



EMERGENCE OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC: PREVENTIVE, COMPLIANCE AND HEALTH VULNERABILITIES OF LIBRARIANS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN BENUE STATE

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Abstract

Purpose: This study was carried out to investigate the level of COVID-19 preventive protocols compliance and health vulnerabilities of librarians' in academic libraries in Benue State.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Descriptive survey design was used for the study. The entire librarians in Federal University of Agriculture and Benue State University formed the population of the study. Three objectives and three questions were formulated to guide the study. Total enumeration of 70 population was used. Instrument for data collection was structured questionnaires distributed with a return rate of 66 copies representing 94%. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, mean scores and ranking as statistical measures for data analysis

Findings: The findings of this study revealed a high extent in practicing of wearing of face masks and shields, Librarians do agree to a high extent compliance in isolation of self during fevers. Furthermore, respondents favoured all the items on compliance such as using of hand sanitizers, avoiding coughing into the air and use the elbows and sharing information using the social media.

Implication: Challenges in averting health insecurity at reopening of academic libraries include re-structuring and re-organizing the Library reading space to accommodate 2 meter physical distancing rule among others.

Originality/Value: Library Management should inaugurate COVID-19 Task-force committee with a detailed Modus Operandi to avert health insecurity in the academic libraries and design new guidelines for handling physical materials because of its vulnerability and Review Library budget composition to financial autonomy for a holistic functioning.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, Preventive Protocols, Compliance, Health Vulnerabilities.

Paper type: Empirical research

Introduction

The whole world and Nigeria in particular has witnessed a dreaded novel disease called Corona virus (COVID-19). Its outbreak was first reported to World Health Organization (WHO) in December 2019 in Wuhan China. WHO (2020) declared it as a Pandemic on the 11th of March 2020 due to the multiple dearth cases which rose above 100,000 and updated confirmed infected cases in over 100 countries in the world. A pandemic was defined by WHO as "The worldwide spread of a new Disease". Pandemic is a Greek word specifically, "PAN" means all while "DEMOS" means people. The Corona virus pandemic which was caused by a

severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is spreading rapidly through the globe. It is a virus new to mankind with no specific or approved treatment. Its' emergence has threaten national and international instability, panic, apprehension, emotional stress, social and economic lockdown of all human activities and creating boredom on the pattern of virus infection, treatment and mostly its vulnerability to the aged and those with underlying ailments.

According to WHO DG, (2020) he asserted that, tropical with Corona virus is transmission from person-to-person through coughing droplets into the nostrils and vocal cavities.

Therefore, emphasis on its preventive measures were centered on practicing respiratory hygiene which is amplified in mostly mass media sensitization to the general public on avoiding touching of faces, eyes, nose mouth and eyes often, encourage use of face masks/face shields, washing of hands with soap and flowing water, observing at least 3 meters physical/social distancing, use of elbows to cover mouths when coughing and coughing into tissue papers and dispose of it properly immediately. He had insisted that testing against the virus is main principle to management and isolation of oneself to avoid infecting others who may be symptomatic. Part of the sensitization to avoid further spread was government stringent policy on: mandatory movement restrictions within the country and nations, closure of business sectors, factories, schools, churches etc.

Government preventive protocols affected academic activities due to the lockdown policy as such academic libraries and other types of libraries had to comply with the directives. However, the lockdown rules was planned to monitor the rate of compliance of government protocols as well as evaluate the response rate and level of infection so far. According to the Director, National Centre for Disease Control (2020), at a press conference of the Presidential Taskforce on COVID-19, he observed its' citizens agitation for ease down on the educational sector, and approved the reopening of schools beginning with the exit class. The researcher at this juncture saw the need to address the gap in the level of preparedness to organize the academic libraries for post COVID-19 utilization of library resources and reflect government approved preventive protocols before reopening of tertiary institutions. Libraries are seen as highly risky environment for COVID-19 infection and transmission due to the population of students (Hopkins centre 2020).

