

Effects of COVID-19 pandemic on University libraries in North-East, Nigeria: A case study of Ramat library, University of Maiduguri

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Abstract

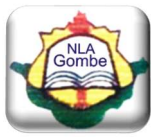
At the beginning of the year 2020, COVID-19 became the most serious threat to international public health. In Nigeria, government imposed some restrictions on the citizens in order to minimize the spread of the virus and death rates. In this situation, community attitudes and behaviours are critical to the management of this pandemic. The COVID-19 lockdown was imposed on the citizens of Borno State, which made it impossible for people to move freely out of their houses. This had serious effect on the lives of people, especially in the use of the library resources. The study investigated the effect of COVID-19 on provision of library services in Ramat library; the population of the study involved sixteen heads of division. Purposive sampling was employed. The study uses case study research design. Qualitative method was adopted for the study in which unstructured interview was used for data collection. Content thematic analysis was used for data analysis and seven themes emerged. These include collection development services, technical services, research and bibliographic services, web based services, reference services, faculty libraries services and administrative services. The finding indicated that COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected the services of the university of Maiduguri library with the exception of web based library services. However, skeletal administrative services were still available at the time of this research.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, University libraries, Ramat library, Library services and Qualitative research.

Introduction

The university of Maiduguri library known as (Ramat Library) was established in 1975 with the University of Maiduguri to support the objectives of its parent institution. The library has eleven divisions, units as well as twelve faculty libraries. The Library organization is meant to facilitate effective functioning and administrative convenience. Ramat library is committed towards providing quality and effective library services through the acquisition and provision of current information resources and facilities, to support teaching, learning, research and community service. The library has a seating capacity of 2,577.

The demand for research into the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the services of libraries is comparatively recent. The Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) was first reported in Wuhan City, China in December 2019. COVID-19 is a major global threat to public health (Lipsitch, Swerdlow & Finelli, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has great negative impacts on all sectors of the society. According to Thelwall and Jonathan (2020), the COVID-19 outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 30th January 2020 and a pandemic on 11th March 2020. The national and international scientific struggle to lessen the spread of COVID-19 to avoid major economic, health, social and educational consequences is unprecedented. Government and community actions are critically important in slowing the spread of the virus and therefore reducing the death rate. Some of the actions taken by the Nigerian government in order to reduce the spread of the Coronavirus include restriction of movement within the state as well



as inter-state travelling. Other actions include shutting down of schools, libraries, markets and other social institutions, mosques, churches. It also created awareness on the need for social distancing, use of facial mask, washing of hands with soap and water and use of hand sanitizer as well as advice on public hygiene and education on COVID -19 symptoms and available services. However, it is not clear how the lockdown in Maiduguri, Borno State of Nigeria has affected the services of Ramat Library, University of Maiduguri. It is therefore important to investigate how Ramat Library offered its services to the patrons during this trying period.

Statement of the problem

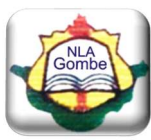
At the beginning of the year 2020, COVID-19 became the most serious threat to educational sector, economic sector, health sector as well as other public sectors. The Nigerian government imposed some restrictions on the movement of the citizens to curb the spread of the disease. These measures included the closure of universities and libraries. The closure of the libraries spells doom as library users could no longer access the resources of the library resulting in massive outcry by the students, staff researchers and other library patrons within the university community. This complain and outcry about the unsatisfactory nature of service delivery persisted through phone calls, emails, twitter and other social media platforms even when staff on level 13 and above were directed to resume work in order to attend to users. The library services providers seem to be unaware of the critical nature of the problem to be addressed. If this situation is not remedied and access to resources restored physically or electronically, the library stands the threat of losing its relevance in the face of strict competition from other information providers who provide cutting edge services to users at the comfort and safety of their homes. This unsavoury and challenging situation prompted the researcher to carry out a study to explore the effects of COVID-19 on the services delivery of Ramat library, university of Maiduguri in order to reposition the library for improved access to information resources to users during and after the COVID -19 in line with international best practices. Furthermore, no study have been located that investigated the effects of COVID-19 on the services of Ramat library, university of Maiduguri.

Objective of the study

1. To ascertain the types of services provided in Ramat library during COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To determine the requirement for effective dissemination of information to patrons in Ramat library during COVID -19 pandemic.
3. To identify the methods adopted in making information resources available to users in Ramat library during COVID -19 pandemic.
4. To determine how COVID-19 affect the services of Ramat library.

