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The Impact of COVID-19 on the Caribbean Library & Information Industry



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THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE FOUNDERS LIBRARY AT ST. GEORGE'S UNIVERSITY, GRENADA, WEST INDIES

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper describes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on operations of the Founders Library at St. George's University, Grenada, West Indies.

Non-empirical research technique: Personal observation and reflection on current events utilizing the authority/experience of the author were used.

Findings: The Library closed physically and services were moved to online-only mode from mid-March 2020. Strategies by the University and activities undertaken by Library personnel during the initial response; the work from home period; and the subsequent phased reintegration of staff when the Campus reopened to limited in-person classes for students of the School of Arts and Sciences by mid-August 2020—are outlined.

Research limitations/implications: This first-hand account, reflecting a management and leadership perspective and written whilst the pandemic is ongoing, is a unique reflection on events; thus, would necessarily reflect the sole perspective of the author.

Originality/value: To date there are no other publications on the effect of the pandemic on Founders Library and few, if any, on its effects on the wider Caribbean. This article will serve as a primary source of information for analysis when post-pandemic research investigates its final effects on libraries in the Caribbean and should prove to be useful in terms of planning for situations of uncertainty, whatever the cause.

Theoretical/Practical/Social/ Implications: An adaptation of project management's urgent/important prioritization matrix on which to base selection of projects is proposed. It is recommended that 'urgency' and 'impact' may be more useful criteria for analysis under pandemic conditions and for contingency planning in emergency situations.

Keywords: COVID-19; Sars-COV-2; Pandemic; St. George's University; Founders Library; Grenada; Caribbean academic libraries; West Indies; Prioritization Matrix

Introduction

This paper describes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic conditions on the operations of the Founders Library, St. George's University (SGU), a US-managed, private international university on the island of Grenada, West Indies. The experience of managing and leading the

Library during a period when it had to be closed physically within a short time-frame and online-only services were maintained by library staff who suddenly had to move to working remotely is elucidated. The importance of decisive but empathetic leadership is discussed. It was found, on reflection, that the prioritisation matrix currently being used by leaders and managers to determine which optimum activities should be focused on changes during a pandemic as different priorities come to the fore as a result of constraints of working away from the physical library and only operating virtually. The conclusion sums up the experience at Founders Library and recommendations on how to manage and lead better are suggested.

Background

St. George's University

SGU was established in Grenada by charter in 1976, on the site of the 4-week 1969 Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) Expo. The rolling terrain of the True Blue lava-based peninsula, surrounded by the bluest of blue Caribbean waters, has been designated the World's Prettiest Campus by Nas Daily ("World's Prettiest Campus"). The School of Medicine (SOM) started classes on January 17, 1977; the School of Graduate Studies (SGS), the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) and the School of Veterinary Medicine (SVM) were founded in 1994, 1996 and 1999, respectively (St. George's University, "History of St. George's University"). Over the years, the 65 buildings on the 42-acre campus have hosted students and faculty from over 140 countries and currently SGU has 7,400+ students and an alumni body of 22,000+ (St. George's University, "About SGU").

Founders Library

Library services at SGU were formalised in 1979 with the creation of the Marion Library on the lower level of the Campus. By 2000, as the University continued to grow in leaps and bounds, the Founders Library was inaugurated in the upper Campus area. It is a three-storey building, with the book collection, information desk, OPACs, Technical Services and Archives & Records Management Units on Level 1; the administrative offices, three computer labs, seven small-group meeting rooms, open study spaces, and the journals stacks on the Level 2; the 24/7 study space is on Level 3. The Library is also responsible for several individual and group study spaces and printing rooms around the True Blue Campus. In addition to this campus, the Library also serves SGU's students based at the Northumbria Campus, Newcastle, UK, and the staff at the SGU New York offices.

Library Faculty and Staff

The professional staff comprises a Library Director, two Faculty Librarians and a Campus Records Manager/Faculty Librarian. (Note that professional librarians at SGU, including the Library Director, have faculty status, hence the use of the term Faculty Librarians). Support staff include a Library Administrator and a Secretarial Assistant (both part of the Administrative Unit along with the Director). The three Units, Archives and Records Management (ARM), Technical Services, and User Services, each have a Supervisor (at the Faulty level, i.e. Faculty Librarian), a Manager and three Library Assistants.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

Pandemics, like all global events, affect the world in fundamental ways. Those that are debilitating or deadly with no immediate treatment, vaccine or cure, such as the COVID-19 disease caused by the novel SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus (World Health Organization, "Naming the Coronavirus"), have an even greater and more destructive long-lasting impact and negatively influence, for example, life-expectancy, quality of life and the future of world development and priorities.

In 2020, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which probably started in China in December 2019, has had and continues to have a tremendous effect on the Founders Library as work that was considered normal and routine no longer obtains at this time. The Library's impromptu closure in March 2020 was considered to be the safest measure and any member of staff who could work from home was encouraged to do so. Nevertheless, SGU did not close but maintained emergency personnel, as necessary. Students moved to classes being in an online-only mode initially. Later, by mid-August at the start of the new academic year 2020-2021, limited numbers of students were allowed to return to in-person classes, whilst following Government required COVID-19 protocols.

The Literature

Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Academic Libraries

Oyelude, based at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, describes the wide-ranging, early impact of COVID-19 on academic libraries, internationally. These include: the cancellation of meetings and conferences; increased partnerships to support access to additional information resources and the collation of quality resources on the novel coronavirus and the accompanying disease caused, COVID-19; and a substantial increase in the number of webinars to help librarians to cope.

Reporting on Academic Libraries' Responses

Cox, in an opinion article, ominously titled "Changed, Changed Utterly", reflects on how librarians felt in a world of uncertainty and fear with not only work, but life in general changed and accurately predicted that libraries in the US would undergo major changes to their collections (e.g., lowered value of print, e-everything, massive digitization projects, loss of major deals for journals, copyright/fair use challenges); services (e.g., increased self-service, virtual alternatives, embedded librarianship, increased support for online teaching and research; increased sharing of open access and open educational resources; and library website as a virtual front door); spaces (e.g., increased and changed study spaces, disappearance of public technology) and operations (e.g., focus on employee safety, doing more with less, continuous learning and development and librarian activism).

The unprecedented nature of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that academic libraries were—like every individual, every institution, and every country—caught unprepared. The response came in waves. Initial measures taken by many countries worldwide were lockdown/stay in place orders and closure of borders. Libraries, at first, had to figure out how to manage their staff remotely and, subsequently, their services in unprecedented lockdown conditions. Early strategies included moving to online-only mode and/or the provision of curbside pick-up loan service where library staff were not under strict stay-in-place orders.

In a quick and timely response, Hinchliffe and Wolff-Eisenberg, librarians at Ithaka S+R, a not-for-profit organisation, based in New York, that helps the academic community to advance research and teaching in sustainable ways, undertook to collate the initial responses in North America ("Academic Libraries Response to COVID-19: Real-Time"). Innovatively, they conducted a series of surveys to cover the first 24 hours ("Academic Library Response to COVID19: The First 24 Hours"), then 48 hours ("Academic Libraries Strategies") and later the first 10 days ("First This") after the WHO declared the pandemic on 11 March 2020. This research found that, in the first 24 hours, there was little change in services offered, but mitigation and prevention measures were introduced, public events cancelled, and cleaning activities increased. Within 48 hours, 8% of academic libraries closed, 23% decreased hours,

23% accommodated remote working and more restricted access and limited services. Significantly, communication with staff remained under 64% for the first 48 hours. To summarise, in the first ten days, it was clear that it was "no longer business as usual for US academic libraries" ("First This") as there was a substantial reduction in access to print collections and a correlation between increased online class delivery and libraries closing, limiting hours and increasing remote work. A similar regional survey of academic libraries in Europe, conducted during October-November 2020, found that a main concern of little more than 70% of participants was the health and safety of library staff (Association of European Research Libraries).

Many communication efforts, such as blogs and opinion pieces, regarding the safety and health, especially mental health, of library staff appeared during this time. One of the earliest webinars, hosted by American Library Association on March 20, 2020, highlighted some coping mechanisms: closing completely, not just closing to users; preparing FAQs and writing blogs for users; suspending active holds to stop persons from coming to the library; recognising that the disruption to life in general and exposure to or contracting COVID-19 was traumatic and could cause mental health issues; and promoting mindfulness for staff and users ("Coping in the Time of COVID-19"). Particularly useful measures taken to assist academic libraries in managing were the collating of resources relevant to pandemic issues (American Library Association; International Federation of Library Associations; Library Connect) and undertaking desperately needed research, such as, the Reopening Archives, Libraries and Museum (REALM) Project's study of how long to quarantine various types of library materials (OCLC).

By May-June, webinars sharing academic libraries' experiences were being promoted, for example, "Agility and Adaptability: The Caribbean Academic Library Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic" organised by Mona Library, The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus; EBSCO hosted several webinars entitled "Coffee (or Tea) with EBSCO" to address COVID-19 related issues for institutions and libraries around the world (Renwick); and Carbery et al. reported on Irish libraries (1-19).

Later in the year, published articles detailing the effects of the pandemic on academic libraries became available (see e.g., Canada's University of Toronto Libraries (Walsh and

Rana), China (Guo et al.), Hong Kong (Ma), Ireland (Kavanaugh), Nigeria (Fasae et al.), Pakistan (Rafik et al.), and Sweden (Temiz and Salelkar)).

The review of the literature revealed that, apart from a webinar by the Mona Library and the possible representation of a Caribbean librarian at a webinar on COVID-19 impacts, there was a gap in documenting the experience of the pandemic's effect on libraries in the Caribbean. It was felt that the opportunity to record a first-hand experience and reflection on the impact of COVID-19 on SGU's Founders Library in Grenada would be warranted.

Non-Empirical Research Technique

This article is based on personal observation, reflection on current events, and utilises the authority/experience of the author (Dan) to present valid commentary, reflection, conclusions and recommendations. Thus, it documents systematically the experience, reflection on, and implications of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic from a management and leadership perspective using narrative reflective writing and the four stages of the reflective practitioner, the process would involve reliving the experience (re-inhabit), notice what was going on (reflect), critically analyse the situation (review), and capture new understanding (reframe) (Owen and Fletcher).

This first-hand account is, of course, a unique observation of events and, thus, necessarily reflects the sole perspective and biases of the author. Hence, it is a non-empirical study; such studies, some scholars argue, "are just as valuable for knowledge acquisition as empirical data" (Dan).

There is reflection on and a discussion of the challenges and implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for library services and on library staff. An approach to decision making and prioritisation of projects to be undertaken under pandemic conditions is recommended. It is hoped that the model suggested will prove useful in planning for situations of uncertainty, whatever the cause.

This article, which describes the impact of COVID-19 on an academic library in Grenada, contributes to the documentation of responses to the pandemic of academic libraries in the Caribbean region, provides food for thought and acts as a "moment in time", screen shot source of data for analysis when the entire period can be fully assimilated and researched. As

the article is written during the pandemic, it is untainted by the final outcomes of the pandemic effects on libraries.

The Experience

COVID-19 Pandemic Reaches Grenada

Although we may have heard of cases of COVID-19 around the world since January 2020, many of us in the Caribbean were unaware of the extent of its swift global spread from epidemic to pandemic status. Administrative colleagues at SGU, a University with more than 80% of the faculty's and student's home residence being off-island, were far more cognizant and proactive.

Late in the evening of Wednesday, March 11, 2020, the day that the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that there was a COVID-19 pandemic (World Health Organization, "WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks"), SGU announced that students who wished to return home could do so with immediate effect and gave them 24 hours in which to respond. The urgency of this request is underlined by the fact that it was made in the middle of mid-term exams for some students. As the safety and well-being of University personnel and the broader Grenadian community were of paramount importance, SGU sought to lessen the burden on the Grenadian healthcare system by encouraging both students and faculty to return home, wherever that might be across the globe. Hence, SGU, with considerable logistical and planning skills, ensured that the majority of students and faculty moved off-island in less than a week. Amazing and admirable work, swift decision-making, sound foresight and courage on the part of SGU's Senior Administration and volunteer staff enabled the monumental task to be undertaken safely and efficiently.

Early on the following Sunday morning (March 15), permission was sought, and approval granted to shorten the Library's opening hours beginning the next day (March 16). Within the same week, the Library was closed, a decision taken by the Library Director and the Provost on the Thursday night (March 19). This decision was conveyed to Library Faculty and Staff via a WhatsApp call from the Library Director (who had flown to Trinidad and Tobago that morning) at a gathering of Library personnel on Friday, March 20. By the following Monday (March 23), a COVID-19 case had been identified on the island and the University moved to online classes and allowed only essential staff on the campus. This move to reduce operations was in compliance with the Grenadian Government's Emergency Powers (COVID-19)

Regulations. The swiftness of the events; fear of contracting a disease of which little was known; the drastic changes warranted by activities to reduce spread of the virus; uneasiness about job security; and the impact of the lockdown on family life were among the concerns prominent in the minds of Library professionals and paraprofessionals during the initial days of working from home. Early on, however, the HR department and senior leadership/management reassured all employees that they would continue to receive full pay and benefits. The Library Director, one Faculty Librarian, who returned to Florida on the day the Library closed, and the rest of the on-island Library personnel shifted into the unfamiliar routines of working remotely. As the Library was a little ahead of the curve, Library personnel had been able to save files online or on thumb drives, forward calls to their cell phones and take work materials home that Friday. They were fortunate to do so as the University required that they work from home and not return to Campus on the following Monday (March 23).

Impact on Library Faculty and Staff

Normally, "working remotely" implies that members of staff have an opportunity to plan and create a comfortable office space in their homes with appropriate computers, ergonomic seating, all the necessary equipment and adequate connectivity and bandwidth. When the lockdown was implemented, all Library faculty and staff (4 professional staff and 14 paraprofessionals) moved to working from home with immediate effect. Thus, they moved rapidly into a situation of working without the support of office equipment, supplies and, in several cases, based on where they lived, with inadequate Internet connectivity and bandwidth. An informal and impromptu survey of Library staff conducted during the week before the Library's closure to determine who had access to IT equipment and the Internet in order to manage remotely, revealed that one person had neither. This was rectified somewhat by the staff member purchasing a smart phone. Others ensured access by borrowing an SGU loaner laptop through their alternative status as SGU students.

Impact on Library Services

Timely and sustained communication

Following its inception in early March, SGU's Incident Management Team (IMT), comprising Deans, Directors, key department heads and on-island representatives, met weekly/fortnightly, as necessary, initially in-person and later online. The Library's representation on this team enabled it to have direct input into decision making and to share

first-hand information with the University community. Often in the Caribbean, libraries are relegated to lower levels of information sharing. Discussions with and monitoring by the IMT played a crucial part in the management of the impact of the pandemic on the University. Timely, effective and comprehensive townhall meetings served to reassure University staff and inform them of developments and decisions taken to ensure the continued growth and development of the University. In addition, SGU had to rearrange expenditure priorities but did not cut faculty's or staff's jobs or salaries.

The SGU administration did an outstanding and admirable job of keeping the University community informed and updated in a timely manner (which continues up to the writing of this article). They used the user-friendly format of frequently asked questions (FAQs) posted in the password-protected University web portal, *Carenage*, covering every aspect of studies and support for students, faculty and staff both on- and off-island. They also provided for the health and care of employees by way of comprehensive and appropriate web-based information and, for those on-island, in-person. The information shared was garnered directly from the relevant departments, so the Library was afforded the opportunity to have updated, key information about its services posted prominently on the University FAQs.

Increased communication among Library personnel

Within the Library, decisions on how and when to communicate, both formally and informally, during the "work from home" period had to be taken. Unit heads met at least twice a week with their staff; the Library Senior Administration met twice a week, formally; and, among professional staff, regular and ad-hoc meetings were held on a need-to basis. The entire Library team met fortnightly.

Recognising that all-video meetings were tiring and difficult, especially when there were connectivity problems, meetings were held in various modes, sometimes with cameras on for greetings at the start and end of meetings only. Less formally, WhatsApp groups for all Library personnel and for senior Library administration were set up for urgent communication and informal sharing, respectively, as soon as the Library closed. Library faculty and staff, in some instances, went beyond the call of duty as they rose to the challenge of remaining relevant to the aims and objectives of teaching and research of the University.

Accelerated implementation of planned projects

The pandemic accelerated implementation of some previously planned projects. One such venture was the roll-out of the EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS) in late March. The implementation process had been undertaken some months before and, fortunately, resolution of the last few technicalities was being finalised when the pandemic was announced. In addition, EDS also provided the opportunity for the Library to implement a live online chat service. The two Faculty Librarians undertook to host two, two-hour chat sessions each day, morning and afternoon, Monday to Friday.

Retrieving books from globally dispersed users

Initially, measures were taken to renew loans and waive fines during the first semester. By the end of the semester, retrieving loans from an international community of staff and students proved to be a challenge. Arrangements for book returns through the SGU New York office were instituted as border closures made sending by mail within the Caribbean and beyond a difficult, and certainly not prudent, task. An amnesty on fines was implemented in an attempt to have books returned. Unfortunately, as persons left the island in haste and could only travel with one suitcase, many books remained in stored luggage and at the homes of the hurriedly departed. During the August Phase 1 return of staff to the Campus, SGU assisted in the packing and shipping of students' belongings to their homes. During this exercise, any Library books found were returned to the Library.

