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Provision of Information Services to Citizens of Edo Land in the Era of Covid-19 Pandemic: The Role of Libraries

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Abstract: This paper emphasizes the various roles play by libraries in the provision of information services to the citizens of Edo land in the era of COVID-19 pandemic. The study also explains the advocacy role that libraries should plays in time of crisis that the coronavirus has brought to the people of Edo land. The study employed qualitative research methods in the course of the investigation. Books, journal articles, newspaper reports, internet sources, etc. were used by the researcher to carry out the study. Findings discovered were that, COVID-19 pandemic have affected every sectors of the economy in Edo land. Citizens can have access to Information to information in the era of COVID-19 pandemic. The study also discovered that, libraries promote health awareness regarding COVID-19. Support COVID-19 research, researchers and academic faculty. Provides information literacy programmes for citizens in the era of COVI-19 pandemic. Connect information resources and services to citizenry. Problems that will hinder libraries from providing information services to citizens of Edo Land in the era of COVID-19 pandemic were highlighted in the course of the investigation. The study concludes that librarians in all institutions should be motivated by means of enhanced packages that will boast dissemination of health information on Covid-19 to the people. Librarians should centre their health information dissemination on Covid-19 on the need to adhere to measures such as isolation and lock down, going out for only vital reasons and essential services, stopping local travel, maintain proper hygiene, avoid hands shake, touch, hug, kiss and to employ a social distancing of one meter from each other.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, Libraries, the Role of libraries.

INTRODUCTION

The survival of any nation depends on the quality of information made available to its citizens in time of crisis. Information is the key to the wellbeing of humanity and stand as the major determinant of decision making. It could be equated to other economic resources such as capital and labour in which an increased investment leads to enhanced productivity. Access to information increases knowledge in the society. The role information plays in the development of individuals, organizations, institutions and the Nation has effectively placed it as a very vital commodity. The benefits are only seen when the right information is provided the user at the right time. This is because; valid information is the key to knowledge which is a pre-requisite for any form of development. When users is seeking for information, one place that usually comes to their mind is the library.

(Umar, 2018) expressed that, libraries all over the world have been recognized for providing unhindered and equitable access to information for all citizenry. The information could be oral, print, electronic or digital formats. They perform major role in inculcating in the minds of citizens the spirit of honesty, discipline, love of one's country and above all positive attitude towards good neighbourliness, transparency and

accountability. Similarly, (Krolak, 2006) explained that, libraries embraced the social responsibility to offer services that bridge social, political and economic, and health barriers and make special efforts to extend their information services to marginalized people. In Nigeria, libraries have become essential ingredients for the attitudinal and behavioural reformation of the citizenry, building a healthy society, anchored on rule of law as well as nurturing a well-informed citizenry. In Nigeria, libraries have been acknowledged to be at the forefront in the promotion of a peaceful, united, disciplined, and democratic nation through the provision of right information at the right time to the various communities using the most appropriate media. Effective citizens' action is only possible where citizens know how to gain access to information of all kinds and have the skills to become responsible and informed participants in democracies, (Agbo & Onyekweodiri, 2014).

But the curial roles that libraries are playing in providing right information to the citizenry have been thwarted in the past few months of 2020 due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus in 2019. Coronavirus which is also called COVID-19 has put the entire world to a cage. The virus has affected every sector of the economy. These ranging from spiritual, psychological, economical, educational, social, moral effects. Libraries are been affected by this pandemic because most of the

libraries in Edo State were short down based on the directives both federal and state government. Citizenry especially health workers need right information in curtailing the spread of the virus, devising means to ease the lock down, and to reduced the tension pose by the virus on the society. The issue is how libraries can continue to provide information services to users, during this pandemic era. What is the role of the librarians is providing the needed information at the right time of his users. It is the crux of this background that this paper will examine provision of information services to citizens of Edo land in the era of COVID-19 pandemic: the role of libraries.

THE CONCEPT OF LIBRARY

Libraries that have been in existence over 6000 years ago and is characterized by different definitions from various scholars in the field of library and information science. (Foskett, 2009) traditionally see library as a collection of books used for reading or study, or the building or room in which such a collection is kept is known as library. Library can be defined as a collection of professionally acquired, processed and preserved information materials of various kinds and formats for dissemination. This makes libraries of all types' service and user oriented. As varied as the libraries are, so are their community of users. (Jabo & Bayero, 2014) opined that libraries are to provide free access to information and should also uphold the principles of intellectual freedom, and ensure that information resources representing all points of view, or at least opposing points of view on any given issue are made available, not succumbing to political and religious persuasions.

