



# THE DLIS 2022

**Information and Knowledge Management in  
the 4th Industrial Revolution and COVID-19 Era**

**Proceedings of The 2022 DLIS 4th Biennial  
Conference**

**Hosted by Department of Library and Information Studies  
(DLIS)**

**25 - 27 April, 2022**

**VIRTUAL CONFERENCE**

**Editor: Prof. P. Jain, Prof. N. M. Mnjama, Prof. B.N. Jorosi & Prof.  
O. Oladokun**



# **The 2022 DLIS 4<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference**

## **Information and Knowledge Management in the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution and Covid-Era**

**Proceedings of the DLIS 2022 International Conference**

**Hosted by the Department of Library and Information  
Studies (DLIS)**

**25<sup>th</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> April, 2022**

**VIRTUAL**

**Editors: Prof. P. Jain, Prof. N. M. Mnjama, Prof. B. N. Jorosi &  
Prof. O. Oladokun**

**Published by:**

Department of Library and Information Studies  
University of Botswana  
Private Bag 00703  
Gaborone Botswana

**Copyright:** © Department of Library and Information Studies. All rights reserved.

# THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIANSHIP IN THE COVID-19 ERA IN ZIMBABWE

Josiline Chigwada

Deputy Librarian

Chinhoyi University of Technology, Zimbabwe

Rosemary Maturure

University Librarian

Africa University, Zimbabwe

## Abstract

*The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were felt in all sections of the society, libraries included. A study was done to examine the changing landscape of academic librarianship in Zimbabwe as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of the study paper was to assess the changes that were brought about to three university libraries due to the pandemic and examine the challenges that were faced by academic librarians in meeting the information needs of patrons. Data was collected through an online questionnaire that was distributed to University Library Directors, Deputy Directors, Technology Librarians, Reader Services Librarians and Technical Service Librarians to gauge the effects of COVID-19 on service delivery. A multiple case study approach was used and three public university libraries were sampled using random sampling. The findings of the study showed that all the library services were greatly affected by the closure of physical libraries as a way of avoiding the spreading of the virus. Students were forced to vacate halls of residence and were not allowed on campus although they were supposed to continue learning so as to finish the semester. Academic librarians were forced to redesign their services and were offering off campus e-resources as well as virtual reference services to keep assisting the patrons when teaching and learning shifted online. The major challenge experienced in the delivery of library services to remote users included issues of internet access, electricity connectivity, bandwidth in far flung areas and shortage of equipment to deliver the services. The authors recommend the urgent need to reskill and upskill the academic librarians to be able to fully operate in a virtual environment as well as to remain relevant in the “new normal”. Institutions should be intentional in offering support to academic libraries so that they get the necessary infrastructure to offer library services and products in the digital and COVID-19 era.*

**Keywords:** *Academic Librarianship, COVID-19 Pandemic, Libraries and new normal, Library closure, Redesign of library services, Virtual reference services, Online teaching and learning*

## INTRODUCTION

A library is the heartbeat of an institution and having it at an institution helps learners to get resources and services to complete their studies. The COVID-19 pandemic brought changes to the way institutions operate, libraries included. Institutions were closed, students were forced to go home and staff members were forced to stay at home and work from home. The way of living and operations in libraries and institutions changed and staff and students had to adjust since

most activities came to a standstill during the lockdown period. Students were forced to learn from their homes and this made the librarians and information professionals to change the way that they operate. Librarians were quick to adapt to new changes and made sure that they continued to offer library services to their users. Since students were not staying on campus, ways of providing services were to be devised by the librarians. These changes made the librarians learn and upgrade themselves on what to do. Users had to rely on e-resources which were accessible as compared to hard copies that were locked inside the libraries.

