

## **CHALLENGES OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE NIGERIAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES**

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### **Abstract**

*The ripple effects of coronavirus pandemic have been felt on all facets of human activities including libraries which were abruptly closed in a bid to contain the spread of the virus. This study was therefore, carried out to examine the challenges of COVID-19 pandemic on the Nigerian academic libraries. Descriptive survey design was used and data collected via questionnaire. The study population consisted of 83 library personnel in Nigeria that took part in the online survey. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages. Findings showed that the Nigerian academic libraries personnel had high level of Covid-19 awareness. The highest coping strategy employed during the pandemic was sharing information. In addition, finding revealed that the lockdown had negative impact on the Nigerian academic libraries. Lack of preparedness for COVID-19, closure of library activities, lack of remote library services and inability to connect to the community for the provision of accurate and reliable information through library constituted services challenge. Therefore, libraries and librarians should learn from the pandemic and take strategic action against future occurrence.*

**Keywords:** *Covid-19 pandemic, Academic Libraries, Librarians, Nigeria.*

## **Introduction**

The novel coronavirus disease also known as COVID-19 has been identified in all the continents of the World. Most people by now have heard of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus -2 (SARS-CoV-2), or COVID-19 and its dreadful impact on the world (Burtram, 2020). This was after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus a public health emergency on 11 March, 2020, hence, a pandemic. The coronavirus disease is pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan, China and was first reported to the WHO Country Office in China on 31 December 2019 (WHO, 2020).

Such events as this are accompanied by an explosion of clinical and epidemiological information and research. In time like this, it is the duty of librarians and other information professionals to provide continually updated information about the spread of the coronavirus disease. The goal of both local and international librarians is to deliver the right message in the right way at the right time, to the clients and the society at large. This information provides an overview of the novel coronavirus to help communities understand the risk factor, identify signs and symptoms, and prevent it from further transmission.

In this unprecedented time, the role of librarians in dispensing educational services cannot be over emphasized. This is because the principal responsibility of librarians is to provide information services that will contribute to ameliorating the challenges of COVID-19 at both local and international level. From the foregoing, it is imperative to know the impact of the COVID '19 pandemics on the academic libraries in the Nigerian context.

Considering the devastating effects of the COVID-19 on all aspect of the entire world, librarians may be faced with various challenges in carrying out their very important role of providing detailed and genuine information on various library platforms. As with COVID-19 disasters, pandemic information needs, are case-specific, but subject matter librarians such as health librarians should be able to utilize professional skills to support administrative decision making, in combating the spread of this infectious outbreak.

## **Literature Review**

The coronavirus disease otherwise called COVID-19 has impacted almost all aspects of daily life. The number of affected countries had also increased drastically. As a result of its alarming levels of spread and severity, the Director-General of WHO, characterized it as a pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). The Merriam Webster Online

dictionary described a pandemic as an outbreak of a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area and affects an exceptionally high proportion of the population.

COVID-19 is coming with a damaging effect and the library is not an exception. Libraries have been playing the role of providing reliable and up-to-date information during times of crisis and pandemic for many decades (Ahmed, Bath, Sbaffi and Demartini, 2019; Featherstone, Boldt, Torabi, and Konrad, 2012; Zach, 2011). Wolf, Serper and Opsasuick (2020) stressed that many people are aware of the threats of COVID-19 outbreak. This cannot be divulged from the fact that the pandemic has ravaged about two hundred countries across the globe, with it stings badly felt by the developed nations of the world.

The advent of the internet, social media, and other means for libraries to communicate with the public, has only further the capacity of libraries to serve in this role (Wang and Lund, 2020). The purpose of this article therefore is to further support that role by examining the challenges of COVID-19 pandemic on the Nigeria Academic Libraries. This is imperative, much so, that Alegbeleye and Mohammed (2020) has postulated that Africa may be positioned to have the most severe and under-detected outcomes related to COVID-19 infection.