Library is seen information system that collecting data, process data, and distribute information to meet the ever challenging needs of users. Library according to Ranganathan's 5th law of library science 'is a growing organism.' It must therefore constantly change in order to deliver value added information services to the society. This is why, (Atkinson, 2001) argued that "the library must be mainly a social gathering place somewhat noisy with plenty of coffee". This statement implies that today's libraries are characterized by innovation and creativity driven by information and communication technologies acceptance and application. In this regard, (Mohammed, 2017) conceived libraries and information centers as veritable portals of organized information useful for coping with varieties of information needs, expectations and challenges. He further buttressed that:

Libraries remain strategic platforms for reading and relaxation in safe and serene environment, individual study and consultation; formal and informal peer group study; internet access and use (web browsing and e-mailing); meeting and socialization; academic and non-academic support services such as teaching and learning ... and finding

solutions to touring exhibitions and displays; films and slide shows; debate and discourse; social, cultural and political networking and integration etc.

The above conception clearly portrays libraries as invaluable pathways for promoting and achieving National consciousness in every country. This has become obvious as libraries create an enabling platform well equipped with high quality information resources, services, facilities, systems and competent personnel where individual citizens could have unhindered access to and use of information and knowledge. They prize honest information- not propaganda- and a diversity of voices allowing users to select and evaluate, (Byrne, 2000). Corroborating this fact, (Atkinson, 2001) asserted that the purpose of libraries is to provide citizens with the intellectual resources to persuade their fellow citizens to accept particular perspectives adopt particular values and take particular action. He buttressed further that the resultant effect of absorbing information has always been to produce more information, i.e. to continue the conversation. From the foregoing, it becomes crystal clear that libraries by their nature, structure, intent and functions are established to foster accountability, discipline, transparency, integrity and patriotism among members of the society especially during this health crisis that everybody in the country is facing.

THE CONCEPT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

According to Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (2020) via its WhatsApp platform noted that "coronaviruses are zoonotic. Meaning that, they are normally transmitted between man and people." Similarly, (Wikipedia, 2020) noted that coronaviruses are a "group of related RNA viruses that cause diseases in mammals and birds. In humans, these viruses cause respiratory tract infections that can range from mild to lethal." Wikipedia further noted that coronavirus mild illnesses include "some cases of the common cold (which is caused also by certain other viruses, predominantly rhinoviruses), while more lethal varieties can cause SARS, MERS, and COVID-19. Symptoms in other species vary: in chickens, they cause an upper respiratory tract disease, while in cows and pigs they cause diarrhea." Mankind has faced many tough pandemic situations throughout history where some of them were more dangerous for the whole community of humans. This time once again every country is facing a very tough situation, fighting with a hidden enemy called coronavirus (COVID-19). Coronavirus is a new virus which is spreading all over the world very rapidly. In most of the cases, people infected with the COVID-19 virus experience illness and recover without requiring special treatment. People of higher age groups and those with underlying medical treatments like

dialysis, diabetes, respiratory diseases, cancer etc. are more likely to develop serious problems.

According to the (WMHC, 2020) “the coronavirus belongs to a family of viruses that may cause various symptoms such as pneumonia, fever, breathing difficulty, and lung infection.” Coronaviruses are a “family of viruses that can cause illnesses such as the common cold, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). In 2019, a new coronavirus was identified as the cause of a disease outbreak that originated in China. The virus is now known as the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), (Coronavirus Disease, 2019)”.

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered novel strain of coronavirus, (WHO, 2020). It first appeared in the city of Wuhan, China, and has spread rapidly to almost all countries across the world. The coronavirus belongs to a family of viruses that may cause various symptoms such as pneumonia, fever, breathing difficulty, and lung infection (WMHC, 2020). These viruses are common in animals worldwide, but very few cases have been known to affect humans. The World Health Organization (WHO) used the term 2019 novel coronavirus to refer to a coronavirus that affected the lower respiratory tract of patients with pneumonia in Wuhan, China on 29 December 2019 (Li *et al.*, 2020). The WHO announced that the official name of the 2019 novel coronavirus is coronavirus disease (COVID-19) (WHO, 2020). And the current reference name for the virus is severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It was reported that a cluster of patients with pneumonia of unknown cause was linked to a local Huanan South China Seafood Market in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December 2019 (Zhu *et al.*, 2020).

According to World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) corona virus seems to spread from person to person by the same mechanism as other common cold or influenza viruses—i.e. by face to face contact with a sneeze or cough, or from contact with secretions of people who are infected. The common symptoms include fever, dry cough, tiredness, shortness of breath, pains and aches, sore throat, and very few people will report diarrhoea, nausea or a runny nose (WHO, 2020). Most people infected with the COVID-19 will experience mild-to-moderate fever and respiratory illness with no special treatment available. The 2019 novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is currently the disorder with the greatest social impact (Ryu & Chun, 2020) due to several factors, including associated deaths, its geographical expansion, stock exchange fall worldwide, cancellation of sporting/ artistic events, shortage of goods in marketplaces, among others (Castro, 2020). That in turn is related to the behavior of societies at different levels (micro and macro) (Villegas-Chiroque, 2020).

Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic in Edo Land

Coronavirus that started in China in 2019 did not get into Europe until after two months, when the virus spread to Europe in January, 2020. It took another one month before the virus got to Africa. According to (Wikipedia, 2020), coronavirus was confirmed to have spread to Africa on 14 February 2020. The first confirmed case was in Egypt, and the first confirmed case in sub-Saharan Africa was in Nigeria. The first confirmed case of the pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 in Nigeria was announced on 27 February 2020, when an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive for the virus, caused by SARS-CoV-2. On 9 March 2020, a second case of the virus was reported in Ewekoro, Ogun State, a Nigerian citizen who had contact with the Italian citizen. COVID-19 pandemic was recorded in Edo Land on the 3rd of April, 2020. By the Edo State commissioner of health. During the discoveries of the index case, a number of measures were taken by the government to stop the spread of the virus. The government through the advice of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and other health agencies imposed a 24 hours curfew. During this time everybody were asked to stay at home, offices, churches, schools, mosques, films house were ask to short down, expect those dealing with essential services such as food, drugs, security, petroleum, etc.

More than 1 billion and 575 million students in approximately 188 countries around the world are reported to have been affected by the closure of schools and universities due to preventive measures taken by countries against the spread of COVID-19 (UNESCO, 2020). The spread of COVID-19 has also caused fear, anxiety, and various concerns among citizens around the world (NCIRD, 2020). Due to the hard hit from the COVID-19 pandemic, public services have been paralyzed, economic and academic activities and classes have restricted to online due to the closure. (

Amorighoye, 2020) holds UNICEF report which states that, 10.5 million of the country’s children aged 5-14 years are not in school. Only 61% of 6 to 11-year-olds regularly attend primary school. Some states in the north east and north west of the country have more than half of the girls not enrolled in schools as marginalization ensures that girls are deprived of basic education. A struggle was going on prior to COVID-19 to ensure young children stay in school and have access to proper education, as Nigeria contributes approximately 20% of the total global out-of-school population.

(Wikipedia, 2020) further noted that as of 30 September 2020, approximately over 50 millions learners are currently affected due to school and other agencies closures in response to the pandemic. According to UNICEF monitoring, 53 countries are currently implementing nationwide closures and 27 are implementing local closures, impacting about 61.6 percent of the world's student population. 72 countries'

schools are currently open. Wikipedia (2020) further stressed that; the school closures impact not only students, teachers, and families. But have far-reaching economic and societal consequences. School closures in response to the pandemic have shed light on various social and economic issues, including student debt, digital learning, food insecurity, and homelessness, increase in social vices.

Though government brought some measures to cushion the effects of the pandemic on educational and other sector of the economic through the use of e-learning modules. Oboh & Oboh (2020) gave the reports of Digital 2020 Global Overview that was published in January 2020, which states that "about 60 percent of Nigerians are not connected to the internet. The statistics for mobile phones, which could also be used as a learning medium, are more hopeful." According to Oboh & Oboh (2020);

Around 169.2 million people 83 percent of Nigerians have access to mobile phone connections; however, of these, 50 percent - around 84.5 million people, reside in urban areas. For the population with access, the proportion would be skewed towards high socio-economic households and urban households; an overwhelming majority of whom are private school students who already have a learning advantage over their public school peers. For children from poorer backgrounds who tend to have less access to internet connectivity, computers, and other devices, and reside in rural areas where local languages take dominance over English, ICT-learning uptake will be limited. The inequity in access to ICT-based learning has the adverse effect of further intensifying the existing disparities in learning outcomes along socio-economic lines, and the urban-rural divide.

This observation Oboh and Oboh (2020) hindered the UNESCO recommended the use of distance learning programmes and open educational applications and platforms that schools and teachers can use to reach learners remotely and limit the disruption of education.

Roles of Libraries and Librarians in COVID-19 Pandemic Era

Pankaj Bhati & Inder Kumar (2020) citing an American writer and producer Mr. Sidney Sheldon once said, "Libraries store the energy that fuels the imagination. They open up windows to the world and inspire us to explore, and achieve, and contribute to improving our quality of life." Today, the roles of libraries and librarians is challenging in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic era. Worldwide. (Krolak, 2006) stated that libraries and librarians are no longer passive keepers and preservers of books, rather, they have evolve to become facilitators of information and lifelong learning opportunities with an emphasis on

service, identifying user needs and community solutions. Also, modern libraries are unfolding the community's learning potentials by providing information on community issues, such as health, employment, continuing education and local history, (Babalola, 2002). What then should be the role of libraries and librarians in the promotion/actualization of the goals of providing information services to users especially in this COVID-19 pandemic era?

