



# **LIBRARY RESEARCH JOURNAL**

**Volume 7, September, 2020**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Availability and Utilization of Information Resources for Igbo Studies in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Library, Igbariam Campus <b>Victoria Obianuju Ezejiofor, Eliezer Chukwuyere Agim &amp; Angela Ifeoma Ndanwu --</b>	<b>- 1</b>
Acquisition of Information Resources in University Libraries in South-East: Prospects and Challenges <b>Roseline Nkechi Obiozor-Ekeze - - - - -</b>	<b>- 8</b>
Inspiring Online Library and Information Services During Covid 19: Perception of Information Professionals in Academic Libraries in Anambra State <b>Adaora M. Orakpor (Ph. D) and Funmilola T. Omoruyi, - - - - -</b>	<b>13</b>
Librarians' ICT Skills Development: Need for Effective Library Services and National Integration in Anambra State <b>Regina Eyiuche Obiadazie, Norbert Amaechi Agbanu Ph.D, CLN. and Grace Nwankwo CLN. - - - - -</b>	<b>22</b>

## INSPIRING ONLINE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES DURING COVID 19: PERCEPTION OF INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN ANAMBRA STATE

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this paper was to examine the perception of information professionals on the availability and effective use of inspiring online library and information services during Covid-19 pandemic era in Anambra State. Four research questions guided the study. The research was focused on academic libraries. The research adopted a survey research design. Population of the study comprised information professionals from selected academic libraries in Anambra State, Nigeria. An online survey google questionnaire form was created to collect and analyze data from respondents. A total of 62 information professionals in the selected academic libraries responded to the online questionnaire form which was also used for the analysis. Data collected were analyzed using frequency count and percentages. Findings of the study revealed that inspiring online library information services should be embraced since the pandemic hindered physical visit to libraries. Poor Internet connectivity, paucity of funds, irregular power supply, ineffectiveness of Ask-A-Librarian services in most libraries, among others were some identified challenges militating against the availability and effective use of the inspiring online library information services. Based on the findings, recommendations were made on how to improve inspiring online library services in academic libraries in Anambra State.*

**Keywords:** *Online Library Services, Academic Libraries, Information Professionals, Covid-19 Pandemic, Anambra State, Nigeria.*

### **Introduction**

Corona virus pandemic is an outburst of respiratory disease which affected many countries of the world. It was declared by the World Health Organization as a severe disease that spreads rapidly and has affected several lives (Robinson, 2022). The outbreak of the disease was severe in 2020 which resulted to loss of many lives and properties. The pandemic has come and gone yet its effect is still felt in the socio-economic and political scene across the globe. As reported by Indranil & Prasenjit (2020), human civilization has witnessed at least five pandemics in recent times, like H1N1 in 2009, Polio in 2014, Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014, Zika in 2016 and Ebola (Democratic Republic of Congo in 2019). Subsequently, COVID-19 outbreak has been declared as the sixth public health

emergency of international concern by World Health Organization in 2020. This infectious respiratory disease was said to have emerged from Wuhan, Hubei province in China in December, 2019. The most initial cases were related to source infection from a seafood wholesale market (Huang, Wang, Ren, Zhao and Hu (2020). Since then, the disease rapidly circled the globe and has eventually been transmitted into every continent.

Due to the unusual outbreak of COVID-19, almost every affected country was under partial or total lockdown for a long time ranging from a few weeks to a few months; the after effect is still very visible all over the globe. Government authorities all over the world had to literally put a ban on free movement of their citizens outside

their homes and country to avoid community and inter country transmission of the disease. One important strategy of the public healthcare system in preventing the transmission of the pandemic was by restricting mass gathering because it was believed COVID-19 could be spread from person to person through direct contact (Huang et al., 2020). WHO has endorsed some safety ways to reduce the general risk of transmission of COVID-19 such as avoiding close contact with people suffering from acute respiratory illness, regular hand washing with soap and water or hand sanitizer particularly, after direct contact with sick people or their environment, maintaining cough etiquette, and avoiding unprotected contact with farm or wild animals, amongst others. Government of different countries suspended all types of religious, cultural, social, scientific, sport, and political mass gathering events in different parts of the world. (World Health Organisation, 2019).

