

VIRTUAL LIBRARY AS A VEHICLE FOR SURVIVAL OF EDUCATION IN A COVID-19 PRONE SOCIETY

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Abstract

The study examined the concept of virtual library and some benefits that could be enjoyed by libraries if implemented during this period of covid-19. Such benefits includes: provision of access to databases, electronic journal, alerting services, online reference services, library cooperation. The study identified poor infrastructural facilities, poor technological facilities, lack of functional information and communication technology policy, cost and inadequate skilled staff among others as some of the challenges hindering successful implementation of virtual library project in this covid-19 era. The paper also discussed ways in which virtual libraries can provide more effective services to meet the information needs of the users in the covid-19 prone society

Keywords: Virtual Library, Education, Covid-19

Introduction

Library is a repository of stored knowledge. The library is established to acquire, process and make available the stored information in whatever format. In essence, the library can be referred to as the life line or heart of education as it supports teaching, research and learning. According to Encyclopedia Americana (2014), library connotes a body of recorded information brought together for a specific purpose, organized for use and made available for users. Indeed the librarians always organize the information environment to reflect their readiness to provide services that will be of interest and profitable to users.

Virtual library and Covid-19 pandemic

A virtual library according to Gbeje (2017), provides access to tools such as databases, electronic journals, alerting services, electronic reference and library cooperation. Folashade (2014), revealed that virtual library can be seen as an electronic access system that provides users with the means for discovering and retrieving information online. The information may be retrieved directly from within the hosting system or through links to other external system. Virtual library can be defined to mean a library with little or no physical plant of books, periodicals, reading space or support staff, but one that disseminate selective information directly to distributed library customers, usually electronically (Powell, 2010). By this definition, users can access information anywhere they find themselves especially during changing global pandemic emergencies such as coronavirus (covid-19). Harris(2014) stated that a virtual library universally implied electronic integration of hers services with traditional library services. He also argued that virtual library can equally be called a desktop library, an on-line library or an electronic library.

Coronavirus (covid-19) was identified by the world health organization (WHO) as an infections disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. According to the World Health Organization (2020) most people infected with covid-19 will experience wild to moderate respiratory disease and recover without special treatment. Older people and those with underlying health conditions such a respiratory disease, diabetes, chronic lung disease and cancer are more likely to experience serious illness. The specific symptoms, however include fever, exhaustion and a dry cough. Other signs include shortness of breath, discomfort, sore throat and in very few people vomiting or running nose. Covid-19 has taken libraries and librarians to the brick wall where they face the tough choices of either delivering or go into extinction.

Presently in this Covid-19 era, virtual library is the answer to survival of libraries. Government are aligned to various approaches which demanded the closure of all institutions, libraries, market, industries and transportation on lockdown mode. Since covid-19 is life threatening pandemic, it becomes increasingly important to find out the best method of avoiding it and showing transmission. According to Umayan (2019), the library today does not only serves as books storehouse but offers comprehensive services to its users from within the stock of the library as well as from a broad variety of external sources. The external sources do not mean only the conventional means like the library building, it may be by virtual means like the internet and other smart technology to disseminate information gathered.

Librarians can strengthen social media skills to help the users in the difficult situation rising out of the suspension of physical classes and closure of physical libraries arising out of covid-19 lockdown with most of the information services provided through library

social networking pages (National Digital Library of India, 2020). In support of this, LadarnHarma and Madin (2020) posits that librarians can provide and share information quickly, efficiently and in real-time as strategies in response to covid-19 pandemic through their social networking pages like facebook, twitter, instagram and linkedin. Also in the work of Olaike and Adetore (2019) they are of the opinion that libraries need to re-tool and up-skill themselves in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to ensure high level of security on the information provided. Librarians need to be well acquainted with the use and operation of audio-visual materials in the virtual library in other to serve the users better.

Benefits of virtual library during this period of Covid-19

Virtual library is in the top line discussion this days as far as library is concerned. Library as we all know, is the heart of every nation or society. Since the outbreak of this deadly pandemic called COVID-19, libraries and librarians has been looking for a way to satisfy librariypatron's without coming to the library. Finally it occurs to mind that virtual library can benefit the users if properly managed, for the survival of Education in a COVID-19 prone society through the following ways;

