



Chapter 1

Emerging Roles of Libraries and Librarians During and Post COVID-19 Pandemic: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter highlights the challenges and opportunities that have and will arise as a result of the epidemic. When the spread of CoronaVirus 2019 (COVID-19) was announced by the World Health Organization (WHO), most schools, colleges, and tertiary institutes around the world were ordered to close so as to contain the spread. Currently, most learning institutions are experiencing challenges related to how to provide critical services; the most critical ones are linked to the library services. With the COVID-19 pandemic still in place, it is evident that libraries will greatly be affected in their service delivery. This chapter, therefore, brings into perspective the eminent changing roles of libraries and the challenges and opportunities that did and will emerge as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides different library case studies and how the COVID-19 pandemic is being handled in Kenya, Morocco, and Hungary. The chapter puts into perspective new insights that will enable libraries to adapt quickly to the new technologies substituting the obsolete and redundant ones.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Coronavirus 2019 disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment generally. The novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) which was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on the 14th of December 2019, has had a negative economic impact in many countries across the world. The inevitable measures that have been put in place to curb the spread of the highly contagious virus and the looming uncertainty about the disease have had knock-on effects on businesses and workers' incomes. The schools, colleges and learning Institutions of higher education have not been spared either, students were obliged to stay at home with very little taking place to enhance continuous education. Libraries along with public social services were asked to close their infrastructures to try to contain the spread of the virus. University professors and academic staff are at home, and more importantly, learners were temporarily deprived of access to libraries that have always been their source of vital information.

While the world is at a crossroads on how to eradicate COVID-19 it is important to note that the situation and circumstances during the pandemic are unique to countries and the type of libraries. Libraries as the heartbeat of educational institutions have been hard hit says (Oyelude 2020). On the other hand, Hinchliffe and Worf-Eisenberg, (2020) argue that people are not only looking at the best practices in the library but also the actions and steps their colleagues are taking in the COVID-19 pandemic. As such most libraries are faced with a dilemma on how to resume operation and still provide effective service delivery while at the same time ensuring the users' safety and theirs too. IFLA (2020) affirms that libraries around the world are facing hard choices around which services to offer and how ranging from minimal restrictions to full closure. It is argued that different governments were taking different approaches, some ordering the closure of all institutions, others indicating that life should continue as usual, and others simply leaving decisions up to library directors.

BACKGROUND

Libraries have always been considered as a vital and integral organ in a society; they are established to meet the information needs of learners, researchers and other users in the community. To the pupils' libraries are a source of information and also an avenue of developing and inculcating a reading culture, to students, it enhances effective teaching and learning, to the researchers it is a road map to conducting research, discovery and publications, while to the local community, it offers an ample environment for community outreach programs, engagement and awareness on local and international issues affecting them. In earlier studies, Blair (1998) described library as a place that is imperative for self-development and learning of students. In a nutshell, a library is a necessity in any community, region, country or the entire world. It is a gate way to information discovery and a source to various solutions.

However, with Coronavirus epidemic all over the world and with physical libraries closed it is eminent that the libraries and librarians need to device appropriate new roles so as to ensure there is free access and consumption of information for all in an easy and innovative way and at the same time enhance safety measures. Nakitare et al. (2020) supports that library services need to be provided to users regardless of location, program or mode of study. While Osuchukwu, et al. (2019) asserts that librarians are in the

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