In Nigeria, a lot has changed in the system of operation particularly, in the educational sector. The pandemic hindered physical visit to institutional libraries because schools were closed. Almost all the libraries in Nigeria have clearly seen that maintaining traditional library service where users visit the library physically seem to have been affected to a large extent. The resultant effect is that many libraries are migrating online. Librarians and information professionals are experiencing a period of drastic change influenced by emerging technologies and the pandemic crises. The effect of technological growth has been greatly felt in virtually every operation in every society. Unskilled expertise, old and ineffective service methods, limited collaborations, resistance to outsourcing and many other challenges have diminished the impact traditional libraries make in today's changing world. The new aid of libraries and information centers are more techno-savvy than the previous generation of libraries especially in this period of global pandemic where there is little or no interaction physically with patrons.

Availability and effective use of online library information services is paramount to information professionals, librarians and library users of the Covid-19 pandemic era because seeking/

searching of educational information and acquisition of knowledge is greatly required in the contemporary educational system. Therefore, learning through seeking/ searching of educational information, acquisition of knowledge and delivery of services by information professionals in libraries must continue despite the pandemic that seem to have changed so many things in the world. (Wei Xia, 2013). The pandemic and its effect notwithstanding, life activities must go on.

This is because when there is a disaster; people still need access to accurate information as well as healthcare prescriptions to help them get rid of fake information (Tanner, Friedman, Koskan and Barr, 2009).

Campbell (2006) cited in Gaylord and Romanus (2016) noted that numerous creative and useful services have evolved within libraries in the digital age: providing quality learning spaces, creating metadata, offering virtual reference services, teaching information literacy, choosing resources and managing resource licenses, collecting and digitizing archival materials, and maintaining digital repositories. Librarians and information professionals are gradually changing to fit into their clients' information seeking patterns.

### **Inspiring Online Information services**

Inspiring online information services are online creative and innovative services meant to motivate and empower libraries, librarians and information professionals to help improve their service delivery. They use various types of technologies to aid the services they render. The introduction of various information and communication technology (ICT) trend has led to reorganization, change in work patterns, and demand for new skills, job retraining and reclassification positions. These services are being used by professional librarians and information providers. Rana (2009) opine that online library services hold the key to the success of modernizing information services. Applications of online library information services are numerous and used in the entire process of storage, retrieval and dissemination. It presents an opportunity to provide value-added information services and access to a wide variety

of digital based information resources to their clients. As a result of online information service delivery on the platform of e-libraries, access to databases outside a particular library and digital resources within the library is provided. There is also access to electronic theses and dissertation and online information literacy instructions which can be in the form of help sheets on how to use a particular database, library catalogue, aggregated vendor resources and other print and non-print resources (Gaylord & Romanus, 2016). Other services the library can offer include online course reserve, online reference services, remote access to online catalogue, web blog and online document delivery. Benson (2001) posits that it takes only creative information professionals /librarians to remove technological barriers and to design innovative system that makes it easier for patrons to find and retrieve the information they need. The librarian is the one who is exposed to the world of knowledge and the keys to unlocking them; hence in line with Khan and Bhatti (2012) opinion, online information resources provide more opportunity to reach the grassroots, hence the need to target specific audiences, and give them the chance to interact with the resources of the library. This also applies to all innovative online library information services.

Therefore, change is a constant challenge for library and information professionals in their bid to make information delivery services available to patrons. Hence this study sought to examine the perception of information professionals on the availability and effective use of inspiring online library information services in Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study sought:

1. To find out the available online library and information services in academic libraries to users in Covid-19 era in Anambra State.
2. To examine the perception of information professionals on the availability and effective use of these resources to users in the Covid-19 era in Anambra State
3. To identify perceived challenges militating against the availability and

effective use of inspiring online library Information services in the Covid-19 era.

