

The Pains and Gains of COVID-19 on University Libraries and Librarians in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of COVID-19 brought a lot of adjustments to every aspect of life, the effect on the educational sector was huge and overwhelming. The university library as one of the major educational support service in the university system was not spared. This paper therefore, examined both the negative and positive effects of COVID-19 on the university libraries in Nigeria. Online questionnaire was used to illicit data for the study. 105 librarians responded to the questionnaire across 35 universities in Nigeria. 40% of the respondents were male while 60% were female. The study revealed that despite the fact that a lot of university libraries were not accessible during the period, some, adapted library services through social media. The major information needs of the library users was for research materials followed by COVID-19 information. The greatest gain of COVID-19 on the university libraries was that it exposed the inadequacy of the libraries to provide services through alternative means. This consequently, drew the attention of the university management to the needs of the libraries. On the other hand, the libraries regretted that they did not have adequate online presence to serve their users during the pandemic period. Nevertheless, many librarians used the opportunity to develop their skills with the attendance of various webinars.

Keywords: COVID-19; COVID-19 Gains; COVID-19 Pains; University Libraries; Librarians

Introduction

The whole world went through a very difficult time due to the outbreak of the Corona virus disease which is known as COVID-19. Governments and different organizations planned various ways of coping and surviving the storm that no one really knew when it will end (Onyeaghala and Olajide 2020, Ladan, Hurana and Madu 2020). The first index case of the disease in Nigeria was confirmed in

Lagos on 27 February 2020, the virus gradually spread throughout the whole nation. On the 30th of March 2020, the government placed a two-week lockdown restriction on three states of the federation namely: Lagos, Ogun, and Abuja due to their relationship with the index cases discovered. Several measures were also taken by both the federal and the state governments to curtail the Corona virus pandemic but it kept spreading like wildfire.

The impact of this, on the educational system of Nigeria, is enormous and very devastating (Reagan, Agbaje & Babatunde, 2020) because all the educational institutions at all levels were forced to close from March 30th to September 20th 2020. This was done to prevent community transmission of the virus. The closure was so sudden, thereby, putting an abrupt end to educational activities in the country. Despite the closure, some university libraries still gave skeletal online services to their numerous users to satisfy their information needs. It should be noted that one of the main functions of any library is to facilitate access to the right information for its community. In fact, if there is anything the world needs more than drugs and vaccines at the time, it is the right information to still the whirlwind that blew across the world. In the midst of the ravaging pandemic, libraries across the globe had to come up with a lot of paradigm shifts in order to keep running. This did not come without some hardships on the part of the libraries and librarians as they could not perform library and information services as usual. The researchers, therefore, attempted to evaluate the pains and gains of COVID-19 on university libraries and librarians in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of the study is to examine the negative and positive effects of COVID-19 on university libraries and librarians in Nigeria, while the specific objectives are to;

1. Identify University libraries that were open and accessible to users during the COVID-19 pandemic
2. Identify the information needs of users during the COVID-19 period
3. Ascertain the activities librarians engaged in during the COVID-19 period
4. Explore the regrets that libraries had during the global health crises
5. Determine the positive effect of the period on university libraries
6. To examine the lessons learnt during the COVID-19 period by libraries

Literature Review

The effect of COVID-19 on education is multi-dimensional as it brought a lot of changes in the Nigeria educational system. The method of education through classroom teaching became impossible during the pandemic. Odili (2020) noted that since there was a stay-at-home order by the Federal Government of Nigeria, and students still needed to continue their education, the most appropriate mode of study is online instruction. Mukhtar, Javed, Arooj and Sethi (2020) also stated that in Pakistan. COVID-19 brought about a turn around in education; the advantages of which include flexibility in learning. They explained that, this flexibility, encompasses comfortability in learning space as students can learn from home; ease of communication between teachers and students and those who are shy, can talk on WhatsApp and be more active in class. It also comprises opportunity for recording a class session and re-playing the video to remember what was said. However, they also pointed out that the disadvantages include, lack of feedback during the class, not being attentive, cost of e-resource tools, such as phones, data, and having to learn the new way of electronic educational instruction.

Sequel to the above, Ifijeh and Yusuf (2020) pointed out that in Nigeria, university libraries' traditional methods of serving users' information needs (which require interaction between the library and users) also became obsolete during the pandemic. Zareef and Ahmad (2021) reported the extent to which different types of services were provided globally by various university libraries during the pandemic. Their findings revealed that 84.6% university libraries offered electronic library services, 79.9% offered online reference services, 38% offered electronic interlibrary loan services, while 38% were able to offer services via the social media and less than one third (30.7%) trained staff and students on the use of webinars. COVID-19 has therefore, introduced new methods of education and service provision in university libraries (Ashworth, 2020).

