

TOOLING AND RETOOLING: CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES OF LIBRARIANS IN NIGERIA DURING COVID-19

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Abstract

Purpose: *the study was to examine how Continuing Professional Development activities of Librarians in Nigeria during Covid-19 can be tooled and retooled.*

Design/Methodology/Approach: *the study adopted the descriptive survey research design. Online questionnaires were sent to librarians through WhatsApp platforms using google forms survey app. A total of 52 librarians who responded were used. The method of data analysis was quantitative analysis using frequency counts and simple percentages. Five research objectives guided the study.*

Findings: *the study revealed that due to the lockdown caused by the coronavirus pandemic, librarians have taken their professional development activities online. Librarians are actively engaged in professional development activities through the various online platforms including zoom trainings, WhatsApp trainings, webinars, etc. They utilize these platforms mostly on a weekly basis. Different areas of the profession are also being covered. Insufficient funds for data subscription, high consumption of data and trainings being too long were among the challenges faced. The study recommends among others that librarians should participate more actively and frequently in these activities, create enough awareness for more librarians to participate also skills acquired should be applied in the workplace in the face of changing information services delivery and workspaces caused by covid-19.*

Practical Implications: *The lockdown experience caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about changes in the nature of library services delivery. This has necessitated the need for Librarians to retool themselves with new skills in meeting up these emerging trends. It is therefore imperative for librarians to equip themselves with necessary skills through the various online training platforms that have become available due to the changes necessitated by COVID-19.*

Originality/Value: *based on the findings of this study, it is recommended among others that to remain relevant in the face of emerging trends resulting from the pandemic caused by coronavirus, librarians should maximize the opportunities provided by different online professional development opportunities to acquire new skills. These skills should also be applied in the workplace to enhance effective information services delivery.*

Paper type: *Empirical.*

Keywords: *Professional development, Covid-19, Librarians, training, Lockdown, Online training platforms, video conferencing.*

Introduction

The world is currently experiencing unprecedented challenges and changes brought about by ravaging corona virus that has led to the COVID-19 pandemic. The virus affected several countries around the world including Nigeria. On 27th of February 2020, Nigeria had its first confirmed of COVID-19 and since then there have been rising number of cases in all

states in the country. The death toll has also increased. As a reaction to this outbreak the World Health Organisation, WHO (2020) recommended social distancing, lockdown and isolation or quarantine to fight the pandemic. Due to the sudden disaster, life has changed drastically overnight. All nations of the world have been affected by this virus and have also resorted to different measures in curbing the pandemic in line with WHO directives. These

lockdown measures include restriction of movements and activities, social distancing, closure of educational institutions, postponement or outright cancellation of physical gathering of people etc. These measures greatly affected the physical activities that people had planned for the year. The cancellation of physical gatherings affected conferences, workshops and others this forced librarians to resort to alternative methods in which they could continue to obtain professional development, especially in the face of drastic changes that will arise in librarianship and information services delivery due to the effects of the pandemic which people now call the “new normal”. This caused a surge in work-at-home activities including online activities such as video conferencing and other social media activities. Online platforms have become predominant due to minimised face to face or physical activities caused by the different lockdown measures. Librarians in Nigeria being a developing country are also trying to adapt to the different online opportunities that have surfaced during the pandemic. In this Scenario, librarians who play a vital role in information services delivery have had to adapt to the various online tools available to train themselves to remain professionally competent in the face of current challenges and changes.

The online environment has provided various platforms for library and information professionals to explore when communicating. With the evolutionary trend of information and communication technologies (ICTs), library and information science professionals can now easily share ideas and information relating to their professional practices. (Udo-Anyanwu et al., 2020).