Literature review

Libraries exist for the benefit of the mind, as the saying goes “only the educated man is free.” Libraries play a fundamental role in the struggle against illiteracy. The librarian is at all times trying to provide the finest possible library services within the existing social framework, but this gigantic effort by the librarians in academic libraries have been mitigated by the advent of COVID 19 pandemic. A study was conducted by Van Lancker and Parolin (2020) revealed that many nations have agreed to shut down schools in line with physical distancing procedure to minimise the transmission and ease the problem on health systems. They further indicated that United Nations, Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) approximates that 138 nations have shut down schools nation-wide and many other countries have effected either regional or local closures of schools. These school closures are upsetting the education of 80% of school children worldwide. Closing schools for a long time may

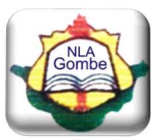


perhaps have detrimental social and health consequences and may likely worsen existing disparities. However, the study failed to point out the problems confronting the school children in terms of library closures and accessibility of information. Moreover, the study did not provide any information on the effects of Corona virus pandemic on the services of any library. This is a gap that the researcher intends to fill.

Mehta and Wang (2020) shared the experience of a university library in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and described the library's position during the crisis while illustrating the uncharted challenges that the pandemic had posed to its digital services. Moreover, they detailed how the library has adapted some existing services into a digital format and explore initiative practices to support the university's full online teaching and learning since March 23, 2020. It reported how the library provided digital services to its teaching faculty and students during the pandemic and the challenges and implications for the library professionals working in-house and remotely. Yet their article shared the experience of a university library in response to COVID-19 pandemic in Asian university. It did not capture the experience of a university library in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigerian university and Ramat library in particular.

Another study conducted by Jæger and Blaabæk (2020) pointed out that COVID-19 amplified inequality in families' learning environments. The authors used register data from Denmark to investigate disparities in families' takeout of digital children's books from public libraries. The results show that the socioeconomic gradient in library takeout by parents' education and income that existed before the COVID-19 lockdown increased after the lockdown. Additionally, the result also indicated that the increase in the socio-economic gradient during COVID-19 was weaker in immigrant than in native families, stronger in families with recent experience in taking out digital materials from the library, and stronger in families with children in the early stages of elementary school. The overall results suggest that COVID-19 increased inequality in learning opportunities because better off families were more successful at using libraries during the pandemic than worse off families. This study did not reflect what transpired as long as library services are concerned in Africa or Nigeria in particular during COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the difference in geographical area as well as the shortage of empirical literature on a study of this nature, it becomes necessary to fill in the missing gap.

In a similar study conducted by Lee (2020) shows that the COVID-19 pandemic and the social distancing policy that several nations have effected have caused distractions to day-to-day routines. He maintained that as of April 8, 2020, schools have been suspended nationwide in 188 countries, and according to UNESCO, over 90% of enrolled learners (1.5 billion young people) worldwide are now out of education. Such shutdown indicated not having access to the resources, they normally have through schools. School routines are vital coping mechanisms for young people. When schools are closed, they lose an anchor in life. Now that schools are closed, some people lock themselves up inside their rooms for weeks, refusing to take showers, eat, or leave their beds. For some students with depression, there will be considerable difficulties adjusting back to normal life when school reopens (Lee, 2020). Many countries are postponing or cancelling university entrance exams. In Hong Kong, the authorities declared a last-minute decision on March 21 to postpone the Diploma of Secondary Education (DSE) exams, which were earlier arranged to take place on March 27, by a month. Based on the poll by the student counselling group HokYau Club in March, 2020, over 20% of the 757 candidates surveyed indicated that their stress levels were at a maximum 10 out of 10, even before the postponement was announced. However, the study of



Lee is Hong Kong based, and the effects of not having access to their library resources were not covered in the study. In a related development, scholars on COVID-19 pandemic carried out many studies (Ahmed, Allaf, & Elghazaly, 2020; Gee & Taylor, 2020; Hsiang, Allen, Annan-Phan, Bell, Bolliger, Chong & Krasovich (2020); Lee, 2020; Pennycook, McPhetres, Zhang, Lu, & Rand, 2020; Thelwall & Thelwall, 2020) but none of these studies specifically investigated the effects of COVID-19 on the services of libraries in Nigeria and Ramat library, university of Maiduguri in particular. This is another literature gap that the researcher intends to bridge.