Universities in Zimbabwe have libraries at their institutions and some have branch libraries that are allocated in town to cater for those who do not stay in town. These institutions are located in different regions to make sure that all the regions are included and students from different backgrounds are included in the study. The three institutions under study were selected from different provinces which are Harare, Manicaland, and Matabeleland. One of the institutions is a private university while two are public. The library IT activities are supported by the infrastructures in the libraries and also in the IT section of the university and some of the institutions were delivering online services before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is against this background that this study was done to

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

COVID-19 brought so many challenges in the academic life of both learners and lecturers and library users had to go through a hard time. Activities at universities had to stop and institutions had to close because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning continued to take place and libraries had to come up with ways and strategies on how to provide the services to the users. Connell, Wallies and Comeaux (2021) noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted higher education, including academic libraries. The COVID-19 pandemic led to unprecedented upheaval in the provision of library services at universities and colleges across the country as the institutions moved to online courses (Tolppanen 2021). This study sought to find out the changes that were brought about because of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe and how three public university libraries in Zimbabwe provided services to the students and faculty members

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The following objectives guided the study:

1. To examine the changes that were brought by COVID-19 in academic libraries?
2. To analyse the challenges faced by academic libraries as a result of COVID-19?
3. To document the opportunities brought about by COVID-19 in academic libraries.

## **ACADEMIC LIBRARY SERVICES PRE-COVID-19**

The world considered that the library was a social institution within an academic setup that provided numerous personal and specialized services to its user community (Panda, Bhatt, Vijaykumar and Singh 2021). Because of this, academic institutions in Zimbabwe invested a lot in opening library services to its clientele late into the night and this helped the users to maximize the conducive reading environment after having classes during the day and also those who studied on part time-basis. Users used to enjoy interacting and socializing with library staff members and this gave them time to get closer to them whenever they needed help. Before COVID-19 libraries were providing many services to their clientele face to face and there were a number of branch libraries off campus where users would go and research and get reading resources to use in the comfort of their homes. The clientele enjoyed all the services in the library and they had assistance from the library staff members at any time of the day. A study by Ameh, Ukwuoma and Oye (2021) revealed that since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been library closures around the world. Globally, teachers, students and librarians have been forced to transition to an online-only environment, as numerous schools, universities and libraries have been compelled to close their campuses in response to COVID-19 mandates (Esherenana and Oyevwe-Tinuoye 2021). There was no challenge with data bundles before the COVID-19 pandemic for the library users since they were using hard copies on campus and Wi-Fi connection.

## **ACADEMIC LIBRARY SERVICE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

During the COVID-19 pandemic period, library services changed and library staff members had to find ways to continue offering services to their users despite the closure of physical libraries.

Learning continued to take place online using different digital platforms and examinations were done online in some institutions. Libraries provided online digital resources and virtual services to the users for research purposes. Staff members had to attend training, workshops and conferences online and this made these meetings to be attended by many people since some of them were being done online and the expenses for conference fee was affordable. This helped staff members to get new technological skills which helped them as they grew in the profession and offered reference services to their users online. This made life easy for the users because now they could get in touch with the library staff members. According to Newman (2021), the good news is that many leaders developed more confidence in making major changes and have proven to themselves that they can act quickly because COVID-19 forced them to. In addition, UNESCO, in cooperation with the European Commission, Twitter, and the World Jewish Congress, launched a series of visual learning resources in the form of infographics to raise awareness of phenomena on the rise during COVID-19, including the existence and consequences of conspiracy theories (UNESCO, 2020).

Clear processes were also needed for the sanitation and disinfection of books and other resources, keeping on the monitoring of research on how materials should be handled to mitigate risk of exposure to the virus (Institute of Museum and Library Services 2020). Libraries in Zimbabwe were fumigated once a day, sanitisers were put by the doors, masking up and washing of hands were done before entering the library. Libraries had to quarantine books in the drop boxes after they were returned by the users for a number of days. The number of users entering the library were minimized to make sure that social distancing was maintained. Recording of names were done for all who entered the library and their contact details for follow-ups in case of a COVID-19 case. Opening hours were reduced because of curfew times so as to allow students and staff to get to their homes within the stipulated times.

### **ACADEMIC LIBRARY SERVICES POST COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

COVID-19 impacted greatly on information centres and academic libraries in Zimbabwe. This made academic libraries come up with ways on how to continue offering services to their users. Librarians had to train users on how to access online resources, collaborate with other libraries

and share ideas. Chakraborty and Jana (2021) noted that librarians equipped their users with the required information literacy skills adequately. According to Gwyer (2015), collaboration among libraries increased access to digital resources and the sharing of resources as inter-library loan systems and enhanced research output. The pandemic helped to identify work roles that can be downsized or replaced with technology as a technique to mitigate infection risk while retaining productivity (Kumar and Modalavalasa 2020). Post COVID-19, professionals, across the globe, opened the virtual doors to their houses and families, while ‘home-working’ was established as the new standard (Martzoukou 2021). The main difference between the higher education field in Zimbabwe and those in European countries is the lack of sufficient infrastructure to utilise online teaching and learning as well as lack of basic equipment from the students' side and connectivity challenges (Taru, 2020).