Increased Library support for the transition to online learning

Under pandemic conditions, the Library's main responsibilities were the provision of access to online information resources and keeping users informed. Thus, responding to connection issues and other queries in a timely fashion was obligatory. Authoritative coronavirus and COVID-19 information resources to counteract fake news, support for teaching and research efforts, and additional information resources, content and trials from supportive vendors to aid user access to more authoritative and quality information during this period were also highlighted and updated regularly on the Library's webpages. Library policy was changed to allow for the purchase of books in e-format only. More open access resources were identified and added to the Library's A-Z listing of online resources.

Move to online training

The Library, traditionally, had conducted only face-to-face information literacy training. The move to online-only mode of interaction provided it with the opportunity to host its first online workshop (via Microsoft Teams) entitled "Discovering the Library's Resources". Registration was managed using Eventbrite, a web-based service which was learnt on a needs basis at the time. In addition to the regular attendees - faculty and students, the session was also attended by staff from SGU HR and Administration thus broadening the base of persons on Campus benefitting from and becoming aware of the Library's offerings. The inclusion of the latter group was considered to be important as libraries in the Caribbean do suffer in part from non-academics not always being fully aware of the role and function of the library and the support it can provide. The online workshops led to the production of the first narrated video on the use of Library resources which was posted on the Library's webpages.

Overhauling the Library's webpages

It was quickly recognised that there was a need to review the webpages providing access to the Library's resources and services. All handouts were updated and posted along with additional tutorials and open access sites. Library-specific FAQs related to the COVID-19 pandemic period when classes moved online together with ARM Unit FAQs were drafted and posted. The former was updated regularly as circumstances changed. Information about obtaining articles via the Library's document delivery service was updated and it was decided that this service would be provided free of charge as the Library had no immediate facility to collect monies.

During this period, the University's new web portal was rolled out. Library faculty and selected Library staff were trained to navigate and update website content using content-management software, quite different to the previous html-based website. As online was the only means of providing academic support to users, reviewing, rewriting and adapting the Library's website content, design and presentation was a high priority activity for Library personnel.

Sustained printing services

Prior to the lockdown, printing was done at the Library or at printing rooms around the Campus. Currently, printing is facilitated, for those students staying on the Campus, at a specific printing room and by appointment.

Adapting promotion and outreach efforts

Founders Library, in compliance with University policy, does not utilise library-specific social media platforms. Other than notifications in the University's weekly online newsletter, the Library informed the University community of upcoming events in print and some email. However, during the period of working remotely, email became the predominant tool used to promote Library events and services to Deans and the President of the Student Government Association (SGA) for sharing with faculty and students accordingly. One-on-one emails to faculty and staff were also used to inform, share and maintain relationships important to academic librarians' ability to accomplish their work most effectively.

As there could not be an in-person graduation, a brief video, wishing graduates well on behalf of the Library, was produced in less than 24 hours (due to the tight deadline and evidence of the willingness of staff to learn on the fly) and submitted for sharing at the online-only commencement ceremony.

Changing roles of Library staff

To ensure that the work of the library remained relevant during the lockdown, every staff member was allocated some responsibility—whether it was answering forwarded telephone calls, assisting users and/or working on projects e.g., finding full-text for the fledgling institutional repository, reviewing book collections for updated editions for purchase, or inputting links for ebooks into the catalogue. The Director and Unit Heads developed viable/feasible projects not "make-work" projects.

Some members of staff had poor/no Internet or Wi-Fi access; no computer—only a cell phone without a data plan; and homes with only one device to be shared among parents trying to do their work and children attending online classes and doing homework all at the same time. Such situations required modifications to assignments and deadlines to avoid added stress. To keep staff engaged, they were assigned to attend continuous development and training sessions and present reports at weekly meetings to share and facilitate discussion about what they had learnt.

Microsoft Teams was rolled out to replace OneDrive in May 2020. The Library Director specifically requested that the Library Team be organized early in its implementation. Its introduction was welcomed as it allowed for improved staff communication, scheduling,

recording and hosting meetings as well as for easy storage of and access to files in a central place by the Library Team and various Library Channels (or sub-Teams).

Phased Return to Work

After four months with only a few imported COVID-19 cases and no community spread, and with most, but not all, students continuing online classes for semester 1, 2020/2021 academic year, SGU determined that some workers could return to Campus on a phased basis, with a 25% capacity in the first instance, from mid-August 2020. It was decided that Library staff would return to the Library at that time. There would be an increase in daily attendance of 50% and 75% in subsequent phases. Adjusting the schedules to accommodate the specified capacity was a significant task as these schedules and timeframes were not internal to the Library but had to be reported to and approved by the overarching IMT committee heads located on-island and at the head offices in New York.

Conditions for the reintegration of staff included no users in the Library, physical distancing of six feet, and use of masks. Some new services, including curbside loans/returns to on-campus users and scanning of essential course materials (if not available in an electronic format) for faculty only, were introduced. COVID-19 testing, use of hand sanitizer, regular hand washing, daily monitoring of one's state of health and other strict Campus regulations to reduce the chances of contraction and spread of the virus were mandated. Plexi glass barriers were installed at the Library's information desk and other places with high interactivity on Campus. Limited use of shared spaces, like the kitchen, was instituted. Staff were encouraged to have long conversations and lunch in the open air. Only one Faculty Librarian was on-island during this period, the others had to continue to work remotely as borders remained closed and COVID-19 cases were increasing outside of Grenada.

Needless to say, the return to Campus and working and providing services under these new conditions warranted the drafting (with input of all Library staff) and ratification of detailed policies and procedures to govern the new "norm." Former traditional activities were no longer routine, simple or self-evident. For example, did conventional copyright regulations/restrictions apply to copying and scanning of materials under eclectic pandemic conditions in developing countries?

The Library's customary face-to-face student orientation was not possible due to online-only mode of teaching. However, the Library was invited to provide input for a general orientation via an online course. A review and transformation of the content of both presentation and wording was necessary in order to communicate the appropriate tone and reflect the customer-service orientation of the Library's offerings.

The two off-island Library faculty returned to Grenada and phase 2 of the staff return started in mid-November. The newly appointed Library Director (the only hire in a period of non-routine hiring) assumed duties remotely in November.

The Reflection

"Library as Place"

Often in the Caribbean, the library, whether academic, national, university, public, special, or school, is seen as a physical space—somewhere to visit, to study, to borrow a book. The lockdown conditions removed what some consider a safe or even, a lucky space.

The Internet is associated with the free indexed Web, thus deep web materials provided by libraries are simply associated with 'online information' and therefore are thought to be free and easily accessible. There is little understanding or appreciation of the work librarians do to enable access to the deep Web by all levels of users which, in the case of academia, would include lecturers, students and administrators. The online-only access to information may prove to be of benefit to libraries if, due to the libraries' outstanding academic support and outreach efforts during this time, persons, usually satisfied with Google searches, become aware of the availability of libraries/authoritative resources and to understand the difference between the two. This is not to deny that in the Caribbean and other areas where the digital divide is evident, many users have been negatively impacted in fundamental ways during this period of online-only access.

Absence from the Library building meant that those projects and routines that were to be done physically in the Library, for example circulation, a major journal weeding project, and book repairs were put on hold. These were resumed when the Library team returned, albeit, at a slower pace, as there was only 25% of staff present initially. Determining priorities for work would require different selection criteria during pandemic conditions.

Management Decision Making

Project management propounds the prioritisation matrix, "popularized by authors Michael Brassard *(The Memory Jogger 2)* and David Allen *(Getting Things Done)*" (Peterson par. 9), to determine those actions that are high priority. This type of matrix is patterned on the Eishenhower Principle-inspired (Scroggs par.1) Important/Urgent Matrix proffered by Covey (151).

For nominal (that is, normal and desired) conditions, general project management practices prescribe an effort-value matrix for task prioritisation (see Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Effort-value Matrix from Peterson, Oliver. "Prioritization Matrix 101: What, How & Why? (Free Template)." *Process.st.*, 6 May 2019, https://www.process.st/ prioritization-matrix. Accessed 15 Nov. 2020.

According to Fig. 1, tasks that are prioritised according to high value/low effort required are considered quick wins and, therefore, relatively easy to achieve; high value/high effort are significant projects taking much to get done but rewarding in the end; low value /low effort tasks can be categorised as fill ins and could be done without urgency, and low value/high effort would be thankless tasks and, thus, not highly prioritised.

Under pandemic conditions, this matrix could be deemed as an unrepresentative model since a task may retain its original effort/value but have a drastically different impact and become more or less urgent or even impractical. Thus, an urgency-impact matrix may be used, allowing for prioritisation analysis based on the degree of impact vs degree of urgency during anomalous or unexpected conditions (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Urgency-impact Matrix

Staff

Founders Library's staff members were accustomed to physical work in the Library, as online work, apart from providing access to and using online resources, was not part of their routine; during the period of working away from Campus, however, they had to work only in the online environment. Therefore, Library faculty had to reassure staff that there were sufficient online tasks for them to do in order to affirm that staff remained relevant to the University's mission and provide service to users.

Recognising that the unplanned and long-term separation could result in a deterioration in staff relationships, connections and relationships among staff had to be encouraged and sustained to ensure that a high level of cooperation and motivation was maintained. As the Library was being restructured into specific units, this period allowed each Unit to "gel" with lots of discussion, laughter, sharing of personal experiences and fun stuff as they got to know each other even better. The Unit heads did an excellent job of keeping work and relationships going and ensuring that staff were kept up-to-date, trained, and motivated, which also helped

them to maintain balance in other stress-related areas of their personal lives. Thus, staff looked forward to and were willing to attend meetings. There was even an online baby shower. One staff meeting was described as the best ever and as extremely useful.

Leadership

Leadership can be interpreted, at its most basic, as having vision, empathy, trust and valid communication; these four characteristics came to the fore and served best in managing the responsibilities, work and staff of the Library. Reassurance that the work of libraries is relevant is a challenge under normal circumstances in the Caribbean, an area that lacks a library-use culture among young people, and is particularly difficult in Grenada where there has been no valid functioning Public Library and National Archives for over a decade. One early leadership challenge, under pandemic lockdown/work-from-home conditions, was managing expectations:

- In terms of communication the value of responding in a timely manner and with honesty and empathy was emphasized
- In terms of productivity how were staff going to know if they were successful? It could not be by monitoring that they worked from 8 am 4 pm. Always keeping in mind individual situations (e.g., being a parent, being pregnant, variable access to the Internet, insufficient access to equipment, lack of tools to work with as well as the nature and type of work that could be done in the online mode), productivity would be measured in terms of output, such as the completion of projects or assignments in a timely manner, rather than counting hours.

Another leadership challenge during this period was engendering trust:

- Demonstrating trust in staff by not micromanaging but giving them autonomy to self-manage and produce results
- Allowing persons who were having difficulties adequate time to adjust
- Understanding that being pregnant in the middle of pandemic or work-from-home conditions may mean that work might "suffer"
- Empathizing with persons who may have multiple reasons for stress: concern about family members' job security, contracting the virus, home schooling, caregiver roles, loneliness, lack of tools or access to the Internet and finding ways for them to contribute, assigning everyone responsibilities so that there should be some measure of balance and accountability

- Getting members of staff to appreciate the work and contribution of others by having Unit heads report at staff meetings and recognising the work that had been completed
- Responding to all concerns, even if research had to be conducted before a response was presented
- Being able to honestly put things into context and project positivity when outcomes were unclear or unknown
- Assuring staff that their best interests were desired.

Reporting to the University in a timely manner and format as well as being accountable for time and work accomplished were among those activities that reflected the relevance and importance of the Library despite relatively easy access to information on the Web by users.

Implications

Library as a Service (LaaS)

It may seem a far-fetched consideration for academic libraries in the Caribbean but what might happen when, having survived the long months (if not years) of the pandemic without the "Library as Place" and with the previously unimaginable push that information technology got during this period, resources and funds become extremely scarce in developing countries. Could Library as a Service (LaaS), that is a paid library-type service, take a foothold? It might be something similar to a DeepDyve (www.deepdyve.com) "the largest online rental services for scholarly research" (Instant Access to Thousands of Journals for just USD 49/month) or a Blinkist (www.blinkist.com), 15-minute non-fiction book summaries, type of offering. This would be in line with development of SaaS (Software as a Service) and PaaS (Platforms as a Service).

Practical Decision Making in Pandemic/Emergency Conditions

It is suggested that the value of the impact rather than the amount of effort be the criterion for determining the order in which activities should be enabled under emergency conditions and when making contingency plans in case of further lockdown conditions. For example, prioritising some tasks before the COVID-19 work-from-home period using the value/effort matrix may have looked like Fig. 3 below. In this case, the tasks were prioritized based on the conditions of working in the Library and valuing the Library as Place rather than for its online services.



Fig. 3. Value/effort Prioritisation Matrix



Fig. 4. Urgency/impact Prioritisation Matrix

However, as Fig. 4 shows, the priorities change under the pandemic conditions using the urgency/impact criteria. In this case, the tasks based on the physical library would not be

urgent nor have great impact, though they are still very valuable and will take effort. Under Campus closure conditions, the online tasks become the priority.

Social Implications for Leadership

For leaders and managers, the suddenness of the drastic changes to social and interpersonal interactions among staff as well as non-existent physical users, means conducting change management without the theory, meaning, there is change but no opportunity to get buy-in, or sell an idea, or any of the other nice, considerate things they are advised to do to make change palatable.

Library staff demonstrated that they wanted a leader with a vision and the ability to manage extreme change, ensuring that staff remained relevant and had a contribution to make. They expressed their appreciation of these attributes and demonstrated trust.

Conclusion

In mid-March 2020, the WHO announced its assessment that COVID-19, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 novel coronavirus, could be characterized as a pandemic. In response, many countries quickly took urgent and aggressive actions, included lockdowns. Libraries around the world, including Founders Library, had to suddenly close physically and move personnel to working from home and delivering services in an online-only mode. This arrangement was to last for several months during which time other measures, similar to those taken by libraries internationally, were put in place including: increased partnerships to support access to additional information resources and the collation of quality resources on the novel coronavirus and COVID-19 (Oyelude); reduced hours followed by closure of the library within days (Hinchliffe and Wolff-Eisenberg, "First This") while other issues, as predicted by Cox, had to be addressed namely, lowered value of print, copyright/fair use challenges, increased support for online teaching and research, promotion of increased numbers of open access items, the library website as the virtual front door, and focus on employee safety and continuous learning. However, unlike the findings of Hinchliffe and Wolff-Eisenberg about US libraries, communication at Founders Library increased considerably. A particular concern stressed in communication was for staff well-being and safety which was also noted in the early ALA webinar ("Coping in the Time of COVID-19"). Founders Library utilised the pandemic resources recommended by ALA and IFLA and the standards on quarantine practices recommended by REALM (OCLC).

By mid-August 2020, the staff returned to work on alternate days. Although the Library remained physically closed to users, it was able to offer curbside loan services to SAS students (whilst SOM and SVM students continued online only) in addition to online services, which were maintained for the University community through-out the affected period.

Library staff have resumed work stronger for the experience. A significant impact of the lockdown was that staff members became closer, demonstrating a strong desire to return to the office and to see their colleagues again, and to resume their duties. All looked forward to the reopening, better equipped and more conscious of and prepared to support both in-person and online service, whereas prior to the pandemic they were primarily focused on in-person service.

The University community came to a much greater understanding and appreciation of the Library's online contribution to and support for teaching, learning and research.

One of the most important lessons learned from the pandemic is that leadership matters. With no similar circumstances for possibly a hundred years to draw on and therefore no training to deal with the likes of the impact of such a pandemic on library services and work, it was necessary to call upon the leadership "instinct".

Recommendations

Keeping in close contact with your professional and support staff, using both formal and informal channels, is an imperative when working remotely, especially given the suddenness of the pandemic events. Continuous communication should be maintained and some of it can be fun or light in nature. Activities could be arranged, accordingly.

Dealing with concerns, both major and minute, in order to alleviate one's own and/or staff stress is prudent. Since workloads may be lighter due to the nature of the individual staff responsibility, this is an opportune time to focus on continuous professional development. Identify relevant sessions, assign staff responsibilities for attending, hold reporting and discussion sessions.

Use the prioritisation matrix to identify the most productive work activities. Use change management techniques to sell your vision, promote the relevance of library work under the

current conditions and to make staff understand the significance of their work, albeit mainly online. This is especially important for staff who get most of their job satisfaction from inter-personal interaction; indeed, this aspect may have been their original raison d'etre for choosing to work in a Library.

It is recommended that leaders stop and take a breath, do their research, analyse and evaluate their situation and respond instinctively, effectively and empathetically. Positive emotional intelligence and values play a role in managing and leading during pandemic times.

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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON BELIZEAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES: STAFF INSIGHTS

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper presents supervisors' insights on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Belizean Public Libraries, during the first ten months of the pandemic (March through to

December 2020). In this regard it purposed to describe changes, issues/challenges and opportunities presented by COVID-19.

Design/Methodology: This non-empirical study utilizes the power of narrative to present a unified first-hand account of the lived COVID-19 experience of select public library supervisors during the first ten months of the pandemic and a reflection on this narrative.