Continuing professional development is considered a very important activity that librarians use to acquire new skills and retool themselves. They must engage in it, so as to keep abreast of new developments in information services delivery and changes in the workplace necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. New information resources, emerging services, alternative ways of organizing work, modified library spaces and

more sophisticated expectation of users has necessitated the need for librarians to keep abreast of these changes and acquire the necessary skills required for the ‘new normal’ caused by COVID-19. This has necessitated the need for librarians to keep up with these emerging trends by developing themselves professionally through rigorous training and retraining so as to retool themselves for effective service delivery. Fortunately, due to the restrictions in physical activities caused by COVID-19 pandemic, several tools have been made available online for librarians to exploit in updating their professional knowledge and acquire skills to perform better on their jobs. Mohammadi and Yegane (2018) noted that Information Technology can be useful for collection management, online services, education, and providing access to spaces and equipment, gathering, analyzing, storing, and sharing information. The author further stated that user expectations from library services has increased because of new technologies that can help libraries to improve their services and increase user’s satisfaction, so librarians should be aware or trained about the various aspects of new technologies and devices will bring new opportunities and challenges in future.

Mahadevan and Kumar (2020) pointed out that librarians also need to give priority to staff training, and user education in regard to ICT-based resources and services. The author also added that to deal with the rapidly changing outbreak or epidemic disaster, libraries and librarians need to respond to rapidly evolving information and guidelines, for acquiring, processing, interpreting, repackaging, and disseminating relevant, up-to-date information to users and should always be ready to enhance its capabilities and move away from traditional way and to adopt virtual ways. Alvite and Barrionuevo (2011) noted that with the rapid development of web 2.0 social software tools, many librarians are supplementing, and even substituting formal professional development for online tools such as blogs, wikis and social networking communities. These online tools are especially attractive because they are free, do not require dedicated blocks of time and travel, and they offer the potential to create lasting

learning environments that foster ongoing professional development. Ugwuanyi and Ejikeme (2011) stated that continuing education will help to maintain job effectiveness in a changing information environment and to meet the demands put upon them by the society, adding that information professionals need to continue to learn, update and refresh their knowledge to prevent the onset of professional alienation in performance and to adjust to the culture and change prevalent in a new information environment.

Librarians are the driving force behind libraries. After a librarian has been given necessary training in an educational institution where he is employed, he develops on the job in order to acquire new knowledge, skills and abilities which ensure their continued usefulness to the organization and at the same time meeting personal desire for advancement. They work as information organisers and providers in various types of libraries and are pivots in which the library rotates, since they are responsible for delivering required services to users.

Studies have also shown that Librarians view the relevance and importance of professional development in many ways, while some believe it is a compulsory tool in professional survival, some take it with levity and are ready to remain with the old knowledge they had already acquired. Mbagwu (2020) opined that ICT skills, training and use are necessary for library staff in university libraries if they are to work effectively using ICTs. The technology is constantly growing and updates come up every now and then has enabled timely and rapid access to information.

Online platforms have suddenly provided librarians with various professional development opportunities. According to Okafor (2020) applications such as zoom, a video conferencing app has become one of the most popular platforms for virtual meetings. The Chinese company which was founded in 2011 allows its users to host up to 100 participants for free on a 40 minutes group meeting. There also other subscription plans available for varying charges. The author also noted that subscribers have surged by 23 million in two months during the pandemic. Zoom is a cloud-based video communications

app that allows you to set up virtual video and audio conferencing, webinars, live chats, screen-sharing, and other collaborative capabilities. These platforms also give users ability to perform in various capacities like hosting meetings, co-hosting, moderating, convener while others linking up do so as participants.

Besides organizing meetings or conference, people can use video conferencing tool to have a video interview, meetings or collaborations, online teaching, remote diagnostics, telecommuting etc. Video conferencing assists a great deal to set up conferences, whether for business, enjoyment or training. Group studies and projects can also be accomplished by using these apps. They include zoom, Microsoft teams, google meet and more recently connectals conferencing app. Other online platforms include webinars which is a blend of “web” and ‘seminar’. A webinar is an event held virtually which is attended exclusively by an online audience. Webinars offers various interactive opportunities like: ask a question, chat, poll, survey, test, call-to-action, twitter.