Access to Information

Essentially, libraries are conceived as vital institutions or organization which provide access to information, knowledge and ideas to the different user groups in the society. (Rubin, 2010) affirmed that libraries exist in many countries as an essential part of having educated and literate populations. Categorically, this statement point to the fact that for any nation, including Nigeria, to succeed in time of crisis, the citizenry are have accessed to information for their survival and for them to realize its fullest potentials and opportunities in terms of human capital development. Libraries at all levels must be accorded utmost priority and due relevance and recognition in its National Development Plans. By this, libraries will be well equipped with resources in various formats so that they can perform their roles of facilitating access to information effectively and efficiently. With unhindered access to relevant information resources and services, libraries often help empower, enrich, orient, inform and develop the citizens by way of inculcating in them values, right attitude, sense of national pride, discipline and loyalty to various rules and regulations that the various health official have prescribe for safe living and to stop the spread of the virus in the country.

In a similar mode, (Oyeronke, 2012) confirmed that access to information accelerates the level of individual advancement as well as corporate educational development. Also, Dats and Davidson (1991) stated that nations would prosper or falter in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic depending on their investments in building an information infrastructure and since human knowledge improvement presupposes information flow and sharing, the collective intellectual abilities of a nation ... will also depends on access to information. These and many other statements suggest that libraries and librarians are indispensable partners in any process, orientation or campaign aimed at eliminating nepotism, inequalities, stealing, bribery, corruption, and encouraging accountability, transparency, justice, good governance and integrity both in private and public life. This means that the information is carefully and systematically selected, acquired, processed, organized and disseminated to their numerous users. Also, with the rapid development in ICTs, librarians especially in the academic libraries, have deployed various relevant technologies in order to enhance and facilitate access to abundant information

which in turn makes the society a better and safer place to live.

Promote Public Health Awareness Regarding COVID-19

To succeed public health, strategies require social acceptance of measures such as school closures, remote working, home isolation and monitoring the health of symptomatic individuals using telephone or online health consultations (Heymann & Shindo, 2020). There are various topics which need to be embedded in awareness campaigns about COVID-19. For example the steps individuals can take to prevent transmission general instructions on using masks, hand washing, and the use of sanitizers, the avoidance of handshakes and various other ways to control the spread of the virus. All librarians (public, specialist, academic and medical) have a responsibility to share evidence based information about this pandemic. Other useful information might include histories from those who are recovering from this coronavirus and advice on good, nutrition and lifestyle which can reduce the risk of this disease. The libraries is to ensure that users adequate knowledge about what coronavirus is, how it is transmitted, what they are to do to stop the spread of the virus in the society.

Support research teams, researchers and academic faculty

Librarians can support medical staff, academics, research teams and paramedical staff by drawing attention to the latest developments regarding vaccination, diagnosis kits and relevant studies published in medical journals. All the well-known databases provide free access to articles relating to COVID-19 (Coronavirus) literature production rate has also increase during this pandemic phase. The librarians are to make sure that researchers get links about various COVID-19 research. Leading publishers such as Elsevier, Oxford, Wiley, BMJ, Nature, Emerald, and Cambridge provide free access to the latest literature on Coronavirus (articles, papers, commentaries, case reports). Also <http://messenger.com/t/NHSRCOfficial>, (<https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/whohealth-alert-brings-covid-19-facts-to-billions-via-whatsapp>), Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and other health agencies websites.

Promotion of Open Access to Information

Generally, libraries have a responsibility to serve as a central information pool, and as a public utility to the citizens. Levin, Leslie & Pucket as cited in (Kargbo, 2008) stated that libraries are in absolutely superb position to be of service to humanity as they are local, usually free, convenient, and trusted by people. They are seen as non-judgmental and apolitical environment and people believe that once the information is in the library, it is considered legitimate. Also, libraries are by their nature, functions, design and purposes democratic institutions. They carried out

essential societal function of ensuring equal and unhindered access to information and knowledge.