Findings: Changes were made in respect of opening hours, safety, social distance, sanitizing, communication, loans, services, customer type, and programmes. There were challenges relating to: transportation, staffing, organisational issues, communication, donations, and handling suspected/actual COVID-19 cases. Opportunities arose in communication, outreach, training, nature of work, and partnerships.

Research limitations/implications: This study is limited to the first ten months of the pandemic and is therefore not a complete study of the impact of the pandemic. A follow-up study would be useful.

Originality/value: This is the first scholarly paper on the impact of COVID-19 on public libraries in Belize. It therefore contributes to the growing literature on the impact of the pandemic on libraries.

Practical Implications: Administration and supervisors learned the necessity of more frequent communication across the system and solid emergency plans that factor in flexibility before the institution is faced with situations that demand it. Only because the Belize National Library Service and Information System (BNLSIS) has 85 years of leadership of the public library system including addressing the variety of concerns between urban and rural libraries, were supervisors able to look at the spectrum of impact from COVID-19 and provide community-specific solutions.

Keywords: Caribbean public libraries; Caribbean community libraries; coronavirus; COVID-19; Belize public libraries; BNLSIS

Introduction and Background

In *Cultural Groups of Belize*, Vernon describes Belize as an independent multi-lingual, multi-ethnic country in Central America (1). Belize shares borders with Mexico and Guatemala. A wide variety of languages are spoken throughout the country. Although English is the official language, Belizean Kriol is the lingua franca; Spanish is the second most popular language, followed by Maya languages (Q'eqchi', Mopan, and Yucatec), Mandarin, German and Garifuna. The July 2020 population estimates show that 419,199 persons live in Belize across its six districts ("Belize Postcensal Population Estimates").

The work of establishing and sustaining a strong network of public libraries is carried out by the Belize National Library Service and Information System (BNLSIS), which is headed by a Chief Librarian, and employs two Principal Librarians, five Librarians, five Assistant Librarians and eighty staff members including one IT technician, administrative officers, senior library assistants, and library and clerical assistants. Belize's Public Library Service is one of two units of the BNLSIS; the other is the National Library, whose primary function is to be the central depository of Belize's documentary resources. The Public Library Service is responsible for operating a national network of free public libraries, which are divided into branch libraries and community libraries. There are thirty-two community libraries some of which are located in schools and community centres while others are in their own stand-alone buildings. The community libraries are smaller than the branch libraries. The fifteen branch libraries are located in the large urban centres and the larger towns/cities/villages of the six districts. The branch libraries are: Corozal Public Library, Sandy Hunter Library, Turton Library Center, Leo Bradley Library, Port Loyola Public Library, Lake Independence Public Library, San Pedro Library in the north; Belmopan Public Library, San Ignacio Public Library, Santa Elena Library, Benque Viejo Public Library in the west; and Allan Arthurs Public Library, Ignacia Cacho Public Library, Independence Public Library, and Punta Gorda Public Library in the south.

Over the years, the public libraries have developed a comprehensive collection, rich in primary source materials covering all aspects of life along with a local collection about Belize, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Many Belizean leaders, past and present, credit the Turton Library Center with nourishing their hunger for knowledge, especially through boys' and girls' readers groups. The libraries are mandated to make information and knowledge accessible to the public and throughout the years, the branch libraries have been visited by locals and foreigners in-person and online, for educational and recreational reading materials. Belize's education system has been criticized for the generally poor quality, as well as the inequality in delivery of service (Näslund-Hadley et al. 4). In this context, the public library service plays a critical supplementary role. Serving since 1935, the BNLSIS libraries have also been a place of choice to explore, discover and connect with Belizean cultures and history through publications and programmes. December 7, 2020, marked the 85th anniversary of public library services in Belize. The commemorative week of planned events was moved online due to the pandemic.

COVID-19, a novel virus, was identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China ("Novel Coronavirus"). The virus is highly contagious and dangerous. It affected the daily services in Belizean society dramatically. The government of Belize has declared multiple COVID-19 pandemic-related states of emergency since March 2020 (Barrow 1). With each declaration, the public library service has had to adjust opening hours and approaches to provide service

to patrons nationwide and remotely. The public library service rapidly adapted to virtual approaches by moving all work, educational information and activities to an online environment. This generated new challenges which significantly impacted services. The legal ports of entry and exit were closed during the first State of Emergency (Belize Constitution (Emergency Powers)) and were later opened for authorized commercial trade in subsequent updates to the legislation. There are families living along the borders with Guatemala and Mexico, who have engaged in generations of trade activities and built social ties in and through these communities. Before the pandemic, illegal cross-border trade was discouraged but only selectively enforced by the security forces in Belize. The term 'border jumper' is used to describe those who cross illegally along the border. Multiple positive test results have shown a direct link between the illegal border crossings and the surge in positive cases in some communities. Despite public service announcements about the consequences of these activities and the increase in fines and terms of imprisonment almost every two months for crossing illegally or handling contraband goods, these activities continue.

Belize garnered international interest at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in late March 2020 because it was the last country in the Latin American and Caribbean region to confirm a case of the virus (Husaini and Abubakar 536). This study aims to contribute to the growing COVID-19 literature through an examination of the impact of COVID-19 on Belizean public libraries through insights from staff. Accordingly, this paper provides supervisors' (Librarians and Assistant Librarians) insights on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Belize's public library service during the first ten months of the pandemic (March-December 2020). Using a reflective narrative, it presents the changes, issues/challenges and opportunities presented by COVID-19.

Literature Review

At the time of writing this paper, a literature search revealed an absence of peer-reviewed articles by or about Caribbean public libraries during the pandemic, and none from a Belizean public library perspective. Therefore, this review draws exclusively on the COVID-19 experiences of public libraries in Europe (Flanders (Belgium), Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland) through a National Authorities on Public Libraries in Europe (NAPLE) report titled "Public Libraries in Europe and Covid-19: Findings from NAPLE Members, April 2020." It also draws on a

survey of 2,545 United States of America (USA) public libraries, conducted March 24–April 1, 2020, by the Public Library Association (PLA), in partnership with other Public Library Data Alliance members titled "Public Libraries Respond to Covid-19: Survey of Response & Activities."

Changes/Trends as a Result of COVID-19 in Public Libraries in Europe and US

Expansion of e-services, creation of apps, online access to local and international digital content, marketing and streaming through social media were some of the trends in public libraries in the US and Europe.

In the US, 98% of public libraries closed ("Public Libraries Respond" 4). Similarly, most public libraries in Europe closed to the public. The staff in many public libraries in Europe worked remotely during closures ("Public Libraries in Europe" 1). In countries where library staff needed to work from their office or library, it is noted that provisions (e.g. anti-bacterial gel was provided, staff worked on shifts to allow for physical distancing) were put in place ("Public Libraries in Europe" 1).

Social media use increased in both locations. In Europe, many countries' public library services were active on social media and involved in making important information available online. This included communication through social media, mailing lists and the posting of information on websites ("Public Libraries in Europe" 2). Several countries had national hashtags around the theme of staying at home or accessing culture online or were operating virtual helpdesks through Twitter ("Public Libraries in Europe" 2). In US public libraries 95% used social media to communicate changes in library services, 89% used social media to promote library services, and 74% used social media to share COVID-19 information ("Public Libraries Respond" 8).

In Europe, physical lending was either limited or suspended and there was a huge focus on online services and digital content, with a wide range of available online services and content across all countries ("Public Libraries in Europe" 1). Also, in Europe, alternative services for the lending of physical library materials were offered in a number of countries and included: 'drive-through' library services, 'take away' service, 'book bags', and home delivery by various means. In most countries, return boxes were closed and people were asked to keep borrowed books at home ("Public Libraries in Europe" 1). In US public libraries, 76% extended online renewal policies, 74% expanded online check-out services, and 22% made curbside pick-up available ("Public Libraries Respond" 5).

Sixty-one percent of US libraries added virtual programming, and 41% expanded online virtual reference/help ("Public Libraries Respond" 5). European public libraries reported a similar trend toward increasing or creating these services ("Public Libraries in Europe" 2, 7-9, 12, 13).

Issues/Challenges Resulting from COVID-19 in Public Libraries in Europe and US

In Europe, some public library staff were redeployed to assist with healthcare efforts; there was one report of staff being stood down and one report of staff being put on unpaid, open-ended leave during the lockdown ("Public Libraries in Europe" 1). European libraries experienced a lack of or mixed information about safety in respect of book handling which led many to suspend physical lending or have a diverse range of book quarantining procedures (Public Libraries in Europe" 10). Libraries in Europe were especially focused on addressing misinformation about COVID-19 and countered it by only sharing or echoing authoritative sources ("Public Libraries in Europe" 12). European libraries grappled with matters of equity as they sought to provide e-services for patrons with limited Internet access, or physical services to vulnerable or elderly populations ("Public Libraries in Europe" 5, 10, 13); a similar situation occurred in US public libraries ("Public Libraries Respond" 1). Also, US Libraries were concerned about securing funding for pre-crisis budgets, including staff salaries and new funding for response work, obtaining cleaning supplies and protective wear for staff, and rebuilding trust in the community that the library is safe ("Public Libraries Respond" 11). Additionally, in the US, depending on staff type, between 1% and 5% were taking vacation or sick leave. More part-time and temporary staff were not being paid as compared with the other staff types (10% and 7% respectively, vs. 1% each for full time MLIS and non-MLIS staff) ("Public Libraries Respond" 9).

Opportunities Presented by COVID-19 in Public Libraries in Europe and US

Publishers worldwide expanded the number of free titles available online; local book and newspaper publishers provided free access to their catalogues and archives in Europe ("Public Libraries in Europe" 7-9).

European libraries redesigned their websites to add or highlight online services, free resources; libraries became the access point for curated lists of free online resources and in some cases included access to their own digital collections ("Public Libraries in Europe" 7-9). Through their website, the National Library of Poland made three million digital items

available, which increased the visibility and use of those resources ("Public Libraries in Europe" 8).

European and US libraries reported increased membership. In Ireland, "over 30,000 new members joined the library in March 2020 compared to just over 17,000 in March 2019" ("Public Libraries in Europe" 8). One library in Virginia issued 418 library cards in three weeks ("Public Libraries Respond" 5).

In Europe, the supply of webinars increased dramatically, and some libraries also offered a Q&A with a librarian service in the form of video chats, with information on resources that users can access digitally ("Public Libraries in Europe" 8-9). There was a growth in online activities and campaigns for reading promotion in European public libraries. In the Balearic Islands, for example, libraries provided videos of authors talking about their books in place of in-person presentations ("Public Libraries in Europe" 9). Libraries in Spain offered content through virtual platforms such as eBiblio (platform for e-lending), eFilm or Tumblebooks. These have seen a significant increase in the number of users, and the contents have been enriched with new acquisitions in some regions ("Public Libraries in Europe" 9). In the US, new virtual programs and outreach/remote services were developed in response to COVID-19 ("Public Libraries Respond" 10).

European and US libraries also implemented or expanded e-services ("Public Libraries Respond" 8; "Public Libraries in Europe" 8, 13).

Conclusion

Library services expanded in some areas and contracted in others because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The expansion was especially evident in the provision of e-services and virtual programming partly because tracking data is embedded within those platforms. The European report takes a narrative approach to presenting its findings while the US report is largely statistical. Each convey how libraries addressed the uncertainties related to the almost overnight transition to e-services, adjusting physical services, library closures, staff safety and reallocating technical and human resources to assist with national COVID-19 relief efforts. Notable was the speed at which libraries used their websites and social media as the best ways to connect patrons with resources. The European report named multiple vendors some of which offered free unlimited access to their resources, but will libraries be able to afford to provide these resources post pandemic? Is COVID-19 creating an unsustainable model? These are among the concerns that could be studied.

Methodology

Given the gaps in the literature on the impact of COVID-19 on Caribbean public libraries generally, and Belizean public libraries specifically, we decided to share our lived COVID-19 experiences through a reflective narrative, which allows for in-depth first-hand information to be shared. Additionally, narrative inquiry focuses "not only on individuals' experiences but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (Clandinin and Rosiek 42–43). Narrative, therefore, allowed us to focus not only on our experiences as supervisors, but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives of the BNLSIS and Belize, within which our experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted. Furthermore, as Chambers points out:

In such a conception reflective practice is manifest both in the inherent power of the narrative itself and in the subsequent reflections of any learner upon that narrative. In this way the originator of the narrative can benefit from the process of writing, while reflecting upon it presents further possibilities both for the writer and for others who might interpret the story differently or provide alternative readings. In this sense narrative making or storying is multifaceted in its potential for reflection (404).

Based on the reports of the impact of COVID-19 in US and European libraries, which highlighted changes, challenges and opportunities, this qualitative, non-empirical research sought to provide a similar examination of the Belizean public library service. Consequently, the following questions guided this paper and served as its objectives:

- 1. What was the impact of COVID-19 on Belizean Public Libraries?
- 2. What changes were made in Belizean Public Libraries as a result of COVID-19?
- 3. What (if any) were the issues/challenges for Belizean Public Libraries, resulting from COVID-19?
- 4. What (if any) opportunities were presented by COVID-19 for Belizean Public Libraries?

Five librarians (all supervisors), co-constructed this narrative experience:

- Librarian 1: supervises 12 branch libraries
- Librarian 2: provides technical and other support necessary for transitioning in the COVID-19 environment
- Librarians 3, 4 & 5: each supervises one branch library; additionally, librarian 3 supervises the two assistant librarians, who supervise all 32 community libraries.

Given the study's objectives, our experiences are presented as a single narrative, under the following themes:

- a. Changes
- b. Issues/challenges
- c. Opportunities

This ordering of the reflective narrative allows us, the supervisors/librarians as well as the readers of this paper, to deconstruct the impact of COVID-19 into meaningful and understandable experiences.

The Experience: Description and Reflection

A number of changes in Belizean public libraries were brought about as result of the COVID-19 pandemic; these are summarised in table 1, which follows.

Table 1

Summary of Changes Implemented in Belizean Public Libraries as a Result of COVID-19

Areas	Pre-COVID-19	During COVID-19
Opening hours for public libraries countrywide	 The opening hours were: 9:00am-7:00pm weekdays 9am-1pm on Saturdays 	• The opening hours changed several times due to Government curfews e.g. on one occasion the opening time was adjusted to 9:00am-5pm Monday through Friday only
Children and adult programmes	30-50 children participated in the programmes	 5-10 children were physically allowed at the library No seniors were allowed Mask wearing, hand sanitizing, and social distancing became mandatory The size of the library building determined the number of children registered for each program
Loans	 Patrons were allowed to borrow 2 books for 14 days 	• Loans decreased by approximately 60%
	 Books were heavily borrowed by patrons countrywide Books moved from shelf to patron and back 	 In order to minimize direct contact, BNLSIS increased the number of books each patron could borrow: patrons were allowed to borrow 4 books for one month Returning rates were slow; fines accrued, which were waived Returned books were quarantined in a box for 24 hours; thereafter, the staff cleaned and filed them
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Internet cafés countrywide	• Frequent usage: an average of 25 patrons per week at a branch library	• Decreased usage: an average of 8 patrons per week at a branch library
Patron type/frequency	• Walk-ins (adults, children, and teenagers) on a daily basis	 Decrease in walk-in patrons Maximum of 10 patrons per day, were allowed in the building Ministry of Health (MOH) protocols were implemented, namely: hand sanitizing, wearing of face mask, and temperature checking
Book launches	• Physical attendees included: teachers, students, and the general public	 Infrequent book launches but when occurred, there was a cap of 5 attendees plus the media; and MOH protocols were instituted (hand sanitizing, temperature checking and social distancing); all other attendees participated via live stream via Zoom
Delivery of boxes of books	• Delivered to various districts at least once per month	• Delivery made to some districts, every three months; restrictions applied
Social media	FacebookYouTube	• Live streaming

Partnership donation	• Frequent	 WhatsApp: video chatting and messaging Facebook Messenger Virtual storytelling Online meetings via Zoom Donations declined by approximately 70% countrywide Donations received were quarantined in a box for 72 hours, staff handled materials using gloves; and cleaning/sanitizing completed prior to
Poolymobile to primary	• String par month	sorting and processing
schools in the villages	• 8 trips per montin	• miniediate nait on trips
Reference and browsing	 Frequent Walk-in service for 	 Decreased by approximately 80% EBSCOHost for reference utilised EBSCOHost and OPAC utilized for search and discovery. Emphasis on real-time chat, e-mail requests, Facebook Messenger requests, WhatsApp requests, and a pick-up service for photocopies and print materials Grab and go services for
	patrons, who had the freedom to browse the collection	patrons
	• Assisted patrons physically and via phone (landline)	 Assisted patrons using real-time chat, e-mail, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and a pick-up service
Storytelling/reading	 Doorstep Tales: storytelling/reading; patrons came to the library on Saturdays 	 Virtual storytelling Traditional skits posted online
Information sources accessibility	• Focus on print resources	Focus on multiple formats

		 Expanded access to resources through networks/social media
Service	 Service in good time Patrons used the physical library 	 Service just in time Library primarily goes to users, virtually
User needs	 Patrons had access to and wanted print resources 	 Approximately 70% increase in patron requests for non-print, online resources, e-services, and ebooks

Opening Hours

Before COVID-19, branch libraries opened to the public Monday to Friday, 9 a.m.-7 p.m. and on Saturdays, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. During COVID-19, several changes were made to the opening hours. For example, at one period of the pandemic opening was Monday to Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.; closed on Saturdays; and at another period opening was 9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays only. Community libraries located in the central, north and south of the country, had fewer working hours per week than branch libraries. Some community libraries opened for 29 hours each week, Mondays to Fridays, while others opened for five hours on alternating Tuesdays and Thursdays or Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Safety/Social Distance/Sanitizing

In March 2020, before the first case of COVID-19 was officially recorded in Belize, each branch supervisor was provided with basic sanitizing materials based on the preliminary protective measures recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). Public libraries operated by three rules: 1. Keep yourself safe; 2. Keep the public safe; 3. Use the resources available, then inform or consult with administration about the most urgent needs or issues. All the instructions and advisories that were mandated by the government, and passed on to the library administration, were strictly adhered to. These measures related to safety and hygiene, physical distancing, and the wearing of masks. Further measures for the public libraries were decided on, based on WHO protocols and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) recommendations.