### **Objectives of the study**

The objective of the study is to appraise the challenges of covid-19 pandemic on the Nigeria academic libraries. The specific objectives are to:

- i. determine the socio-demographic characteristics of library personnel in Nigeria;
- ii. ascertain the level of awareness of COVID-19 pandemics among library personnel in academic libraries in Nigeria;
- iii. ascertain the coping strategies used by library personnel during the period of COVID-19 pandemic in academic libraries in Nigeria;
- iv. find out the lockdown status experienced by library personnel in academic libraries in Nigeria;
- v. identify the challenges of COVID-19 pandemics in academic libraries in Nigeria;
- vi. determine some precautionary measures to be taken against future occurrence of similar pandemic outbreak in academic libraries in Nigeria;

- vii. find out steps to be taken by the management of academic libraries in time of pandemic.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were answered in the study:

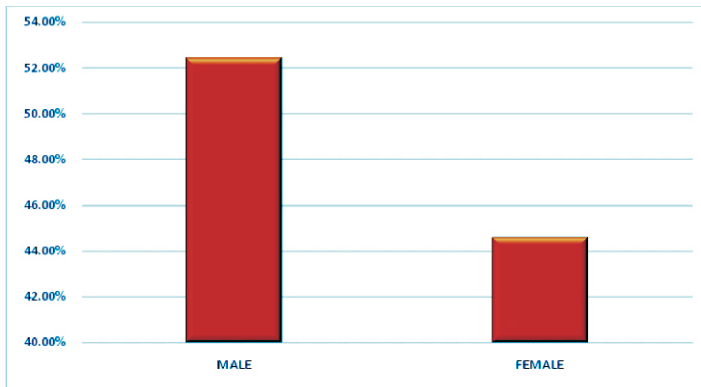
- RQ1. What is the level of awareness of COVID-19 pandemic among library personnel in academic libraries in Nigeria?
- RQ2. What are the coping strategies used by library personnel during the period of COVID-19 pandemic in academic libraries in Nigeria?
- RQ3. What lockdown measures by the government are experienced by library personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic by library personnel in academic libraries in Nigeria;
- RQ4. What are the challenges faced by library personnel in academic libraries in Nigeria as a result of COVID-19 pandemic?
- RQ5. What are the precautionary measures to be taken against future occurrences of similar pandemic outbreak in academic libraries in Nigeria?  
  
find out steps to be taken by the management of academic libraries in time of pandemic.
- RQ6. What steps are to be taken by the management of academic libraries in time of pandemic?

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a quantitative methodology using descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of eighty-three library personnel in Nigeria who took part in the online survey and were enumerated. The instrument of data collection was questionnaire. It contained questions on respondents' demographic characteristics and multiple choice questions in line with the objectives of the study. The consent of the respondents was sought. All the eighty-three copies of the questionnaire administered were returned and analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages.

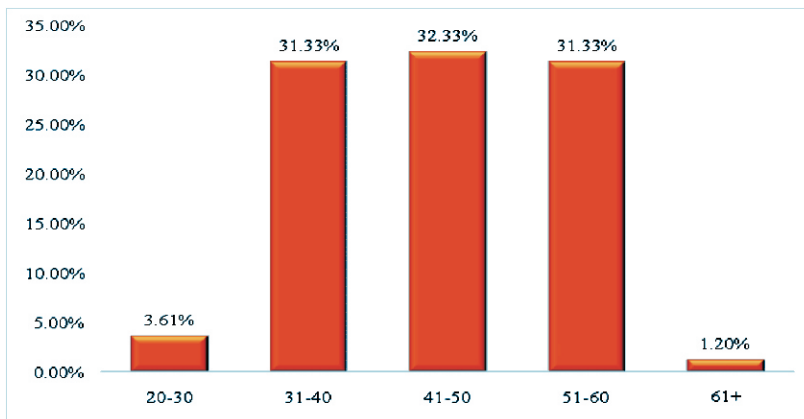
### **Findings of the study**

The demographic characteristic of the respondents was analysed using descriptive statistics and the results are presented in Figures 1, 2 and 3.