Librarians have adopted many strategies and technologies to ensure that access to their collection and records become open to all. They keyed into Open Access Initiatives (OAIs) in order to meet the ever growing demand for information services and ever changing information needs of the citizenry. Thus, libraries have now become alternative publishers through Institutional Repositories (IRs), (Cho, 2008, as cited in Jain, 2012). OAI has contributes immensely in the availability, accessibility and usability of information and knowledge in libraries especially the Academic libraries whose major preoccupation is to compliment teaching, learning and research activities of their parent institutions. On this note, Swan & Chan (2009) as cited in (Jain, 2012) averred that it is not surprising that libraries are involved in a wide range of open access related activities considering the strong connection between their mission and OAIs. In Nigeria, many academic libraries have now developed IRs as well as exploiting the vast information resources and services on the OA databases in order to improve the quality of their library services. The resultant effects of this trend would be to facilitate the cultivation and building a well-informed, peaceful, disciplined and productive citizenry in Nigeria.

Information Literacy Programmes

With the emergence of ICTs, which further created new dimensions and perspectives in the information environment, information literacy programme has now become key responsibility of libraries all over the world. According to UNESCO (2003), Information Literacy encompasses knowledge of one's information concerns and needs, and the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organize and effectively create, use and communicate information to address issues or problems at hand. It is a prerequisite for participating effectively in the Information Society, and is part of the basic human right of lifelong learning. Also, The Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL, 2004) defined information literacy as a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that information literacy is about inculcating in the minds of citizenry the spirit of inquiry, critical thinking, innovation and creativity by identifying, accessing, evaluating, retrieving and use of information to stay safe within the society. Thus, It can be rightly argued that for the to be impactful on the lives of citizens, the citizens require to possess some basic information literacy skills to enable them competently distinguishes between right information, right sources and fake news that have flooded the information environment.

Changing the Library and Information Services (LIS)

“Library is a growing organism” is one of the five laws of Library Science. This particular law points to the fact that LIS is dynamic and never static. It will continuously change in accordance with the dynamics of the society. In this line of thought, libraries are conceived as responsive institutions determined to continually sense the feelings, aspirations, desires and needs of citizens and subsequently respond to them by creating a conducive learning environment vis –a- vis providing quality information products and services. It is therefore quite instructive to state that being a librarian in this 21st century, requires creativity and innovation to survive, grow and remain relevant and competitive. (Heye, 2006) asserted that with our skill set and a continuous evolution of technology, information professionals can play a key role in companies, organizations and society at large. He further stated that as technology, user behavior and users’ information needs constantly change information professionals have to adapt- meaning constantly change. This change does not threaten our professions, but is an excellent driver to our becoming important key players and lynchpins in the information ecology. The clarion call here is that librarians are now challenged to change and adapt newer technologies in order to enhance and improve LISs. In response to this trend, Nigerian libraries have since accepted and deployed relevant ICTs by way of library automation, OPAC, Internet, and provision of online databases in support of their print information resources and services, (Mohammed, 2002). In the same mode, Library and Information Science Schools in Nigeria, have integrated the basic technology trends into their curriculum.

Connecting Information Resources and Services with Citizens

It is one of the primary tasks of libraries to satisfy the information needs of the citizenry during this COVID-19 pandemic era. This is done by firstly understanding the various needs of the citizens; designing products/services that matches the needs; selecting and acquisition of relevant products/services and delivering the products/services to the citizens. Also, to successfully connect library services with the citizens’ needs, Mohammed (2017) identified among others the following:

The vision and mission of the institution, organization or society being served; the types and contents of selection and acquisition policies; the nature and characteristics of the customers; the types of vocation; specialization; and profession of the customers, the existing and anticipated information needs of the citizens; the type, quality, relevance and appropriateness of the information resources; the types, scope and levels of the existing and anticipated services to be provided.

The above requirements point to the need for strategic alignment between library resources, services, functions and operations with the information needs of the citizenry. Every type of library is supposedly expected to align its products/services to meet or exceed the information needs of its customers. In practice, strategic alignment calls for redesigning, remodeling and rebranding of the library services taking into cognizance the ever-growing demand for information and the ever-changing information needs and behaviour of the citizenry. This development, will in no doubt make library services very attractive, and satisfying in such a way that citizens patronize them, appreciate them, support them and above all, adore them. Consequently, a literate society will be created due to citizens’ participation in reading and use of information and knowledge.

Provision of variety of materials

Libraries now makes a collection of a wide variety of materials in digital forms – books, journals, manuscripts, reference works, theses and dissertations, government documents, maps, video, images, pictorial materials, music and make same available to patrons. Since the lock down have affected users from getting physical books, through the advent of information and communication technology, libraries now offer electronic resources to its users. (Edogiawerie, 2020) noted that electronic resources are importance in COVID-19 era because of some reasons to include: “easy and instantaneous access without wasting time for processing, printing, binding, and delivery, eliminates printing, binding and postage costs, allow interactive facilities, enable simultaneous access to a large number of users, and data can be easily manipulated at regular intervals and can be kept always up-to-date in electronic media.” Libraries as a result of the lockdown to provided information services to users through the use of the electronic resources.

