Chapter 10
Transcending Doors in Library Service Provision

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ABSTRACT

Libraries are storehouses of information that support decision making in society. The COVID-19 pandemic shook the foundations of the operations of libraries. Libraries had to shut their doors on their cherished patrons. This created information hunger and anxiety. Librarians were also locked outside their libraries and could not provide access to the information resources within their libraries. Using technology, services such as remote/off-campus and online services were provided to users. Looking through the lens of the pandemic, the attention of librarians is drawn to the need to invest in electronic resources, the need to invest in emerging technologies for the provision of library services, and the need for disaster management policies and plans.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries are storehouses of information that support the decision-making process of organisations and individuals in the society. The collections, organization and services provided by libraries are based on the philosophy of library science as propounded by Ranganathan-the father of library science in 1931. However, the COVID-19 pandemic experienced in the year 2020, in almost all countries of the world has shaken the very foundation of library science. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced libraries to shut their doors on their once cherished patrons and clients. The pandemic compelled libraries around the world to limit physical access to resources, service provision and contact hours defying Ranganathan's philosophy that underpins librarianship. Hence most of these resources and services could not be accessed outside the doors of the libraries.

Irrespective of the challenges brought forth by the pandemic, libraries have had the opportunity to review the policies that govern the development of their collection, resources, practices, functions, and services. Looking through the lens of the pandemic, it is obvious that some library practices and services need to be revamped using emerging information and communication technologies to provide satisfactory services to users in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The growth and the shifting nature of knowledge as well as the equally changing demands of library patrons call for a corresponding response in some library practices and service delivery. Change in libraries is thus inevitable owing to the transforming nature of the environment in which they exist. Most libraries during the pandemic failed to provide resources to users because their collections are print dominated. This means the wealth of their collections was locked behind doors during the pandemic.

While some libraries faced challenges during the pandemic, others gained popularity with users. This was made possible using information and communication technologies. Library information and communication technologies services such as live chats with librarians, remote access to library resources through the library Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), the use of social media in service provision, library outreach programs, among other services, have been made library access possible and popular.

It is worth mentioning that libraries and the world at large may not return to their previous modus operandi in terms of service provision after the pandemic. The new normal which is the use of the online services should be embraced for the survival of libraries. This calls for training programmes for Library staff to be abreast with changing trends in the use of technology in librarianship. Libraries also need to make huge investments in technology such as computer hardware and software to enable them provide services beyond their doors. The use of information technologies in libraries will enable them to transcend their doors in reaching the information needs of their users.

The need for libraries to have disaster preparedness policies and plans came to light during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most disasters strike when organizations and institutions are least prepared to mitigate them, and a significant number of libraries around the world were not spared. This has been exacerbated by limited risk management which mainly was done in anticipation of physical damage to library resources such as fire and floods.

The chapter utilised the Balme Library of the University of Ghana as the case with discussions guided by Ranganathan's principles of library science. The Balme Library is the Headquarters of all the Satellite, Halls, Departmental/School and College libraries in the University of Ghana. The chapter ends with a conclusion as well as recommendations of how libraries can maintain their operations in lieu of the philosophy of library science in a pandemic and beyond.

This chapter seeks to address the challenges brought on by the COVID-19. The chapter therefore seeks to:

- Discuss the philosophy that underpins library science and how its foundations were shaken by the prevalence of COVID-19 pandemic.
- Explore popular services among library users that were instigated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Demonstrate improvements, and developments that were achieved using technology.
- Examine the experiences in the implementation processes.
- Explore strategies of capacitating both library staff and patrons as well as spread awareness of online access.

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