### **CHANGES BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The first objective of the study sought to find out the changes that were brought by the COVID-19 pandemic in academic institutions in Zimbabwe. The pandemic forced individuals and businesses around the world to shift to working remotely using multiple services, such as Zoom, Skype, Slack, Microsoft Office Suite, and G-Suite applications and this transition is forcing companies to re-evaluate their long-term staffing needs (Kumar and Modalavalasa 2020). Libraries come up with innovative ways of reaching out to their users through different ways. Similar sentiments were shared by Mohan, Rao and Shivananda (2021) who noted that the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated librarians to come up with reformed, effective, and innovative services by implementing technologies to keep the information flow from the libraries to both the categories of users, i.e., users who use the library remotely as well as users who visit the library physically. Ashworth (2020) further noted that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought a lot of creativity and innovative practices in library programming, operations and services. Libraries have been repurposed to perform traditional conventional and other social functions and thus, realigning library services.

### **OPPORTUNITIES BROUGHT ABOUT BY COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a rapid leveraging of digital skills, platforms, expertise, and models of service delivery to continue providing exceptional and transformative experiences for the University of Calgary community (Murphy, Lewis and McKillop 2021). Furthermore, during the pandemic, academic libraries were involved in actively offering additional services around the curation of resources related to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak to help academic researchers advance their understanding as well as help them increase awareness of the importance of information evaluation for the public as a protective mechanism against the COVID-19 ‘infodemic’ (World Health Organization, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis provided an opportunity for the universities to reconsider if their leadership in all aspects had the requisite skill sets to manage their departments during the crisis (Stoller 2020). Library consultations significantly shifted, and many libraries halted face-to-face interactions due to COVID-19 (Anderson et al., 2021). However, these changes brought some challenges in the libraries. Academic libraries in Zimbabwe managed to offer digital and virtual library services; however, they faced challenges, including a lack of internet connectivity to interact with patrons (Tsekea and Chigwada, 2020).

### **CHALLENGES FACED AS A RESULT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The second objective sought to assess the challenges brought about by COVID-19 to selected academic libraries in Zimbabwe. When COVID-19 struck in different continents, libraries faced some challenges in providing information to their users. Some other challenges include poor funding, indifferent attitudes of library managers, absence of well-defined and uniform library policies and non-compliance with the demands of ICT (Nkechi et al., 2018). It was concluded that COVID-19 by its nature is disruptive to everyday life, restrictive to human-social relations and is an instigator to tradition, spirituality and intellectuality in the country (Chirisa et. al, 2021). The pandemic has affected the users in finding the information they need from the libraries due to the worldwide lockdown (Asif and Singh 2020). The pandemic impacted heavily on academic research productivity of faculty members (Krukowski et. al, 2021). There were delays in publications and printing of books as people were working from home and this made libraries unable to get reading resources from the publishers. Some of the teaching staff, students and library staff lost professional development opportunities to support research because of



limitations to travelling in universities. Limited access to campuses made the users fail to access the hard books that were available in the libraries since most of them could not afford to pay for data bundles. Reading environment was poor and unwelcome to the students and they found it difficult to concentrate on their studies. The structure of education is altering, and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic situation, users required more online services, and their expectations were beyond the limitations with limited and inadequate library budget (Neufeld, 2014). Ohler and Pitts (2021) recognize the many changes COVID-19 has brought to the entire academic enterprise that has long been challenged by rising personnel and healthcare costs, a highly competitive market for new students and research funding, and pressures to upgrade physical infrastructure.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study used an interpretivist paradigm using a qualitative research approach. A survey was employed using a multiple case study design where data was collected using an online questionnaire which was distributed to university library directors, deputy library directors, technology librarians, reader services librarians and technical services librarians in order to gauge the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on library service delivery. Three public university libraries in Zimbabwe were sampled using random sampling and 15 librarians were selected using purposive sampling and the questionnaire was distributed online. The research sites and the respondents were anonymised for confidential purposes. Thirteen responses were obtained out of the sample of 15 librarians. The survey monkey analysis feature was used to analyse the data which was presented thematically.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The first objective of the study sought to document the changes that were brought by the COVID-19 pandemic in academic libraries. The results showed that all the library services including circulation, acquisition, reference, technical, information literacy training and library orientation were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Another respondent chose “other” and