Objectives of the Study

- I. To determine the frequency of participation in professional development activities among librarians during COVID-19.
- II. To establish the types of professional development activities librarians engage in during COVID-19;
- III. To ascertain the areas of professional development activities of librarians during COVID-19;
- IV. To determine the ways of participation in professional development activities of librarians during COVID-19; and
- V. To ascertain the challenges faced by librarians in participating in these professional development activities during COVID-19.

Statement of the Problem

Prior to the pandemic caused by COVID-19, Librarians were relying heavily on physical activities and gatherings like conferences and

workshops to continue to retrain and retool themselves for professional growth. Due to the discovery and spread of COVID-19 that led to a pandemic that has claimed so many lives, different measures were taken to curb the spread. These measures included the reduction or outright cancellation of physical gatherings including conferences, workshops and other avenues that librarians were relying heavily on for professional development. Information services delivery was also greatly affected and has services can no longer be rendered the way they were rendered before the lockdown. This has resulted in a wakeup call to librarians to retrain and retool themselves so as to live up to the new expectations in information services delivery. Librarians were now left with no choice than to source for other avenues to update and retool themselves to remain professionally relevant. Fortunately, a plethora of avenues have been available online in which librarians can utilise to update their skills and equip themselves to cope with the changes that are occurring in information services delivery. What are the other avenues that have been made available? How have librarians utilised these avenues in updating and retooling themselves to keep themselves in touch with emerging trends in the profession during the COVID-19 era? It is therefore against this background that the researchers developed interest in investigating the alternative methods or tools in which librarians are using to retool and equip themselves with adequate skills to remain relevant in the face of the 'new normal' caused by COVID-19.

Literature Review

An online survey was conducted by Ishtiaq, Sehar, and Shahid, (2020) on librarians working in university libraries in Sindh, Pakistan. The questionnaire was designed in google form. This tool was considered better than the administration due to the lockdown. Stratified sampling technique was used in this study and the target population was Library professional working in Academic libraries, for this purpose 29 Academic Libraries were selected from Sindh Province working under private sector. The data were analysed by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Data gathered on different learning methods during the

lockdown for library staff found that 65.6% are already replying online learning so the familiarity of online culture is not new for them. Another most used option is learning with peers by discussing different issues these days, some small academic libraries have limited services and resources but with a good understanding of peers, they are confident providing good services and get themselves updates easily with discussions. Further, 9.4% of them attended the conference on multi-discipline and the attendance of webinar remains low at 3.1%. 13.8% suggested that more and more could be learned during this lockdown because several services are being offered online including courses, seminars, and conferences so that an individual can learn by it better while 40% answers that webinar attendance could be a good option.

In another study conducted by Cossham and Fields (2006) on continuing professional development of librarians in New Zealand, respondents were asked to identify their personal continuing professional needs by topic over the next 2–3 years. Twenty-four topics were listed for respondents to choose from, based on major library functions and services, and personal issues (such as time management and customer service). There was also opportunity for additional responses under an 'Other (please specify)' category. Unsurprisingly, topics associated with electronic resources and information technology scored highly as 'very important' (71 per cent and 66 per cent respectively), with reference skills (55 per cent), information literacy (53 per cent), research (49 per cent), communication skills and user education (both 44 per cent) coming next highest. Strategies for developing a personal CPD plan, digitisation projects, and management skills also scored highly as 'very important'. Correlating topics with library types led to some predictable responses with, for example, children's services being rated highly by public and school librarians but not by special librarians. However, information literacy was selected as either very important or important by high numbers of respondents in all library sectors, which was unexpected.

In a study conducted by Ishtiaq, Sehar, and Shahid, (2020) to investigate the role of

university libraries in this outbreak situation suggested that more and more could be learned during this lockdown because several services are being offered online including courses, seminars, and conferences so that an individual can learn by it better while 40% answers that webinar attendance could be a good option.