Marking social distancing became an imperative. Initially, staff, using tape, marked three feet between the front desk and the next person in line at all branches. The distance was later extended to six feet between persons, as per the updated State of Emergency legislation. Staff members were advised to promote grab and go services, frequently clean high touch areas of the library, wear a mask, maintain physical distance between persons, sanitize, increase hand washing, and implement plastic desk guards at the front desks and on tables within the branches. Equipping all the libraries and maintaining supplies throughout the country have posed ongoing challenges, due to unavailability of some resources and transportation issues. Shops in Belize City, where the headquarters is based, placed limits on the quantities of disinfectant spray, alcohols and gels that could be purchased per person. In some instances, remote rural libraries used basic soap or laundry detergent and water when more effective supplies were inaccessible. At the largest branch library in Belize City, each employee was given a hand sanitizer and a disinfectant spray. Also, children's services areas and the circulation sections received disinfecting wipes and gloves. A box was left at the door to receive returned books which would be quarantined, cleaned and re-shelved. Disinfecting wipes were used for frequently touched items, for example, phones, desks, keyboards, computer mouse, door handles, and faucets. To assure patrons that it was safe to be in the libraries, flyers highlighting the protocols were circulated via physical notice boards in the library, and also via social media. Prior to August 2020, there was no final decision about a protocol for responding to positive or suspected cases of COVID-19 in the workplace.

Communication

The BNLSIS is generally a very bureaucratic organisation. Between late March and December 2020, the pandemic triggered a temporary decentralization of operations. Disrupted transportation and communication along with limited resources converged to cause multiple unique situations at all libraries which required immediate administrative input. Since the pace of change was too rapid for the existing bureaucracy, general guidelines and memos were given and persons within the chain of command became accessible to staff through WhatsApp. This decision by the Chief and Principal Librarians empowered the supervisors who could quickly advise their direct reports on the best response based on the particular library's circumstances and constraints. In their book, The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations, Brafman and Beckstrom describe the differences between centralized (spider) and decentralized (starfish) organisations, concluding that each has its own strategic advantage. The application of that advantage determines the longevity of the organisation including its fortitude to withstand times of crisis such as when the leaders are unavailable or during emergencies (9-27). The BNLSIS, despite being traditionally centralized, showed that it could decentralize to ensure business continuity.

Due to the circumstances, library staff members adapted varying approaches to engage with patrons and communities. In March 2020, email exchange was the most common use of technology between staff and users. Later, social media, specifically WhatsApp, became popular for internal communication while Facebook became the preferred method for external communication such as literacy promotion and marketing.

Belize shares borders with Mexico and Guatemala. The Government of Belize took swift action to reduce social mobility in March 2020; this resulted positively in extremely modest COVID-19 infection rates initially. However, by around late July 2020, enough cases had come into Belize (mainly via cross-border traffic with Mexico) that COVID-19 entered the general population (Husaini and Abubakar). One-third of the community libraries mentioned in this paper are situated near a border. Supervisors of the community library staff created a WhatsApp group chat to share updates such as book handling procedures and other safety measures discussed at virtual management meetings.

Thirteen of the fifteen branch libraries had active Facebook pages before COVID-19. During the pandemic, the two branch libraries created Facebook pages and one branch library upgraded. Photos were posted, videos of activities were uploaded, and notices of programmes and events were shared. The National Heritage Library (NHL), which is under the BNLSIS but not a focus in this paper, created a YouTube account which hosted some of the videos from the public libraries; these were later uploaded to Facebook. Prior to the pandemic, Facebook posts were not archived; however, as more videos were created and staff deleted the original files, a policy had to be created to ensure future access.

Social media allowed the libraries to adopt new roles by immersing themselves in a public dynamic platform with their patrons. They have been able to make the best of this unpleasant situation by setting up online resources and outlets. The libraries have used various approaches to advertise and start virtual programmes or reading events. The branch libraries have a significant following, as evidenced by the number of total views (67,600 views) from March to September 2020 (see table 2). The figures for reaches and comments reflect an increasing awareness of the BNLSIS. It should be noted that the year 2020 saw uncommon spikes in total reaches and engagement on posts for multiple branches. The post with the highest reach to date among all public libraries with 18,435 reaches, 5,538 engagements, 175

comments, 175 shares, 335 likes, is a video of a Library Assistant performing the nursery rhyme "There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly".

Table 2

Facebook Posts, Reaches and Comments (March 2020 - September 2020)

Branch Libraries	POST	REACH	COMMENTS	
Corozal Public Library	7 virtual stories	8689	521	
Sandy Hunter Public Library	16 posts: virtual stories, arts &	6288	18	
	crafts, library trivia			
Turton Library Center	8 posts: virtual stories,	6117	0	
	historical and educational			
	posts, government press			
	releases, and poetry			
Leo Bradley Library	2 virtual stories	19,400	184	
Lake-I Public Library	2 virtual stories	24	0	
Belmopan Public Library	5 posts: virtual stories, book	1131	5	
	collection promotion			
Benque Public Library	33 virtual stories	419	37	
Santa Elena Public Library	5 virtual stories	66	13	
San Ignacio Public Library	9 posts including virtual stories	10,451	0	
Allan Arthurs Public Library	17 posts: virtual stories, video	1340	4	
	of book collection			
Ignacia Cacho Public Library	4 posts: virtual stories, and	1268		
	alphabets in Garifuna language			
Independence Public Library	17 posts: virtual stories, and	2274	4	
	pictures of activities			
Punta Gorda Public Library	8 posts: virtual stories, and	10,062	0	
	poems			
San Pedro Library	1 virtual story	71	2	
Total	134 posts	67,600	788 comments	
		views		

Chen et al. describe the ways in which academic and public libraries were using technologies and social trends to make their services popular and user-friendly (4). Similar types of interactions were being used in Belizean public libraries. The concept of a public library as a physical place that patrons visit to get information is rapidly changing to it being a social cyberspace, where patrons can access, communicate, and contribute to existing knowledge. Librarians are responding to the popularity of social networking sites and their expanding role in the creation, use and sharing of information by engaging them through a central medium for interacting with the library patrons, and meeting their information needs. Social media is a powerful tool for information dissemination; for example, the Facebook likes and comments measure 'engagement' and user satisfaction. Not surprisingly, most visitors to the libraries' Facebook pages are from local communities.

Additionally, in the past, support for virtual patrons at branch libraries was primarily for persons far from a library but living within the country, with occasional international requests. Library employees countrywide reported an increase in the number of international requests for services.

Loans

Prior to the pandemic, all patrons could borrow two books, for two weeks. Since late March 2020, patrons have been allowed to borrow four books for four weeks, and to renew them by phone or email. Since the pandemic, returned books have been quarantined in a box for 24-48 hours; they are then sanitized and re-shelved.

Services

The services offered pre-COVID-19 were primarily face-to-face. During the pandemic, some libraries were able to connect online with patrons and provided other services, such as real-time chat, e-mail requests/deliveries, Facebook Messenger requests and a pick-up service (onsite or electronically), sometimes free or for a small fee. Community libraries, however, generally have limited or no computer or Internet access, and in some instances are completely paper-based since the building has no electricity.

In certain locations, people only go outside when they have no choice, and staff are nervous to have the library open. The community library staff has employed changes that work to increase circulation. One staff member has taken a box of books from the library and placed it, along with an empty box, under a tree near their home for borrowing and returning books. Two services offered prior to the pandemic: the delivery of boxes of books to schools in remote areas, and a book mobile service to remote areas not serviced by branch or community libraries, were suspended.

Changes in Customers of Library Services

The Public Libraries have seen a change in the number, frequency and type of patrons who visit the library. One branch has observed teachers with one or two students, and parents accompanying their school-aged children. Prior to the pandemic, teachers met with students at school and children went to the library alone or in groups. At most branches, the patrons who stay in the library at length are now primarily adults; before the pandemic, the majority were children. In-person programmes were suspended all over the country. Community library staff became particularly nervous when positive cases were identified in their villages, because of the interconnectedness of the society.

Programmes

Throughout Belize, the month of March is known as Child Stimulation Month. During this month, pre-schools and primary schools with students six years old and younger would visit the library in organized scheduled groups daily. Attendance at the largest branch in 2019 was 1,438 students; in 2020 the total fell to 667 students. Parents were not comfortable with sending their children to school, nor with giving permission for the school to take their children to the library. The libraries in the south did not see such a significant difference in their attendance figures for 2019 and 2020, as positive cases were isolated in the north at that time.

The annual summer program is another highlight for all libraries countrywide. In 2020, the summer program at the largest branch library was not a success. There were eleven students each day compared with a daily attendance of 87 children in 2019. In the northern community libraries, the garden projects and eco-clubs started at the library, but the library staff also had to go to the homes of those interested to assist the patrons to set up their home gardens as part of the summer program. The turnout for the summer program was 75% lower than usual, as parents would not allow their children to go to the library. Parents were instead recording their children reading, as the library staff had requested assurance that families were bonding through reading. Staff worked directly with families through WhatsApp. As with Child Stimulation Month, the southern libraries had similar attendance for their summer programmes in 2020 as in 2019.

Belizean public libraries are known for quarterly, culturally relevant, intergenerational programmes. The community libraries are especially dynamic since they frequently have well-supported programmes for families. One such program is the Finados, a cultural event celebrated by the Mestizo cultural group in early November. This program brought an average of 100 persons to each participating library. Attendees recite specific prayers and bring food offerings to this program which is led primarily by older women in the community. Most COVID-19-related deaths in Belize are of persons over 55 years old. Since older persons are staying at home, and tend to be 'low tech', the community libraries did not plan any in-person Finados activity in 2020. Instead, library staff recreated altars, posted these on social media and encouraged posts and tagging of pictures or videos of past celebrations by their community.

December 7, 2020, marked the 85th anniversary of public library services in Belize, and 2020 was to be a festive year of system-wide, in-person activities highlighting milestones, culminating in a week-long celebration in December 2020 at the historic first public library in Belize City. The commemorative week of events occurred online instead, with one in-person activity that was streamed on Facebook. The virtual week of celebration was a success in that branch and community library staff were able to share their activities which had never happened on a system-wide scale.

Prior to the pandemic, the public libraries were providing literacy programmes, partnering with NGOs for cultural and learning activities, and conducting outreach services at public events outside of the library, such as hospitals and parks. Libraries were often used by the public as a community space for meetings, tutoring, book launches, accessing local materials, Internet cafés, and poetry nights. In addition, some public libraries also offered recreational materials, such as: videos, and hosted cultural or educational events where the community would socialize with family and friends. Book launches were now happening in small groups, which were recorded on Zoom, or using a cell phone, then shared by the libraries through social media.

Challenges/Issues Resulting from COVID-19

A summary of the challenges/issues related to COVID-19 is presented in table 3, which follows.

Summary of Issues/Challenges as a Result of COVID-19

Pre-COVID-19	During COVID-19
Budget was granted for children and	Drastic budget cuts
adult programmes	
Staff felt safe	Some staff members expressed feelings of
	fear, anxiety, and stress
Public transportation was challenging	Public transportation challenges increased:
	service was severely disrupted within and
	between communities, towns and cities
Community library staff countrywide	During the pandemic, receipts were sent
purchased supplies and were reimbursed	through WhatsApp for quick
through documentation sent via a	reimbursement.
paper-based model using the public	
postal service.	

Transportation and its Impact

Transportation is a national ongoing challenge in Belize. The community libraries have been directly impacted. For example, to get a quote for a desk shield, staff in the north would have to find or charter transportation to a neighbouring village, as the carpenters there do not use phones. Also, the buses would leave the villages on a Monday, and returned only on a Friday. Libraries in those areas had no desk guards because they would have to go to the neighbouring village within a certain time, and stay over, in order to obtain the quote. The days away from their homes were costly and increased their exposure to COVID-19.

The initial and subsequent states of emergency caused a nationwide disruption in transportation which adversely affected the remote villages more than the urban areas. There is literally no public transportation between many villages and the urban areas in their district. Prior to the pandemic, BNLSIS headquarters would send packages to branch libraries in district towns for the community library staff to pick up. Reports, receipts and sometimes equipment were sent and received in this manner because the post offices are in the district towns. Staff in the towns now send and receive mail less frequently. This affects reimbursement if the staff paid for supplies out of their own pocket without following the procedure of obtaining pre-approval.

Staffing Issues

After the libraries reopened in May 2020, it took the libraries about three weeks to adapt to the health protocols and shift towards remote or online services. The demand for online services such as access to ebooks, streaming media, and virtual programming increased. The staff described a range of new activities including publicizing, circulating print collections, and highlighting online collections. As library professionals, we know that there is always work to be done when libraries are open; but completing this work came at a high cost for some. Some staff members operated in a state of fear when cases surged in their area. Asking staff to return to work in May was difficult for the supervisors who were also concerned about safety. The slow return from alternating shifts in May to working daily in late June assisted in the transition. Returning to work meant that, in addition to promoting and developing remote services, the daily duties of collection development, writing reports, statistics, and processing materials, were still expected.

Staff expanded the ways through which they could be reached, and experienced heightened stress because of the pandemic and the ever-changing nature of the services. Meetings continued in-person with adherence to physical distancing, which became stricter only after positive cases were climbing. When the positive cases began to rise in August, many staff reported feeling:

- (i) angry that the library did not return to an alternate schedule, or close in areas where multiple people were infected with COVID-19; administration did not approve the closure of any service point except when the government declared that businesses in the area be closed;
- (ii) isolated because the usual visits from their colleagues and supervisors ceased;
- (iii) unsafe at work in those cases where they ran out of disinfecting supplies.

The needs of the patrons far exceeded the service capacity of not only the libraries, but also the social services available within communities. Numerous staff reported missing their regular work routine, and, in the beginning, being primarily concerned about their co-workers' and family's safety.

Countless Zoom meetings and WhatsApp video chats and group messaging ensured that library business continued, and provided an opportunity for peer-to-peer discussions. As such, public libraries had to prioritize, not only the physical safety of the staff, but also their mental health. BNLSIS did not provide direct mental health services to staff although, as one written feedback from a staff member to a supervisor indicates, there may be a need for it:

During the beginning of this pandemic at a point in May 2020 it did affect my mental health, I kept worrying about my health, safety and as well about my family. If I would have gotten the virus how my family would have to deal with it. It did not affect my daily performance because I still managed to do my work even though we were in rotation for the months of May and June.

Commuting staff from the larger branches were relocated twice to branches closer to their homes. First, in the early stage of the pandemic before the State of Emergency in late March declaring a complete lockdown of the country, then in May, when the libraries reopened, the staff continued to work close to home. In July, after a new State of Emergency decreased the restrictions on movement and allowed for expanded travel within the country on public transportation, staff returned to commuting. Later, another State of Emergency was declared mandating an 8 p.m. curfew for all persons. The hours of the library were then adjusted to close at 6 p.m. Commuting staff returned on August 24 to working nearer to their homes.

An informal survey was completed in August 2020 when the positive cases began to rise throughout the country. The survey showed that 100% of the public and community library staff were willing to work from home. Of those surveyed at the fifteen branch libraries, 80% stated that they had adequate space to take materials home to process, 32% responded that they had access to a computer, and 12% stated that they had no Internet.

Organisational Issues

The bureaucracy of the library system created challenges. Community library staff must ask their supervisor, who then asks the Librarian, then the Principal Librarian, then the Chief Librarian to obtain supplies or address infrastructure needs. At times, the responses do not arrive in time, or at all. Branch libraries are supervised by librarians who must obtain permission from the Principal Librarian then the Chief Librarian. Prior to the pandemic, staff would obtain a quotation to purchase supplies if their branch did not have a bank account. Staff would then seek approval from their supervisor, receive approval, then wait for the money to be sent; or proceed with the purchase. If they used their own money a reimbursement is processed after physical receipts of the purchase are sent to headquarters. Each step of the process comes with a cost in terms of time or money, sometimes both. During the pandemic, receipts were sent through WhatsApp, and reimbursements made through bank transfers; but there were situations in which reimbursements took a longer time to process or the staff had no access to their bank. When staff could not go through the process of requesting approval for a quote and instead had to hurry to purchase as the safety supplies became available, they experienced a delay in their reimbursement. This discouraged staff from using their money for necessary supplies.