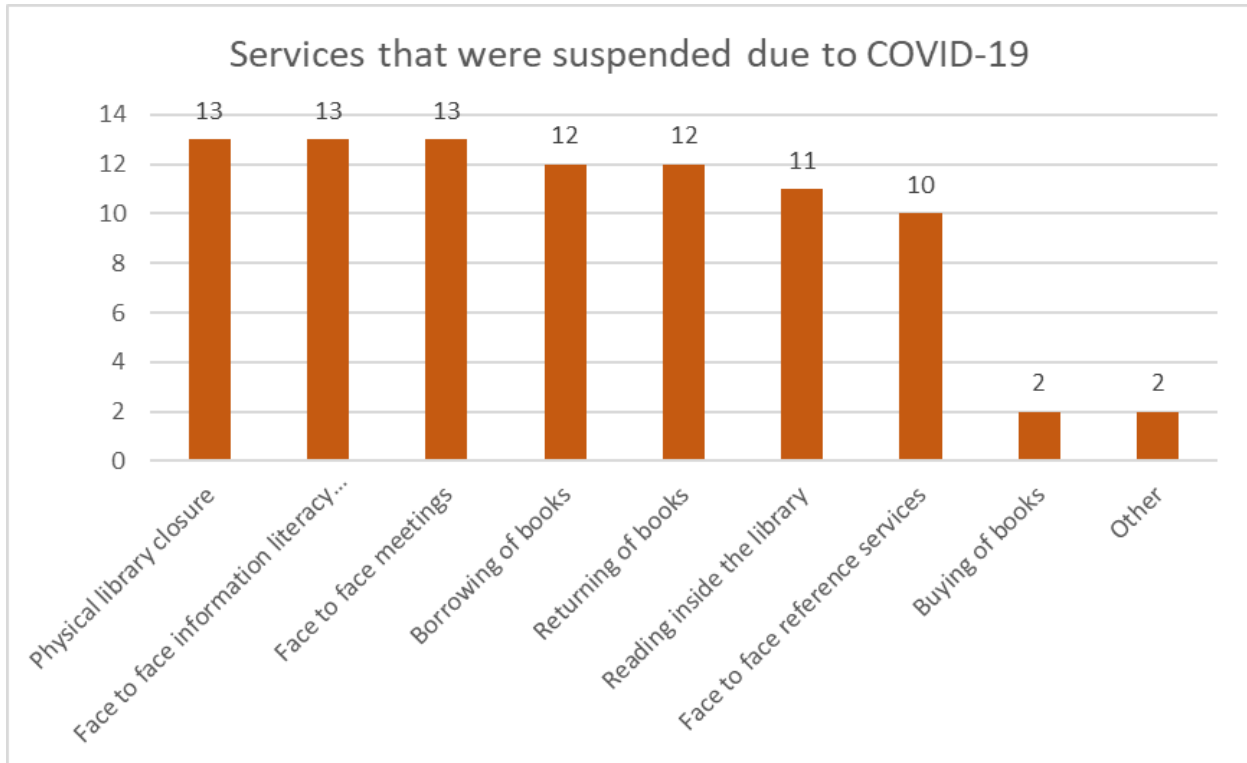
added that they used to hold research clinics for researchers and these were also affected as shown in table 1. This is in line with what was stated by Ukwuoma and Oye (2021) revealed that since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been library closures around the world. Chirisa et. al, (2021) noted that COVID-19 by its nature is disruptive to everyday life, restrictive to human-social relations and is an instigator to tradition, spirituality and intellectuality in the country.

