Adaption and reorganisation of academic libraries following the COVID-19 pandemic

Josiline Chigwada[1]
josyphiri@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0003-0964-3582

The coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic significantly impacted the traditional functioning of academic libraries, prompting a critical need to investigate the challenges and opportunities in adapting and reorganising these institutions. This study documents how academic libraries transformed following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. It identifies how these libraries evolved to meet the changing needs of users in a post-pandemic world. A qualitative study was done using a multi-case study design where three university libraries were purposively selected. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Fifteen participants were selected using stratified random sampling technique where the strata comprised of library management, technical, reader, circulation, and technology librarians. The data was analysed using thematic content analysis. The findings reveal that libraries were forced to enhance virtual library services to continue serving the library users to meet the needs of hybrid teaching and learning. Online reference services were introduced, and virtual training sessions and meetings were continued after COVID-19. Library services were embedded in the learning management systems. This study assists academic libraries to better handle future disruptions or unforeseen circumstances to improve online resources, enhance remote access, and integrate advanced technologies to enhance the overall user experience.

Keywords: virtual services, hybrid learning, remote learning, information accessibility, user experience, higher education

1 Introduction

The Government of Zimbabwe declared coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) a national disaster in December 2019 and the first full lockdown was declared in April 2020 (Mutambisi, Murasi & Mazodze 2021). Academic libraries needed to adapt and reorganise their services to meet the challenges that were brought about by the coronavirus pandemic (Appleton 2022; Ashiq, Jabeenm& Mahmood 2022; Dobreva & Anghelescu 2022; Robertson, Foxhall & Hodge 2023). The public and private sectors had to take bold steps toward ensuring human survival and their continued existence during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Tabish 2020). These measures were necessitated by the desire to ensure that the virus was under control by minimising physical interaction between humans (World Health Organisation 2020).

The Wellcome (2021) acknowledges the ravaging effect that has been caused by COVID-19 whereby the disease severely affected society such that people's well-being and the economies were not spared. According to Chakraborty and Maity (2020), people struggled to slow down the transmission of the disease by testing and treating patients, quarantining suspected persons through contact tracing, restricting large gatherings, and maintaining complete or partial lockdowns. As the virus continued unabated, more people struggled with undernourishment, some business enterprises faced closure which in turn led to loss of jobs by millions in the workforce, and lockdowns further exposed millions of families to hunger as they did not have income or food. For instance, in Zimbabwe, Matsungo and Chopera (2020) reported that several health and wellness challenges resulted following the imposing of a lockdown in 2020 as food prices increased yet diet and consumption patterns were disrupted, dietary diversification receded and stress among individuals increased.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges to academic institutions forcing them to swiftly adapt their operations to ensure continuity amidst restrictions and safety concerns. Academic libraries are regarded as essential hubs of research, learning, and community engagement and were supposed to navigate the complexities of the pandemic while maintaining their pivotal role in supporting education and scholarship. As a result, academic libraries were also affected by the forced closure of physical library buildings while teaching and learning continued online, which was the first of its kind in the country. It was noted that most academic librarians in Zimbabwe were not prepared for the physical closure of library buildings (Chigwada 2020), but some saw some opportunities to enhance library services during that period (Chigwada 2021). This study sought to document how service delivery by libraries in institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe transformed following the outbreak of COVID-19. Understanding how these libraries responded to the pandemic is crucial for identifying best practices, addressing existing gaps, and informing future crisis preparedness strategies. The research seeks to provide

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1.   Josiline Chigwada is Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of South Africa

valuable insights into the resilience of academic libraries in the face of adversity and contribute to the broader discourse on crisis management in the higher education sector by addressing the following research objectives:

- To assess changes in library service delivery at academic libraries in Zimbabwe following the outbreak of COVID-19.
- To determine the rationale for introducing the changes to academic library services in Zimbabwe in response to COVID-19.
- To draw lessons from the steps taken by academic libraries in Zimbabwe in response to the outbreak of COVID-19.