Tools Use By Libraries to Provide Information Services To Users In The Era Of Covid-19 Pandemic

From the inception of the library and information profession, information services has been one of the core services provided for library patrons. It started with the face-to-face type of service but with this coronavirus pandemic era this method will not welcome as a result of the lock down impose by the federal and state government. However, with the advent of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the methods of providing the same services have improved tremendously. Unfortunately, it is disheartening to note that libraries and information providers (LIPS) in the developing countries have still not taken full advantage of ICT in the provision of the information services to their patrons. According to Silverstein (2003), before now, librarian was able to effectively serve a patron without conducting a satisfactory face-to-face interview and ensuring that the queries were well understood. The patrons have to meet with the librarian before their

question is answered. But today, with the advent of information and communication technology (ICT), library and information providers (LIPS) have been able to serve not only patrons face-to face, but also virtually.

This development was summarized by Alessia Zanin-Yost (2004) this way.

“In the past ten years, libraries have become both more sophisticated and more dependent on new technologies. For example, libraries migrated from card catalogues to on line catalogues. With so many changes in the profession, reference service has also changed. Today, librarians not only help patrons at the reference desk but also in cyberspace. This new type of service, called digital or virtual reference, has emerged as a result of various factors, including the advent and wide use of the internet and the development of software capable of providing synchronized and asynchronous service. Digital/virtual reference is quite new, but has quickly become popular because of demands by patrons to access information anytime, anywhere”.

E-mail service encourages accessibility of librarians to their patrons, and knowledge databases of queries and answers can be stored easily and effortlessly for future use. Some systems have been developed to construct data bases for the matching answers to queries. According to Roesch (2006), e-mail service is very easy and cheap to implement and can be sent even when the library has closed. The problem however, is that patrons may ask questions in an unstructured manner which may leave out important aspects of the query and take some time for reply. The librarians can in turn, request for clarification, which might aid in the search answers to the queries. The librarian must be given enough time to do his research on any given question. This is usually preceded by instructions from the librarian stating the number of hours it will take to work with the question. E-mail services does not necessarily require the use of additional software except on very few occasions when answers to queries are in the formats requiring additional software to view it. Another tool that the web form is an interface provided on a web site whereby patrons can send questions and expect the answers at a later date. The web form consists of some defined fields that have to be filled in by the patrons. They are often times directed to provide details about their questions in order to provide the necessary information within the context of the question. To the patrons, the process of filling such forms is often perceived to be long and cumbersome. However, for ready reference type of questions, some library patrons do not have the patience to wait for the amount of time required for the e-mail/web form reference services and thus chat reference was born to eliminate the time lag. Further, some libraries are currently using Web contact

software to establish Web Contact Centers which offers a variety of features for digital reference services. They allow communication via e-mail, web form and chat, and also enable more interactive collaborations through tools such as page pushing, escorting and co-browsing. Further functionalities like electronic monitoring, cooperative answering, administration and statistics are also provided. Librarians can utilize the monitoring tool for supervision to know user navigation processes on the library server, and can offer help via chat where required. Co-operative answering allows for digital reference services offered in collaboration with other libraries. The administrative tools can be used to direct particular queries to specific members of staff who are capable of answering such queries via automated routines. Finally, web contact center software include a wide range of statistical measures that record all transactions and can be used for evaluating the service. Libraries can introduced chat service or real time service for users in this COVID-19 pandemic era. This is another method of providing real time on-line services. Such services may be provided 24/7 or not necessarily around the clock. Libraries use different chat software depending on their capabilities. These range from simple to complex ones and from popular and general ones such as those in AOL's. Instant Messenger and Net meeting, to those developed specifically for reference services. Among the recently available software mostly used by the libraries are those that can perform extra functions such as push capabilities and co-browsing, which not only allow the reference librarians to deliver more than URLs but also push the actual pages to the user's computer.

There is a comprehensive list of institutions using different types of chat services such as Livehelper (<http://www.livehelper.com/>) Liveperson (<http://www.liveperson.com/>), 24/7 reference (<http://www.24/7ref.org/index.efm>), LSSI – Virtual Reference Tool-kit and Question Point, AOL instant messenger (<http://www.aim.com/index.adp>), DIGI Chat (<http://www.digichat.com/>). However, many problems hinder successful implementation of chat services to libraries. The first problem is software capabilities. When the software for the chat is not capable, the chat can never hold successfully. Secondly, librarians must be good in using keyboard to send messages across to the patrons. Chat reference that is not controlled by some forms of authentication scheme may waste the time of the librarian, who may be providing services for patrons outside the usual work areas. Video conferencing is another tool in the middle of the 1990s. Morgan (1996), Pagell (1996) and McGeachin (1999). This is because of involves the use of voice over internet protocol, as both parties need to own webcams. Most social app like WhatsApp, facebook, instagram have software that support video conferencing. Libraries can use other applications like zoom, Skype to render information services via video conferencing.

