

LIBRARIANS AND INFORMATION SERVICE DELIVERY IN KOGI STATE NIGERIA DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Purpose: This article seeks to find out the role played by Librarians in information delivery in seasons of the dreaded pandemic in Kogi State.

Methodology/Approach: Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study and is guided by five objectives and research questions. The population comprises of 85 professional Librarians in Kogi States. Questionnaire was administered online for the collection of relevant data which was analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in bar charts and table.

Findings: The findings from the study revealed that majority of the librarians in Kogi state work with Academic Libraries and majorly play the role of assisting their patrons in solving their queries, updating users with current information and providing selective information to special patrons. Hence, the major types of information services provided by librarians during COVID -19 seasons include: Current Awareness Services (CAS), online Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) services and Electronic Document Delivery Services, which are delivered majorly through social media platforms, emails and library websites. In the delivery of information services, librarians encounter the major challenge of poor funding for effective service delivery, inadequate facilities and inadequate internet services.

Implication: The role of libraries and librarians cannot be under mined in providing information services for prompt decision making in an era such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The study recommends adequate funding, upgrading of library services to online services among others as a way of enhancing the roles of librarians in information services delivery in time such as this. Hence, study has implications for university libraries and librarians in Kogi state, as they will need to re-think and re-strategies on effective ways to enhance information service delivery in the era of crises or pandemic.

Originality/value: This paper provides empirical evidence on the role of librarians in information service delivery in the era of COVID-19. Based on the findings, the recommendations of this study can effectively enhance information services delivery in the season of pandemic or crises.

Keywords: Library, Librarians, Information, Information service delivery, and Covid-19 pandemic

Paper type: Empirical Research

Introduction

Libraries have been and will continue to be a necessity as long as man seeks for more knowledge and understanding of the changing world he lives in. A library in a lay man's language is a place where collections of books, periodicals, manuals and records of human knowledge in print and non-print format are kept for use (Fagbola, Uzoigwe & Ajegbomogun, 2011). Chukwudum and Dika (2017) noted that the

place of library and information services cannot be ignored, because access to information is a critical factor in decision making for economic, human and nation development. Quality and timely information service delivery is one among the several factors that drives the library profession, which is in consonant with the fifth Law of Ranganatan that says "save the users' time". Therefore, it is important to note that service delivery is geared basically towards meeting the information demands and needs of

users at the right time when the need arises.

Anaeme and Okoye (2017) define a library as an organized collection of information resources in print and electronic format, under the custody of a trained librarian who effectively manages the resources to ensure they are adequately utilized by users to satisfy their varying needs (research, teaching, learning, entertainment/recreation, etc.). From this definition, Anaeme and Okoye specifically emphasized the role of librarians in the organization and management of libraries and information resources. The role of librarians in a traditional library setting focuses on the acquisition, processing, storage/preservation and dissemination of information to a target audience in a particular place and at a particular time. However, the integration of ICTs in information service delivery has transformed the method in which librarians render their services. Librarians are now facilitators of round the clock access to information resources within and outside the walls of the library (Agbo, 2015). Hence, librarians are at the fore front of providing information services to respective communities in order to support their teaching, learning and research needs. Effective delivery of information services that meet the needs and aspirations of citizens, decision-makers and life-long learners is a long standing goal of the library and information profession (Alabi, Nduka, & Olatise, 2012).

The year 2019 and 2020 remains a very significant period in the minds of people around world with the outbreak of the dreaded pandemic diseases called coronavirus (COVID-19) in Wuhan, China in December 2019. It has spread worldwide and impacted virtually all aspects of our daily life (Wang & Lund, 2020). The spread of the virus had led to high rate of deaths, economic recession, loss of investment by firms, loss of jobs, poverty, fall in household consumption, increase in crime rate and violence, etc. Consequently, it led to the complete or partial shutdown of libraries till further notice in many countries around the

world and has also forced libraries and librarians to begin to rethink and re-strategize on measures to effectively overcome the scourge of the disease and to continue to enhance their noble work of effectively providing information services for human and national development.