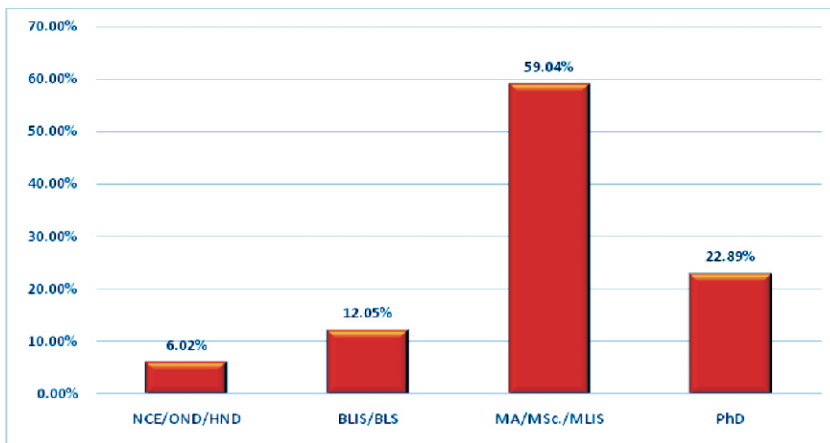
The result of the study showed that 52.42% were male while 44.58% were female.

**Figure 2: Age**



The demographic characteristics of the respondents showed that 32.3% respondents falls within the age bracket of 41-50 years old, 31.3% fall within 31-40 and 51-60 years respectively.

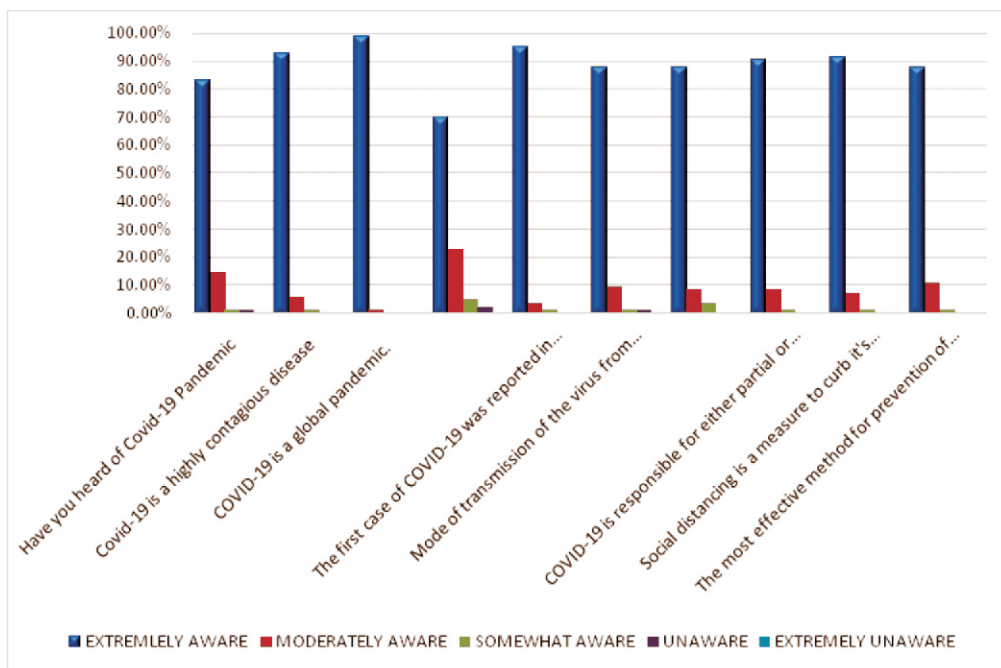
**Figure 3: Highest Academic Qualification**



The highest qualification of the respondents revealed that the majority with (59%) were Master's Degree holders. This was followed by PhD with (22.9%) and Bachelor Degree holders in Library Science with (12.1%).