Methodology

The method adopted in carrying out the study was qualitative method. The research design is case study. Unstructured interview was used for data collection, and it covered the method adopted in making information resources accessible to users, effective dissemination of information to patrons, types of services provided in Ramat library, and how COVID-19 affect the services of Ramat library. The respondents were individually interviewed and the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The researcher listened attentively to the interviews recorded and read the transcripts many times. The researcher read, edited, and checked the data, paragraph by paragraph, for accuracy. The respondents were coded K1 to K16 for anonymity and ease of analysis. Audio and video recorded interview was transcribed verbatim. Thus, at the open coding stage, units of analysis were used to identify statements within the transcribed texts that matched or connect to the study objectives. The minor themes were clustered into major ones. Emerging nodes created at the open coding stage are grouped under another code at the axial coding stage development to reflect the research objectives. Their responses reported based on the responses to the themes raised in the interview. The analysis was done thematically.

Population and Sample

The population of the study comprised one hundred and forty staff, twenty-one staff were purposively selected to represent the population but only sixteen staff participated in the study. Some of the head of divisions were not willing to participate in the study because the researcher several times had aborted appointments with them. The appointments were re-scheduled but still not successful. Those that participated in the study were selected based on the following reasons: (a) they are the head of Divisions and Faculty libraries, (b) they assigned responsibilities to their subordinate, (c) they participate in policy making of the library, (d) they come to work during COVID-19 pandemic and (e) they interact with patrons of the library either physically or virtually.

Findings

The study presents only the key findings. The key findings are mainly the responses of the respondents on the effects of COVID-19 on the services of Ramat Library, in the University of Maiduguri as presented on the table 1 below. In an effort to explore the effects of COVID-19 on the services of Ramat library, seven (7) themes emerged from the data generated from the interviewees' responses. These are collection development services, technical services, research and bibliographic services, web based library services, reference services, faculty library services, and administrative services.

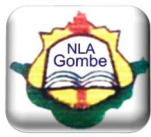


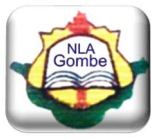
Table 1: turning codes into themes

Code	Theme
▪ I could not perform my office responsibilities of acquiring library resources especially books and journals	▪ collection devt services
▪ Books to be processed by the technical division had to be kept in the collection development pending the reopening of the library.	▪ cataloguing services
▪ In Research & Bibliographic services Division, the needs of the library users could not be met since the closing of the library building in March 2020	▪ research & Bibl. Services
▪ E-library met the needs of users in terms of disseminating information resources during COVID-19 pandemic	▪ web based services
▪ Officers in charge of readers' services halted services during COVID-19 pandemic except for signing of clearance forms.	▪ readers' services
▪ Faculty libraries are the worst hit during COVID-19 Pandemic. The faculty libraries remained closed throughout the COVID-19 period.	▪ faculty libraries
▪ Administrative staffs of the library were on ground to perform administrative services	▪ administrative services

(1) Collection development services Division

With regards to collection development services, K1 informed the researcher that since the emergence of COVID-19, she has a huge fear that she might contract the virus. In her own words “certainly I have a huge fear that I might contract the virus and based on that, I did not go to the office. However, government relaxed the lockdown by requesting those on grade level 13 and above to go to the office. Based on the directives of the federal government, I have to be in the office.” She disclosed that one of the major responsibilities of her office include acquisition of library resources especially books and journals, but could not acquire library resources since the emergence of covid-19 pandemic.

However, K1 disclosed that during COVID -19 pandemic, she had serious practical problems coping with the acquisition, storage and handling of the acquired resources. Major constraints arose from non-appearance of staff from level 1-12 as directed by the federal government as well as getting vendors and delivery of the resources. K1 further revealed that services of the library are genuinely affected as the number of personnel on ground to process and acquire information resources needed to meet information needs of users was inadequate. Therefore library information resources needed by patrons were not satisfactorily provided. This culminated to increased non patronage of the library.



(2) Cataloguing and classification division

Technical service is one of the themes that emerged during the interviews with the respondents. K2 informed the researcher that, during COVID-19 pandemic, the technical section of the library was completely locked down. The data indicated that only the head of the cataloguing division was coming to work and could not do anything throughout the period. Books to be processed by the technical section had to be kept in the collection development pending the reopening of the library.

(3) Research and Bibliographic Services Division

The result of the interview indicated that in Research and Bibliographic Services Division, the needs of the library users could not be met since the closing of the library building in March 2020. K3 disclosed that in the Division, there was no provision of library support or online services to the library clients. K3 stated that the basic requirements for effective dissemination of information to users are to deploy online access to resources, services, and academic supports. With respect to online services, K3 informed the researcher that no services provision was made in the Research section of the library as there was no deliberate policy update with regards to progress on the phases of COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the patrons of the library were not satisfied with the services based on their complaints.