Benue State in perspective situated in the middle belt, North Central of Nigeria has a population of about 4,253,614 according to the census (2006) had recorded her corona virus index case on the 22nd March 2020. Its total confirmed rate of the virus infected cases as at 30th July 2020 is 346.

Covid-19 has remained a mantra in several agencies and academic libraries are not left out.

Problem of the study

Libraries harbor so much furniture, books, print and non-prints, e-resources as well as technological gadgets whose enormous use cannot be over emphasized. The libraries are meant to be spacious to accommodate the population of users or students. It is indeed a worry if prior preparations are not met before the full reopening of academic libraries which may trigger health insecurity within the library community.

Objective of the study

The specific objectives are, to:

1. Investigate the extent of preparedness of librarians on COVID-19 preventive protocols in academic libraries in Benue State.
2. Ascertain the level of compliance by library staff to avoid COVID -19 health insecurity in academic libraries in Benue State.
3. Challenges envisaged in preparedness of the Libraries to avert COVID-19 health insecurity in the academic libraries in Benue State.

Literature Review

There are quite a number of studies on the emergence of the dreaded novel virus (COVID-19) in circulation. However, this study focuses on the three objectives stated above. The library is regarded as a high risk area confirmed by John Hopkins report of April 23rd 2020 which had earlier reported that Libraries are at low risk if it is reopening. His claims was wrongly presented and was later re-positing to confirm that Libraries are at high risk of reopening if proper preventive measures are not put in place. To this end, government directives on the closure of every sector which schools and libraries were inclusive which were indisputable fact that without the decision, controlling community infection of the pandemic is disastrous.

In Nigeria, the Minister of Health, Osagie Ehanire had in the month of April 2020, unveiled 12

COVID-19 testing laboratories that can test 1500 samples daily. He said increased testing capacity would mean the number of cases identified would increase and would include testing contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases. This was proactive enough to curtail further community spread.

In another development, Gilbert et al (2020) report provided an important tool to map out the continental risk for the spread of COVID-19 in Africa which should be used for a frame work of action to collectively avert the spread and comprehensive strategy for preparedness and response to easing down with effective collaboration of the African Center for Disease Control and prevention in Africa (CDC). The susceptibility of the disease reinfection after the easing down depends solely on the practicing and compliance of the government protocols which is the non-pharmaceutical preventive measures since there is no permanent cure. Moeti (2020) had explained that, analysis have shown that those with underlying conditions are affected in Africa such as those with HIV who are not yet accessing treatment, diabetics and others are those vulnerabilities of concern.

Librarians' perception of health security dwells on massive available personal preventive equipment at the wake of reopening of the university libraries to protect both staff and patrons. Benue State is an agrarian community most of its citizens (Nongo, & Ode 2018) whose wards or children are students and users of the university libraries needs to be protected during accessing information. Sensitization and advocacy of COVID-19 preventive measures as asserted by Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) (2020) that, librarians delivering services in all types of libraries with different geographic locations and sizes are learning the facts about this public health crisis and helping to inform their patrons.

Librarians can inform their patrons on what steps they may need to take on COVID-19 prevention and control, which are to sanitize their collections, and post hand-washing reminders in the library. Caren (2020) affirmed that the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's corona-virus page and the Boston Public Health Commission's corona-virus page will be kept up to date and will include location-specific information to keep the

community better informed. Adeleke (2020) is of the opinion to for libraries to imbibe hypermedia and digital library services to avert infection of the COVID-19 virus due to the vulnerability of our physical resources. In the same vein, Yakasai (2019) described what asymptomatic patient is and how he or she could infect others if self-isolation is not considered and complied with immediately. He further said that, some asymptomatic patients have some objective abnormalities whose frequency is not known. He asserted that, Covid-19 infection is mainly on adults of middle age and older persons with underlying medical ailments.