**RQ1:** What is the level of awareness of COVID-19 pandemic among library personnel in academic libraries in Nigeria?

**Figure 4:** Level of awareness of COVID-19 pandemic among library personnel in academic libraries in Nigeria

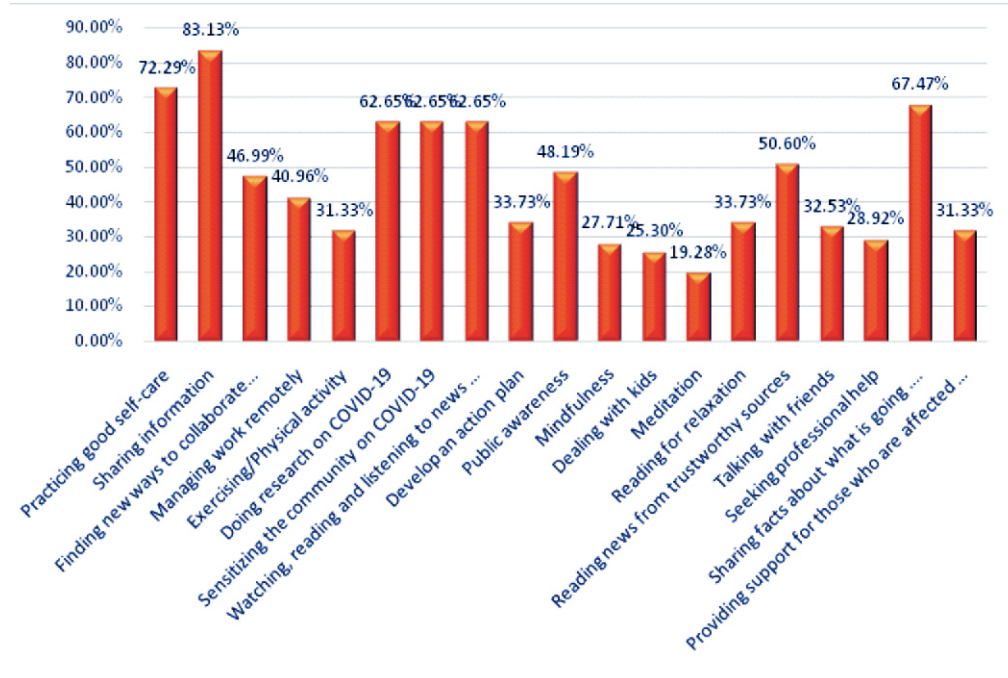


The result revealed that the level of awareness of library personnel in academic libraries in Nigeria is very high. A total of 100% respondents were extremely aware that COVID-19 is a global pandemic. Over 70% respondents affirmed positively that they have heard about COVID-19 pandemic, the disease is highly contagious, and that it was first reported in Wuhan, in China. Similarly, the respondents were fully aware that it has a multiple mode of transmission and that one of the most effective ways of curbing it is to maintain social distancing.

**RQ2:** What coping strategies are employed by library personnel during COVID-19 pandemic in academic libraries in Nigeria?



**Figure 5:** Coping strategies are employed by library personnel during COVID-19 pandemic in academic libraries in Nigeria