2 Theoretical framework

The study utilised the social innovation typology model by Winberry and Potnis (2021) which provides a model of innovations in the context of libraries (Syn, Sinn & Kim 2023). The typology consists of six innovative service categories which are lifelong learning, emergency response, civic engagement, economic development, health, and diversity and inclusion. Lifelong learning represents ongoing information literacy training; emergency response deals with disaster response and recovery efforts; civic engagement involves public interaction with stakeholders and institutions; economic development stimulates financial growth; health encourages physical and mental well-being; and diversity involves providing support for social groups without adequate support in the community (Winberry & Potnis 2021). This study adopted the social innovation typology as a model for analysing academic libraries' response to the COVID-19 pandemic to provide innovative services to the university communities in Zimbabwe. The theory was used to look at the various innovations that were done by academic libraries during the COVID-19 era in terms of services to meet the evolving needs of users, processes, or workflows to ensure the continuity of operations while adhering to public health guidelines, structural changes to adapt to the new realities imposed by the pandemic, and how new partnerships were created to address the challenges caused by COVID-19. Therefore, the theory would cover aspects of all three research objectives to assess the changes made by the pandemic, the effects of those changes, and the lessons learnt.

3 Literature review

This section documents the literature review concerning the changes that were brought about by COVID-19 to academic library services, and the lessons learnt from the pandemic. Medawar and Tabet (2021) and Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) observed that COVID-19 impacted library services in several ways, but more importantly, the physical spaces were closed, and library services became predominantly virtual. Circulation services were affected by extending book loan periods to cater to the restricted movement due to lockdown restrictions (Ncube & Nyabadza 2020). Academic libraries found the need to shift their collection development practices and philosophies to ensure that they support students and researchers in the short term and long term, no matter where they are (Dobreva 2020). Electronic book subscriptions were done to enable wider access to reading materials. Academic libraries offered or strengthened virtual services to assist patrons in finding full-text articles and learning to use electronic (e)- resources through virtual workshops (Koos, Scheinfeld & Larson 2021).

The use of web conferencing software such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, WebEx, Bigbluebutton, and Google Meet was common. These were used to provide instructional workshops, webinars, and one-on-one consultations (Intahchomphoo & Brown 2021). The development of video tutorials to assist patrons facing challenges in accessing the library services was also done. There was an increase in the usage of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Telegram (Dadhe & Dubey 2020; Lobo & Dhuri 2021). Librarians had to adapt service models and workflows to continue providing quality information resources and assistance to students and staff.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted normal operating procedures and there was a need for quick and innovative strategies to respond to the changes to meet the information needs of the patrons (Tsekea & Chigwada 2021). However, although service provision continued, not all library services could be offered because of the limited staff available and some restrictions to provide services such as inter-library loan, document delivery, and face-to-face faculty liaison. COVID-19 brought about some changes in the library and the lessons learned are documented in the next section.

Planning for emergencies helps academic libraries to better respond to disruptions. Lessons were learned in preparedness, communication, documentation, collaboration, staffing, library modality, and infrastructure, which shaped plans for operating during the post-COVID-19 era. Lessons learned include:

- Academic libraries should develop and implement library pandemic plans and library business continuity plans (Harris 2021).
- There is a need to invest in and develop technology access and offerings through subscriptions to e-resources and virtual platforms for online services, and events and to be able to access one's desktop when working from home.

There is a need to pivot all services to the online mode through virtual library tours and orientation. Upgraded and expanded information communication technology platforms, artificial intelligence, digitised resources, e-resources, staff access to technological devices from home, and internet access for library staff would ensure that there is no library service disruption in the face of a pandemic (Rafiq, Batool & Ali 2021; Tsekea & Chigwada 2021).

- Continuous professional development is key to meeting the changes taking place. There is a need to reskill and retool library staff to function in an online environment. All library staff should have the requisite digital skills to deliver basic online services to ensure business continuity during and after a pandemic (Lobo & Dhuri 2021).

- Need for a hybrid model with a greater focus on the online segment, which allows remote access to library resources. Library services should be remotely accessible to students and staff regularly by providing any resource and every type of support at any time (Howes, Ferrell, Pettys & Roloff 2021).

From the literature, there is a paucity of empirical research examining how academic libraries in Zimbabwe responded to the changes that were brought about by COVID-19. This study was done to document how the academic libraries in Zimbabwe responded to the pandemic and point out the lessons learned as a crisis preparedness strategy that can be adopted in providing library services.