According to OCLC (2020) As libraries have closed their physical spaces and adapted services to remote work, we've seen library staff spend more time than ever on professional development and online learning. In a poll conducted during the recent [OCLC virtual town hall](#), 81% of attendees reported that they have engaged in more professional development since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a free resource open to all, Web Junction has long been "the learning place for libraries." But the increase that we've seen in time spent learning on webjunction.org between March and April 2020 has been, put simply, extraordinary. March and April saw a record-setting spike in Web Junction Course Catalog usage (650% increase in users and 1,791% increase in hours spent learning). In fact, we had approximately as many learners in Web Junction's catalog in the month of April alone as we had during all of last year. OCLC has also seen increased learning activity across many of our virtual professional development resources.

Methodology

An online survey was conducted on practicing librarians. Data was collected using online questionnaire. This tool was considered more practicable than the physical administration due to the lockdown. The questionnaire was developed using Google forms app which is a part of Google suite. Google Forms is a useful means that helps organise data, create charts to visualise trends in an appropriate way and can connect the data to a spread sheet to make it much easier for the researcher to conduct more inferential and statistical processes (Mallette and Barone, 2013). Random sampling technique was used to survey librarians in Nigeria using different WhatsApp professional platforms belonging to librarians. a total of 52 librarians participated in the survey. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The method of data analysis used was quantitative analysis using frequency counts and simple percentages. The results were presented in tables and charts.

Presentation of Results

Figure 1 below reveals that majority of the respondents 66.7% were female while 33.3% were male bringing to a total number of 52 respondents.

Gender
51 responses

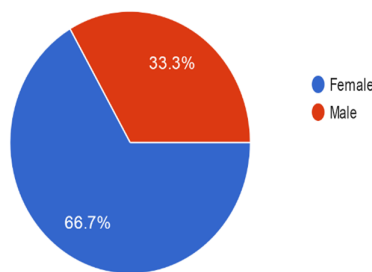


Figure 1: Gender of the respondents

Age
52 responses

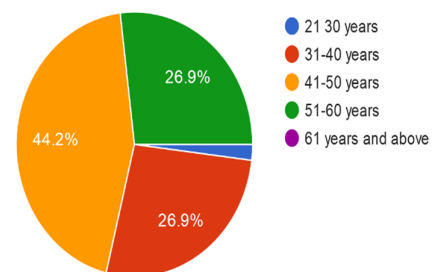


Figure 2: Age group of respondents years. There was no respondent above the age of 60 years.

Figure 2 discloses that the highest number of respondents 44.2% fell within the age bracket of 41-50 years, 26.9% belonged to the age brackets of 31-40 years and 51-60 years. While the least was within the age bracket 21-30

Figure 3 reveals that the highest number of respondents 14 (26.9%) were of the rank of senior librarian, 10 (19.2%) were librarian I, 9 (17.3%) were Principal librarian and librarian II,

6 (11.5%) were assistant librarian, 2 (3.8%) each were of the rank of University librarian and Deputy University Librarian.

Rank

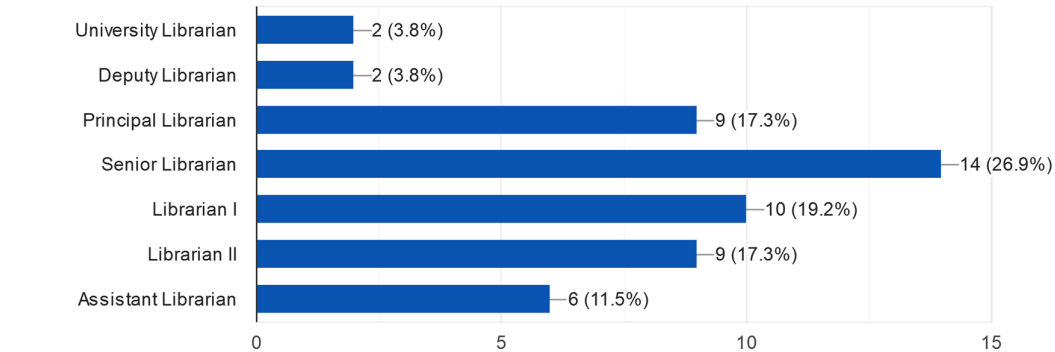


Figure 3: Rank of respondents

Number of Years in Service?