4. To proffer solution to enhance the availability and effective use of inspiring online library information services in the Covid-19 era to users.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by these research questions

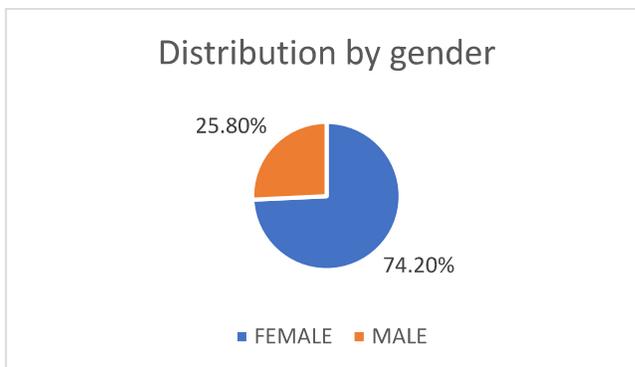
1. What are the available inspiring online library information services in academic libraries during Covid-19 era in Anambra State?
2. What is the information professional's perception on the extent of availability and effective use of the inspiring online library information services to users in the covid-19 era in Anambra State?
3. What are the challenges militating against the availability and effective use of inspiring online information services during the Covid era in the State?
4. What strategies could be adopted to enhance the availability and utilization of the inspiring online library information services in academic libraries in Anambra State during Covid era?

### **Methodology and Analysis**

The survey research method was adopted for this study which sought information from respondents on their perception on inspiring online library information services. The population comprised sixty-two (62) information professionals from some academic libraries in Anambra State, Nigeria. A self-developed online survey using google questionnaire form was created for data collection from the respondents. The respondents were stratified on the basis of sex, age, respective library type and names of institution. A total of 62 information professionals in libraries responded to the online questionnaire form which were all analyzed and used for the study because the number was manageable. Data were analyzed using simple percentages and frequency count. Result of the analysis was presented in tables and graph charts according to the research questions that guided the study.

**Results Table 1: Respondents by gender**

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Female	46	74.2%
Male	16	25.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

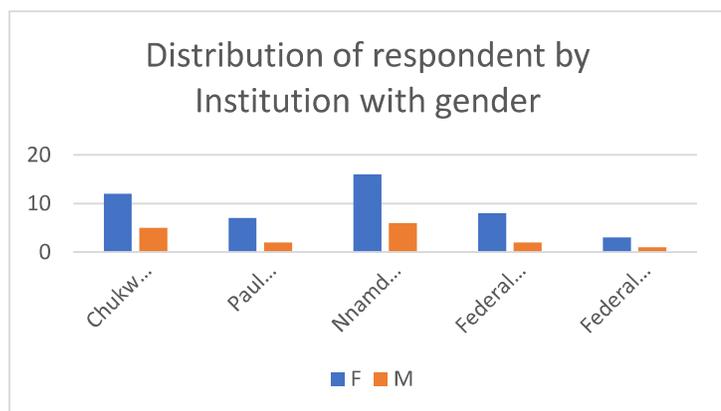


**Figure 1: A pie chart showing the distribution of respondents by gender**

Table 1 revealed that out of the 62 (100%) respondents, 46(74.2%) were female and 16(25.8%) were male. A pictorial view was also illustrated in Figure 1. The result revealed that the female gender responded more than the male gender.

**Table 2: Breakdown of respondent by institution**

Institution			F	M	Frequency/Percentage
Chukwuemeka University	Ojukwu	Odumegwu	12	5	17 (27.4%)
Paul University Awka			7	2	9 (14.5%)
Nnamdi Azikiwe University			16	6	22 (35.5%)
Federal Polytechnic Oko			8	2	10 (16.1%)
Federal College of Education (Technical), Umuenze			3	1	4 (6.5%)
<b>Total</b>			<b>46(74.2%)</b>	<b>16(25.8%)</b>	<b>62(100.0%)</b>

