiting numbers in the library	2.98	0.93	Significant
F	Promoting hygiene	2.97	0.90	Significant
G	Keeping staff safe	2.92	0.86	Significant
H	Implementing a regular cleaning process	2.65	0.99	Significant
I	Continuing to promote online services and resources	2.82	0.89	Not significant
J	Developing click-and-collect or drive-through services in order to allow access to books without human contact	2.22	1.05	Not significant
Significant mean value		= 2.88		

Majority of the respondents indicated that Creation of Functional Library Websites ($x=3.0683$), Use of Social media ($x=3.0509$), Exponential social distancing ($x=3.02621$), Managing remote working ($x=3.0073$), Limiting numbers in the library ($x=2.9898$), Promoting hygiene ($x=2.9767$), Keeping Staff Safe ($x=2.9288$), Implementing regular cleaning processes ($x=2.6501$) and Continue to promote online services and resources ($x=2.8256$) are strategies Academic libraries can adopt to help curb the spread of Covid-19 virus while only a few agreed that developing click-and-collect or drive-through services to allow access to books without human contact ($x=2.2267$) as a strategy.

Research Question 2: What are the challenges that may affect the adoption of these strategies by academic libraries?

Table 9: Challenges that may affect the adoption of these strategies by academic libraries.

N-297.

Item	Challenges	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
A	Inadequate funding	2.6148	0.3938	Not Significant
B	Poor technologies infrastructure	3.3765	0.7092	Significant
C	Lack of skilled personnel	2.9055	1.0634	Not Significant
D	Lack of technological gadget	3.1860	0.8238	Significant
E	Lack of internet data	3.0625	0.9609	Significant

Grand mean value = 3.03

Inadequate funding($\bar{x}$ =2.6148), Poor technological infrastructure (mean=3.38), Lack of skilled personnel($\bar{x}$ =2.9055), Lack of Technological Gadget ($\bar{x}$ =3.1860) and Lack of internet Data($\bar{x}$ =3.0625) were identified as major challenges that may affect the adoption of these strategies by academic libraries. With a significant mean value of 3.38.

Discussion of findings

The findings of this study are presented in line with the objectives;

The findings of the study revealed that the creation of functional websites, use of social media, Exponential social distancing. Managing remote working, limiting numbers in the library, promoting hygiene, keeping staff safe, Implementing regular cleaning processes and promoting online services and resources are the strategies academic libraries can adopt to help curb the spread of covid-19 virus while only a few agreed that developing click-and-collect or drive through services and allow access to books without human contact as a strategy. Challenges that may affect the adoption of these strategies by academic Libraries: The study also revealed that inadequate funding, poor technological infrastructure, lack of skilled personnel, lack of technological gadgets and lack of internet data were identified as major challenges that may affect the adoption of these strategies by academic libraries.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, strategies such as Creation of Functional Library Websites, Use of Social media networks, social distancing. Managing remote working. Limiting numbers in the library, Promoting hygiene were identified as ways in which Academic libraries can help curb the spread of Covid-19 pandemic. The study also identified challenges such as Inadequate funding, Poor technological infrastructure, Lack of skilled personnel, Lack of Technological gadgets, Lack of internet Data as things that may affect the effective implementation of the strategies.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. The Librarians in Nigeria should, as a matter of urgency develop new skill sets tailored towards providing and redirecting library service delivery in support of learning in a virtual environment.
2. The academic libraries in Nigeria should be given their pride of place as academic hubs, through adequate funding to be able to meet up with global best practices.
3. The telecommunication companies like MTN, Glo can as a way of rendering their social responsibility give free data to students of these institutions.

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