**Table 1:** Library services affected by COVID-19

<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS</b>
Other (Research Clinics)	1
Acquisitions	5
Technical services	6
Reference	11
Information literacy training	11
Library Orientation	11
Circulation	13

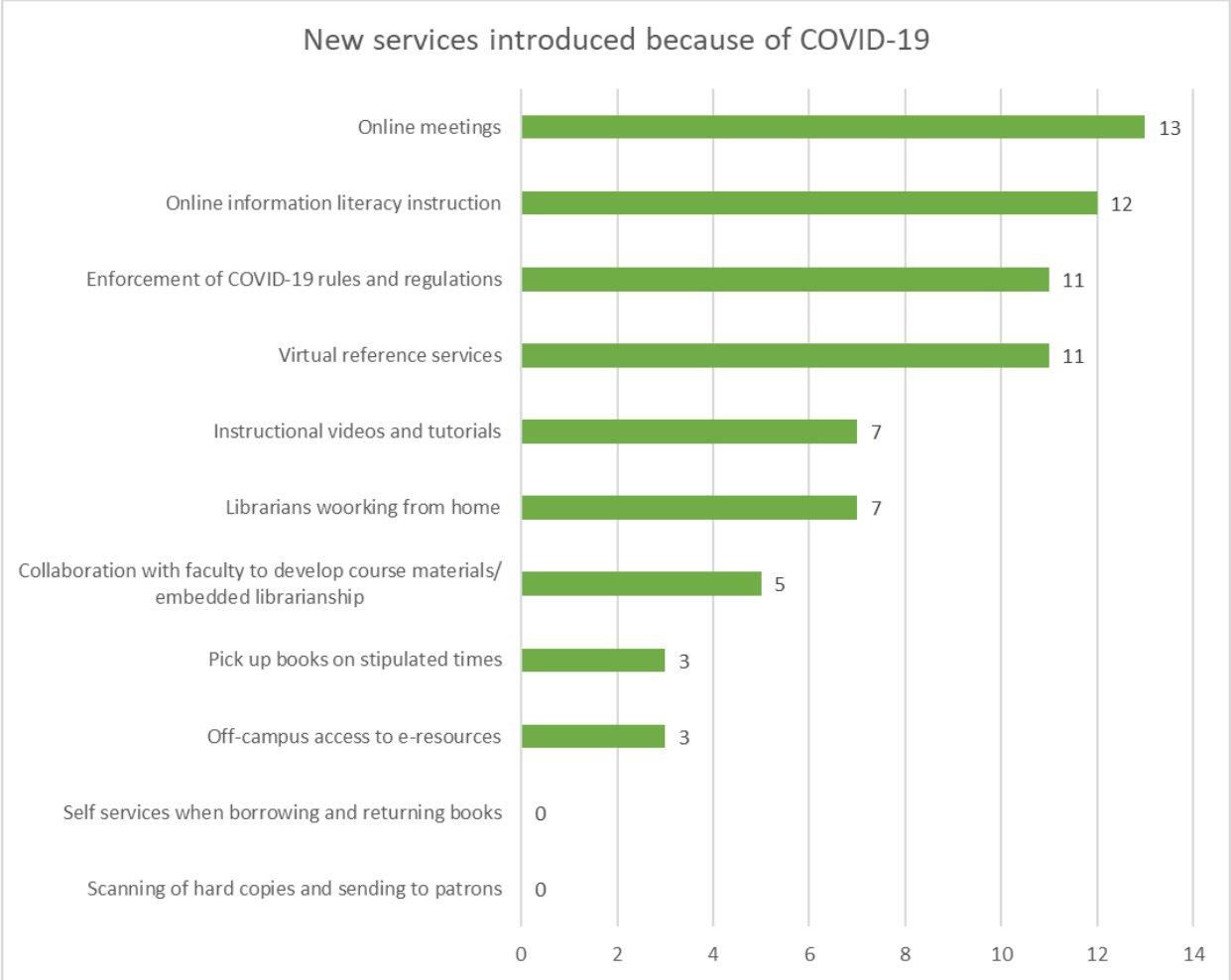
It was noted that all face to face activities were suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic era since people were supposed to minimise contacts in service delivery. The services that were suspended are shown in figure 1. Those who chose “other” indicated that the baggage area was closed and patrons who visited the library were supposed to come without bags. This was supported by Esherenana and Oyevwe-Tinuoye (2021) who pointed out that globally, teachers,

students and librarians have been forced to transition to an online-only environment, as numerous schools, universities and libraries have been compelled to close their campuses in response to COVID-19 mandates.