Voice over internet Protocol (VOIP) is a technology that enables simultaneous transfer of voice and other data via standard internet Protocol. It only requires additional hardware in order to function. With VOIP, library patrons are offered the speed of internet communication in presenting their questions rather than typing them. However, libraries are very slow in using this service because of the need for additional hardware requirements and lack of user acceptance.

Apart from the individual institutional efforts in providing virtual reference services to their catchment areas, a number of institutions are working together to provide co-operative reference services facilitated by digital media and the internet. In the United States more than 50 libraries have already joined reference consortia. Many reasons are responsible for offering digital reference services in collaboration. One reason is having access to the knowledge that enables several librarians to broaden the range of subjects that can be covered and thus raises the level of quality. Secondly, sharing the workload and shifts enables libraries to offer this service during longer hours. Costs of software and database are reduced due to negotiation powers of consortia. The consortia are responsible for the training, staffing, legal issues and assessment of the digital reference. According to (Singh, 2004), several hundred libraries worldwide participate in "Question Point". Question Point offers a wide range of modules and functionalities. The question point is able to answer and administer questions per e-mail and chat. This service with the library profile module is used to co-ordinate the collaboration among the participating libraries. Another module can be installed to build up and maintain an archive database ("Knowledge Base") in which all queries and answers can be classified and anonymously stored for further reference. Another module administers the personal profile and settings for each individual reference librarian, which can further help in the distribution of queries when they come. However, the question point software can also be used for an individual library to offer information service via e-mail or chat on a local level without participating in any collaborative library services.

Library can build a websites to provide users. An author Mckiernan owns a website that lists libraries that offer real-time services using chat software, live interactive communication tools, call centre management software, bulletin board services and other internet technologies. Most of these services are designed for registered users of the libraries. They are also a number of organizations providing free access to on-line sources; these allow users to either select a specific source or conduct a search on a range, or all of the reference sources. The social media are considered as tools to seek health information (Mohammed cited in Brindha, Jayaseelan and Kadeswara (2020). The coronavirus outbreak has not been the first pandemic witnessed in the age of social media. At least three other

pandemics have occurred in the last decade; there was the swine flu in 2009, Ebola virus in 2014 and Zika virus in 2015, with all the outbreaks having had prominence, wide documentation and considerable influence on social media. At present, there are a number of social media available that can be used to disseminate health information including Covid 19. The following chart is based on the information presented in Social Media by Dewing (2012): Social network site. These above social medium have been a source of information to people in gaining knowledge on various aspects of life including Covid 19 health information. In this regard, librarians are expected to utilize these social media to provide effective health information to their numerous patrons. These social media allow librarians to adopt a new role by placing themselves into a social realm with patrons from different part of the country. By reading blogs, group postings, and message boards, the librarian becomes an active participant, who is able to anticipate and advise patrons as needs arise. Linking to patron profiles also keeps the librarian within the consciousness of patrons, which can potentially increase interaction (Courtney, 2007), and promote their knowledge of various health information.

Factors Hindering Libraries Providing Information Services in the Era of COVID-19 Pandemic

The provision of information services to citizens in Edo Land is faced with numerous problems which hinder effective utilization. According to Krubu and Osawaru (2011), these problems include funding, infrastructure, competencies, personnel issues, and system breakdown due to low current. Funding, according to Odion and Adetona (2009), has been a perennial problem facing library managers in their bid to carry out library operations, especially in this information age. Daniel in Daramola (2004) revealed that research evidence has shown that many developing countries like Nigeria, Ghana and Uganda find it difficult to cope with the challenges of the new information technology, due to scarce human, material and financial resources. This has prevented many libraries from establishing and maintaining a library services.

Another problem hindering libraries from providing information services in Nigeria is inadequate infrastructure, which includes the epileptic power supply, low internet connectivity, system breakdown, due to low current, etc. (Edogiawerie, 2020) noted that the "absence of standby generators in some libraries to replace the electric power when it is off is still a problem for viable ICT environment. In libraries that depend solely on generators, their providing funds for the constant fuelling and maintenance when the generators breakdown is a problem." (Umar, 2018) noted that funding is amajor critical problems facing most if not all Nigerian libraries (National; Academic; Public; School and Special). Regrettably, financing library services in Nigeria has been a long standing

problem for several decades. Both Federal and State Governments do not provide adequate budgetary allocation to development libraries in the country. This ugly situation has hampered the growth and development of LISs from many front such as inability to hire qualified manpower; appropriate and conducive library building; procurement of adequate and relevant library resources and services; deployment of relevant ICTs; expansion of Library and Information services to the rural communities etc.