Statement of the Problem

Timely and easy access to information is a very vital desire of every human being and libraries and librarians play a very vital role in that direction. They exist to meet the information needs of researchers, students, legal practitioners, health workers, policy makers and the general public irrespective of their profession and characteristics. It is no doubt that the COVID 19 Pandemic took all and sundry unaware and unprepared and crippled virtually every system, organization and institutions in most countries of the world, forcing them to go on locked down. The nationwide lockdown either partially or completely irrespective of the States in Nigeria has crippled information service delivery in most libraries. Kogi state is not ruled out of this situation as the doors of many libraries (Academic, Public, Private and Special Libraries) in the State were closed completely or partially to patrons and most librarians had to work from their homes. The fact that library patrons will need to access information to satisfy their information need in the period of the lockdown is the major challenge and responsibility that librarians in Kogi State have to cope with. This has prompted some libraries to be able to reinvent and come up with innovation for providing information services to patrons at home or wherever they may be located by providing some specific information services through other means apart from the traditional one-on-one contact with patrons. However, the inability of some libraries to access and deployed technologies in providing information services for assisting in curbing the situation showcased a huge deficiency and drawback for libraries today and also poses a threat for the future. Since librarians are regarded as information

professionals, this study therefore aims at investigating their roles in information service delivery in seasons of COVID-19 pandemic in Kogi State.

Objective of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the role of librarians in information service delivery during COVID-19 pandemic in Kogi State. Specifically, the study will:

1. Identify the type of libraries where most librarians in Kogi State work.
2. Find out the role played by librarians in the season of pandemic crisis in Kogi State.
3. Determine the type of information services provided by librarian in delivering information in the season of pandemic crisis in Kogi State.
4. Ascertain the medium librarians used in delivering information in the season of pandemic crisis in Kogi State, and
5. Identify challenges encountered by librarians in information delivery in the season of crisis (Pandemic) in Kogi State.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What type of libraries do most librarians in Kogi State work with?
2. What role do librarians play in the seasons of crisis (Pandemic) in Kogi State?
3. What type of information services does librarians in Kogi State provides in delivering information in the season of pandemic crisis?
4. What medium do librarians used for delivering information in season of pandemic crisis in Kogi State?
5. What are the challenges encountered by librarians in information delivery in season of crisis (Pandemic) in Kogi State?

Literature Review

Provision of information for the satisfaction of the public's curious information needs is the crux of every library, be it academic, national, public,

special, school or private. Every library regardless of its types and size is established to solely provide information. Alabi & Sani 2013 and Eze, (2017) define information services as consisting of arrays of activities and facilities targeted at providing information in various formats so as to satisfy the broad and varying information needs of library patrons within a community or society. Issa, Amusan, Olarongbe and Akangbe (2013) also supported that information services are library services that are aimed towards providing users with the right information needed to answer their queries and to help them accomplish the task of for decision making or reduction of the level of uncertainty. Information services are of various types ranging from reference and information service, document delivery services, online reservation of books, current awareness service, Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) services, inter library loan service, online database services, resource sharing, information repackaging, e-mail alerts, instant messaging, etc.

Effective delivery of information services that meet the needs and aspirations of citizens, decision-makers and life-long learners is a long standing goal of the information profession. The role of librarians is to support, enrich and provide superb services – in person and online (Alabi, Nduka & Olatise, 2012). Librarians are information specialist with expertise in acquisition, processing, preservation and dissemination of information sources, for authenticity, objectivity, authority and currency. Anaeme and Okoye (2017) noted that librarians can be found working in any sector of a nation be it health, education, agriculture, banking, technology etc. they are mostly in institution of higher learning, schools, government and private organizations and their role in the organization and management of libraries and information resources are fundamental to the success of their parent organization and for national development.

Librarians have to reach user populations and their need for up-to-date relevant information. When this is done, there can be limitless access

to the library and information resources by millions of users and information seekers and their optimal use. The COVID-19 era has presented an opportunity for librarians to show their worth and expertise. As scientists and health professionals search for solutions to COVID-19, librarians are also playing an important role of disseminating COVID-19-related information and resources to the public through various channels available to them, especially as most patrons may not be able to come to the library frequently due to lockdown or restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic (Okiki, 2020). In fact, librarians are major stakeholder in the fight against COVID-19 they play significant roles in the season of the pandemic globally in different ways. Librarians provide access to information resources within the period of lockdown where the pandemic outbreak was at its peak and are not relenting in their efforts (Ali & Gatiti, 2020). Similarly, they filter, update and disseminate information content to meet up with current demands of field workers, researcher, health care workers, decision and policy makers and the public in general.