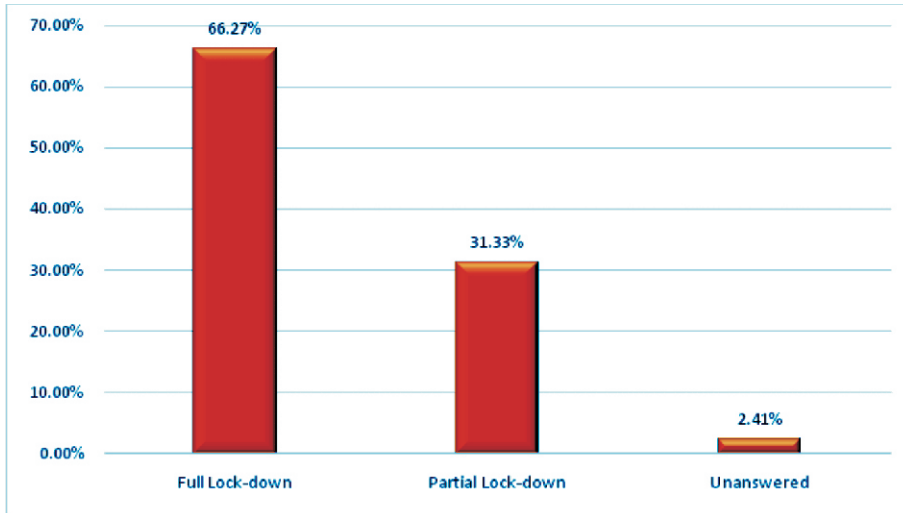


Among the coping strategies employed by library personnel during the period of the pandemic is that they were busy sharing information (89.1%), practicing good self-care (72.3%), showing facts about what is going on(67.5%), carrying out research work, sensitizing the community about COVID-19 and listening to news.

**Additional responses include:** “Visiting hospitals and creating public awareness to people prone to high risk of death when they are infected e.g., asthmatic patients, aged, diabetic patients, people with respiratory disorder, pregnant women, nursing mothers and the likes”.

**RQ3:** What lockdown measures by the government are experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic by library personnel in academic libraries in Nigeria?

**Figure 6:** Lockdown measures by the government experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic by library personnel in academic libraries in Nigeria



The responses showed that 66.27% went on total lockdown while 31.33% experienced partial lockdown.

RQ4: What are the challenges of Covid-19 pandemic by library personnel in academic libraries in Nigeria?

**Figure 7a:** Challenges of Covid-19 pandemic experienced by library personnel in academic libraries in Nigeria

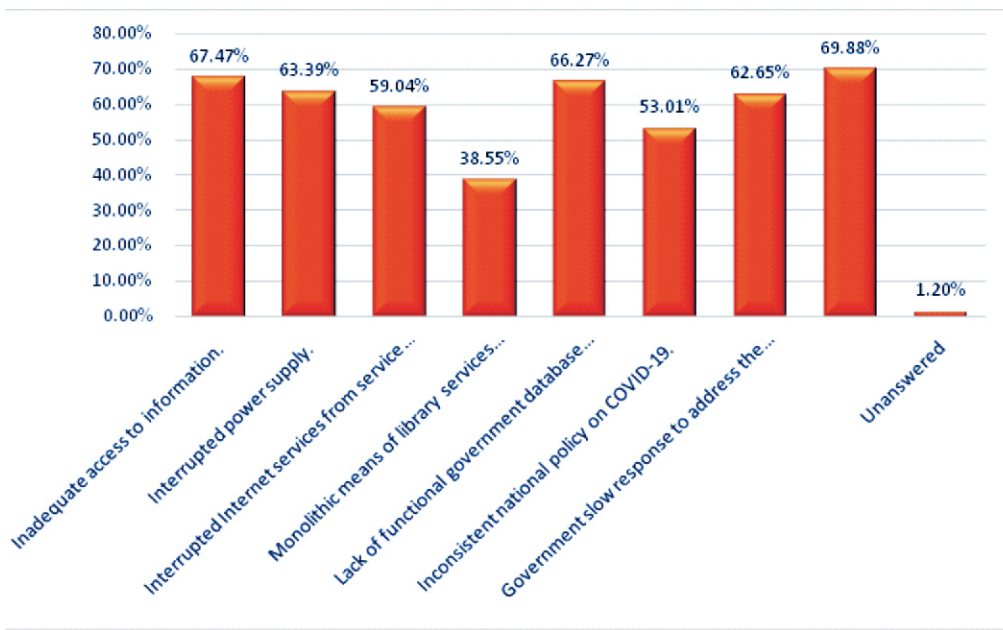




Figure 7a showed that 69.9% respondents reported that the lockdown has negative impact on the library, 67.5% respondents noted that it was the challenge of inadequate access to information. 66.3% respondents frowned at the lack of functional government databases to access information and 62.7% respondents admitted that government's slow response to address the pandemic is a critical challenge.