For libraries to successful provide information services to citizens they need to have the required number of qualified staff. Regrettably, most Nigerian Libraries do not have the requisite number and combination of library staff to effectively realize their library automation goals and objectives, (Umar *et al.*, 2018) & (Krolak, 2006) lamented that many libraries in Nigeria are run by non-professional staff. It is assumed that any volunteer or teacher can manage a library. But the quality of a library service depends on the professional quality of its staff, and this in turn depends on the quality and relevance of the training that they have received. Another major problem retarding developmental issues including libraries in Nigeria has been the continuous rise of dearth of relevant physical infrastructure. Provision of relevant information service in COVID-19 pandemic era depend on the availability and functionality of certain infrastructures such as conducive building architecture and telecommunication architectures. Unfortunately this is poorly provided for in Nigeria.

As libraries strive to play their important role in the society, they are expected to assemble relevant and adequate information resources and services for the use of citizenry. Conversely, it is not surprising, to discover on the shelves of most Nigerian libraries bunches of outdated and irrelevant books, journals, and audio visual materials. (Umar, 2018) stressed that, this situation, can perhaps, be attributed to lack of funds to acquire relevant and current books, journals and audio visual resources on one hand, and excessive dependence on donation of information resources from individual philanthropists, government agencies and NGOs respectively. (Umar, 2018) disclosed that, this trend, if not checked, portends great danger to the corporate existence of every nation as its citizens will continually lack access to relevant information. It will also, malign the historic reputation of libraries and librarians among the comity of information professionals.

It is no doubt that, libraries flourish well in countries where their government and its functionaries are actively interested and involve in matters of library developments, they are considered key essential priority project. However, Nigerian libraries, especially national, public and school libraries have been deliberately neglected by federal and state governments. Government do not support the development of libraries

in the state. All this affects the provision of information services in Nigeria. Information poverty connotes a situation where individual members of a given society do not have the necessary information systems, of which libraries are one, to access and use information for the betterment of their lives and societies/communities at large. Arguably, libraries and information centers cannot survive, grow and become relevant in such nations where a majority of citizens' orientations and thinking is towards making naira and dollar, rather, than searching for information and knowledge.

CONCLUSION

A health literate society is one that understands both the severity of the situation and how to protect itself and others, through simple actions. But it is also the responsibility of information providers to provide clear, simple information that can be understood. Collectively, the responsibility for health literacy is everyone's. The Government, information providers, and other professionals, all play a part and lives literally do depend on it. In the current pandemic, librarian must provide routine core services for regular library users. These activities will continue for as long as necessary. A need for information exists in every crisis; librarians and information professional must be ready to meet this need whether it is for COVID-19 or something else. Although social distancing is a good way to prevent the spread of COVID-19, information access to users remains a social responsibility of our librarians and information personnel.

Recommendations

Based on the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic that is ravaging the world. The following recommendation if proffers for librarians to continue providing information to ensure a safe society. These recommendations are:

- i. Librarians in all institutions should be motivated by means of enhanced packages that can be used to cover cost for subscription and other social media tools that will boast their dissemination of health information on Covid 19 to the people
- ii. Librarians should center their health information dissemination on Covid 19 on the need to adhere to measures such as isolation and lock down, going out for only vital reasons and essential services, stopping local travel, maintain proper hygiene, avoid hands shake, touch, hug, kiss and to employ a social distancing of one meter from each other.
- iii. Librarians should carefully plan, efficiently executed, well reported means of disseminating authentic and reliable information on Covid 19 health information to people by using the most appropriate trusted social media so as to curb false information.
- iv. Librarians must organize from time to time public sensitization using the social media to educate people on how to use their mobile phones to access

- or interact with the health professionals on any health related issue.
- v. Health information delivery programmes that utilize emerging technologies, such as the MoTech, have great potential to reach more people in rural communities quickly and cheaply per person. Librarians can design, test and utilize them to aid health workers in disseminating health information.
 - vi. NLA and its affiliate chapters across the States should develop and coordinate a conscious and strategic voice in advocacy and lobbying for national and state policies that affect the development, growth and competitiveness of libraries and librarians in Nigeria. This could be realised through strategic engagement of the relevant stakeholders such as Federal Executive, State Executive, National Assembly, State Assemblies, Local Government Executive and other MDAs of government all levels.
 - vii. There is the urgent need for the librarians to become more creative and innovative in the way manner they render information services to their customers. The need for change of attitude, training in new skills and building on existing skills among librarians is recommended. This will enable librarians to deploy relevant ICTs in support of library and information services across communities in Nigeria.

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