Kanamadi (2005) cited in Jayadev, (2013) explained that the technological advancement in this digital era has continued to enhance an improved quality information services delivery for libraries. It has helped libraries and librarians to device ways of offering services to users that are in distance location. Thus, libraries combine both technology and information resources with internet connection to deliver information services such as online reference services, online catalogue, online chat, online document delivery, full text databases, email services, institutional repositories, etc. furthermore, the social media tools are deployed to ensure timely delivery of information and to interact with patrons to know their views and opinions.

Golden (2012) cited in Alabi, (2018) pointed out that library services are embedded in the cloud computing technology. The deployment of this technology in its full capacity is to enhance the provision of unlimited access to information.

Hence, most library operations and services have been redefined and redesigned thus; libraries can now operate round the clock providing services. Based on this, Shonhe and Jain (2017) observed that publishers presently provide a wide range of e-resources that are accessible online through mobile technology. In the quest to meet up with the needs of library users, Shonhe (2017) suggests that libraries can use various information dissemination techniques such as personalized collections, SMS/text notifications, online reference services, social networks, websites, mailing lists and OPACs. Okiki (2020) further gave some examples of some existing digital strategies of delivering information to the public and also noted that many new opportunities will continue to be developed. These include:

- **Personal space/My Library:** This is a self-service platform where library users manage their personalized accounts with custom-made collections. Here 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. With this platform, librarians are able to send customized scanned documents, images, audio books and e-books to library users' personalized accounts.
- **Text notifications via the use of mobile devices:** Mobile devices can be used in disseminating information and multimedia content such as videos, images and audio files. Librarians use this service to alert patrons regarding the latest information on happenings around COVID 19 on how to stay safe or other related information.
- **Social media:** They are more appropriate for use on marketing information and delivering personalized information resources to groups of people or individuals.
- **Quick response (QR) codes:** These are two dimensional barcodes that direct users to

desired websites. It can be used by libraries on a certain topic or subject area. Verma and Verma (2014) noted that QR codes are akin to mobile tagging.

- **Online reference services:** online platforms allow librarians to create a bond with patrons and improve their efficiency through provision of a 24/7 reference and information service.
- **Library websites:** Libraries now uses websites to effectively share information, links, share updates and announce news/events.
- **Mailing lists:** To targeted fusers, mailing list can be used by libraries to receive personalized information at the same time.

The adoption of recent technologies in information service delivery is accompanied with its associated challenges such as short lifecycle and becoming obsolete and out-dated as it can no longer function with a more advanced and improved version of same product. This is buttressed further by the opinion of Emma, (2005) cited in Faga and Musa (2017) who emphasized the fact that the life expectancy of digital media is an issue of concern. Furthermore, Aliyu (2015) noted that even though many libraries in Nigeria are trying to become ICT compliant, they however encounter some challenges. These include among others, inadequate finance, poor technical skills, erratic electricity power supply, lukewarm attitude of users, political instability, geographical isolation, inadequate infrastructure, and corruption. Issa, Amusan, Olarongbe & Akangbe (2017) reported that information service delivery in libraries is challenged by reluctance of people in accepting change, high cost of ICT facilities and internet bandwidth, inadequate experts, lack of maintenance culture, and lack of sustainability.

Today, librarians are anticipated to manage digital libraries, organize digital knowledge and information and disseminate digital information