**Figure 7b:** Challenges of Covid-19 pandemic by library personnel in academic libraries in Nigeria

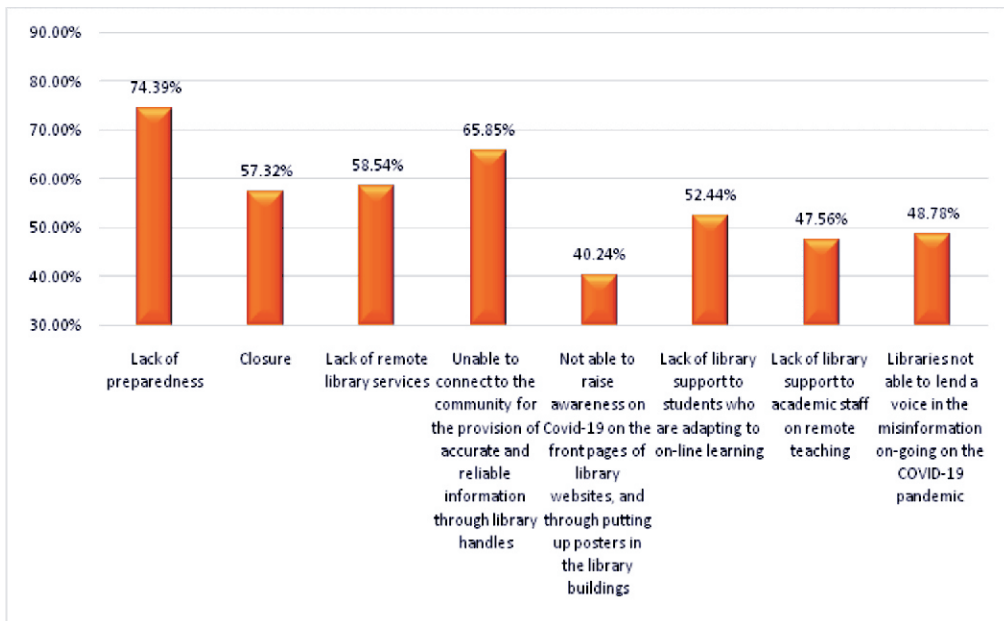
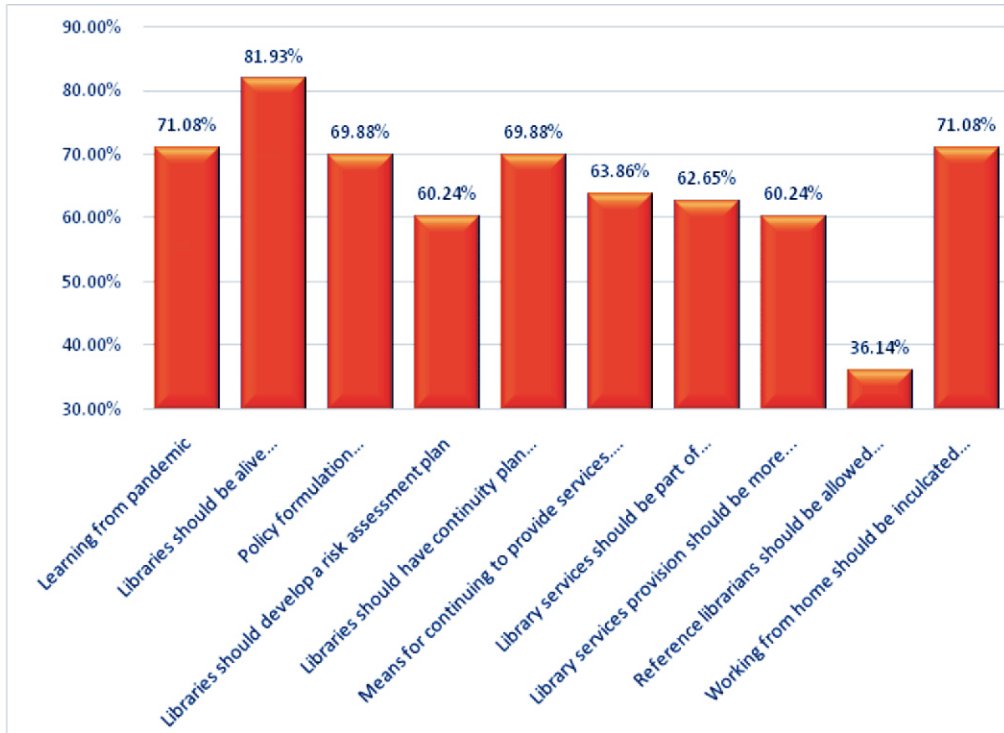