Research Methods

This study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population comprises 70 librarians in Benue State University Makurdi and Federal University of Agriculture Makurdi. Total population enumeration was used. Instrument was the questionnaire it contained demographic questions on respondents' characteristics, 31 questions in three clusters on; level of practice, compliance and challenges of preparedness to post COVID-19 and reopening academic library services in Benue State. It was distributed via mobile phone App (WhatsApp) due to the lockdown and closure of the libraries it took one month to reach respondents. A five-point rating scale of very high extent, high extent, medium extent, small extent and no extent was used for question 1 and 2 while very great extent, great extent, medium extent, small extent and no extent was used for question 3 with weighted values of 5,4,3,2 and 1 respectively. A total of 66 questionnaires representing 94% returned and suitable for analysis. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics frequency counts and simple statistics mean where 3.00 and above was regarded as accepted while 2.99 and below was regarded as rejected.

Data presentation and findings

The Data collected were presented and analyzed using descriptive statistics expressed in frequency distribution percentages mean scores.

The result of the data analysis is presented below: findings revealed that 66 librarians filled the questionnaire

Fig 1 Demographic details on qualification of respondents

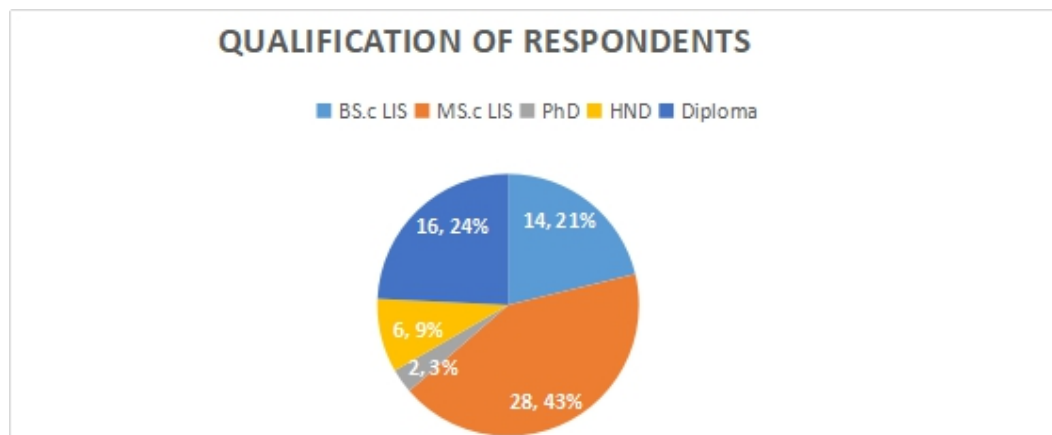
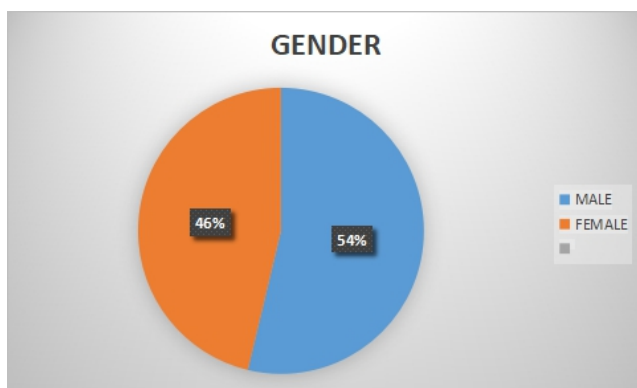


Table 1 shows qualification of respondents from the two university libraries

	FREQUENCIE %		
	S	BSU	FUAM
PhD		2	3
MS.c	14	14	42.4
BS.c	6	8	21.2
HND	3	3	9
Diploma	8	8	24.2
TOTAL	66		100

Fig 2 shows demographic details of the Gender representation of the respondents



The demographic details of the qualification of respondents in Table 1 shows that, a significant number of librarians have a high degree in Library and Information Science.