Prior to the pandemic, staff could request pay advances for medical and other expenses. Also, staff with passing marks on their performance appraisals would receive an annual increment. During the pandemic, all staff members were notified that, due to the austerity measures imposed by the government because of financial constraints, hiring and increments would be put on hold for the fiscal year.

Communication

Supervisors identified a missed opportunity at some branches before the pandemic to ensure that e-mail addresses of all patrons were recorded in their profiles within the integrated library system. This oversight was recognised in April when the senior managers met to discuss the best medium through which to contact patrons about the shift to expanded online services, grab and go services, and other updates.

Donations

Due to the pandemic-related travel restrictions (locally and internationally) and the economic uncertainty in the business community, donations from NGO's and generous citizens decreased. Donations declined in cash, school supplies, activity books, and other materials that were given for programmes at branches throughout the country; consequently, the summer programmes, which usually ran for two weeks, had to be shortened to one week.

Suspected/Actual COVID-19 Cases

The Ministry of the Public Service issued a guideline, dated August 20, 2020, with recommendations on how to maintain workplace safety. The seven-page document listed, in great detail, possible scenarios and how the Heads of Department (HODs) should address each of them. The document was used to address numerous close calls, such as when family members had co-workers who tested positive for COVID-19. Several noteworthy cases arose that required the libraries to be cleaned professionally or closed for a few days.

Case 1: One staff member reported to his supervisor that although he had not been in direct close contact with an original confirmed case, he had been in touch with a close contact of the confirmed case. His supervisor instructed him to work from home until the person who was in close contact with the confirmed case received a COVID-19 negative result. Staff had

worn mask at work and maintained physical distance, so only the co-worker in his department was informed by their supervisor that there was a minute possibility that her co-workers were in contact with someone who was in contact with a person who tested positive for COVID-19. Their section of the library was disinfected after both persons went home. The next day, staff in other sections of the branch felt they too should have been directly informed, even though the risk to them was considered very minimal. The concern from a supervisory standpoint was privacy for the individuals and reducing the level of panic, considering the staff was not directly in contact with the confirmed positive case.

Cases 2 and 3: When the staff tested positive, the libraries were immediately closed, then a professional service was called in to disinfect each building. The co-workers of the persons who tested positive obtained tests from their local health department. A notification was posted on the closed branch library's Facebook page and the library's website. When tests for the other staff returned negative, the libraries reopened. The libraries were closed for 7-9 business days, commensurate with the amount of time it took for the other staff to receive their negative test results.

Case 4: The alcalde (village leader) in two villages near the border declared that all persons must stay at home, and ordered businesses to close, including the library. Both libraries closed for two weeks at a time, with one library having to be closed on two occasions. The alcaldes' decision was to prevent community spread when persons were traveling between Belize and Guatemala. These were rare cases in which the community leaders did not wait for the central government to declare a State of Emergency in their village.

Opportunities that Emerged as a Result of COVID-19

The pandemic presented us with many challenges, but it also provided us with opportunities. Together we:

- Developed self-confidence and courage as it relates to social media use
- Gained more knowledge of online resources such as ebooks, Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC), EBSCOhost and other databases
- Expanded and promoted electronic and online services for patrons
- Learned how to utilize different apps to create virtual stories, flyers and videos

- Learned more innovative and creative ways of using recycling materials for arts and crafts
- Built stronger communication networks.

Training

Staff received specific training on how to supervise their teams and how to use and/or teach the use of the online resources, such as the online catalogue, EBSCOhost, and dLOC. Through partnerships and subscriptions these online resources have been available to Belizeans for over a decade and all staff initially received training; however, updates to the resources or staff turnover have contributed to a variation in staff's dexterity.

Nature of Work

Staff members have been using the downtime to address backlogs. The time formerly used for creating, planning and hosting in-person programmes was being used to input books into the integrated library system, process the backlog of acquired books, weed the collection, and increase online engagement. The range of activities now includes: creating videos which highlight the collection or services, answering reference questions through e-mail, phone or Facebook, and assisting patrons with using online resources.

Communication/Outreach

New opportunities arose during 2020 as library services became more visible through social media. Staff conducted and shared author interviews, recorded messages, and story times to send to peers and community members through WhatsApp.

Peer-to-peer communication happens now almost equally through e-mail, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp. The headquarters of the library had a phone initially that did not use WhatsApp, but this changed because of necessity/demand. There is no online chat through the website.

Between March 2020 and June 2020, the Library's website reflected the scramble to shift from face-to-face and analog services to online and remote services. The front page of the website featured photographs of the Bookmobile, Senior Citizens Committee, and a memo from the Chief Librarian notifying the staff and public about the closure of all branches, with links to EBSCOhost, and a page with educational resources for students. There was an urgent need to train more persons to manage the website and to come to some agreement about the services that would now be featured. The Librarians agreed that more visual content needed to be on the front page, content that reflected the diversity of Belizeans as well as easy access to the public library's catalogue, EBSCOhost, and the Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC). Librarians sought and received training from the vendors of the integrated library system and the website to increase the number of trained persons and expand the skills of those who were previously trained. The result is that by September 7, 2020, when primary schools countrywide experienced their first day of virtual classes, the newly revamped website reflected the intended outcome of highlighting online resources for all ages.

BNLSIS became a partner of the dLOC initiative in 2009. To date, the library has uploaded 70 unique full-text titles on the platform with some titles having multiple issues. Other digital publications about Belize from partner institutions are also hosted on dLOC. The total item views of BNLSIS publications in dLOC from March to December 2020 shows a decrease of 17,400 views from the same period in 2019. However, the figures for June, July and August, 2020, were higher than the previous year; most notably the difference between July 2020 and July 2019 was 12,350, with 2020 having more than double the number of views. This leaves room for speculation that students and researchers were traveling via this platform since commercial flights to Belize were only for repatriation at that time.

The social media pages of the library reflect the diversity in the country, as videos from libraries have been shared in Maya, Kriol, English, Spanish and Garifuna.

Partnerships

Partnerships with local authors existed before the pandemic and this has increased since the pandemic. Known, new, and aspiring authors countrywide have partnered with the libraries to share their writings through social media. Before the pandemic, the authors primarily engaged with the library for research and book launches, not necessarily for ongoing marketing and promotion.

Practical Implications

After analysing the conditions during March-December 2020, BNLSIS learned that COVID-19 reshaped the way supervisors had to plan all traditional activities. This paper reveals that agility, especially during a crisis, is one of the key components for ensuring staff and patron security and satisfaction. The study alerted the supervisors of the extent to which one size doesn't fit all and the importance of listening to and supporting the recommendations of staff at each service point about their community's needs. Public librarians in the Caribbean managing the pandemic may be able to learn from the approaches that we have provided in this paper. What consistently failed was inaction, bureaucracy and actions based

on pre-COVID-19 conditions. What worked were informed and prompt response based on consultations with direct reports and administration. Belizean public library staff significantly reduced the accessibility distance between themselves and their communities by using their personal devices (data and phone credit) as a tool to be reached through social media, online and offline messaging and content creation and sharing. Supervisors had to communicate and adapt frequently in delivering services online since the appetite for local content was increasing and expanding daily. This provided numerous opportunities to engage with current and potential patrons. The staff had to improve their skills, expertise in e-book usage, creation of virtual stories, use of social media platforms and provision of other relevant services. Consequently, the BNLSIS has had to redesign its services to facilitate its patrons during the pandemic. For example, the libraries changed from analog to digital dissemination of information and moved more to web-based or virtual interactions. Further, this paper highlights the necessity to initiate and encourage different approaches to online learning, staff meetings, cultural and educational programmes through collaboration between multiple organisations and libraries.

Managing Positive/Suspected Cases

By the time there was a first suspected case of COVID-19 infection at any library, administration had advised all staff to proactively report to their supervisor if they, or someone in their immediate environment, were experiencing early symptoms or thought they may have been exposed. The supervisor would then consult with management, and later inform any potentially at-risk co-workers. Supervisors were also responsible for sanitizing the workstations of staff members who were sent home. In cases where there was actual COVID-19 exposure, the branch was closed and BNLSIS paid a professional sanitization service to disinfect the entire building in two phases before re-opening. These measures prevented the spread of COVID-19 to other staff and patrons. Lessons learned about COVID-19 management in Belizean public libraries included:

- stay up to date with the Ministry of Health workplace advisories; share widely, and encourage their implementation;
- take immediate informed action for all reports of potential exposure; and
- keep staff informed; they prefer to know from supervisors of even the slightest risk of a COVID-19 infection of a co-worker and how it is being handled before they find out through the grapevine.

Conclusion

This paper examined the impact of COVID-19 on public libraries in Belize through insights from supervisors. COVID-19 resulted in changes with respect to opening hours, safety, social distance, sanitizing, communication, loans, services, customer type, and programmes. There were challenges relating to: transportation, staffing, organisational issues, communication, donations, and handling suspected/actual COVID-19 cases. Opportunities arose in communication, outreach, training, nature of work, and partnerships. Communication presented as a change, a challenge and an opportunity.

Public libraries in Belize have faced the challenge of COVID-19 by drawing on the experiences of libraries locally and around the world. Any decision to restrict services or close a library is a difficult one and taken only following an assessment of the situation. The measures we have taken to curb the impact of COVID-19, some based on guidelines by the Ministries of Health and the Public Service, included: minimal service; full closure; quarantining of materials, social distancing; remote services; limiting number of users in libraries, events and activities; promoting good hygiene; and modifying opening hours. Supervisors had to simplify and streamline organisational issues then reshape the way they planned traditional activities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered for consideration:

- 1. An increase in financial resources is an essential element in the development of the public library system in the new environment. There should be a proper allocation of funds for all forty-seven public libraries countrywide and their management bodies.
- 2. Continue to transition paper-based administrative processes into an upgraded digital equivalent.
- Redistribute supervisory responsibilities. The ratio of those being supervised to those supervising could have been reduced (even temporarily) from up to twenty per supervisor to ten per supervisor.
- 4. Provide special training for supervisors so that they can receive and offer emotional and mental health support. Supervisors had to equip themselves to respond to the fears and concerns, as well as other emotional reactions of their teams. Administration did not provide/facilitate training/therapy to support supervisors who interacted daily with

multiple staff, especially those residing in areas with multiple COVID-19 positive cases.

- 5. The library should invest in new equipment and material so that each branch can play a better role in this new pandemic situation. The visual and audio quality of the posted and shared video recordings depend fully on what is available to the staff at each library.
- 6. Future disaster and strategic plans should reflect geographic differences. Location made a difference. The districts in the south of the country were the last places to receive COVID-19 positive cases. The libraries there hardly experienced any reduction in the number of children who attended the summer program. Meanwhile in the north of the country and along the border, the number of positive cases increased in July, which caused parents to keep their children at home, and staff to feel vulnerable at work.
- 7. Include preparation for and management during a pandemic in the library's disaster plan.
- 8. Encourage awareness of new emerging technologies and changing concepts in the field of library and information science.
- 9. Further studies could include users' perspectives of the impact of COVID-19, as this paper only covers the first 10 months of the pandemic, and on the complete impact of the pandemic on Belizean public libraries.

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JAMAICAN SCHOOL LIBRARIES' READINESS TO DELIVER ONLINE SERVICES IN SUPPORT OF ONLINE EDUCATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Purpose: To investigate the readiness of school libraries to offer online services to their constituents who were engaged in emergency online learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology: Quantitative research method was utilised: a questionnaire, administered via Google Docs, was used to collect data from 180 teachers (teachers in charge of school libraries, teacher-librarians, school librarians and library assistants who worked in or were responsible for school libraries) at the early childhood, primary and secondary levels in Jamaica.

Findings: 70% of the school libraries in the sample were offering a kind of online service; the majority of these were offering limited online services when compared to the face-to-face services that were provided prior to the pandemic. Some schools had the ICT infrastructure and the staff to offer online services, but staff required training in a number of areas. Funding was seen as a critical barrier to the online offerings.

Research limitations/Implications: Convenience sampling was used given that the challenges of the pandemic made it difficult to locate participants. Therefore, only those who were available were included, which may impact the generalisability of the findings.

Originality/Value: This original research provides up-to-date information on the current state of some early childhood, primary and secondary school libraries in Jamaica during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study is valuable as it provides data on the state of Jamaican school libraries, during the COVID-19 pandemic, which can later be used to inform training and implementation of services during a pandemic.

Keywords: School Libraries; LIAJA; Jamaica; Primary and Secondary Education; ICT and School Libraries

Introduction and Background

The Role of School Libraries

School libraries are integral to the academic success of a school. According to the American Library Association (ALA) "school library programs staffed by qualified school librarians

have a positive impact on student academic achievement" ("Why are School Libraries Essential?"). The role of the library is still relevant in the online environment as students, even though they are at home, still require resources for curriculum support and recreational reading. Although many students might have access to the Internet, they may not have acquired the necessary skills to effectively search for and evaluate information; therefore, the librarian is needed to provide education to this effect until students are able to do so competently (Deursen et al. 1343). Students also need to learn how to remain safe in an online environment, which might be new to many of them, so the librarian is of value in teaching students these necessary survival skills.

We live in a rapidly changing environment where transformation, driven by information and communication technologies (ICTs), has impacted every facet of our lives, including education; therefore, ongoing modifications are needed in the education sector to keep curricular offerings relevant. This has made the role of the school library more critical in helping students to acquire the necessary skills to navigate the information and technology rich environment. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) states that "the school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society." In addition, it postulates, "[t]he school library equips students with lifelong learning skills and develops the imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens" ("IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto 1999" para. 1).

School Libraries in Jamaican Government Schools

The Jamaica Library Service (JLS) reports that through its School Libraries Network (SLN) it provides resource materials, training and advice to 898 schools including: 29 infant schools (government owned early childhood institutions); 596 primary and infant, and primary schools (schools with grades 1 to 6; the infant and primary schools also have an early childhood department); 85 all age schools (schools with students aged 6 to 15); 73 primary and junior high schools (formerly all age schools which were upgraded, they serve students aged 6 to 15); 102 high schools (schools which provide a predominantly academic curriculum for students in grades 7 to 13); 9 technical schools (schools which offer a predominantly technical based curriculum for students in grades 7 to 13); 4 vocational (secondary level schools which focus on the teaching of vocational subjects) and special schools (which cater to students with special needs). Based on the JLS' assessment of the total number of schools

served, 550 are active and 80 are partially active. According to JLS, an active school library has: a designated room with an organized collection; personnel in charge of the library; and access to the collection (Jamaica Library Service 132). Partially active libraries have a designated room with personnel assigned but there are likely to be challenges with students accessing the resources. The remaining 268 school libraries were inactive, some schools were without designated space for libraries although students have access to the collection, and there are also cases where students had no access to the collection ("About Schools Library Network"). The service to primary schools started in 1952, four years after the commencement of the public library service (Salmon 19). In 1969, secondary schools were added to the service. Shelley-Robinson notes that there were "less than 100 schools" that were not served by the SLN, and this includes "most of the older high school" (101) which have been popularly termed "traditional high schools." These have been described as "more developed" (Hines), and generally have established libraries; some of these schools are included in the sample for this research.

SLN offers the following services to school libraries:

- The selection, purchase, cataloguing, classification and distribution of material resources;
- Consultation on the design and layout of library facilities;
- The organisation of library resources;
- The training of teacher-librarians and other school library personnel through seminars, workshops as well as 'on the job' programmes;
- Conducting activities and programmes that promote literacy, reading and the use of libraries;
- The inspection of school library facilities and the provision of guidance on best practices;
- Conducting book exchanges (Jamaica Library Service, "About the School Library Network").

At the school level, the school administration is responsible for the day-to-day operations of school libraries including hiring staff, supervising the daily functions of the school library, determining the library programme, and acquiring additional resources to add to those provided by the SLN.

Prior to COVID-19, the school library sector in Jamaica, one of the more organised school library systems in the Caribbean (Shelley-Robinson 97), was experiencing challenges such as inadequate staff, limited and in some cases outdated resources, slow integration of ICT, lack of funding, and unavailability of a curriculum for teaching media and information literacy. In addition, some school libraries were not integrated into the educational programme of the schools, and the roles of the libraries and library staff were not clearly established (Shelley-Robinson). These challenges are likely the results of what Shelley-Robinson describes as "regional governments' unwillingness to develop specific policies for the establishment and operation of these libraries (95).

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

Michael Browne, chairman of CARICOM's Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD), reported that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted schooling for over five million students, and 200,000 teachers within CARICOM (Browne para. 1). These numbers include schools in Jamaica from the early childhood through to the secondary levels, which closed initially for fourteen days on May 13, 2021 ("Schools Closed for Fourteen Days"). Although education resumed for Jamaican students on April 22, 2020, ("Update: Schools to Resume"), it did so in an online mode as the effects of the pandemic worsened. At the time of writing this paper, schools were still operating in the online mode after attempts to reopen some schools had to be abandoned because of an increased spread of the virus. Jamaican school libraries which normally offer services in the traditional mode were severely impacted as their users were online while the resources remained in a physical format for the most part, making it difficult for the libraries to continue to provide service to staff and students.