The new services provided by libraries and the information industry were remarkable in meeting the information needs of researchers

in the COVID-19 era. Chisita and Ukwoma (2021) assessed the provision of services by academic libraries in South Africa during the pandemic and discovered that many libraries and publishers gave open access to their resources to enable researchers make adequate use of such materials. Leo (2020) also revealed that series of measures were taken in the Chinese University of Hong Kong ('CUHK') to meltdown the effect of COVID-19 on the library users. These include; extending the borrowing privilege of physical items, waiving the overdue fine, and rolling out of a new service namely Zoom-with-a-Librarian to provide remote support from Library staff when users are off campus. In Nigeria, Kasa and Yusuf (2020) reported that there was increased usage of ICT facilities in universities. Universities tried to acquire ICT facilities after the stay at-home, there was innovation and collaboration in service delivery, and the use of Telegram for library services was initiated, where users could access some of the library resources. Onifade (2020) also claimed that Information literacy trainings were conducted for users through Zoom, Skype and Google meet.

In spite of the above, staff and students could not make effective use of the ICT facilities because the facilities were limited and could not sustain the new electronic dispensation (Kasa & Yusuf, 2020). It was reported that some institutions had low bandwidth, while staff and students do not have free access to the internet. This therefore limited their access and use of library resources. These challenges arose because university libraries in Nigeria did not have the technological competence; infrastructure and human expertise for the provision of effective online/digital services like their counterparts in advanced countries (Deleaney, Archbold, Cleary, Dodd, Doherty & O'Brien, 2020). In other words the libraries do not have enough time to prepare for the physical restriction and therefore, do not take some technical issues into consideration such as transition to remote working; this was never envisaged and no provisions was readily available for it (Kasa & Yusuf, 2020).

Ogunmodede and Wiche (2021) substantiated the above position with their investigation on library services offered by universities in

Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic. They stated that these services include; making available links to open access resources, reference and information services, seamless and structured access to e-resources, creating awareness about emerging technologies for teaching and learning, providing links to access several e-resources directly from the publisher's websites, information literacy skills, spread news and service alerts, online workshop and tutorials, providing training to lecturers on the use of online platforms for teaching, live chat with the students and conducting orientation for the new students. However, the study showed that most of the services rendered by academic libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown were rendered occasionally. This is due to some challenges faced by libraries which include poor funding, epileptic power supply, lack of adequate support from the government, and inadequate library infrastructure.

Nevertheless, Ali (2020) claimed that in any pandemic, there are three dimensions to a librarian's role: promoting awareness by creating and disseminating information relating to preventive measures; supporting research team and researchers by providing information regarding the latest developments, research and literature; and meeting the core needs of regular library users. Amaechi, Eweani and Eke (2018) thus, viewed transformation of library and information centers as improving product and services offered in Nigerian libraries to meet the needs and demands of the knowledge society. This implies that in any pandemic such as COVID- 19, it is appropriate for libraries to satisfy the need of their users. Heymann and Shindo (2020) also opined that in situations involving global health crises, the masses must be well supported with constant information provision such as how to work from home, school re-opening, how to combat the spread of the virus and general information to put the mind of the masses at rest. Hence, Iyanda (2020) in his study of three universities, namely Northeastern Illinois University, Louisiana State University and Valparaiso University stated that information about the virus was the most desirable to everyone during the period because they wanted to know how to be safe.

Despite the difficult time, many strategic roles were played by librarians as the need arose all over the world. Such roles include contact tracing in Ireland and San Francisco, and in the University of Kuwait, information dissemination on COVID-19 (Deleaney et al, 2020). It was noted that regardless of the fact that libraries were closed to users in order to stop the spread of the virus, some libraries were used as makeover homes for the children of medical personnel who were busy working to ensure the eradication of the virus. On the other hand, Fasae, Adekoya and Adegbilero-Iwari (2020) observed that as the lockdown was eased, physical and online library services were encouraged. Although preventive measures such as wearing nose masks, use of hand sanitizer and social distancing were enforced. Leo (2020) in corroboration therefore, concluded that globally, “COVID-19 provides a unique opportunity for academic librarians to rethink their key roles and core values in supporting teaching and learning”.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research method; this is because survey research design is suitable for a large population-based study (Ponto, 2015). The population of the study comprises all librarians working with the universities in the thirty six states of Nigeria. Respondents were briefed about the purpose of the research before seeking for their consent to partake in the survey voluntarily. An online questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. It was designed via Google form platform. The questionnaire was administered through the WhatsApp platforms of librarians and also on individual WhatsApp contact of librarians working in different university libraries in Nigeria. It was also sent through electronic mail to some librarians to enhance more responses. The online questionnaire was used in order to ensure availability of respondents and accessibility of research instrument in a convenient environment. The survey was left open for six months after which it was closed and harvested for analysis. At the end of the sixth month, 105 respondents participated in the survey. The results harvested from the Google form were merged with the ones personally retrieved and were analyzed using