Gender composition of respondents as shown in Table 1 indicates that the majority 36(54%) of the

respondents are male while 31(46%) female constituted minority. This indicates the fact that, there are more male librarians participants than female in this study.

Table 2: Mean representation of the preventive measures practice for the two libraries in Benue State by Librarians

S/NO	Items Statement	TOTAL=N	X	FREQ	R	D
1	Wearing of face mask or face shield	66	4.53	299	1	A
2	Do you agree with practicing self-isolation during chilling fevers, coughing etc	64	4.48	287	2	A
3	Using of hand sanitizes	62	4.40	273	3	A
4	Washing of hands with soap and water	65	4.27	278	4	A
5	Social media use in sharing information	63	4.15	262	5	A
6	Fumigation of libraries and offices	63	4.09	258	6	A
7	Avoiding coughing into the air rather into the elbows	66	4.06	268	7	A
8	Avoiding crowded environments	64	4.03	258	8	A
9	Staff health is assured with available safety preventive gadgets in the libraries	63	3.84	242	9	A
10	Observing respiratory hygiene	66	3.81	252	10	A

Keys: A= Accepted; D= Decision; R= Ratings

The result of the study as presented in Table 2 shows the mean of respondents on the practice of the COVID-19 preventive measures in preparedness of its post era and reopening of academic libraries in Benue State. The result shows that, all the items had ratings above 3.00 set as a criterion for accepting an item. This

implies that, the following among others are appropriately practiced to avoid health insecurity in academic libraries in Benue State. The result shows that, among the appropriate preventive measures practiced by librarians, wearing of face mask or face shield has the highest rating while observing respiratory hygiene has the least rating.

Table 3 Mean representation of the extent of Compliance in practicing COVID-19 preventive measures by librarians in the two universities in Benue State.

S/No	Items of Statement	TOTAL =N	X	FREQ	R	D
11	Do you agree with practicing self-isolation during chilling fevers, coughing etc	65	4.12	268	1	A
12	Wearing of face mask or face shield	63	4.06	256	2	A
13	Avoiding coughing into the air rather into the elbows	65	4.04	263	3	A
14	Avoiding crowded environments	63	4	252	4	A
15	Washing of hands with soap and water	62	4	248	5	A
16	Social media use in sharing information	63	3.96	250	6	A
17	Using of hand sanitizes	66	3.93	260	7	A
18	Observing respiratory hygiene	62	3.93	244	8	A
19	Fumigation of libraries and offices	66	3.87	256	9	A
20	Staff health is assured with available safety preventive gadgets in the libraries	64	3.78	242	10	A

Keys: A= Accepted; D= Decision; R= Ratings

The result of the study as presented in Table 3 shows the mean of respondents on the compliance of the COVID-19 preventive measures in preparedness of its post era and reopening of academic libraries in Benue State. The result

shows that, all the items had ratings above 3.00 set as a criterion for accepting an item. This implies that, the following among others are appropriately complied with in accordance with government proscribed preventive measures to

avoid health insecurity in academic libraries in Benue State. The result shows that, among the appropriate preventive measures practically complied by librarians is practicing self-isolation

during an experienced cough or fever from family members has the highest rating while staff health is assured with available safety preventive gadgets in the libraries has the least rating.

Table 4 Mean representation on extent of challenges in preparedness to the post-COVID-19 reopening of university libraries in Benue State.