Against this background, in December 2020 the Schools Section of the Library and Information Association of Jamaica (LIAJA) hosted a session to sensitise school administrators and library personnel to the importance of offering services online, and to provide information, through a series of workshops, aimed at assisting school libraries to offer online services. A total of 393 persons registered for the session, and 247 attended. There were brief presentations on the following topics: the importance of the school library in the digital age; implementing a cost-free library management system; acquiring the EBSCOhost database; and accessing free online resources for primary and secondary schools. In addition, one principal shared her experiences of the library at her school, which was

offering online library services during the pandemic. After the workshop, the researcher distributed a questionnaire, aimed at collecting information on the current status of school libraries and their readiness to offer online services, which formed the nucleus of this paper. This investigation is important as it adds to the body of research on school libraries in Jamaica, and chronicles school libraries' response to the challenges posed by emergency remote learning as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings might also help to guide interventions to ensure the survival of at least some school libraries across the island of Jamaica.

Literature Review

Due to the currency of the topic, at the time of writing this paper, scholarly reports and research were evolving; consequently, the literature reviewed in this section is predominantly American and Canadian, represented by empirical studies done by the American Association for School Librarians (AASL) and the Canadian School Libraries (CSL).

Impact of Emergency Closure of Schools on School Libraries

The effects of the lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic were felt in education generally, and in all types of libraries including school and academic libraries. As emergency remote learning replaced face-to-face classes, UNICEF noted that approximately 83% of students enrolled in institutions worldwide from the early childhood to the secondary levels were able to access learning through online channels (UNICEF). As IFLA pointed out, libraries had to make decisions as to whether to close completely or offer minimal services, and in October 2020, libraries in several countries remained closed while in others, including Jamaica, they were opening with "precautions in place to protect health" (n.p.). Petrowicz, in her discussion of libraries' response to the pandemic, reports that measures implemented at the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics Library included "posting a batch of subscribed eBooks" (para. 3). Addressing the issue of school libraries in particular, IFLA reported that the closure of schools in thirty-four countries resulted in the closure of school libraries (IFLA, *COVID-19*).

School Libraries Support of Teaching and Learning

AASL outlines eight roles of school librarians and their responsibilities in the event of distant learning with no face-to-face contact. As instructional partners, the school librarians

collaborate with teachers for students' orientation and provide professional development to teachers in the use of digital resources and platforms. As teachers, they should conduct research on the impact of learning loss and share the findings with colleagues. They should also "explore and share methods of engaging all learners in online discussion" (n.p.). As leaders, teacher librarians should collaborate with teachers in exploring ways to assist the disenfranchised and provide technical support to families. They are responsible for locating and curating open educational resources as information specialists. Another role, that of programme administrator, requires the school librarian to collaborate with the public library, create a listing of community resources that students can access, and investigate and develop partnerships (American Association of School Librarians n.p.).

The closure of school libraries had repercussions not just for the services offered, but also for the books loaned to students. In reporting on the various practices implemented across the globe to continue to provide library services and gather library resources that were on loan at the time of closure, IFLA stated that some school libraries adapted the strategies used by their parent institutions to offer scaled-down services to their clients. School librarians in Geneva, for example, were leaving baskets in classrooms for the return of books, while the Portuguese Network of School Libraries (PNSL) offered support to its members by creating a guide and an online platform. The PNSL guide provides suggestions on how school libraries can continue to offer their services. Brazil also utilised an online platform through which school libraries offered different types of online services including virtual libraries, limited access to the physical building, resource delivery, online reference service, and the teaching of digital skills. IFLA also highlighted the e-NILAM programme in Malaysia which promoted reading during the closure of schools (IFLA, *Covid-19*).

The Indiana Library Federation (ILF) detailed how school librarians in that state served their constituents during the stay-at-home period. They provided training, supported staff and students, collaborated with other libraries, and assisted with technology (n.p.). School librarians offered training to faculty to help them create tutorials and transition to the online environment, and they also supported students and faculty with online instruction, learning, technology support and readers' advisory (Indiana Library Federation n.p.). Additionally, they created tutorials on how to use technology and digital resources. Given that students were learning online without much prior training, school librarians also supported them in the transition to the online environment and made checks regarding their academic, technology,

social and emotional wellbeing (Indiana Library Federation n.p.). School librarians in Indiana also collaborated with their colleagues in public, academic and special libraries to host events such as virtual authors' visits, maker labs and book clubs. They also hosted virtual open office hours to facilitate those clients who required the service. Some of these activities were also being done in other states, however, there were no "standard" services being provided across states and school districts (Indiana Library Federation n.p.). The AASL reported 53% of school libraries offered virtual classes during the pandemic. Approximately 86% of the school libraries in the AASL sample offered virtual assistance and about 95% offered reference service via email, chat, and text (American Association of School Librarians). Habley found, based on data collected across the United States in August 2020, that the circulation of books was still relatively high "with 94% of respondents on the school district level and 85% of respondents on the building level reporting that books would continue to be circulated" and that despite "the uncertainties and upheaval of families during these times, ... the majority of these items were returned to the school library." (para. 3). Additionally, Witteveen reported that librarians were "sharing book recommendations and engaging in readers' advisory via interactive book displays hosted on a school's learning management system, such as Schoology" (para. 13).

Canadian school libraries also experienced significant challenges, which forced them to devise innovative ways of surviving the pandemic. Some school libraries remained opened and "staff [we]re keeping their role while also 'stepping up as curriculum leaders, resource curators, and digital lead teachers in many schools" (Deziel n.p.). Based on a comparison of the strategies used in both the United States of America and Canada, it can be concluded that Canadian teacher-librarians adopted strategies similar to those of their counterparts in the United States of America, namely: online programming, research support to teachers, and helping administrators train staff who were not comfortable with the use of technology (Freibauer n.p.).

Among the professional development needs of school librarians is training in technology, and this is due mainly to the rapid developments in technology and its integration into library services. A study of school librarians in Jamaica, conducted by Baker-Gardner and Stewart, found that school librarians had a need for ongoing training in technology (187). In addition, an evaluation of professional development activities conducted by LIAJA also revealed a significant emphasis on training in the use of technology for school librarians (88). Witteveen

supports the need for rigorous training programmes for school librarians and notes, "school librarians continue to work as creatively and flexibly as possible, learning new skills and serving in new roles" (para. 28). However, she acknowledges that this new norm presents its challenges; she states, "but the learning curve for this new model of librarianship—and a lack of official training—can be overwhelming" (para. 21).

Freibauer reported that the elimination of the position of teacher-librarian in 450 elementary schools in the Toronto School District and similar action in York Region District resulted in the redeployment of staff and the laying off of library technicians (para. 3). This would make it impossible for these school libraries to offer online services to staff and students. The school library sector in Jamaica was slow in responding to the challenges of the pandemic possibly as a result of the challenges identified previously. This delayed response resulted in lack of or limited service. IFLA reported that in order to alleviate the need for service to students, "the National Library of Jamaica established a programme to help students continue to study and pass their exams." (Section – Providing Services Remotely).

School libraries and librarians internationally have made many adjustments in order to continue to offer services during emergency remote learning, and IFLA has been instrumental in conveying information about the many methods used to do this including finding novel ways to collect books that were on loan and launching online services (IFLA n.p) School library associations have also been integral in helping members to adjust to the new work environment. AASL and the PNSL have issued guidelines to their members on how to provide services to their constituents in the online environment (American Association of School Librarians n.p); American Library Association 1-8). The Indiana Library Federation (ILF) shared how its librarians have been offering professional development and other support to faculty and students to aid in the transition to online learning (Indiana Library Federation n.p,). School librarians in Canada experienced significant challenges as some libraries were closed and librarians redeployed. Other Canadian and American school librarians were serving in several capacities such as: staff support, student support, curriculum leadership, resource curation and digital leadership (Deziel n.p.). Due to challenges being experienced by school libraries in Jamaica, the National Library of Jamaica (NLJ) provided services to students (IFLA n.p.).

Methodology

Given the absence of detailed scholarly information on the impact of the pandemic on school libraries in Jamaica, and the resultant gap in the general literature on the impact of the pandemic on school libraries globally/in the Caribbean, this paper seeks to:

- Assess the initial impact of the closure of schools (as a result of the pandemic) on school libraries in Jamaica;
- Investigate Jamaican school libraries' readiness to support online teaching and learning;
- Identify the need requirements of Jamaican school library personnel for the successful delivery of online library services; and
- 4. Identify the likely barriers to the successful provision of online school library services in Jamaica.

As such, this research was guided by the following questions:

- 1. How were Jamaican school library services impacted by the transition from face-to-face to online learning?
- 2. Do Jamaican school libraries have the ICT infrastructure to support online learning?
- 3. How ready were Jamaican school libraries to deliver online services in support of online teaching and learning?
- 4. What were the professional development needs of Jamaican school librarians for the successful delivery of online school library services?
- 5. What was the likely long-term impact of the closure of Jamaican schools (due to the pandemic) on Jamaican school libraries?
- 6. What were some of the likely barriers to implementing online school library services in Jamaica?

According to Gay, a quantitative approach provides the researcher with the opportunity to "describe current conditions" (14); it was, therefore, considered to be particularly suited to describing the current conditions of school libraries in respect of readiness to support emergency remote teaching and learning and was consequently selected as the approach for this study. The descriptive survey method was used to examine and report on the impact of school closure due to COVID-19 on school library services. The population for this study consisted of school library personnel at the pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels. A sensitisation session was held to provide information about the series of workshops and to seek support for the attendance of school library personnel. A total of 247 individuals attended the sensitisation session including principals, vice-principals, teacher-librarians,

librarians, teachers in charge of school libraries, library assistants and administrative assistants. Using convenience sampling, 204 participants were selected from the population of 247. Within the context of this paper, it is important to make distinctions between the various categories of personnel who work in the school library. A teacher-librarian is a person formally trained in both teaching and librarianship. Some libraries are operated by teachers who have no formal training in librarianship, and others by librarians who have no formal training in teaching. The term school library personnel is used throughout the paper to include all the groups of persons working in Jamaican school libraries.

School administrators and teachers who had no knowledge of school library operations were not included in the sample. They were removed because they were not involved in the daily administration of the libraries and therefore would not be able to provide the information being sought. In addition, in some cases, administrators and school library personnel from the same school were present, so, to include both in the sample would have likely resulted in over-reporting for the respective school library.

Although the use of convenience sampling negatively impacts the generalisability of the results of the study, as Fraenkel and Wallen noted, the disadvantages of convenience sampling can be decreased through the inclusion of "demographic and other characteristics of the sample that was studied" (112). This guideline was followed in this study. A questionnaire consisting of twenty-seven items was administered via Google Docs to the 204 school library personnel, which included library assistants, school librarians, teacher-librarians and teachers in charge of the libraries. The questionnaire had twenty-six multiple choice items divided into four sections with a fifth section for respondents to provide additional comments. Section 1 contained seven questions which collected demographic data such as school type, enrolment and location, collection size and composition, library accommodation and staffing. The six questions in Section 2 focused on Internet connectivity at both the school and in the library and the number of computers in the library. Section 3 contained six questions which sought information on library services offered prior to the discontinuation of face-to-face instruction, and the services which were being offered during the lockdown. The final six questions, which comprised Section 4, collected data on the implementation of online services, including the professional development that would be required for library personnel, a possible timeline for the implementation of these services and potential barriers to moving online. The fifth section allowed respondents to provide additional comments. (See Appendix for the questionnaire).

One hundred and eighty (180) questionnaires were completed and returned (representing a response rate of 88%). Quantitative data from sections 1-4 of the questionnaires were tallied and analysed using charts and graphs generated by Microsoft Excel. For the fifth section of the questionnaire, qualitative responses were analysed and presented using a thematic approach. Demographic data was presented first; the remaining data was presented by research questions. Items 14 to 19 provided data for research question 1. The responses from items 8 to 13 provided data for research question 2. Research question 3 was answered by data garnered from items 20 to 22; research question 4 was answered by items 23 and 24. Research questions 5 and 6 were answered by items 25 and 26 respectively.

Presentation of Findings

Demographic data

In keeping with the advice of Fraenkel and Wallen to provide information on demographic characteristics (112), the first seven questions requested demographic data on the type of school, enrolment, location, library facilities, staff qualification, collection size and types of resources.

Of the school library personnel, 66% worked in libraries located in rural areas and 31% in urban areas. There were no responses to this item from 3%. The responses to the question on the types of schools in which the school library personnel worked showed that the libraries were found in a variety of schools (see fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Types of Schools

The majority (43%) of respondents were from primary schools. When the percentage of representatives from the infant and primary (12%), preparatory (3%), and primary and junior high (1%) were added to the total for the primary schools, the result showed that a significant percentage of these respondents (59%) were from schools which catered to primary age students. 37% of the respondents were from secondary schools. The findings might therefore be influenced by the high number of primary schools in the sample.

The enrolment ranged from below 100 students to 2,500, with the majority having 300 or less students (see fig. 2).



Fig. 2. School Enrolment

39% of the libraries served schools with enrolment of up to 300 students; 29% of these schools were located in rural areas. At the other end of the enrolment spectrum, 21% of the schools had enrolment exceeding 1,200 students. Of this 21%, 17% were secondary schools, and 11% were in rural areas. The majority of pre-primary and primary schools had low enrolment compared to the majority of secondary schools which had enrolment exceeding 1,200 students.

The responses to the item on library accommodation revealed that 87% of the schools had a library room. The other schools had books on shelves or in cupboards or boxes, and few had multiple rooms to accommodate the library. Secondary schools and large primary schools were more likely to have library rooms than small primary schools.

The staffing of school libraries is critical to decision making and the implementation of online services. The item which asked school library representatives to state their positions showed that the 180 school libraries were staffed by 237 individuals, with 18% of the libraries staffed by more than one individual. These individuals held various positions (see table 1).

Table 1

Category of Staff	Early Childhood	Primary*	Special Education	Secondary	Total
Teacher	2	51	1	9	63
Teacher-Librarian	3	40		44	87
Librarian		2		11	13
Library Assistant	1	1		43	45
Volunteers		10	1	6	17

Categories of Personnel Working in School Libraries by Position and School Type

Administrative Assistant		4		8	12
Total	6	108	2	121	237

Primary* includes primary, preparatory, primary and junior high, infant and primary

Based on the data provided by the participants, the most popular category of library staff was teacher-librarian, and this category was employed almost equally in the primary and secondary schools. This accounted for 87 (approximately 37%) of the staff deployed to the school libraries from which the sample was drawn. School libraries, predominantly those in the primary schools, were operated by teachers, and this accounted for 63 persons representing approximately 27% of the overall number of workers in these libraries. Library assistants accounted for 19% of staff working in the libraries, however they were deployed mainly to libraries in the secondary schools where they worked under the guidance of the librarians or teacher-librarians. Based on the data presented in table 2, when the number of librarians and teacher librarians were added together and calculated as a percentage, only 42% of personnel working in school libraries were trained as librarians. There were 180 school libraries represented in the sample, and only 100 of these (55%) were staffed by library professionals (librarians or teacher-librarians).

No one was currently assigned to 7% of the libraries, as the staff had been reassigned to classrooms as a result of the closure of school due to the pandemic. The representatives from these libraries who attended the seminar and submitted data provided some insight into the impact of the pandemic on school libraries. 7% served in school libraries predominantly at the primary level, and they usually worked under the supervision of the teacher in charge of the school library.

The collections of approximately 42% of the libraries contained less than 1000 items, while 47% had between 1001 and 5000 items. The collections in most libraries were print resources only; however, 30% of the libraries had CDs, 21% had DVDs, and 10% had ebooks. Only 6% of the libraries in secondary schools had online databases.

Research Question 1: How were school library services impacted by the transition from face-to-face to online learning?

Participants were asked to indicate the services provided prior to and after the transition to online learning. 70% of the libraries reported that they provided services after the closure of the physical plant. The 7% of the libraries that had no personnel were included in the 30% that was no longer offering services. The types of services provided prior to and after the transition are shown in the following figure (see fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Services Provided by School Libraries Prior to and after the Transition to Online Learning

A comparison of the services offered by school libraries prior to and following the transition to online learning shows that the same services were being offered, but that the number of school libraries offering them declined significantly during the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, the majority of libraries (53%) offered circulation, whereas after the pandemic only approximately one third of that number or 17% were still doing so. Traditional reference was being offered by 50% before schools closed and experienced a similar reduction in usage during the pandemic declining to 18%. These were followed by information literacy which fell from 39% to 24%. The significant decrease in services such as circulation and traditional reference was the only service, which experienced no change; however, given that students were now online, an increase in the demand for this service might have been expected.

Research Question 2: Do school libraries have the ICT infrastructure to support online learning?

This item sought to discover ICT resources available in the school libraries and ICT services that could be introduced on a phased basis. When asked about access to the Internet in both the school and the library, responses indicated that 84% of the schools provided Internet access to staff, while approximately 66% of the schools provided Internet access to students. 27% of the primary schools did not provide Internet access to students, and 18% of the schools which did not provide Internet access were rural primary schools with enrolment below 300 students. It is noting that 9.5% of the schools without Internet service were in urban areas. Schools had access to the Internet through both broadband (61%) and Wi-Fi (85%), with a small number having both.

To determine the ICT resources in the library, participants were asked to indicate which resources were available. The responses are shown below (see fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Current ICT Resources in School Libraries

Less than half the libraries (47%) represented in the sample had access to Wi-Fi. Approximately one-third (34%) had computers in the library with Internet access. 10% of the school libraries had a combination of Wi-Fi access, computers with Internet and computers without Internet. Some respondents indicated that the computers in the school library were not working. Of the 180 libraries represented in the sample, approximately 37% had no
computers, 36% had 1-5 working computers in the library, while the others had more than five.