52 responses

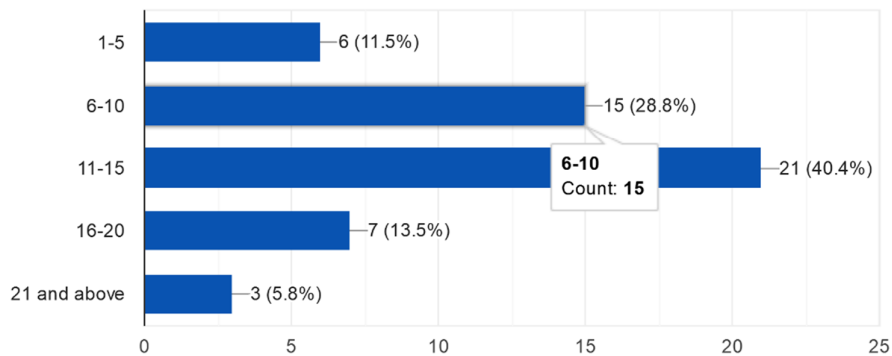


Figure 4: Number of years in service

1. Have you engaged in any professional development activity during COVID-19?

52 responses

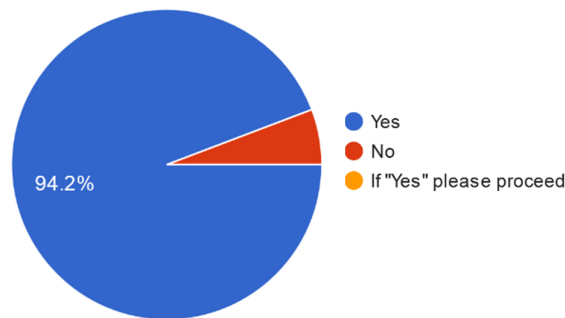


Figure 5: Engagement in CPD activities

2. How often do you engage in professional development activities during COVID-19?

52 responses

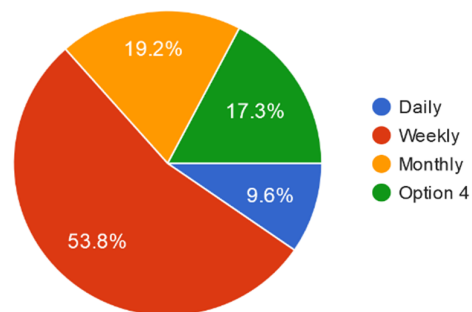


Figure 6: Frequency of participation in CPD activities

Figure 4 shows that a majority 21(40.4%) of the respondents have 11-15 years working experience. This is followed by 15(28.8%) of the

respondents who have 6-10 years working experience, 7(13.5%) have 16-20 years working experience, 6(11.5%) have 1-5 years working

experience, while 3(5.8%) of the respondents have 21 years and above working experience.

Figure 5 shows that 94.2% of the respondents have engaged in CPD activities while 5.8% have not engaged in any CPD activity during COVID-19.

Figure 6 shows that the majority of the respondents 53.8% participated weekly, 19.2% participated monthly, 9.6% participated daily while 17.3% never participated.

3. How many PD activities have you engaged in since the last five months?

52 responses

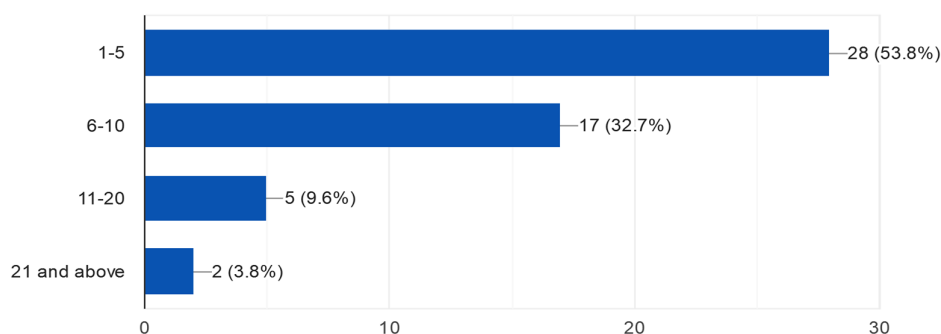


Figure 7: Number of CPD activities engaged in.