4 Methods and materials

The study is situated in the interpretivist paradigm, in which a qualitative research approach was used. The research adopted was a multi-case study design in which three universities in Zimbabwe that were purposively selected and constituted the research sites where 2 were public and the other one a private university. One of the public universities represented the new public universities, and the other one the older public universities. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and participant observation. An interview guide was used with open-ended questions which were crafted and guided by the objectives of the study to avoid researcher bias. Fifteen participants drawn from the three universities were selected to participate in the interviews.

Using stratified random sampling technique, five participants from each participating university library were interviewed. The librarians on the research site were grouped according to the sections they work such as circulation, technical services, information, and communication technologies, reader services, and library management to come up with five strata. Simple random sampling technique was then used to pick one participant from the strata. Librarians from the sections were interviewed first and the process ended with library management who provided the summary of what transpired in all the sections. Online interviews were done to collect the data and to ensure the trustworthiness of the research instrument, 4 rigour criteria were looked at, that is credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Forero, Nahidi, De Costa, Mohsin, Fitzgerald, Gibson, McCarthy & Aboagye-Sarfo 2018). To ensure the credibility of the data, the researcher ensured that both the interviewer and interviewee had the required knowledge and skills that were sought in the study. An observation checklist was used to ensure consistency across the three research sites where participant observation was done as well as to triangulate the data sources for the confirmability of the results. A detailed track record of the data collection process was done to ensure that the findings were dependable. Purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure the transferability of the findings. Interviewer bias was reduced by involving three research assistants to be part of the interview process and recording the interviews.

The data was transcribed and analysed using thematic content analysis where the six steps of familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up were followed (Maguire & Delahunt 2017). The institutions were arranged alphabetically and named 1, 2, and 3 respectively for confidentiality purposes. Participants from Institution 1 were named A, B, C, D, and E, those from Institution 2 were F, G, H, I, and J, and those from Institution 3 were K, L, M, N, and O.

5 Findings and discussion

The research sites and participants were anonymised to conceal their identities, and the findings were presented according to the objectives.

5.1 Changes in library service delivery following the outbreak of COVID-19

The participants indicated that several changes were introduced because of the COVID-19 pandemic and all the staff members and patrons were supposed to observe the World Health Organisation (WHO) protocols and guidelines to curb the spread of the disease. These were pointed out by participants A, B, C, D, M, N, and O, who stated that they used sanitisers, book drop boxes, face masks, and footbaths at the library entrance, decongested the library and some staff members were working from home, allowing a limited number of users to enter the library building to allow social distance,

and serving patrons using online services as compared to face to face. The use of online reference services was enhanced using WhatsApp, Live Chat, Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams to hold virtual training sessions and meetings. This was in line with what was stated by Medawar and Tabet (2021) who pointed out that the closure of physical spaces necessitated the use of online services to provide access to library resources and services. They added that these online and blended services continued during the post-pandemic period since the pandemic gave birth to blended teaching and learning processes.

Participants B, F, M, and N added that their libraries created more WhatsApp groups to reach the patrons easily as stated by Lobo and Dhuri (2021) who mentioned the use of social networking sites to communicate with patrons who were working and learning from home. Participants E and M added that returned books were quarantined and they encouraged remote access to e- resources using the RemoteXs platform. Participant E stated that *loan periods were extended to avoid frequent visits to the library* in support of what was stated by Ncube and Nyabadza (2020).

Participant J pointed out that *the library created small instructional videos for students to access the library services* while Participant K indicated that *the library availed more open-access databases that were accessible via the library webpages* as supported by Dadhe and Dubey (2020) who talked about the increase in the use of open educational resources in teaching and learning. Participant L revealed that they *reduced the seating capacity of the library by arranging the tables and chairs according to the social distance requirements*. Participant N stated that *the library requested core e textbooks from the patrons so that the library could subscribe and provide access to those information services* since the patrons were operating from home as stated by Koos *et al.* (2021) and Rafiq *et al.* (2021) who indicated the need to strengthen virtual services to support online teaching and learning in the pandemic era as well as the need for library staff to work from home to ensure that service delivery was not disrupted.