Figure 7b revealed that lack of preparedness for COVID-19, closure of library activities, lack of remote library services and inability to connect to the community for the provision of accurate and reliable information through library constituted services challenge.

In addition, other responses include: "Lack of provision of information in different local languages that layman can easily comprehend by libraries". "Poor awareness services to library users about how COVID-19 cases are being treated using homemade remedies"

**RQ5:** What precautionary measures are to be taken against future occurrences of similar pandemic outbreak in academic libraries in Nigeria?

**Figure 8:** Precautionary measures to be taken against future occurrences of similar pandemic outbreak in academic libraries in Nigeria



The results of precautions to be taken by the library against future occurrences includes: libraries should be alive to their responsibility by providing information to the community. Libraries and librarians should not jettison lessons learnt from the pandemic and that policy of library personnel working from home among others must be put in place by the library administration.

Additional responses include: “Libraries should keep records concerning pandemics and diseases for reference purposes. Indigenous knowledge resources on medicine should be properly documented for future use”

### Discussion of the findings

The results of this study revealed that majority of the respondents were aware of the occurrence of COVID- 19 pandemic which might not be unconnected to the professional inclination of the respondents. The finding also showed that COVID-19 is widely known globally. The result of this study is in line with the finding of Wolf, Serper and Opsasnick (2020) that many people are aware of the threats of COVID-19 outbreak.

The finding of this study on coping strategies revealed that sharing information, practicing good self-care, sharing facts about what is going on and giving clear information on how to reduce the risk of the infection to people were adopted by library personnel in Nigeria. This is in line with the findings of Ahmed et al (2019), Featherstone et al (2012) and Zach (2011) that libraries have been in the frontline of providing accurate and timely information in times of crisis and pandemic for decades. Watching, reading and listening to news, doing research on COVID-19 and sensitizing the community on COVID-19 are also in agreement with the view of Wang and Lund (2020), that libraries have been communicating with the public through the use of the internet and social media.

The study found that COVID-19 pandemic came with its many challenges as observed by the respondents. The most prominent challenge faced was the closure of library activities. This has in no measure has hindered development. When free flow of information is hindered, it retards the flow of development. This is consistent with the submission of Ogunmodede and Adio (2012) who found a direct relationship between information flow and strategic produce of library managers.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, there were essential services allowed to carry out the day-to-day activities, such as the frontline medical services, the pharmaceutical services, the free transportation of food items etc. Library services such as reference service should be allowed as one of the essential services allowed by the government to operate. This is because as essentials as food to the body, and drug to the sick, so also, and even much more is information to development. If this is done, it will go a long way to help whosoever is in need of information to get it at their fingertip.

From the findings of the study, it was gathered that libraries and its personnel should not handle the present phenomenon with levity. Library personnel must learn from the pandemic. This may include changing our method of operation in readiness for such an occurrence in the future.

Similarly, as part of precautionary measures, librarians are expected to be alive to their responsibility in fighting against misinformation during the period of COVID-19 pandemic. Provision of accurate information is an antidote to every form of misinformation and disinformation in the society. This assertion corroborates the submission of Ahmed et al (2019) Featherstone et al (2012) that library personnel have been playing the role of provision of up-to-date information especially in the time of disaster. However, the onus is on librarians to be responsive in providing online services to users remotely.

## **Conclusion**

The findings showed that library personnel were extremely aware that COVID-19 is a global pandemic and it is highly contagious disease. In addition, they employed a number of strategies in coping with the pandemic during the lockdown. However, the library personnel were confronted with several challenges that hindered their potential during the lockdown.

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