owing to the fact that we are all in a global village as a result of the internet, and ultimate goal of a digital librarian is to facilitate access to information just in time to the critical end users and to also facilitate electronic publishing (Pal, 2013). In the same vein, Gbaje (2007) opined that the managing of subscription to e-resources and negotiation of license, identifying open access and free web-based materials also constitute some of the emerging roles of the librarians in the digital age. Okiki (2020) advised that in the era of pandemic, librarians should serve as catalysts for the effective dissemination of information to promote true knowledge. They should disseminate information via existing digital media platforms to educate users. In an ever-increasing digital environment, libraries should establish working relationships with health agencies and communication organizations with the objective of cooperative developments of collections, referrals and information sharing for the satisfaction people information needs.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study and was guided by five specific objectives and research questions. The population comprises of 85 professional Librarians who are registered members of Nigerian Library Association, Kogi State Chapter and also work in various libraries (National, Academic, Public, School and Special Libraries) in the States. Questionnaire was designed and was administered online for the collection of data. Out of 85 professional librarians, only 57 responded to the online questionnaires, representing 67.1% response rate. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage and mean scores). Specifically, research questions one, two and three were presented using bar charts, while research question four was presented in a table.

Results

Figure 1: Types of Library where Most Respondents Work

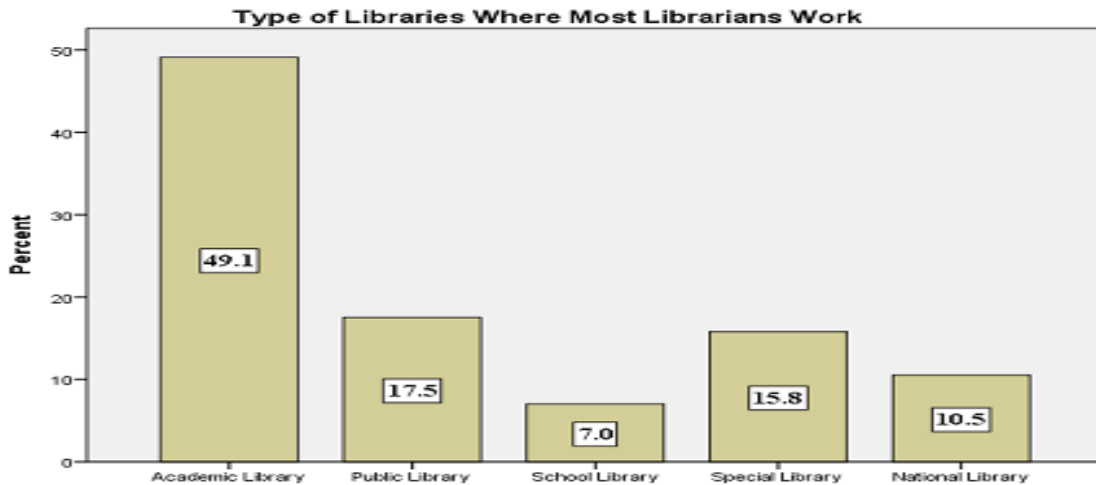
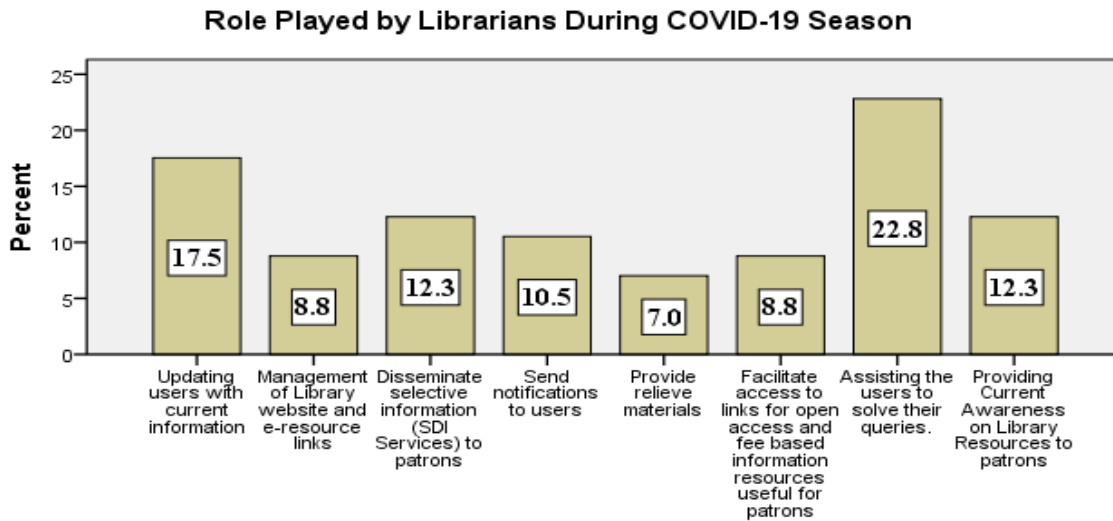


Figure 1 by the highest percentage shows that most respondents work in Academic libraries (49.1%). 17.5% work in Public libraries, 15.8%

work with Special libraries, 10.5% work with the National library, while 7.0% respondents work in School libraries.