S/NO	Items of Statement	TOTAL =N	X	FREQ	R	D
21	Library reading space would be limited due to social distancing	65	4.52	294	1	A
22	Lack of funds to subscribe to social media	64	4.40	282	2	A
23	Library task force committee on post COVID-19 preparedness in academic libraries	62	4.20	261	3	A
24	Closure of Library due to COVID-19 Lockdown	66	4.18	276	4	A
25	Decrease in patronage of the library	62	4.08	253	5	A
26	Staff health is assured with available safety preventive gadgets in the libraries	66	4.04	267	6	A
27	Staff strength in the era of COVID-19 is limited due to enormous tasks	66	4.10	271	7	A
28	Restriction of opening hours of the libraries	65	4	260	8	A
29	Movement restrictions	65	3.95	257	9	A
30	Anxiety	65	3.93	256	10	A
31	Inaccessibility of some staffers of the library	63	3.63	229	11	A

Keys: A= Accepted; D= Decision; R= Ratings

The result of the study as presented in Table 4 shows the mean of respondents on the challenges of post COVID-19 preventive measures in preparedness of reopening of academic libraries in Benue State. The result shows that, all the items had ratings above 3.00 set as a criterion for accepting an item. This implies that, the following among others are challenges to avoid health insecurity in academic libraries in Benue State. The result shows the highest rating is Library reading space would be limited due to complying with the COVID-19 preventive measure of avoiding crowded population which is commendable and the least rating is inaccessibility of some staffers of the library due to the continuous lockdown.

Discussion of findings

The main purpose of this study is to determine the level of librarians' preparedness to the post COVID-19 and reopening of the academic libraries in Benue State. The result of the study from the research question 1 shows that, wearing of face masks or shield; affirming to the rule of isolation during chilling fevers, coughing

and vomiting; using of hand sanitizers and frequently washing of hands with soap and running water among others are the factors used to practice in preparedness for the reopening of libraries to avert health insecurity. The finding of this study is in agreement with the NCDC regulation of COVID-19 non pharmaceutical preventive measures.

Research question 2 addressed the practical compliance of the preventive measures. The result of the study shows that self-isolation during chilling fevers, coughing, wearing of face shields and avoiding coughing into the air and rather into the elbows by librarians was to a high extent complied with it to avoid health insecurity when exposed to asymptomatic user. The finding of this study is in line with the views of Yakasai (2019) assertions that, asymptomatic patient, could infect others whose immunity are weak with an underlying ailments. This imply that, Library Staff should self-isolate at times of coughing or fever because he or she may be asymptomatic and infect others of the dreaded novel corona virus during the post COVID-19 era.

The finding of the study also shows the challenges encountered by librarians in preparedness of reopening to a high extent includes; library reading space would be limited due to two meter social distancing rule, lack of funds to subscribe to social media, lack of task-force committee on post COVID-19, closure of the library due to lockdown and staff strength in the era would grossly be limited due to the enormous task. This implies that, there would be a decrease in library use due to reduced infrastructures of space, ICT and furniture consequently, hypermedia and digital services would be enhanced and it conforms to the views of Adeleke (2020) that the new normal services should be digitally inclined.

Conclusion

The study has established the fact that academic libraries in Benue State should imbibe the use of technologies holistically to serve our teaming users by advocating for e-resources, establishing or activating open educational resources. University management as a matter of urgency should prioritize funding to the libraries to procure PPE as a precautionary measure to avert health insecurity during the post COVID 19 era. Lastly, in a bit to contain the re-infection of Librarians disseminating information due to the vulnerability of physical materials, there is need to retrain librarians for post COVID-19 service delivery as hypermedia and library of things is the in-thing. It is therefore pertinent to up-skill and retool in contemporary technologies.

Recommendation

Based on the challenges in the preparedness of reopening the academic libraries in Benue State, it is recommended that;

1. Library Management should inaugurate COVID-19 Task-force committee with a detailed *Modus Operandi* to avert health insecurity in the academic libraries and design new guidelines for handling physical materials because of its vulnerability.
2. Re-structure and re-organize the Library reading space to accommodate 2 meter physical distancing rule.
3. Open Educational Resources should be activated in these institutions to render

e-resources services as well as online reference services.

4. Review of Library Budget Composition upwards and approve financial autonomy to its Management for a holistic functioning in the post COVID-19 circumstance.
5. Propose Health Security Policy implementation for library staff as it regards to hazards on the job.

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