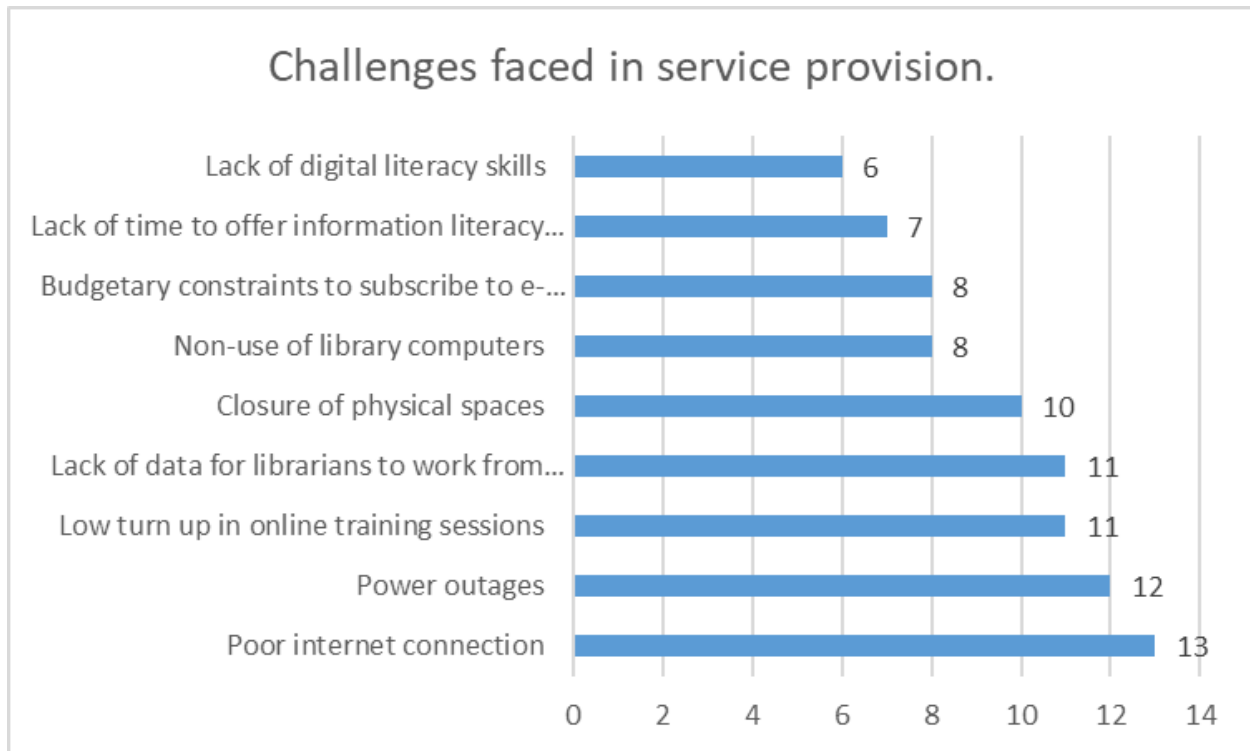
**Figure 1:** Services suspended due to COVID-19 pandemic

Academic libraries in Zimbabwe introduced new services during the COVID-19 pandemic era to replace the banned services in a bid to curb the spread of the virus. The results showed that most of the new services were virtual since there was a need to minimise direct contact with other staff members and patrons. The services introduced are shown in figure 2 and this is supported by Ashworth (2020) who stated that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought a lot of creativity and innovative practices in library programming, operations and services. In Zimbabwe academic libraries that were studied, there were no self-service in borrowing and returning books and the librarians did not scan hard copies to send to the patrons during the COVID-19 pandemic era.