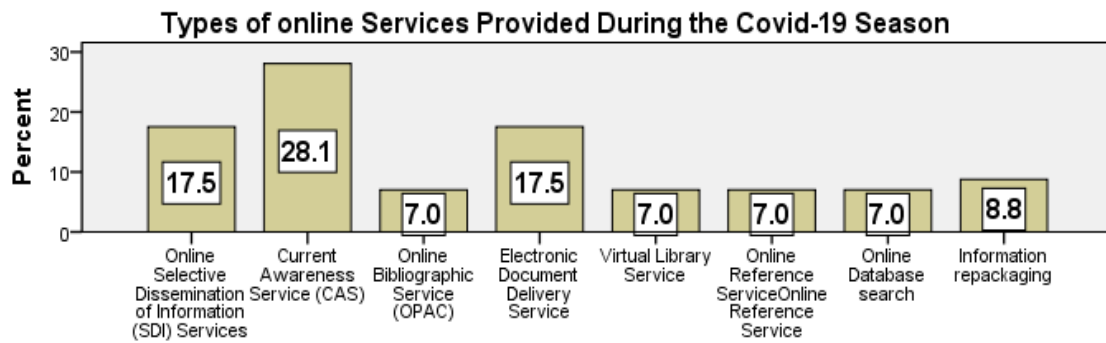
Figure 2: Roles that Librarians Played During COVID- 19 Seasons



The result in Figure 2 shows that the major roles that librarians played during COVID-19 period from the highest score include: assisting users to solve their queries (22.8%), updating users with current information (17.5%), disseminating selective information to patrons and providing

current awareness on library resources to patrons (12.3%). Other roles base on low score include: management of library website and e-resources link and facilitating access to links for open access free based information resources useful to patrons (8.8%) respectively and providing relieve materials (7.0%).

Figure 3: Types of Information Services Provided During COVID-19 Season



The result in figure 3 by highest percentage shows that the major types of information services provided by librarians during COVID-19 season include: Current Awareness Services (CAS) (28.1%), followed by Online Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) services and

Electronic Document Delivery Services (17.28%). 8.8% respondents were involved in information repackaging and 7.0% representing the lowest respondents provides online bibliographic services, virtual library services, online reference services and online database search.

Figure 4: Channels that Librarians Use for Information Service Delivery during COVID-19 Season