descriptive statistics involving the use of percentages, pie charts and bar charts to present the results.

Results

This section presents the finding of the study.

Demographic Characteristics

From the findings of the study, 35 Universities in Nigeria participated in the study; 14 out of the 35 universities were federal universities, 13 state universities and 8 were private universities. The total of 105 librarians from these universities responded. The status of the respondents ranks from Assistant librarians to University librarians. The study however, revealed that majority of the respondents were Senior librarians representing 30% of the total respondents followed by the University librarians’ rank which is represented by 17% of the respondents (see table 1). This finding indicates that those that responded to the questionnaire were senior library personnel and therefore, were seen to be capable of providing accurate information regarding the study. 40% out of the respondents were male while 60% were female (see table 1). The indication of this is that the proportion of male librarians working in the university libraries in Nigeria is smaller when compared with their female counterpart. Adomi and Oyovwe-Tinuoye (2022) corroborated this, that the LIS profession is dominated by females in Nigeria.

Table I: Demographic characteristics of Respondents (N=105)

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percent N=105
Gender		
Male	42	40
Female	63	60
University (N=35)		
Federal	14	40
State	13	37.1
Private	8	22.9
Rank		
Asst Librarian	9	9
Librarian II	14	13
Librarian I	12	11
Senior Librarian	32	30
Reader Librarian	16	15
Deputy Librarian	4	4
Professor/UL	18	17

Access to the Library by Users during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The respondents were asked whether their library was accessible to users during the COVID-19 pandemic, 47 (44.8%) affirmed that their libraries were accessible while 58 (55.2%) stated that their libraries were not accessible (see figure 1). The finding suggests that not up to half of Nigerian university libraries were accessible to users during the Covid-19 pandemic. This substantiated Oyelude (2020); Ameh *et al* (2021), Omeluzor, Nwaomah, Molokwu and Sambo (2022) assertions that most university libraries in Nigeria were shut during Covid-19 pandemic. However, the situation is not peculiar to Nigeria as Ameh *et al* (2021) reported that more than 3000 libraries across the world were shut during this period. The implication of this was that the resources of many university libraries were left unused. This is very painful as the main function of the university libraries is to facilitate the use of library resources to support the goals and missions of their universities.

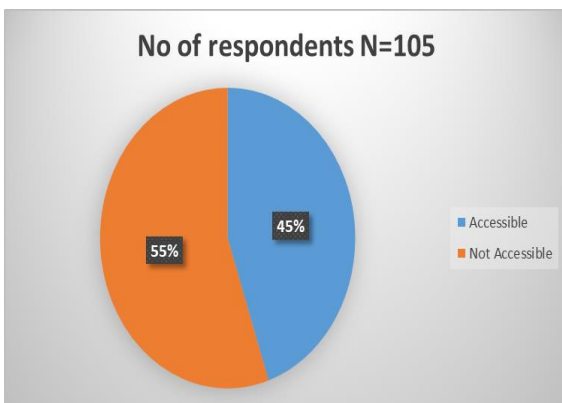


Fig. 1: Accessibility of the University to users during the COVID-19 lockdown Period

Information Needs of the Users during COVID-19

The respondents were asked to state the information needs of their users during COVID-19. Majority of the responses (30%) indicated that their users were in need of research materials, 20% revealed that their users were in need of information on COVID-19, 17.5% noted that access to e-resources was their users’ information needs, 12.5% stated that their users needed someone to assist them concerning their research, 10% indicated the need for study space, 5% indicated the need for

newspapers and another 5% wanted to borrow books from the library. This finding indicates that the greatest need of the university library users was for research materials. This may be due to the fact that most universities in Nigeria were in session before the outbreak of the pandemic and therefore they need to carry on with their studies (see Table 2). However, the second major need of the users was information on COVID-19. This corroborated Iyanda (2020) report that information about the COVID-19 was very important to everyone at the period because many people wanted to know and understand how to stay safe during the period. Adomi and Oyovwe-Tinuoye (2022) also reported that the major information concern of the LIS professional at the period is COVID-19 information. The least needs of the users were book loan and the need for Newspapers. The implication here is that despite the pandemic, users still desired physical library resources and newspapers to read during the period even though they are small in number