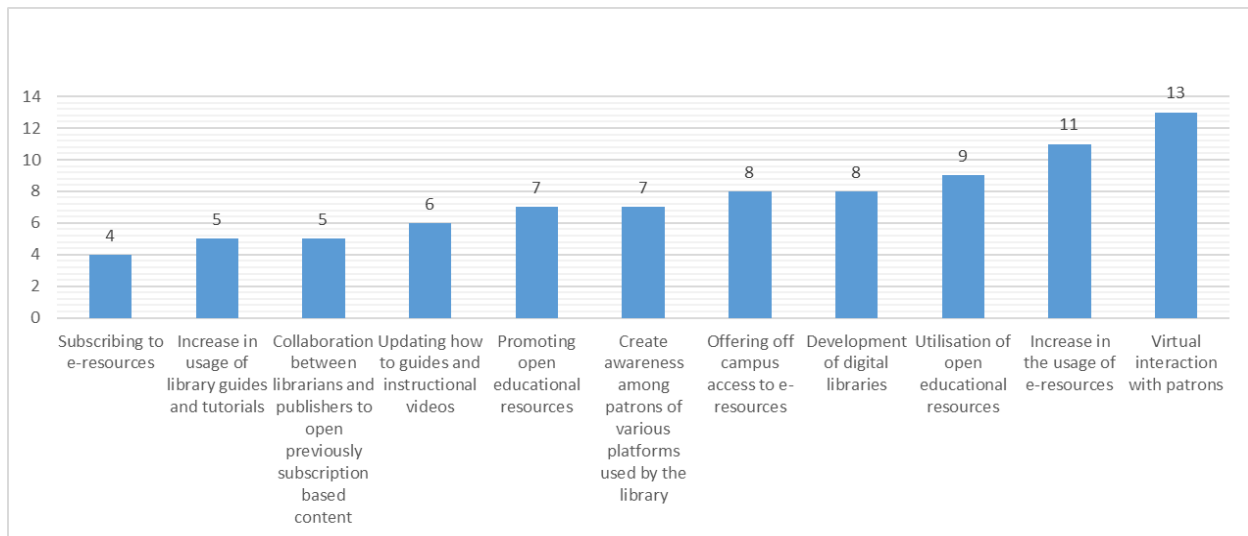
**Figure 2:** Services that were introduced because of COVID-19 pandemic

The second objective dealt with the challenges faced by academic libraries in the COVID-19 pandemic era. The respondents indicated that they faced a number of challenges as they try to operate in the new era in service provision. These include data issues, poor attendance by library patrons to training sessions, power outages, lack of digital literacy skills, poor internet connection among others as shown in figure 3. This was supported by Krukowski et. al, (2021) who indicated that the pandemic impacted heavily on academic research productivity of faculty members.



**Figure 3:** Challenges faced in service provision in the new normal

The third objective documented the opportunities that were brought about by COVID-19. The respondents indicated that the coming of the COVID-19 pandemic offered some opportunities as well which include an increase in the usage of e-resources when teaching and learning shifted online, utilisation of open educational resources, development of virtual libraries among others as shown in figure 4. This was supported by Shivananda (2021) who indicated that COVID-19 pandemic necessitated librarians to come up with reformed, effective, and innovative services by implementing technologies to keep the information flow from the libraries to both the categories of users, i.e., users who use the library remotely as well as users who visit the library physically. Academic libraries in Zimbabwe managed to offer digital and virtual library services; however, they faced challenges, including a lack of internet connectivity to interact with patrons (Tseke and Chigwada, 2020).



**Figure 4:** Opportunities offered by COVID-19

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study revealed that university libraries in the selected universities in Zimbabwe were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and this made students fail to access the physical resources in the libraries as they continued with their studies. Librarians had to come up with innovative ways to provide services to their users who were studying and teaching online. This made the library staff members improve their technological skills, conducted meetings online with the users and provided virtual reference services among others. However, some students found it difficult to access library resources online because they could not afford to buy data bundles which are regarded as expensive in Zimbabwe. The authors recommend that library staff must upskill, reskill, and retool to be able to offer virtual services to users. Academic libraries must invest enough budget allocations towards electronic information resources and provide avenues to access such resources so that users can be able to access them when they are not on campus using cheap platforms that can be affordable.

## References

Ameh, G. J, Ukwoma, H. C and Oye, P. O. (2021). Covid-19 Pandemic and Evolving Library and Information Services: Lessons for Nigeria International Journal of Development and Management Review (*INJODEMAR*), 16(1).

Anderson, R., Fisher, K., and Walker, J. (2021). Library consultations and a global pandemic: An analysis of consultation difficulty during COVID-19 across multiple factors. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 47(1), 102273. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2020.102273>

Ashworth B. (2020). *Covid-19's Impact on Libraries Goes Beyond Books*. Available at <https://www.wired.com/story/covid-19-libraries-impact-goes-beyond-books>.