Research Question 3: How ready were school libraries to deliver online services in support of online teaching and learning?

Library representatives were asked to indicate the services they could provide online as well as on a phased basis beginning January 2021 and ending at the beginning of the academic year 2021/22. The results are shown in Figure 5, which follows.



Fig. 5. Schedule for Implementation of Online Services

Media and information literacy (MIL) classes (still incorrectly referred to as Library Skills in some schools) was the service currently being offered by most (27%) of the school libraries. The hosting of a Google Classroom page (21%) followed. Google Classroom, defined as "a suite of online tools which allow teachers to set assignments, have work submitted by students, to mark, and to return graded papers" (Edwards); is the preferred tool used in Jamaica for the delivery of lessons. The service that showed the highest possibility for implementation by most libraries by the end of the Easter term was the provision of links to reading resources in the Google Classroom (44%); the establishment of Google Classroom pages (35%), and links to curriculum resources (27%) followed.

If implementation proceeded as planned, by September 2021, 68% of the school libraries should have a Google Classroom page with links to relevant reading resources. In addition,

56% of the schools should have their Media and Information Literacy classes online, while 47% should be doing online reference. There should be gradual implementation of services such as: online databases (27%), and integrated library management systems (24%). The quality of the services provided in the schools was impacted by the type of school (e.g., primary or secondary) and whether it was located in an urban or rural area.

Small schools, especially those in the rural areas, indicated less of a commitment to adopt online services. Secondary schools demonstrated more of an interest in online services generally, especially as it related to online databases and integrated library management systems.

Research Question 4: What are the professional development needs of school library personnel if they are to successfully deliver online services?

Training is essential for the development of new skills and competences. Based on the topics introduced at the sensitisation seminar, participants were asked to indicate those topics in which they needed additional training. The responses are shown in fig. 6.



Fig. 6. Training Needs of School Library Personnel

The most prevalent training need was how to implement a library management system (LMS), (79%). Participants were introduced to Koha in the seminar as a free option that could be implemented in schools that do not have the resources to purchase a subscription-based system. Given the financial challenges facing schools because of

non-payment of fees and cessation in fundraising events due to COVID-19 restrictions, it is understandable that 86% of the respondents are interested in training in how to find and access free online resources. Only 31% of the participants were interested in online databases and 28% wanted to learn more about the role of the school library.

Respondents were given the opportunity to indicate additional training needs in the "Other" category of the questionnaire. There were 57 responses which were organised for reporting based on the five roles of the school librarian as advocated by Cohen et al. These roles are: teacher, leader, instructional partner, information specialist, and programme administrator (1). 44% of the areas for training identified by the respondents concerned the administrator role, while 35% aligned to the role of the teacher librarian as information specialist; and 19% to the teaching role. The roles of leader and instructional partner did not feature in their responses.

Research Question 5: What was the likely long-term impact of the closure of schools (due to the pandemic) on school libraries?

Respondents were asked to provide qualitative data as to the likely impact of the cessation of face-to-face classes and the emergency move to online education, on school libraries; 113 participants (63%) responded. The responses, which totalled 134 when they were grouped by theme, varied, representing a range of perspectives that were likely informed by the current situation of the respondents. Responses focused on five of the six elements of library provision: physical infrastructure, services, staff, users, and resources are shown in Table 2. The responses about the funding of the school library which is the sixth element necessary in the provision of effective service in any type of library. This could be due to the lack of consistent funding for school libraries (Shelley-Robinson 110). Participants' responses also included comments about the need to upgrade libraries so they could offer online services. Based on the responses, respondents believed if libraries were not upgraded, they could become extinct. The latter category of responses was included in the analysis.

Table 2

Areas of Impact/Possible Impact of the Shift to Online Instruction as a Result of the Closure of Schools

Areas of Impact	Percentage %
Upgrade to online	22
Users	21
Resources	19
Service	13
Possible extinction	13
Physical infrastructure	4
Staff	4
Other	4
Total	100

The majority of responses (22%) indicated the respondents' belief that as a result of the closure of schools due to COVID-19, libraries would upgrade and begin to offer some services online. 21% of the responses indicated a likely impact on users including staff and students, while 19% stated that resources would be affected. This effect on resources would include the lack of relevance of current physical resources and the need to acquire additional resources to deliver online services.

Respondents believed that the current situation would lead to a lack of use of the physical plant. Two possible reasons were suggested for this. Some respondents believed it was due to the library going online, while others felt that buildings would no longer be needed and libraries would be closed due to lack of access. One respondent felt "the library may be used for other things such as isolation area instead of its intended purpose." Another respondent concurred stating "the library room might be used for holding area for children showing symptoms." This was supported by another respondent who explained the possibility of "restructuring of the workspace", while another referred to the possibility of "drastic changes" with regard to physical accommodation.

In terms of services, 13% of the participants presented differing perspectives. Some resigned themselves to the current dilemma and their inability to offer traditional services. This position was articulated by one respondent who stated, "because the library does not offer online services, it is not able to meet the needs of the clients." 22% saw this fall out due to COVID-19 as an opportunity for school libraries to customise their mode of operation to

meet the online environment. One person summed up both positions in one statement: "reduced face-to-face interactions but increased online participation." Another supported this statement by saying "establish virtual library in addition to the physical one." One more extensive reply addressed several issues including relevance of the school library, the need to provide support for students in an online environment, and the need for creativity in offering library services online:

School libraries will be more relevant as the need for information is greater and the online environment demands a lot of independent study and students will need to access the information without leaving the confines of their home. School libraries will also need to create online relevant programmes that cater to the needs of faculty and students. Basically, bring the library services to the online landscape in a creative manner.

These statements found support from other respondents. One individual spoke of the need for a "strong online presence." Another respondent believed the migration of the library to the digital space might actually result in increased usage. There was also fear that the closure of the library might endanger library resources. One respondent stated, "the overall effect is likely to be depletion of the stock and damage to some resources like the computers not in use."

The 4% of the participants who felt that staff would be affected believed the impact would be manifested in two ways. Participants were aware that the current skills of librarians were not up to par for online learning so there was a need to "learn the rudiments of the digital space." This was supported by the large number of librarians who indicated a need for training in various aspects of the use of ICTs, including library management systems (79%), finding and accessing free resources (86%), and online databases (28%). The other likely impact on staff was the deployment to other areas where school administration felt they would be more beneficial, and the data indicated that in some instances school librarians had already been redeployed.

It was believed the inability to use the library due to COVID-19 would adversely affect students. There was the perception that it might result in "students' lack of interest in printed book materials", and that it would negatively impact literacy rates. Participants thought that less fortunate students would be most impacted by the lack of access to the libraries because of their inability to acquire resources by other means. One respondent stated:

... some students from depressed communities may lack resources to access learning online and therefore will be 'short changed' as it relates to online information. Also, students who reside in rural areas where access to Internet services is lacking can be challenging as well. Overall, students will not cite the need for a physical school library and will become frustrated at some point due to COVID-19 restrictions. They might even lose interest in information learning.

This statement reflects the belief that the overall impact on students of loss of school library services might be great.

13% of the respondents believed that the pandemic had already sounded a death knell for school libraries, as they would become obsolete and would no longer be required to offer services. Words and phrases such as "dormant", "dormancy", "a thing of the past" and "will be no more" were used to express this perspective. Others believed the survival of school libraries was dependent on their ability to successfully transition to the digital space. One respondent stated, "Unless online access becomes available, the library as we know it will become obsolete." S/he believed if school libraries failed in this transition process, they were likely to "eventually have persons questioning their importance." One respondent linked the survival of the library to its relevance by stating, "either relevance will be seen, or we will become obsolete." Another was more strident in her/his assessment of the situation. S/he stated there will be "further erosion and undermining of the role of our school libraries." Some respondents offered solutions to the current lack of service. One explained how the school library could remain relevant, s/he stated, "COVID-19 limited the use of the library in the physical space so now more than ever school libraries have to provide access to databases, links and other online resources. Being accessible online, the school library will remain relevant and useful to staff and students."

A variety of comments were captured in the "Other" category. School library personnel have some general concerns including the lack of support from the Ministry of Education for school libraries and the absence of a curriculum for the teaching of media and information literacy. They also expressed gratitude to the library association for the support it provided in the form of professional development. One stated, "libraries are one of the countries' greatest resources. It will take quick action and creativity from the library association to sell this value as a necessity to empower parents, students and teachers all going forward." Another supported this call by saying, "please plan and conduct more workshops to assist us to transition to an online library." Another stated, "the initiatives being taken with school libraries will auger well for teaching and learning."

Research Question 6: What were some of the likely barriers to implementing online school library services?

Participants were asked to indicate what was likely to be the greatest challenge in the implementation of online services. Table 3 displays the responses.

Table 3

Challenges to the Implementation of Online Services

Challenge	Percentage
Funding	83.2%
Lack of computers	56.3%
Limited time of library personnel	56.3%
Limited ICT skills of library personnel	28.7%
Lack of understanding of the role of the librarian	21.6%
Lack of support from school administration	15.6%

Funding was cited by 83.2% of the respondents as the greatest challenge to the implementation of online services in the library. Lack of computers and limited time of librarians (56.3% each) were cited as other important factors. The issue of limited ICT skills of librarians was again raised by 28.7% of the respondents. The lack of support from school administrators (15.6%) and a lack of understanding of the roles of the school librarians (21.6%) received the lowest responses.

Analysis of Findings

Demographic Data

Of the 180 respondents to the survey, the majority were from primary level institutions (including preparatory, primary, infant and primary, and primary and junior high schools) and the majority of the schools were located in the rural areas. Demographic characteristics impacted school library provision in several ways. Since small rural primary schools have

been identified as being less likely to have teacher-librarians (Bamberger et al.), computers and Internet in the library and offer online services (Wang 127) than large secondary schools, the implementation of online services might be challenging in these rural schools due to lack of or limited technology and absence of trained staff. Parris noted that school library provision at the primary level was "non-existent" in Barbados in 1982 (18), a position which Jordan underscored after examining school library provision in the Commonwealth Caribbean (46). While this might not be true of Jamaica based on the data, the quality of the service in terms of collection size, personnel and the integration of ICT warrants attention (Shelley-Robinson 99).

Library Staff

Staffing is critical to the level of service that is delivered in a school library. Staff knowledge and competence are vital, especially where the role of the school librarian has not been clearly established based on policy, as is the case in Jamaica. Shelley-Robinson, in 2007, found that Jamaican school libraries were staffed by individuals with a variety of qualifications. Based on the data of this research paper, the majority of school libraries (49%) were staffed by teacher-librarians while the number being operated by teachers (32%) was almost the same as that reported by Shelley-Robinson (109). Those libraries operated by library and administrative assistants (26%) and volunteers (9%) were not likely to be able to implement an online programme due to issues such as a lack of the requisite knowledge and skills and possibly a lack of commitment to the process on the part of volunteers. Some of the schools (7%) did not have library programmes, as there were no personnel assigned. When the number of libraries being operated by administrative assistants and volunteers is added to the number of those currently without staff assigned, almost half of the libraries in the sample might not be able to implement an online programme due to inadequate staffing.

Collections

Library collections were mainly print-based and small, with 42% of the schools having less than 1000 items. This figure is comparable to Shelley-Robinson's findings that 55% of the schools in her sample had collections of 2,000 or less (104). Based on her findings, it is probable that the majority of the items in the collections of libraries in the current survey have been donated since school libraries do not receive direct funding from the parent institution to acquire resources but receive books from the Jamaica Library Service (110). Furthermore, based on Shelley-Robinson's findings (110), it is also probable that the

relevance and currency of these resources might render them unsuitable for use in the online environment. Therefore, any decision to go online will have to focus on the development of current collections.

Given the lack of staff in some libraries, the small collections, the lack of Internet access and the limited ICT resources such as computers, it is likely that some school libraries will not be able to transition to the online environment without significant intervention aimed at developing collections, providing professional development for staff and ensuring the technological infrastructure are in place. These interventions are required not only at the school level, but even more so at a national level to ensure that school libraries are able to offer quality service and to support students in an increasingly technological environment.

Comparison of Services Provided Before & After the Closure of Schools

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the libraries offered a combination of traditional and online services; however, the restrictions imposed to manage the pandemic had a significant negative impact on these services. The services most commonly provided before the pandemic were circulation (53%), reference (50%) and information literacy (30%). The provision of both reference services and information literacy classes decreased by more than 50% given that these services were usually offered in a physical mode. Circulation of library resources was also affected as only approximately one third of the libraries continued to circulate resources after the suspension of face-to-face classes. The number of libraries offering email reference (9%) remained unchanged. 27% of the libraries offered virtual classes during the pandemic, this is half of the number reported by American Association of School Librarians (AASL n.p.).

Comparatively, school libraries in Jamaica failed to capitalise on email, an existing online medium of communication, to continue to offer services. There was no change in the number of libraries offering this service, even though some of the channels for offering service prior to the closure of school were not available. Although 53% of the sample stated that they engaged in circulation prior to COVID-19, only 39.2% indicated that they had books on loan when schools were closed. This difference of 13.8% raises questions as to whether the 53% is correct as the expectation is that if libraries were offering circulation services, books would be on loan. Schools were closed abruptly, and this did not allow them any time to retrieve the books that were on loan.

Based on the qualitative data, the circulation of books in the schools surveyed fell by two thirds; librarians feared that if they loaned books during the pandemic, the items might be lost or damaged, a finding which deviates from that of Habley. The Jamaican data also shows a decline in consultation with teachers, which fell from 30% to 14%. While this might be explained by the fact that, for the most part, teaching staff were working remotely, it should be noted that consultation with teachers was one significant way school librarians in the United States of America and Canada provided support during online learning.

ICT Infrastructure

There are two components to offering online services: having the infrastructure to support online delivery and implementing services that are suitable for online offering. The majority of schools provided Internet access to both staff and students, so there was existing ICT infrastructure in these institutions. Approximately 16% of the schools did not provide Internet access to academic staff, and 34% offered no access to students. Internet access was available via Wi-Fi and broadband. Reader's earlier 2017 study of secondary school libraries in Jamaica found that 47% of the schools in her sample were ready for ICT integration (Abstract). However, her sample was drawn primarily from secondary institutions located in the urban area. In this present study, the typical profile of a school that lacked Internet access for academic staff was one with an enrolment of less than three hundred students and was located in a rural area. This was almost a year after the start of the pandemic and students were expected to be pursuing online learning. The fact that Internet access was available to the majority of the teaching staff makes them a ready audience for online library services.

Although the majority of schools had access to the Internet, access to it in the library was significantly lower with 47% having Wi-Fi access and 34% having broadband access. This is higher than the 12.9% reported by Shelley-Robinson in 2007 (107); the improvement could be due to the general increase in access since that study. Of the 180 school library representatives who responded to the survey, 37% had no computers in the library and 19% had computers with no Internet connection.

One other issue was the need to upgrade the available computers. Some schools were better resourced as they reported that they had more than fifteen working computers in the library. These schools experienced better provision as based on the data collected from library

personnel, the majority of schools (73.5%) had five or fewer computers. Although the introduction of ICTs into school libraries was reported by Daley as early as two decades ago (56), and Laird found that students at one high school used the Internet in the school library at least once per week during that same period (46); the majority of school libraries in this sample were still unprepared to provide online service.

Implementation of Online Service

The timeline for the implementation of online services indicated that most institutions were interested in offering some level of online service. Some of the services they wanted to offer during online instruction as a result of the closure of schools matched those being offered elsewhere as reported by IFLA and some library associations, including: teaching of information literacy online; provision of access to databases; implementation of an online public access catalogue; access to the library's digital learning management platform page; locating free online resources for teachers; online reference; and the provision of bibliographies for subject teachers listing online resources.

AASL also mentioned that approximately 53% of its sample offered online classes. According to Burt, "students are not prepared with the necessary "research and social-ethical skills" required for remote or hybrid learning models" (para. 5). Many students who did not previously have online access lacked the skills required to safely navigate the online environment. This lack of skills makes the teaching of media and information literacy online a critical issue in these times. The need for school librarians to provide assistance to teachers in terms of identifying and providing access to free online resources is reflected by practices in the United States of America and Canada where school librarians were "guiding teachers through a complicated web of free online resources" (Bamberger et al. para. 3).

Google Classroom, the learning management system used in Jamaica, was being used by 21% of the sample. Based on the qualitative data, a few school librarians were using Google Classroom to promote reading resources. Burt reports that 55% of the librarians in his sample were teaching online (para. 11). By the beginning of the academic year 2021/22, Jamaican schools should be close to that number if implementation proceeds as indicated in the survey.

Other types of online activities proposed for implementation were also being offered in the United States of America based on the AASL survey. La Rosa found that "64% [of librarians

surveyed] will be continuing or adding remote library activities" (para. 2). Habley also reported an "increasing reliance on virtual resources" (para. 3). This was clearly not the case in Jamaica, where the majority of school libraries were not yet online, and the library association had just started initial efforts to encourage this. Some institutions indicated that they would not be able to implement some of the online services until September 2021. Although this might seem late, given the uncertainty of the timeline for the pandemic, online services will be needed even after schools return to face-to-face. According to Fayval Williams, Minister of Education, Youth and Information in Jamaica, "online learning, which has become prevalent in schools since March, is here to stay, even after the advent of the coronavirus (COVID-19)" ("Online Learning Will Be Relevant" para. 1).