(4) Web based library services

Web based library in Ramat library was described by K4 as a library without shelves. All the respondents pointed out that, through e-library, the needs of users in terms of disseminating information resources to users during COVID-19 were met. K4 was of the opinion that the needs of library resources were met during COVID-19 through the online databases on the website of the e-library and through the emails of the e-library staff. The data indicated that staff of e-library offered services through the chat tool, phone calls, responding to emails etc. K4 was optimistic that patrons of e-library were satisfied with the e-library services in spite of poor network experienced sometimes.

(5) Readers' services

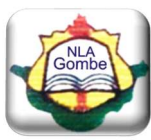
The data generated during the interview with K5 revealed that the officers in charge of readers' services halted services to users during COVID-19 pandemic except for signing of clearance forms. The interview data indicated that family members of those that lost their relatives (staff of the university) during COVID-19 came to the library for signing clearance forms. Signing clearance form is one of the responsibilities of the staff of readers' services division. One of the requirements for collecting benefits of any member of staff that died is to provide a clearance form from the library. This was another section of the library whose services was critically affected by COVID -19 pandemic.

(6) Faculty library services

Faculty libraries are the worst hit during COVID-19 pandemic as indicated by the interview data. All the interviewees told the researcher that the faculty libraries remained closed throughout the COVID-19 period (K6, K7, K8, K9, K10, K11, K12, K13, 14, and K15). No services were rendered to patrons. According to the respondents, some final year students made contacts with the faculty library staff either physically or through phone calls on how to get materials in the faculty libraries for their final year projects, but unfortunately they were told that the faculty libraries were all closed.

(7) Administrative services

The data generated indicated that administrative services in the library include planning, directing, budgeting, controlling human resources, etc. Findings disclosed that administrative



staffs of the library were on ground to perform administrative services such as generating and signing of administrative records. K16 pointed out that skeletal services were offered but normal services in the library can only resume fully if the federal government announces the resumption of tertiary institutions.

Discussions

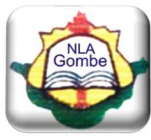
The essence of conducting this research is to explore the effects of COVID-19 on the services of academic libraries in which university of Maiduguri library is a case study. The study found that university of Maiduguri library services delivery was adversely affected by COVID-19 pandemic. The data available shows that faculty libraries were all closed down during the COVID-19 in spite of the importance of the libraries to staff and students in the faculties where the libraries are situated. This is similar to a study carried out by Van Lancker and Parolin (2020) where they revealed that United Nations, Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) approximates that 138 nations have shut down schools nation-wide and many other countries have effected either regional or local closures of schools. These school closures are upsetting the education of 80% of school children worldwide. Closing schools for a long time may perhaps have detrimental social and health consequences and may likely worsen existing disparities.

Other areas of library services affected by COVID-19 pandemic include collection development services, technical services, research and bibliographic services, as well as readers' services division. Only the Head of Divisions were seen around but they were not performing any duties. The result available shows that administrative staff were offering skeletal services.

However, the result shows that web based library services known as e-library was effectively functional throughout the COVID -19 pandemic. The researcher discovered that the e-library had eight (8) subscribed databases as well as forty-five (45) unsubscribed data bases (free data bases). These data bases are attached to the website of the e-library for easy access to clients. A chat tool is attached to the website where patrons can ask questions and other related matters in which any of the e-library staff can respond to the enquiry. This is congruent with the study carried out by Mehta and Wang (2020). Their article shared the experience of a university library in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and described the library's position during the crisis while illustrating the uncharted challenges that the pandemic had posed to its digital services. Moreover, they detailed how the library has adapted some existing services into a digital format and explore initiative practices to support the university's full online teaching and learning since March 23, 2020. It reported how the library provided digital services to its teaching faculty and students during the pandemic and the challenges and implications for the library professionals working in-house and remotely.

Conclusions

This research work established that COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected the services of Ramat library, University of Maiduguri. The entire faculty libraries were shut down, which means staff and students could not have access to the resources of the faculty libraries. Similarly, the study established that other services of the university library were shut down except the e-library and administrative services. Staff and students could have access to e-library databases, while administrative staff were available to skeletally perform their administrative responsibilities. In view of this, the library management should provide more financial support to improve the online services of the library since the COVID -19 has made migration to online paradigms inevitable. The COVID -19 protocols of the NCDC about



social distancing, wearing of facemask, provision of running water and soap as well as hand sanitizers should be maintained. Further study need to be carried out on the Assessment of Post COVID-19 Library Services Delivery in Nigerian Universities in the North Eastern Region of Nigeria.

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