Participant observation findings confirmed that service delivery changed following the outbreak of COVID-19 at all three libraries involved in the study as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Library service changes introduced following the outbreak of COVID-19

	Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3
Reference services			
Live chat	No	Yes	No
WhatsApp	Yes	Yes	Yes
Email	Yes	Yes	Yes
Facebook	Yes	Yes	Yes
Twitter	No	Yes	No
Reference desk	Open	Closed	Closed
Circulation services			
Self-check-in	No	No	No
Quarantining books	A week	3 days	6 days
Suspend borrowing	Allowed to borrow	Suspended	Allowed to borrow
Sanitising hands	Person sanitising	Automated sanitizer	Pedal sanitizers
Fumigation	Yes, every week	Yes, not scheduled	Yes, not scheduled
Self-isolation	Yes	Yes	Yes
Research support services			
How to guides	Developing	Available	Available
Online assistance	Yes	Yes	Yes

The findings indicated that Institution 1 was not using the live chat facility, while Institution 2 was using it. Institution 3 indicated that they faced challenges with the ICT section which did not approve their request to have a live chat account due to technological challenges within the institution. Reader Services Librarians of Institution 1 used WhatsApp to communicate with patrons, while those of Institution 2 used their accounts to communicate with patrons. Those from Institution 3 were in WhatsApp groups where they communicated with clients. This was in line with what was stated by Lobo and Dhuri (2021), and Medawar and Tabet (2021). In terms of email, official and personal accounts were used to communicate with patrons. Institutions 1 and 3 had official Facebook pages that were not active, while Institution 2 was using departmental accounts to communicate with patrons. The same applied to the use of Twitter accounts in these institutions. It was noted that the physical reference desk was closed at Institutions 2 and 3 during the COVID-19 pandemic and Institution 1 continued offering physical reference services and post-COVID-19, both virtual and physical services were continued to offer services to the patrons. These strategies were used to position the library, as stated by Dobreva (2020), Intahchomphoo and Brown (2021), and Tsekea and Chigwada (2021).

In terms of circulation services, there was no self-service at all the libraries, and patrons were allowed to borrow and return books at the circulation desk at Institutions 1 and 3 while Institution 2 suspended borrowing. The returned books were quarantined for 7 days, 6 days, and 3 days respectively, supporting what was stated by Ncube and Nyabadza (2020). All libraries encouraged patrons to sanitise their hands upon entering. They also sanitised surfaces and used a foot bath at the library entrance. Affected individuals were advised to self-isolate. All libraries provided virtual research support services at

different levels, as stated by Medawar and Tabet (2021). Institution 1 was in the process of developing the how-to guides which were greatly needed by the patrons. Institution 2 had the guides on the website and social media platforms, and they were also distributed to patrons via email. Institution 3 provided services to researchers online and was also providing training on referencing and citation. All the libraries were offering research support services using various platforms and had shifted meetings to online as pointed out by Intahchomphoo and Brown (2021).

5.2 The rationale for implementing changes

Participants A, B, D, E, F, I, J, M, and O indicated that the changes that took place in their libraries were necessitated by the need to safeguard staff and patrons from COVID-19, reach more patrons since they were not on campus, and comply with the WHO guidelines and government of Zimbabwe lockdown measures, as stated by Intahchomphoo and Brown (2021). Participant F added that there were fewer sessions of face-to-face teaching and learning, and the library should be relevant in such a scenario by providing services that can be accessed anytime, anywhere, if one is connected to the Internet. Participants K, L, M, N and O pointed out that the changes were made to provide more resources to the community, increase access and usage of resources and maintain access to resources while combating the spread of the disease. This supports what was pointed out by Intahchomphoo and Brown (2021) who stated the need to promote virtual services so that patrons are aware of them and avoid the spread of the virus among both library staff and users.

Participants were asked to share their feelings on what they felt had to be done to enable efficient service vis-à-vis the prevailing COVID-19 challenges. Six recommendations were suggested by the interviewees, namely, subsidising Internet and e-resource subscriptions, equipping staff and patrons to work remotely, developing enhanced software, upgrading ICT infrastructure, addressing misconceptions about online learning and COVID-19 among librarians and remodelling library services to match the changing needs. Participants felt that subsidising Internet connectivity and e-resource subscriptions would lead to increased usage of online platforms, as some librarians and patrons were deterred by the prohibitive costs. All the participants concurred that availing appropriate equipment to facilitate remote and online learning was critical in ensuring that library service delivery continued efficiently during the COVID-19 pandemic and post-COVID-19 era. Participant L remarked that universities should *"provide laptops and data to students to be able to access e-resources from home."* Participant B reiterated the need to *introduce more interactive platforms where library staff can interact with patrons instantly and serve them without delay*.