Table 2: Information Needs of the Users during COVID-19 (N=200; Multiple response allowed)

Information needs of library patrons	Frequency	Percent
Research materials	60	30
Newspapers	10	5
E-resources	35	17.5
Information of Covid-19	40	20
Book loan	10	5
Space to study	20	10
Research Assistance	25	12.5

Librarians’ Activities during COVID-19 Period

One of the aims of this study is to examine how librarians used their time during COVID-19, 33.3% of the respondents stated that they used the time to attend webinars, 25.7% claimed that they used the time to develop their research skills, 14.3% used the opportunity to write papers for publication, 9.5% attended to pending family issues, 5.7% were involved in community engagements while 4.8% being the least number of respondents, used the time to

learn a trade (see Table 3). It shows that majority of librarians attended webinar during this period thereby acquiring new knowledge which is very gainful to them. This aligned with Delaney *et al* (2020) study that library staff continued to engage in professional development opportunities by engaging in online webinars. However, Kasa and Yusuf (2020) report on the study of Ahmadu Bello University Library, Zaria was a contrast. They claimed that some library staff (including librarians) experienced frustration due to various problems such as inconsistent internet services providers', timelines variations and therefore, they became hesitant, irritated and negative emotional feelings set in.

Table 3: Librarians' Activities during COVID-19 Period

Activities	Frequency	Percent (%)
Developing my research skills	27	25.7
Attended Webinars	35	33.3
Attended to pending family issues	10	9.5
Wrote papers for publication	15	14.3
Community engagement	6	5.7
Learnt a trade	5	4.8
Acquired a skill	7	6.7
Total	105	100

The Regrets Libraries Had during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Respondents were asked to state what the regrets of their libraries were during COVID-19. The majority of the respondents 42 (40%) regretted that their library did not have an online presence and as a result, they were not able to offer their users the services they needed. From the study 30 (28.6%) regretted that the subscribed databases were not maximized and this amounted to a waste of fund for their libraries. This is so because most of these databases were not accessible off campuses. 15% of the respondents regretted that not all their potential users had access to the library resources because majority do not have access to the internet, thus they were

debarred from using the library resources (see Fig 2). This confirmed Reagan, Agbaje and Babatunde, (2020) study that majority of people from deprived background were debarred as they do not have access to alternative learning facilities. On the other hand, some of the respondents (8%) regretted that a lot of programs planned by their libraries were either cancelled or put on hold. The major regret therefore, was the lack of online presence of the libraries. Ameh *et al* (2021) corroborated this, because many Nigerian library resources are yet to be fully digitized and thereby their services made available online, it was difficult for them to properly and adequately disseminate information about COVID-19 to their users. These regrets were very painful to the libraries as they were not able to perform maximally and moreover, some resources were left to waste.

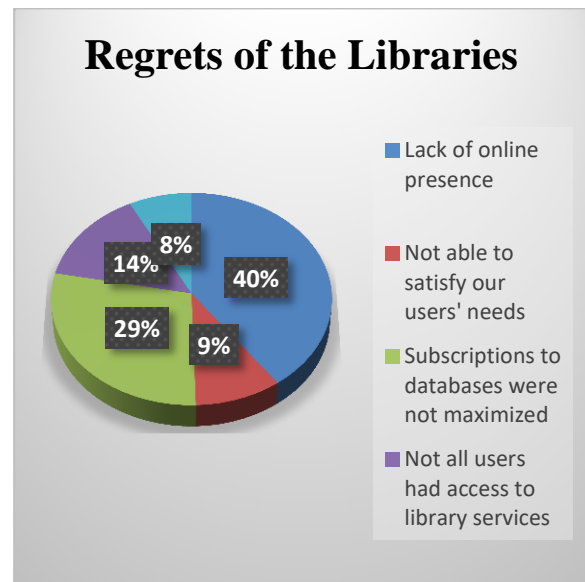


Fig 2: Regrets of the Libraries at this period

Positive effects of COVID-19 on Libraries and Librarians

Respondents were asked what they considered as positive effects of the pandemic on their libraries. The majority of the respondents 42 (40%) stated that the situation created opportunity for libraries to adapt to new ways of providing and delivering library services. About a quarter 28 (26.7%) of the respondents stated that the libraries were able to gain more recognition from the university authorities. A