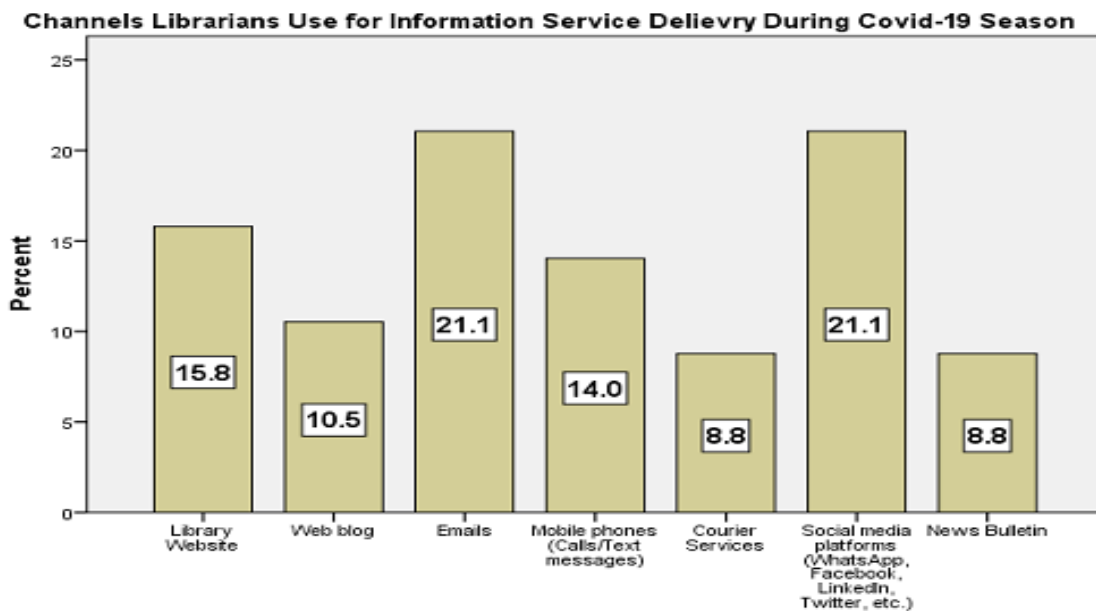


Figure 4 shows that the major channels used for information delivery by librarians during the season of COVID-19 pandemic by highest percentages are: social media platforms and

emails (21.1%). This was followed by library websites (15.8%) and mobile phones (14.0%). The channels that are less used are: web blogs (10.5%), news bulletin and courier services with (8.8%) respectively.

Table 1: Challenges Encountered by Librarians in Information Services Delivery in the Season of Pandemic in Kogi State

| CHALLENGES | SA | A | D | SD | Mean | Decision |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------|----------|
| Unavailability of library policy on pandemic and disaster management | 14 (24.6) | 15 (26.3) | 16 (28.1) | 12 (21.3) | 2.54 | Agree |
| Inadequate funding | 32 (56.1) | 21 (36.8) | 3 (5.3) | 1 (1.8) | 3.47 | Agree |
| Reluctance in accepting change | 4 (7.0) | 23 (40.4) | 25 (43.9) | 5 (8.8) | 2.46 | Disagree |
| Lack of preparedness | 15 (26.3) | 31 (54.4) | 4 (7.0) | 7 (12.3) | 2.95 | Agree |
| Inadequate internet connectivity | 8 (14.0) | 36 (63.2) | 8 (14.0) | 5 (8.8) | 2.82 | Agree |
| Erratic power supply | 14 (24.6) | 32 (56.1) | 8 (14.0) | 3 (5.3) | 3.00 | Agree |
| Inadequate ICT facilities | 10 (17.5) | 32 (56.1) | 11 (19.3) | 4 (7.0) | 2.84 | Agree |
| High cost of facilities and bandwidth | 11 (19.3) | 22 (38.6) | 17 (29.8) | 7 (12.3) | 2.65 | Agree |
| Inadequate manpower | 7 (12.3) | 22 (38.6) | 16 (28.1) | 12 (21.1) | 2.42 | Disagree |
| Lack of maintenance culture | 9 (15.8) | 21 (36.8) | 16 (28.1) | 11 (19.3) | 2.49 | Disagree |
| Inadequate training | 11 (19.3) | 17 (29.8) | 19 (33.3) | 10 (17.5) | 2.51 | Agree |
| Low perception of the worth and value of libraries to national development | 13 (22.8) | 20 (35.1) | 8 (14.0) | 16 (28.1) | 2.53 | Agree |
| Lack of ICT skills | 7 (12.3) | 25 (43.9) | 15 (26.3) | 10 (17.5) | 2.51 | Agree |
| Low capacity infrastructure | 11 (19.3) | 23 (40.4) | 11 (19.3) | 12 (21.1) | 2.58 | Agree |

Table 1: above shows that the challenges librarians encounter in the delivery of information during the season of COVID-19 pandemic include: Inadequate funding for libraries (3.47), erratic power supply (3.00), lack of preparedness (2.95), inadequate facilities (2.84), inadequate internet connectivity (2.82), high cost of facilities and internet bandwidth (2.65), low capacity of infrastructure (2.58) unavailability of library policy on pandemic and disaster management (2.54), low perception of the worth and value of libraries to national development by citizens (2.53) and inadequate training and lack of ICT skills (2.51).