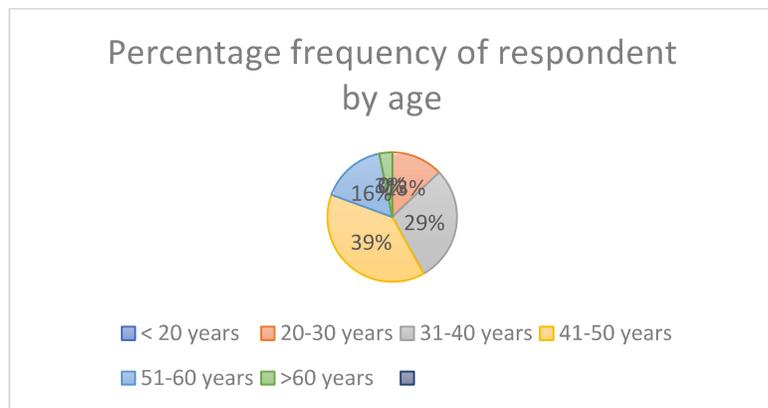


**Figure 2: A chart showing the distribution of respondents by institution**

Table 2 and Figure 2 revealed that respondents from Nnamdi Azikiwe University had the highest response with a frequency and percentage of 22(33.5%) which is more than half of the total respondents 62(100%) while Federal College of Education Technical Umuenze had the least response with frequency and percentage of 4(6.5%).

**Table 3: Breakdown of Respondent by Age**

Age	Frequency	Percentage
< 20 years	0	0.0%
20-30 years	8	12.9%
31-40 years	18	29%
41-50 years	24	38.7%
51-60 years	10	16.1%
>60 years	2	3.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100</b>



**Figure 3: A pie chart showing the distribution of respondents by age**

Table 3 shows the breakdown of respondents by age. The table indicated that ages 41-50 years (39.2%) responded more than other ages while ages >20 years was the least. This was also revealed in the Figure 3 showing the pictorial view of each age range in a pie chart.

**Table 4: Inspiring online Library Information Services available to users in your institution**

S/N	Online resources	Frequency	Percentage	Decision
1	Library webpages, Institutional repositories	55	88.7%	Available
2	Internet and web services	56	90.3%	Available
3	Social media services: Facebook, Twitter, Wiki, linkedIn, pinterest, flickr, youtube, blog etc.	45	72.6%	Available
4	Interlibrary collaboration in sharing of resources	45	72.6%	Available
5	Digital literacy and training	35	56.4%	Available
6	Ask-A-Librarian services	30	48.4%	Not Available
7	Real time interaction with the library	16	25.8%	Not Available

The response item was structured on Available and Not Available, 50% and above was regarded as available while below 50% was rated as not available. From the results in Table 4, item 2; Internet and Web services had the highest frequency count and percentage of 56(90.3%); followed by item 1; Library webpages, institutional repositories which had 88.7%. Item 7; Real time interaction with the library had the

lowest frequency count and percentage of 16(25.8%).

The result of Table 4, reveals that: Internet and Web services; Library WebPages, institutional repositories; social media services, Interlibrary collaboration in sharing of resources and digital literacy and training were inspiring online services available to the users of the institutional libraries under study.

**Table 5:** The perception of information professionals on the extent of availability and effective use of the inspiring online library information services to users in the covid-19 era

S/N	Items	GE (4) F (%)	ME (3) F (%)	LE (2) F (%)	NA (1) F (%)
1	Users access the library webpages	35(56%)	18(29%)	2(3%)	7(11%)
2	Access to Institutional repositories	0(0%)	40(65%)	15(24%)	7(11%)
3	Access to web and internet services	6(10%)	22(35%)	28(45%)	6(10%)
4	Interlibrary collaboration in sharing of resources	0(0%)	19(30%)	26(42%)	17(27%)
5	Ask-A-Librarian service was still very functional	0(0%)	13(21%)	17(27%)	32(52%)
6	Online sensitization or training on the social media platforms still going on during the pandemic	0(0%)	12(19%)	23(37%)	27(44%)
7	Real time access to information is still effective	0(0%)	0(0%)	16(26%)	46(74%)
8	Feedback from users	0(0%)	5(8%)	10(16%)	47(76%)