minority of the respondents 20 (19%) stated that they were fascinated by the flexible work schedule because the number of staff was prorated so that a fraction of the staff worked on site while some worked from home. Few respondents 15 (14.3%) indicated that many librarians were able to upgrade their skills as they had to use technology to provide services for users (see fig 3). The finding therefore, shows that the main positive effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on university library in Nigeria, is that libraries were able to adapt library services through alternative ways thereby making university libraries very creative. This aligns with Ashworth (2020) who opined that the outbreak of COVID-19 has brought a lot of creativity and innovative practices in library programs, operatives and services. These positive effects were very gainful for the libraries and the librarians. Thus, irrespective of COVID-19 pandemic, libraries and librarians can still function remotely, providing patrons with access to information at their comfort zones.

of their libraries as they were not able to provide services through alternative means. This made the university authorities to appreciate the importance of the library and draw their attention to their needs. A minority of the respondents 22(21%) stated they learnt that it is possible to enhance their skills with the attendance of webinars, 19(18.1%) stated that they learnt that there is need to improve the use of technology in university libraries in Nigeria because the pattern of library services is evolving rapidly around the world. Few of the respondents 15(14.3%) learnt how to work from home. They indicated that it was a new experience for them. A little percentage of the respondents 14(13.3%) stated that they learnt that libraries need to prepare for disaster in their strategic plans. The findings of the study confirms Ameh et al (2021) report that inadequate ICTs in libraries in Nigeria to drive digital libraries made it extremely difficult to provide services to the public and more so provide adequate information about the pandemic to the public.

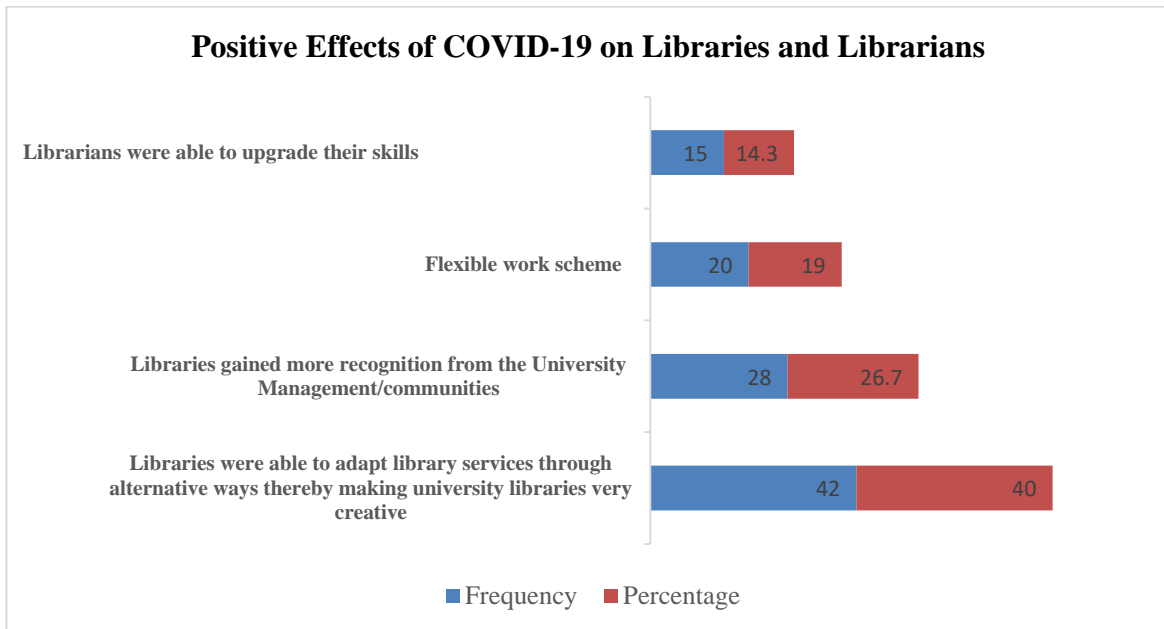


Fig 3: Positive effects of COVID-19 on Libraries and Librarians

Lessons Learnt from COVID-19 Outbreak by Libraries and Librarians

Respondents were asked to share some of the lessons learnt during COVID-19 period, 35(33.3%) of the respondents stated that outbreak of COVID-19 exposed the limitations