Figure 7 revealed that majority of the respondents 28 (53.8%) participated in 1-5 CPD activities, 17 (32.7%) participated in 6-10, 5(9.6%) participated in about 11-20, while the least number 2 (3.8%) participated in more than 20 CPD activities.

Table 1 shows below that majority of the respondents 48 (92.31%) participated in zoom meetings, followed by 42 (80.77%) that participated in webinars; 39 (75%) participated in whatsapp trainings; 24 (46.15%) participated in google meet trainings while the least was LinkedIn trainings with 9 (17.31%).

Table 1: Types of CPD activities carried out by Librarians

S/N	CPD Activities	Yes	No	NA
1.	Zoom meetings	48 (92.31)	2 (3.85%)	1.92 (1%)
2.	Webinars	42 (80.77%)	8 (15.3%)	Nil
3.	Whatsapp Trainings	39 (75%)	8 (15.38%)	1.92 (1%)
4.	Google Meet trainings	24 (46.15%)	16 (30.77%)	6 (11.54%)
5.	LinkedIn Trainings	9 (17.31%)	31 (59.62%)	3 (5.77%)

Table 3: Areas of CPD Trainings

Areas of CPD Trainings	Yes	No	Undecided
Library Administration	34 (65.38%)	12 (23.08%)	6 (11.54%)
Library Automation	37 (71.15%)	14 (26.92%)	1 (1.92%)
Graphics Design	28 (53.85%)	21 (40.38%)	3 (5.77%)
Creation and use of online surveys	38 (73.08%)	14 (26.92%)	Nil
ICT skills	47 (90.38%)	5 (9.62%)	Nil
Presentation skills	40 (76.92)	11 (21.15%)	1 (1.92%)
Online marketing of library services	25 (48.08%)	24 (46.15%)	3 (5.77%)
Information literacy skills	36 (69.23%)	16 (30.77%)	Nil
Current Awareness Services	1 (12.5%)	51 (87.5)	Nil
Data analysis	2 (25%)	50 (75%)	Nil
Information security	1 (12.5%)	51 (87.5)	Nil
Mobile device operation	1 (12.5%)	51 (87.5)	Nil
Online research	1 (12.5%)	51 (87.5)	Nil
Statistical analysis	1 (12.5%)	51 (87.5)	Nil
No	1 (12.5%)	51 (87.5)	Nil

Table 4: Ways in which librarians were involved in CPD Activities

S/N	Ways Involved	Participation	
		Yes	No
1.	Trainer	42%	58%
2.	Participant	89.8%	10.2%
3.	Moderator	21.7%	78.3%
4.	Co host	32.7%	67.3%
5.	Convener	77.1%	22.9%

Table 5: Challenges faced

S/N	Challenges faced	Yes	No
1.	Lack of technical know how	25%	39 (75%)
2.	Technophobia	9.6%	90.4%
3.	No time to participate	40%	60%
4.	Insufficient funds for data subscription	76.9%	23.1%
5.	The training takes too much time	20 38.5%	61.5%
6.	The training takes too much of my data	35 67.3%	32.7%
7.	Poor internet connectivity	16 30.8%	69.2%
8.	Over subscription	2 3.8%	96.2%
9.	Lack of interest	1.9%	98.1%

The greatest challenges faced by librarians in participating in professional development activities during COVID-19 include insufficient funds for data subscription, too much consumption of data, lack of time to participate and too much time, with corresponding percentages of 76.9, 67.3, 40 and 38.5. technophobia, over subscription and lack of interest scored very low at 9.6%, 3.8% and 1.9% respectively.