These items were structured on a 4-point scale that ranges from Great extent-GE (4 points), Moderate extent-ME (3 points), Low extent-LE (2 points) and Not at all-NA (1 point). From the results in Table 5, item 1 reveals that 35(56%) of the respondents perceived to a great extent that users can access the library webpages. Item 2 reveals that 40(65%) perceived to a moderate extent that users have access to Institutional repositories. Item 3 with 28(45%) and item 4 with

26(42%) reveals to a less extent that users can access Web and internet services same with interlibrary collaboration. Most of the respondents in Item 5, 6, 7, 8 falls under “Not at all” column; this shows that respondents perceived that Ask-a-librarian services, Online trainings on social media, Real time access and feedback from users were not that effective in the various institutions.

**Table 6:** Perceived challenges militating against the availability and effective use of inspiring online library Information services in the covid-19 era

S/N	Items	SA (4) F (%)	A (3) F (%)	D (2) F (%)	SD (1) F (%)
1	Poor Internet connectivity, problem with the internet service provider	35(56%)	20(32%)	5(8%)	2(3%)
2	Irregular power supply	36(58%)	15(24%)	6(10%)	5(8%)
3	Poor technological infrastructure	37(60%)	20(32%)	5(8%)	0(0%)
4	Lack of skilled and technological expertise	13(21%)	31(50%)	11(18%)	7(11%)
5	Phobia for change on the part of some Information professionals	2(3%)	8(13%)	12(19%)	40(65%)
6	Considerable time commitment on the part of the skilled staff	13(21%)	32(52%)	12(19%)	5(8%)
7	Poor students’ engagement on the social media platform	12(19%)	33(53%)	15(24%)	2(3%)
8	In sufficient Time allotted for browsing	12(19%)	32(52%)	10(16%)	8(13%)
9	Lack of funds or limited funds to support more advanced features	40(65%)	20(32%)	2(3%)	0(0%)
10	Government restricting access to the use of some social media platform	3(5%)	10(16%)	17(27%)	32(52%)

These items were structured on a 4-point scale that ranges from strongly agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points), Strongly Disagree (1 point). From the results in Table 6, more than half of the respondents Strongly Agreed that item 1 with 35 (56%) Poor Internet connectivity, item 2 with 36(58%) irregular power supply, item 3 with 37 (60%) poor technological infrastructure

and item 9 with 40(65%) Lack of funds are major challenges. Item 4 with 31(50%) indicates that half of the respondents agreed that lack of skilled and technological expertise is also a challenge. More than half of the respondents in item 5 with 40 (65%) strongly disagree that Phobia for change and Government restriction in item 10 with 32(52%) are challenges. More than half of

the respondents agreed that item 6, 7, 8 are also perceived challenges.

This result implied that almost all the respondents agreed with all items as the challenges militating against the availability and effective use of the

inspiring online library services except (items 5) Phobia for change on the part of some librarians and (item 10) Government restricting access to the use of some social media platform.

**Table 7:** Solutions to the perceived challenges militating against the availability and effective use of inspiring online library Information services in the covid-19 era

S/N	Items	SA (4) F (%)	A (3) F (%)	D (2) F (%)	SD (1) F (%)
1	Strong internet connectivity	55(89%)	7(11%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
2	Constant power supply	56(90%)	6(10%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
3	Good technological infrastructure	60(97%)	2(3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
4	Skilled and technological expertise	51(82%)	11(18%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
5	Information professionals ready to accept change	30(48%)	30(48%)	2(3%)	0(0%)
6	Time commitment on the part of the skilled staff	40(64%)	19(31%)	3(5%)	0(0%)
7	Users' engagement on the online library information services	52(84%)	10(16%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
8	Sufficient Time allotted for browsing	32(56%)	26(42%)	1(2%)	0(0%)
9	Supply of funds to support more advanced features	40(65%)	22(35%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
10	Government restricting of access should be minimize or stopped	37(60%)	10(16%)	15(24%)	0(0%)