Calls made by the participants to avail resources for both library staff and students to access resources easily address inequality concerns raised by Altbach and de Witt (2020). It was evident from the interviewees' responses that negative perceptions of the new normal way of serving patrons and misconceptions about COVID-19 required attention. Participant H provided a summative solution to the challenge by remarking that, *librarians must shift their mindset from the old traditional ways and adapt to the new normal and be innovative and get data and gadgets to use*.

Participants I, K, N and O called on for the remodelling of library service by *"closure of the physical library"*, *"subscrib[ing] to more relevant e-resources"*, availing "*more e-resources to be subscribed to*", and *"… strategic planning and increase the purchase of specific e-books to support mostly undergraduate program(me)s that are mostly depended on certain books."* Closure of libraries' physical spaces was not unique to the three libraries studied as Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) report on the same; this was not only mandatory but a life-saving step. The decision to close libraries' physical spaces confirms Pokhrel and Chhetri's (2021) observation that COVID-19 presented new opportunities for libraries as they shifted towards online services.

5.3 Lesson learnt

Participants reported that they ensured staff could deliver services by providing protective equipment (PPE) such as face masks, face shields, and gloves. All three libraries promoted remote teaching and learning, with *"allocation of data bundles and tools and training on emerging tools and software"* being one of the priorities (Participant O). All three academic libraries employed innovative means of ensuring service delivery. For instance, Participant B indicated that *"librarians formed WhatsApp groups which include patrons…"* to enable the academic librarians *"to communicate with patrons and attend to their queries."* The findings reaffirm the assertion by Tsekea and Chigwada (2021) that librarians ought to be innovative to remain relevant.

The study also substantiates the increasing use of WhatsApp which was earlier reported by Ncube and Nyabadza (2020), and Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021). Access to library resources was further enhanced by facilitating remote access, especially using the libraries' web pages as a central portal for accessing services. Allowing library staff to work from home was not unique to Zimbabwean libraries; Rafiq *et al.* (2021) reported on the same approach to service delivery in the United States. In addition, campus-wide Wi-Fi facilities were upgraded, and library staff were afforded training opportunities so that they could competently offer services. The three libraries carried out monitoring and evaluation of library resource usage

and provided training through workshops and webinars to promote the usage of the library services. The importance of marketing library services for increased use was also stressed in a study by Intahchomphoo and Brown (2021). The monitoring and evaluation involved ensuring efficient service delivery on online platforms and this included *"making sure that all social media platforms were manned"* as pointed out by Participant C.

Participants indicated that many challenges were faced by the three institutions in service delivery. They indicated that they had challenges with gadgets that were not available to assist their clientele. Participants H, L, and M shared similar views when they said that they *"did not have laptops to use for the different activities like meetings and webinars."* Some participants highlighted that their institutions had data bundle challenges, which prevented them from providing services and resources to the users and that made usage statistics low. Participant C added that "*there was no data for patrons and staff, and we could not work from home because of data challenges"* and *"there was a lack of data to serve clients"* (Participant J). This affected them to attend virtual training as well.

Participants noted that some of their users could not access the resources because of network connectivity and power challenges since some of them stayed in rural areas. This was further complicated by some who had poor ICT skills due to their background, as highlighted by Participants C, F, and M. Participant D added that *late renewal to subscriptions of electronic resources affected the users' access to some of the electronic resources in the library*. Several solutions were suggested, and these included, *"institutions purchasing laptops and providing data bundles for staff members to be able to offer training and other services"* (Participant A) and *"Staff members took turns to come to campus to ensure that COVID-19 regulations were followed in the staff buses"* (Participant B). This helped staff members to provide services both on-campus and off-campus and attend online meetings and webinars for professional development. Participant I stated that *"we engaged the administration to provide data to the library staff to work from home."*

A study by Rafiq *et al.* (2021) established that library staff had to work from home, which in turn increased their workload. However, there was no policy addressing these new working routines. Participants indicated that library staff members resorted to the use of cheaper and affordable facilities like WhatsApp, emails, and other platforms (Participants B, D, E). Furthermore, participants E and F added that presentations were compressed to minimise the use of data and send recorded training guides and steps on how to access electronic resources. Ncube and Nyabadza's (2020) report also highlighted the increased usage of WhatsApp for service delivery although librarians in the country lamented the prohibitive costs of accessing the service. On a different note, Participant D indicated that *nothing was done at one of the institutions; they just had to wait for the lockdown to be suspended*. Lastly, Participant O added that *apart from what was raised above, there was an introduction of standard operating procedures (SOPs) relating to COVID-19 that enhanced protocols by users and staff members. Drop boxes to quarantine returned books were also introduced*.