Discussion of the Findings

The analysis of the findings revealed that most respondents work in academic, public, special and national libraries. Hence, in relation to the opinion of Anaeme and Okoye (2017), librarians

can be found in any organization be it an institution of higher learning, government and private organizations, etc. Their roles in the organization and management of libraries and information resources are fundamental to the success of their parent organization and for national development.

The results further shows that the major roles that librarians played during COVID-19 period include: assisting users to solve their queries, updating users with current information, providing selective information to patrons and creating current awareness on library resources. The findings is in line with the opinion of Alabi, Nduka and Olatise (2012), who emphatically noted that the role of librarians is to support, enrich and provide information – in person and online (Alabi, Nduka and Olatise, 2012). More so, Amusan, Olarongbe and Akangbe (2013) also

supported that services provided by librarians are aimed at helping the users to answer their queries and to help them accomplish the task of decision making or reduction of the level of uncertainty through the timely provision of current information.

From the analysis of the findings, the major types of information services provided by librarians during COVID-19 season include: Current Awareness Services (CAS), Online Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) services and Electronic Document Delivery Services. This is in support of the study conducted by Amusan, Olarongbe and Akangbe (2013) identified the major types of information services such as Current Awareness Services, Document delivery services, Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) services, Reference services, etc. and emphasized that these services are aimed at providing people with the right information that enhances accurate decision making.

The major channels used for information delivery by librarians during the season of COVID-19 Pandemic are: social media platforms, emails, library websites and mobile phones. This is in consonance with the study by Shonhe and Jain (2017) and Okiki (2020) who suggested that libraries adopt various technological medium of information dissemination such as emails, social network sites, mobile technologies for SMS/text notifications, websites, etc. to improve their library service delivery.

The main challenges librarians encounter in the delivery of information in the season of COVID-19 pandemic include: Inadequate funding for libraries, erratic power supply, lack of preparedness, inadequate facilities, inadequate internet connectivity, high cost of facilities and internet bandwidth, low capacity of infrastructure, unavailability of library policy on pandemic and disaster management, low perception of the worth and value of libraries to national development by citizens and inadequate training and lack of ICT skills. In agreement with this finding, Aliyu (2015) noted that in the process of becoming ICT compliant,

many libraries in Nigeria still encounter major challenges such as inadequate funding for effective library services, poor technical skills, erratic electricity supply, inadequate infrastructure, and corruption. Issa, Amusan, Olarongbe and Akangbe (2017) also supported that information service delivery in libraries is challenged by high cost of ICT facilities and internet bandwidth and lack of skilled personnel.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 era has ushered in some changes in the way and manner in which information services are rendered by librarians. Since information access remains the social responsibility of libraries and librarians, in order for them to be able to meet these information needs of their patrons and maintain relevance in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, it became imperative for library and information professionals in Kogi State to re-strategize on alternative means of information service delivery. The study revealed that most librarians in Kogi State work in academic, public and special libraries. During COVID-19 pandemic, they assisted their patrons in solving their queries, updating users with current information, providing selective information to special patrons and creating current awareness on library resources and services. Hence, the major types of information services provided by librarians during COVID -19 seasons include: Current Awareness Services (CAS), online Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) services and Electronic Document Delivery Services, which were delivered through social media platforms, emails, library websites and mobile phones. therefore, it is noteworthy to concluded that the roles of librarians in information service delivery during the COVID19 pandemic is not quite satisfactory, as they encounter the major challenge of poor funding for effective service delivery, inadequate facilities, inadequate internet services, lack of ICT skills among others.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proffered.

1. Librarians working in the various types of libraries in Kogi State should embrace the use of online technologies to enhance effective information service delivery in the era of COVID-19 pandemic
2. Librarians should be adequately trained and provided with the necessary facilities so as to play more roles in the provision of efficient information services to their patrons during the seasons of pandemic and crises.
3. Libraries in Kogi State should upgrade their services to electronic or online services so as to effectively meet the information needs of their patrons irrespective of their location in seasons of pandemic and crises such as COVID-19.
4. Libraries in Kogi State should adopt the use of various online channels and intensify the use of web blogs, websites and cloud computing technologies for effective, timely and equitable information access by various patrons.
5. Authorities of libraries should ensure adequate funding for the provision of facilities and skills development opportunities necessary for effective information service delivery in their libraries.

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