From the results in Table, more than half of the respondents Strongly Agreed that item 1 with 55 (89%) strong internet connectivity, item 2 with 56(90%) constant power supply, item 3 with 60(97%) good technological infrastructure and item 9 with 40(65%) supply of funds are major solutions to the challenges. Item 4 with 51(82%) indicates that more than half of the respondents agreed that skilled and technological expertise is also a solution to the challenges. Half of the respondents in item 5 with 30 (48%) strongly agree that information professionals readiness to accept change and Government restriction to access being minimized as stated in item 10 with 37(60%) are more solutions to the challenges. This result implied that almost all the respondents agreed with all items as the solutions to the challenges militating against the availability and effective use of the inspiring online library services during covid-19 pandemic.

**Discussion**

This paper examined the perception of Information professionals on the availability and effective use of inspiring online library information services available in Covid-19 pandemic era.

For research question 1 on the inspiring online library information services, our results in Table

4 revealed that majority of the respondents have available in their libraries most of the listed services. This shows the flexibility of information professionals to new learning, opportunity to participate and accept change and it is in agreement with Dame (2013) who said that in an era of unpredictable, dynamic change, academic libraries must develop a flexibility that permits them to shift priorities and directions.

For research question 2 in Table 5, It is evident that the average respondents agree to a moderate extent on the availability and effective use of all these services. It is not just for these services to be available in the library but there must also be effective service delivery to users. The respondents however said that services like Ask-a-librarian services, Online sensitization, real time access and feedback from users are of low extent and not at all in some cases. These are important value-added services that needs to be embraced the more. Khan and Bhatti (2012) in agreement with this, put it thus; social media provides more opportunity to reach the grassroot, hence the need to target specific audiences, and give them the chance to interact with the resources of the library. This also applies to all innovative online library information services.

Research question 3 in table 6 revealed that almost all the respondents agreed with all the itemized challenges militating against the availability and effective use of inspiring online library information services. These challenges include poor internet connectivity, irregular power supply, poor technological infrastructure, lack of skilled and technological expertise, considerable time commitment on the part of the skilled staff, poor students' engagement on the social media platform, insufficient time allotted for browsing, Lack of funds or limited funds to support more advanced features. These and many more are in line with the challenges most researchers give when it comes to online inspiring services or web-based information services. However, results from this study revealed that Phobia for change on the part of some librarians and Government restricting access to the use of some social media platform are less of the challenge.

Research question 4 in table 7 revealed the solutions to the challenges militating against the availability and effective use of these services. Strong internet connectivity, constant power supply, good technological infrastructure, technological expertise, acceptance of change, Time commitment on the part of the skilled staff, Supply of funds among others were the listed solutions. Our results showed that all the respondents agreed with all the itemized solutions to the challenges. The findings of research question 3 and 4 agrees with Benson (2001) that it takes only creative information professionals /librarians to remove technological barriers and to design innovative system that makes it easier for patrons to find and retrieve the information they need.

### **Conclusion**

The paper examined the perception of Information Professionals on the availability and effective use of inspiring online library Information services in Covid-19 pandemic era. The research adopted a survey design. The population comprised of 62 Information professionals from some selected Academic libraries in Anambra State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that inspiring online library information services are to be made available the more, since the pandemic hindered physical visit to libraries. Poor internet connectivity, lack of funds militating against the availability and effective use of the inspiring online library information services. Based on the findings, recommendations were made on how to improve on the services.

### **Recommendations**

The researchers therefore, recommend that library management should ensure that more inspiring online library information services made available to users; libraries must develop a flexibility that permits them to devise solution that would assist librarians to handle the challenges militating against the availability and effective use of inspiring online library information services in the Covid-19 era and in the changing times; in order to give directions to users to use more online services. Finally, librarians should target specific users and give them the chance to interact with the online library information services; Government and management should ensure the provision of funds, strong internet connectivity and the provision of constant power supply.

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