6 Conclusion and recommendations

The library's physical services were greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and a lot of changes took place in the new normal, which were maintained up to the post-COVID-19 pandemic period. It was important to offer remote access to library products and services so that patrons would benefit during the online teaching and learning process. The findings from the study suggest that access to the internet and electronic resources was costly, and access to digital gadgets among librarians and patrons did not match demand. The study findings demonstrated that academic librarians in Zimbabwe embraced safety and wellness principles as they endeavour to ensure their safety from COVID-19 through different practices. The study also revealed that academic librarians in Zimbabwe employed various strategies to offer excellent service delivery by reskilling themselves to meet the demands of the new normal. The study showed that libraries continued to offer services online, despite the challenges that the three institutions encountered in providing services to their users. Library staff members played a significant role in ensuring that users had continued access to the resources, using different formats that were affordable to all users. The institutions provided support in the form of bundles and equipment to use.

The innovative services that were offered by the academic libraries were in line with the six categories of the social innovation typology model. Lifelong learning skills were offered to library users and library staff upskilled themselves to offer the digital services. All the libraries responded to the emergency by providing innovative services such as virtual reference services and access to online resources. The academic libraries dealt with the health of both users and staff by complying with social distancing measures and physical closure during the lockdown periods. Diversity and inclusion were incorporated into service delivery to meet the needs of various users during the pandemic period. The university community and other stakeholders were engaged to find solutions to problems that were encountered, and the libraries worked with everyone to ensure the economic development of the community despite the challenges offered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of this study have implications. Understanding how academic libraries adapted their services to support remote teaching and learning can inform future strategies for providing effective online resources and assistance to students and lecturers during pandemic times and under normal circumstances. This process can shed light on the infrastructural challenges faced due to the sudden shift to online services including issues such as Internet connectivity, remote access

to information resources, access to devices, and digital literacy among library staff and users. This can assist in addressing disparities among library users as a way of promoting equity and inclusivity in higher education. As a result, the results of the study can provide valuable lessons for building resilience and preparedness for future crises such as disaster preparedness and management, contingency planning, flexible staffing arrangements, and investment in adaptable technologies. Therefore, the study can contribute to the broader understanding of how academic libraries can effectively respond to crises and adapt to changing circumstances to better serve their communities.

The author recommends that institutions invest in electronic resources that patrons can access on and off campus. There is a need to ensure that all library services provided by the library are accessible remotely. Patrons should be informed about these services and trained on how to utilise and benefit from them. Libraries should provide links to open-access databases and encourage the use of open educational resources so that users can access information resources if they are unable to subscribe to e-resources. Libraries should develop easy-to-use "how-to guides" and tutorials to assist patrons in accessing virtual services from anywhere. These can be uploaded on websites and made available via social media platforms. Training sessions should be enhanced to ensure that virtual library services and resources are utilised. Librarians should offer virtual reference services and be available to answer queries from patrons using chat facilities, WhatsApp, and other social media platforms. Library administration must support staff members by giving them data bundles that enable them to serve the patrons from the comfort of their homes. A review of Internet access tariffs to make them more affordable is highly recommended.

The government's endeavour to facilitate low-cost internet access for educational purposes through the Zimbabwe Academic and Research Network (ZARNET) must be expedited. Equipping staff and patrons with appropriate gadgets to enable them to work remotely cannot be understated. The author reiterates raising awareness and trust among stakeholders about online teaching and learning as an equally good model of education. Library staff should receive training on how they can be productive in the new normal as part of continuous professional development. Ways of embracing new technologies, such as web conferencing tools are key in the new normal, and how to productively work from home. This can be achieved through formal courses, webinars, conferences, and workshops among other avenues. Patrons should also be trained on how they can utilise library resources in the new normal. Libraries should develop policies and standard operating procedures that should be followed by both staff and students during pandemic times. They should also educate patrons and staff on what is expected of them and continuously inform them about WHO protocols and guidelines as well as the updates from the Ministry of Health on the COVID-19 pandemic.

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