Summary of Finding and Discussion

- I. High frequency of participation in online professional development activities among librarians during COVID-19.
- II. Librarians engaged in different types of online professional development activities librarians during COVID-19.
- III. Librarians online professional development activities covered different areas of librarianship during COVID-19.
- IV. Librarians participated in different capacities of online professional development activities of during COVID-19.

Findings from this study show that majority of librarians were frequently engaged in professional development activities during the lockdown and also did that regularly. This shows

that librarians were able to move their professional development activities from physical gatherings to online, and did not just sit back and wait for the resumption of physical professional training opportunities that they have been used to. This is in line with the findings by OCLC (2020) and Ishtiaq et al. (2020) that there has been increased learning activities across many virtual professional development resources. OCLC (2020) also noted that there has been a surge in usage and users and increase in hours spent learning among librarians during Covid-19.

Findings from this study revealed that librarians engaged in various CPD activities. the findings also revealed that majority were engaged in various virtual or online forums including zoom, webinars, WhatsApp trainings and google meet trainings, only a few used linkedIn trainings as a platform of training during Covid-19. This goes to show that librarians took advantage of the various online training and professional development opportunities to train and equip themselves for the changes ahead in their workplace. However, the study by Ishtiaq et al. (2020) contradicted this by stating that participation in webinars remained low but that librarians agreed it could be a good option.

Findings from this study further revealed that different areas of librarianship were covered, including creation and use of online surveys, library administration, library automation, presentation skills, online marketing of library services, information literacy skills and other current topics in librarianship. This is in line with the study conducted by Cossham and Fields (2006) in which topics associated with electronic resources and information technology scored highly. Reference skills and information literacy, research, communication skills and user education were also topics covered. However, information literacy was selected as either very important or important by high numbers of respondents in all library sectors, which was unexpected.

Findings from this study also reveal that librarians participated in different capacities while utilising the online platforms. Majority participated as just participants, while just a few participated as host, co-host and convener.

From the findings on challenges faced in participating in these CPD activities it was noticed that the greatest challenges faced by librarians in participating in these professional development activities during COVID-19 include insufficient funds for data subscription. too much consumption of data, lack of time to participate and that the trainings took much time, over subscription and lack of interest scored very low, this showed that librarians were able to register for most of the courses and were not deterred by over subscription of the trainings that prevents people from registering. It shows that librarians were highly interested in developing themselves professionally online and were not technology shy. They were also skilled enough to use the various platforms. This is in line with the findings by (Udo-Anyanwu et al., 2020) that listed the major challenges faced to include: high cost of subscription to internet access and trainings taking too much of data. Lack of skills scored very low. This however contradicts Alvite and Barrionuevo (2011) who stated that these online tools are especially attractive because they are free, do not require dedicated blocks of time and travel.

Conclusion

Based on the findings it can be concluded that majority of librarians were actively engaged in professional development activities online in one way or the other. The findings of the present study also proved that the pandemic situation caused by the novel coronavirus reshaped all activities of life and lockdown and changed the style of acquiring professional development of librarians in Nigeria from physical avenues to online platforms. Librarians have therefore had to brace up to the drastic changes that the pandemic has caused and acquire sufficient training that will enable them offer services that will suit the prevailing circumstance. They will have to use the different online platforms available like zoom, webinars, WhatsApp etc. to retrain and retool themselves for effective information services delivery.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered for consideration.

1. Librarians should effectively utilise the online or virtual platforms being made available to effectively equip themselves for the changes ahead so that they can play a better role in this new pandemic situation.
2. Librarians should create more awareness of the different trainings available so that others can also participate.
3. More training opportunities should be made online.
4. Librarians should also be sensitized on the need to acquire these trainings on evolving technologies so that they will not be left behind.
5. Skills acquired should be effectively utilised in the workplace.

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