1. **Provision of access to databases:** Virtual library can be of a great help to library users in this period of COVID-19 by provision of free access to database. This will give library clientele the opportunity to access any information they need in the library from their home thereby reducing the spread of this deadly pandemic called COVID-19. Ali (2020) stated that to avoid the spread of the virus, library users are no longer allowed to access library databases within physical building of the library rather than from their different homes.
2. **Electronic journal:** Electronic journals also known as E-journal are scholarly journals or intellectual magazines that can be accessed via electronic transmission. Some journals are born digital in that way they are solely published on the web and in a digital format, but most electronic journals originated as print journals which subsequently evolved to have an electronic version while still maintaining a print component. According to Mian (2020), E-mail can be linked to all library users for effective information on current journals thereby making it possible for users to access those journals from their various homes to avoid the spread of COVID-19.
3. **Provision of alerting services:** Due to the spread of this deadly pandemic (COVID-19), virtual librarians are in a high spirit to inform all the library users in there information database on the latest or current information needed by them to avoid visiting the library thereby reducing the spread of COVID-19. The alert information or service is based on one's area of interest. Alert services will make the researchers to have rest of mind, believing that once there is any information, it will surely get to them. According to Aina (2014), many users can access

information simultaneously. From single electronic site from many locations and copies of information can be delivered with electronic speed.

4. **Library cooperation:** Virtual library also provides an avenue for sharing knowledge and other source of information. It can provide a forum to interchange ideas from resource-rich to resource poor libraries or from resource poor to resource rich libraries. Consequently, all participating libraries will share information through global network of virtual libraries (Gbaje, 2014). Sharing of library resources among one library and another will go a long way in assisting the library to have access to the material they do not have, thereby at the same time be of better advantage to library users in the sense that they will have access to those material right point from there different homes thereby reducing the spread of COVID-19. Linking one virtual library with another will help both the librarian and the library patrons and also make education to survive in the covid-19 prone society.
5. **Provision of reference services:** virtual librarian receives volumes of inquiries which need satisfying responses in ensuring customer service. Smith, Jacobs and Lippincoth (2010) state that the librarians could simultaneously use the knowledge to address multiple customer queries. This is ideal for services in COVID-19 era. For instance, inquiries on call numbers, title of the book and dictionary definitions can be given instantly with mobile reference service technologies.

Challenges Facing Virtual Library Development In Nigeria

In embarking on virtual library project, there are bound to be problems which can be converted to challenges. Many of the libraries still operate manually. There is need to create electronic information system that match individual patterns of thinking and learning. There is no area of library operations which the computer has seen applied with tremendous gains. Then how much of these technological devices are available in libraries? In the course of computerizing library operations, there are problems confronting the libraries. The problems include; shortage of manpower and lack of spare parts coupled with this problem according to Arokwe, (2011) is the problem of constant computer breakdown and low level of electricity supply. Erratic power resulted in the burning of some components which could not easily be replaced.

Since virtual library project and library automation are capital-based, library managers need to inject adequate funds to install the required information and communication technology facilities and infrastructures to digitalize library services. One other approach could be for the authorities to solicit for international sponsorship of these projects. Such instance would complement the efforts of the funding government in the area of training and retraining of personnel and provision of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructures.

There is no doubt that building and sustaining of virtual library requires the proper technological infrastructure application. These infrastructure includes telecommunication, servers, application platforms and software application. Telecommunication infrastructure is a major factor in the deployment of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) particularly for implementation of a virtual library (Ogunsola, 2016). Nigeria had recorded substantial improvement in the telecommunication industry over the past few years. As a result, there have been increased competition and availability of wide range of voice, data and internet applications and services.

Lack of a national fiber network backbone infrastructure, bandwidth and connectivity are some of the major issues affecting a successful implementation of virtual library. The erratic supply of electronic power is a major problem as most internal cafes and computer internets are running generators which significantly increase the cost of internet access. Maintaining web servers that host locally digitalized materials and other digital resources required web technology skills. The skill of developing, installing and configuring web application in a network environment requires an understanding of how to choose network operating system, handles different level of access privileges among users.

Librarians should be prepared to meet the challenges posed by these new technologies. By this, librarians with this web technology skills will be required to facilitate skilled information retrieval and to intervene between the user and the information to help users evaluate what they retrieved. According to Magaji (2014), the great challenges of acquiring web technology skills to light up traditionally based knowledge in information management is now being faced by Nigerian librarians **Conclusion**

In this period of corona virus (covid-19), librarians are charged with the responsibility to reach users and enhance their access for up-to-date relevant information using virtual library. In this era of information explosion where many information are churned out on daily basis, virtual librarians are expected to collect, organize, store and disseminate accurate information to the patrons. In this era of covid-19 pandemic, it is expected that virtual librarian work independently to deliver services oriented information to its clients from anywhere they are, at any given time. It is expected that virtual librarians share quality information to its clients so that they will feel comfortable and satisfy.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made;

1. Skilled librarians should be employed in virtual library to disseminate proper information to the user. This is because traditional method of library services are no longer needed in this era of covid-19.

2. Librarians should be provided with palliatives to serve as motivation as been provided to other medical and health workers. This will motivate them to delivery there services at any given time.

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