Asif, M., and Singh, K. K. (2020). Trends, opportunities and scope of libraries during Covid-19 pandemic. *Ijlist*. <https://doi.org/10.18231/j.ijlsit>

Chakraborty, S and Jana, S. (2021). Challenges and opportunities of academic libraries in India because of COVID-19. *Annals of Library and Information Studies*. 68, 110-118

Chirisa, I., Mavhima, B., Nyevera, T., Chigudu, A., Makochekeka, A., Matai, J, Masunda, T., Chandaengerwa, E. K., Machingura, F., Moyo, S., Chirisa, H., Mhloyi, M., Murwira, A., Mhandara, L., Katsande, R., Muchena, K., Manjeya, E., Nyika, T. and Mundau, L. (2021). The impact and implications of COVID-19: Reflections on the Zimbabwean society. *Social Sciences and Humanities Open*, 4 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2021.100183>. (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590291121000796>)

Connell, R. S., Wallis, L., and Comeaux, D. (2021). The Impact of COVID-19 on the Use of Academic Library Resources. *Information Technology and Libraries*, 40(2). <https://doi.org/10.6017/ital.v40i2.12629>

Esharenana, E. A and Oyovwe-Tinuoye,, G. O. (2021). COVID-19 information seeking and utilization among library and information science professionals in Nigeria. *IFLA Journal*, 1-12. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/03400352211031587>

Gwyer, R. (2015). Identifying and exploring future trends impacting academic libraries: a mixed methodology using journal content analysis, focus group, and trend reports. *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, 21(3), 269-285.

Institute of Museum and Library Services. (2020). Research Shows Virus Undetectable on Five Highly Circulated Library Materials After Three Days. Available at: <https://www.imls.gov/news/research-shows-virus-undetectable-five-highly-circulatedlibrarymaterials-after-three-days> (accessed 12 January 2022).

Krukowski, R. A, Jagsi R, and Cardel, M. I. (2021). Academic Productivity Differences by Gender and Child Age in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine Faculty During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Women's Health*, 30(3), 341-347. <https://doi.org/10.1089/jwh.2020.8710>.

Kumar, V and Modalavalasa, R. P (2020). Five lasting changes from the COVID-19 pandemic: The world has changed and it will remain different in many ways. *Abc News*, 16 August 2020.

Martzoukou, K. (2021). Academic libraries in COVID-19: a renewed mission for digital literacy. *Library management*, 42(4/5): the worst case scenario after COVID, 266-276. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1108/LM09-2020-0131>

Mohan, M. T; Rao, M and Shivananda K. B. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on Academic Libraries: A Case Study. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 6152. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/6152>

Murphy, J. E, Lewis C. J and McKillop, C. A. (2021). Expanding digital academic library and archive services at the University of Calgary in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. *IFLA Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F03400352211023067>

Newman, N. (2021). Academic Library Leadership Lessons from COVID-19. *Library leadership and management*. 35(2).

Nkechi, A., Eweani U.V. and Eke C. C. (2018). Challenges to library and information services (LIS) delivery in the 21st Century: The situation in three academic libraries in Imo State, Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 2075.

Neufeld, K. (2014). Onwards and upward: reflections on community college library leadership. *Journal of Library Administration*, 54(5), 426-434.

Ohler, L. Angie, and Joelle Pitts. (2021). From Peril to Promise: The Academic Library Post–COVID-19. *College & Research Libraries News*, 82 (1),41–4. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.82.1.41>.

Panda, S, K; Bhatt, A, Vijaykumar, M and Singh, R. P. Continuing of Library Services During the Covid-19 Outbreak in Indian Academic and Research Libraries: A Survey. (2021). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 6066. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/6066>

Stoller, J. (2020). Reflections on Leadership in the Time of COVID-19. *BMJ Leader*, 4, 77-79. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/leader-2020-000244>



Taru, J. (2020). Digital tragedy: doing online teaching in Zimbabwe during the pandemic. *Coronatimes*, April 2020. <https://www.coronatimes.net/digital-tragedy-zimbabwe-pandemic/>.

Tolppanen, B. P. (2021). A survey of response of access services in academic libraries to COVID-19. *Journal of Access Services*, 18(2), 65-76 <https://doi.org/10.1080/15367967.2021.1871619>

Tseke, S. and Chigwada, J. P. (2020). COVID-19: strategies for positioning the university library in support of e-learning. *Digital Library Perspectives*, 37(1), 54–64. <https://doi.org/10.1108/DLP-06-2020-0058>

UNESCO. (2020). *New resources to counter COVID-19 conspiracy theories through critical thinking and empathy*. available at: <https://en.unesco.org/news/new-resources-counter-covid-19-conspiracy-theories-through-critical-thinking-and-empathy>.

World Health Organization. (2020). *Munich Security Conference: Speech by Director General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus*. available at: <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/munich-security-conference>.