Table 4: Lessons learnt from COVID-19 out-break in terms of library services

Lessons Learnt	Frequency	%
Need to improve the use of technology in the library as the pattern of library services changes as the world is evolving rapidly	19	18.1
Libraries Need to plan for disasters	14	13.3
COVID-19 exposed the limitation of our libraries to the University managements	35	33.3
I learnt how to work from home	15	14.3
Possibility of enhanced my skills with the attendance of webinars	22	21
Total	105	100

Discussion

The study revealed that not all the university libraries were accessible to users in Nigeria during the critical period of COVID-19. This resulted to a lot of pain for libraries as they were not able to fulfil their obligations to their users. Those that were accessible used their internet facilities as well as the social media platforms to provide library services for their users; they were able to adapt library services through alternative means. This gave the university libraries opportunity to be innovative and creative and can therefore, be regarded as a gain for the university libraries.

The restrictions to the use of the library however, inflicted some hardship on both the users and the staff. There were lots of adjustments that staff had to make in order to make the library services accessible to their various users. Some libraries were able to add new services for the users such as online services, while some libraries reported that in as much as they tried to adapt, it did not work for them which is very painful to them. On the other hand, where libraries were able to provide services through alternative means, they were not able to reach all their potential users because a lot of users do not have access to the internet. This created a lot of gap between the library and the users.

Another painful effect of COVID-19 on the university libraries was that the library materials were not maximally used, for example some subscribed databases were not accessible beyond the university campuses and as a result could not be used by remote users.

The huge investment upon such databases were wasted during the COVID-19 pandemic, this is really painful to the libraries. Despite, the anxiety exhibited during the period of COVID-19, this study revealed that the major need of the library users was for research materials. Although this may be due to the fact that most universities were in session before the outbreak of COVID-19 and also, both the students and researchers still needed to continue their academic works.

Nevertheless, the greatest gain of the university libraries was that it drew the attention of the university management to the needs of the libraries. Like Ifijeh and Yusuf (2020) pointed out, despite the negative perceptions on the relevance of the library and librarians, the university management still expected libraries to perform wonders without adequate infrastructure. The outbreak of COVID-19 exposed the inadequacies of the university libraries and thereby forcing the university managements to see the need for equipping the libraries with modern and state of the art equipment. This led to emergence of new library services in a bid to support users. On the part of librarians, many of them were able to acquire new skills because of the webinars attended during the pandemic. This is gainful to the librarians as they were able to update themselves in the profession; innovative services were provided and there was enlightenment and preparedness for future pandemic or disaster.

Conclusion

COVID-19 has undeniably brought about numerous pains and gains to university libraries and librarians in Nigeria, service provision, patronage and staff have undoubtedly been affected. Various changes include, online presence of libraries have become a sine qua-non for effective service provision while traditional methods of service delivery have not thrived in the pandemic era. The challenges of using social media platforms affected library staff and patrons. Databases accessible only on campus lost their value due to lockdown and therefore, they were no longer utilized because of inaccessibility. Nevertheless, COVID-19 brought innovations to university libraries; it birthed the awareness of the importance and creativity of online presence of libraries and capacity building of staff and students to develop ICT Skills. Furthermore, it created awareness of the value of e-resources that were accessible outside the campus and awareness of the need for disaster planning during pandemics for effective service delivery in all situations. In spite of all these, the fact still remains that the physical library cannot be replicated in its entirety (Delaney et al, 2020). University libraries will forever remain a hub for the universities to preserve knowledge.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are therefore, made to improve library service delivery in time of crisis:

1. The integration of ICT into the information world has made it pertinent for libraries to have online presence for effective service provision. It is therefore, recommended that university libraries in Nigeria should have and sustain efficient online presence for effective and all-time service delivery.
2. Many library users were not able to make use of the databases subscribed to by the library because such could not be accessed from outside the campus and thus resulted to waste of money. Thus, it is recommended that University librarians liaise with database vendors before subscription, so as to ensure supply of databases that can be accessed both within and outside the campus for maximal utilization.
3. The use of social media platforms for library services is now a global phenomenon unfortunately, some libraries were not able to make use of these. It is therefore, suggested that university management should equip their libraries with essential ICT facilities, internet connectivity, and data subscription. Furthermore, data should be freely accessible to staff and students for academic purposes.

Limitation of the Study

It was difficult getting responses to the online questionnaire, after several reminders the responses were not encouraging until personal copies were sent through personal mails. The researcher would have loved to have more responses from colleagues.

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