Likely Impact of COVID-19

The discussion as to the likely impact of the closure of schools on school libraries as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic revealed some issues that were supported by findings from other research. For example, the Canadian School Libraries Association notes that some school districts "have chosen to reassign school library staff, restrict access to library resources, and in some cases completely close the library and shut down associated programs and services." The redeployment of school librarians in Jamaica has already begun, based on data from the respondents. There is also the report of cuts in budget from both the United States of America (Bamburger; Witevveen) and Canada (Deziel). This is not the case in Jamaica, as school libraries do not receive regular funding. La Rosa reports that 50% of librarians were losing their library space due to closure or the need for additional classroom space to facilitate social distancing (para. 2). Although this is a likely scenario for Jamaica, the majority of schools were still online.

Training for School Librarians

It is obvious from their responses that school library personnel feel they will need substantial training in order to implement online services. 61% of the overall responses had to do with ICT related topics. However, traditional topics such as cataloguing and how to organise a library were also identified. School library personnel would have benefitted from some training provided by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information. However, this training is provided to all teachers and therefore would not meet the specific needs of teacher-librarians. The need for free training in how to gain access to free primary and secondary resources would have been important given the harsh financial climate and the

inability of schools to purchase resources based on the limited income from fees and fundraising activities. Online databases would be new to the majority of school libraries. There was limited interest in the online databases (31%) which could be due to the low numbers of secondary schools, the likely audience for online databases, in the sample. The low number of persons interested in learning about the role of the school library (28%) could be an indication that some of the persons attending the seminar were trained as teacher-librarians and therefore would be aware of their roles. This finding on the need for additional training in ICTs for Jamaican school librarians underscores the findings of Baker-Gardner and Stewart (220) and Witteveen (par. 28).

Barriers to the Implementation of Online Services

Funding, a lack of computers in the library, and limited time for library personnel to perform the many duties assigned to them were likely barriers to the implementation of online services. Funding has long been a challenge for school libraries in Jamaica (Shelley-Robinson 110), and so it is not surprising that it was identified again in this study as the greatest barrier to school libraries offering online services. Daley also found that funding was the main factor which impacted the acquisition of additional ICT infrastructure in Jamaican secondary school libraries. She further found that school librarians saw fundraising as their major opportunity to acquire funding to equip school libraries with computers (60). The lack of computers and the limited time are also significant factors that are likely to have negative impact on the implementation of online services. School library personnel had a variety of duties to perform, and some were tasked with teaching subjects other than information literacy while running the library. In addition, the majority of teacher-librarians were one person librarians (OPLs) (Baker-Gardner 73); therefore, the number of them citing limited time can be understood against this background.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of data, the following conclusions were drawn:

• The majority of school libraries were offering minimal services. Some school library personnel were innovative and had devised ways of offering online service while others were offering scaled down versions of their face-to-face service by allowing small groups to access the physical plant. This had resulted in the redeployment of some school library personnel, as school administration felt that their skills might be better employed in other non-library related activities.

- Although the majority of libraries would like to offer their services online, based on the absence of access to the Internet and unavailability of computers, it seemed that some school libraries might not be able to make the transition. For those schools that are in a better position, a variety of solutions might be necessary, taking into consideration their unique needs. These include the conversion of the card catalogue to online public access catalogue so it can be accessed off site, the acquisition of electronic resources to meet the needs of the students especially those at the secondary levels, and the teaching of MIL classes online where this was not yet implemented.
- Another challenge was that librarians needed continuing professional development to hone their technology skills so that they would be better able to serve effectively in an ICT enabled environment. The training provided by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information, Jamaica, was not specialised enough to help them to deliver the types of services that are required. Another staff factor that needs to be addressed is the shortage of librarians within these institutions, as dedicated staff is required to implement online services.

Based on the conclusions drawn from this research the following recommendations are being presented:

- In other jurisdictions, library associations have come on board to provide support to school libraries. This is also the model in Jamaica, where LIAJA has provided ongoing professional development to school librarians (Baker-Gardner 67). The association therefore needs to provide a rigorous training programme for schools which gives each the option to participate in seminars which meet the needs of its library personnel. This training is currently needed and so should be launched as soon as possible.
- Even in those schools that already have Internet access, the number of school libraries with Internet access is low. Despite the severe financial constraints, school administrators need to make provisions for the school libraries to be equipped with Internet access and better computers where these are needed. School administrators also need to provide support to school librarians so that each school library can at least have a presence in the online environment. This would be especially beneficial to those students who are already marginalised, and those whose research and technology skills need to be developed.

• Given the many challenges of the online environment, including online predators and abundance of online information, media and information literacy is a necessity. School librarians therefore need to be online where the students are, teaching them how to navigate the environment safely and effectively. Although there is not a national curriculum for the teaching of media and information literacy, elements of this are embedded in the New Standards Based Curriculum which was launched in 2016. School librarians need to apprise themselves of the content and use the Google Classroom to deliver these lessons.

If these recommendations are implemented, they would go a long way in ensuring that school libraries continue to offer services that meet the needs of their clients who have migrated to an online environment. Inability to do so would mean that school libraries may no longer be able to fulfil their mandate as outlined by IFLA. In an education system where these libraries are already marginalised, it might mean the closure of some school libraries.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

School Libraries on the Information Superhighway

Kindly complete this questionnaire, which will provide data to the Library and Information Association of Jamaica (LIAJA) regarding the kind of professional support needed by school libraries.

Section 1: Demographic Data

1. Type of School

Early childhood	O Primary
Basic and Primary	Preparatory
O Primary and Junior High	Secondary
Other:	
2. Location	
Urban Other:	Rural
3. Enrolment	
Less than 300	301 - 600
601 - 900	901 - 1200
Over 1200	Other:
4. Library accommodation	
Books in boxes	Books in cupboard
	\bigcirc
Library room	Multiple rooms
Other:	Multiple rooms
Other: 5. Collection Size	Multiple rooms
Other: 5. Collection Size Collection Less than 1000 items	Multiple rooms 1001 - 5000
Other: 5. Collection Size Less than 1000 items 5001 - 10,000	 Multiple rooms 1001 - 5000 10,001 - 15,000
Other: 5. Collection Size Less than 1000 items 5001 - 10,000 15,001 - 20,000	Multiple rooms 1001 - 5000 10,001 - 15,000 Over 20,000

6. The collection is made up of (Tick all that apply)

Printed books

Electronic books
Printed journals
Databases
Other:
7. The library is staffed by (Tick all that apply)
Librarian
Teacher-librarian
Teacher
Library assistant
Administrative assistant
Administrative assistant Volunteers

Section 2: Information and Communication Technology Infrastructure

7. Access to the Internet is available to the academic staff at the school.

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		INC)

9. Access to the Internet is available to students at this school.

\bigcirc Y	es	\bigcirc	No
7 J I	00		110

10. Access to the Internet is available via wired connection

\bigcirc	Yes	\bigcirc	No
	100		110

11. Access to the Internet is available via WiFi

Yes No

12. The library has _____.(Tick all that apply)

Computers without Internet access

Computers with Internet access

Online databases

(

Online Public Access Catalogue

13. How many working computers do you have in the school library?

(None	Less than 5
6-10	11-15
O More than 15	Other:

Section 3: Services offered by the library

14. Identify the services provided by the school library prior to emergency online learning.

	Circulation
	Information Skills classes
	E-mail reference
	Telephone reference
	Consultation with teachers
	Subject bibliographies
	Traditional (in person) reference services
Othe	r:

15. Prior to the closure of school, was the library opened full time?

1 Ies

No No	(C		Ν	0	
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16. Identify the services provided by the school library since COVID-19.

Circulation
Information Literacy classes
E-mail reference
Telephone reference
Consultation with teachers
Subject bibliographies
Traditional (in person) reference services
Other:

17. Did you have books on loan when school closed as a result of

COVID-19?

) No

18. If yes, what have you done to recover those books?

_		
19. About what percentage of those books have been		
recovered?		
C Less than 25%	26% to 50%	
51% to 75%	Over 75%	
Other:		

Section 4: Implementing and Delivering Online Service

20. Which of the following online activities does the school library currently engage in? (Tick all that apply)

21. Which of the following online activities would the school library be able to implement by the end of the Easter Term? (Tick all that apply)

Access to its own Google Classroom page

Provision of links to reading resources in Google Classrooms

Provision of links to curriculum support resources in Google Classrooms
Teaching Information Literacy online
Providing online reference (e-mail, WhatsApp, or telephone)
Access to online databases
Provision of bibliographies for subject teachers listing online resources.
Adoption of an integrated library management system
Access to Online Public Access Catalogue
Other:

22. Which of the following online activities would the school library be able to implement for the beginning of the academic year 2021/2022? (Tick all that apply)

Access to its own Google Classroom page
Provision of links to reading resources in Google Classrooms
Provision of links to curriculum support resources in Google Classrooms
Teaching Information Literacy online
Providing online reference (e-mail, Whatsapp, or telephone)
Access to online databases
Provision of bibliographies for subject teachers listing online resources.
Adoption of an integrated library
management system
Online Public Access Catalogue
Other:

23. Which of the areas introduced at the seminar do you think you need additional training in?

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The Role of the School Library

How to implement a library management system

Free Online Resources for primary schools

Free Online Resources for secondary schools

24. List additional areas you believe you need training in.

25. Describe what you believe is likely to be the overall effect of the suspension of face-to-face classes due to COVID-19 on school libraries in the long term.

26. What do you envision to be the greatest challenge to getting your school library online (Tick the top two)

Funding
Limited ICT skills of the school librarian
Lack of computers to perform administrative functions in the library
Lack of support from school administration
Lack of understanding of the role of the school library
Limited time as the librarian has to perform other duties not related to the library
Other:

27. You may include additional comments here.

PUSHING STUDENTS TOWARDS EBOOKS: A CRITICAL LOOK AT USAGE, AWARENESS, PERCEPTIONS AND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

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Abstract

Purpose: This research, conducted at The University of the West Indies Open Campus (UWIOC), investigated graduate students' awareness, preference, usage and the challenges faced when discovering, accessing and using ebooks. The study also examined the adoption of an epreferred collection development policy in light of the COVID-19 pandemic environment.

Design/Methodology: Data was collected using an online survey, which was administered to students enrolled in graduate programmes during the months of June and July 2020. Survey Monkey was used in the design, delivery and data collection for the online survey. A

self-designed questionnaire containing twenty-one, mainly open-ended questions was employed.

Findings: The results showed that students opted for a hybrid collection but preferred ebooks over print, suggesting that an epreferred collection development policy is a valid option for libraries operating in a distributed environment and in the environment created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research limitations/implications: This study would have been enhanced if a mixed method approach had been employed. A focus group or interview would have given further insight into students' choices. The population size for this survey may have been impacted by a generally low enrolment during the summer period.

Originality/value: There is limited published research on the adoption and use of ebooks in academic libraries in the English-speaking Caribbean; this paper attempts to help fill this gap.

Theoretical/Practical/Social Implications: The geographically distributed nature of the UWIOC has meant that an epreferred policy for ebooks was the realistic option for the OCLIS to provide resources to the UWIOC community. This became even more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: ebooks; epreferred policy; online learning; COVID-19 pandemic; Caribbean academic libraries.

Introduction

Academic libraries have been moving towards increasing their acquisition of electronic resources by purchasing the electronic equivalent of print and in some cases actively replacing their existing print collections with electronic format. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this became more critical. Libraries are pushing their users towards the use of e-books. Wang and Bai define the ebook as a book published in a digital format, transferable via the Internet, and that can be accessed and read on a portable device, such as a laptop, a smartphone, an ebook reader, a tablet or on a desktop computer (247). The ebook appeared in the early 1970s after Michael S. Hart first digitised the U. S. Declaration of Independence. Today the use of ebooks is commonplace and increasing in most parts of the world, and particularly in higher education. According to a survey conducted by *Library Journal*, there had been a steady increase in the acquisition of ebooks in U.S. academic libraries over the period 2012 to 2016 ("Ebook Usage" 3). The trend has also been observed in other academic libraries across the world including Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Hong Kong. In Swedish university libraries, for example, ebook titles grew from 5,695,211 in 2015 to 7,504,325 in 2016 according to the National Library of Sweden (Maceviciute et al.).

In the English-speaking Caribbean, the growth in the publication / use of ebooks has not gained significant traction. Some academic libraries have increased their acquisition of ebooks, but this is not the general trend. The authors in mid-2019 conducted an informal survey of libraries of regional higher educational institutions in the English-speaking Caribbean including Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Jamaica, Belize, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua, St. Lucia, Grenada and Dominica. The results showed that for many the ebooks held came with subscribed databases. For others, ebooks were acquired only on demand and for a few, an epreference was seen in the acquisition of materials only for specific areas of the collections. The survey highlighted that there is no formal epreferred policy in their overall collection development. The exception to this general trend was found at The University of the West Indies (UWI) where the Open Campus (OC) was the only campus at which there was an epreferred collection development policy for ebooks. The policy recognises that the acquisition of ebooks over physical books is more efficient and cost effective for the distributed environment in which the campus operates. At the other campuses of The UWI, two campuses purchased ebooks as part of their acquisitions model, while one campus purchased ebooks only on demand.

For the purpose of this study, ebooks refer to those available in The University of the West Indies Open Campus Libraries and Information Services (OCLIS) that are either purchased, available through subscribed databases, or freely available online. An epreferred policy is defined as one where print would be purchased only if it is the most cost-effective option, the item has intrinsic value, or an e alternative is not available (OCLIS). For a variety of reasons, students have been slow to adopt e, and print is still the preferred format for a substantial number of users (Cumaoglu 132; Foasberg 719; Millar and Schrier 174). These findings have motivated the authors to examine the effects of the epreferred policy for ebooks on The University of the West Indies Open Campus (UWIOC) students.

The main objectives of this study are to:

- Determine students' awareness of ebooks
- Determine students' preference: e or print format
- Identify the challenges students face in discovering, accessing and using ebooks
- Examine the extent to which ebooks are used for research
- Determine students' awareness of the OCLIS epreferred policy
- Examine the impact of COVID-19 on students' use of ebooks

The authors, having found limited published research on the adoption and use of ebooks in academic libraries in the English-speaking Caribbean, seek to fill this gap to an extent. This study will be of benefit to libraries that operate in a similar environment to The UWIOC and are required by circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, to adopt an ebook preferred policy for collection development.

Background

The UWI Open Campus (OC)

The UWIOC is one of five campuses of The UWI, one of the few regional universities in the world. In the 2020, Times Higher Education ranked The UWI among the top 600 universities in the world ("The University of the West Indies") and it remains the number one university in the English-speaking Caribbean. Established in 2008, the UWIOC seeks to address the unsatisfied demand for higher, distance and continuing education in underserved communities across the Caribbean, in particular, those territories that did not have a physical UWI campus. Unlike the other UWI campuses, which are landed, The UWIOC, is primarily a virtual campus, although it does maintain nearly fifty physical sites, called Open Campus Country Sites, in seventeen English-speaking Caribbean countries. Today, the UWIOC offers a range of programmes from certificate to graduate level. It continues to advance teaching and learning in the region through unique approaches to online, distance, blended, and face-to-face learning modalities. The UWIOC caters not only to the traditional student, but also provides increased opportunities for mature students (who may lack formal qualifications) and students from lower socio-economic groups, to pursue tertiary level education (Thomas and Soares 4).

The Open Campus Library System (OCLIS)

The OCLIS provides a range of onsite and online resources and services to students, to support teaching, learning and research in its highly distributed environment with a diverse student population. The UWIOC has several small to medium sized libraries at its sites, throughout the English-speaking Caribbean. Students also have access to print and digital information resources via UWIInC, the online discovery and access portal of The UWI Libraries. The ebooks that are provided via UWIInC come from various sources; some are purchased individually, with perpetual rights access; others are included with OCLIS database subscriptions; and others are free titles.

COVID-19, the OC and the OCLIS

As the OC operates in several Caribbean jurisdictions, its daily operations in each country varied according to the government's regulations regarding COVID-19 protocols in that country. The OC expanded its home-based work arrangement programme to establish a framework to ensure that it was able to conduct its business in light of the pandemic. This was applied on either a full-time or a phased basis depending on the gravity of the pandemic conditions existing in the various country sites. This impacted the operation of the physical libraries in some countries, for example, the libraries in Trinidad and Tobago have been closed since mid-March 2020. Students in Trinidad and Tobago have not had access to print resources or other onsite library services during this period. At other country sites including Grenada, St. Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, libraries have been operating on a staggered basis offering access to services in the physical environment. The majority of face-to-face classes were moved online and previously online courses continued as usual. The OCLIS also moved to extending the hours of its virtual reference service.

Literature Review

Epreferred policy

As academic libraries continue to increase their ebook collections, they have "introduced strategies to reduce purchasing of physical items, and at least potentially, to remove previously purchased physical items from the collection in favour of electronic equivalents" (Wells and Sallenbach 169). The results of a survey conducted by Proquest in 2016, which included 460 libraries from North America (73%), Europe (11%) and the rest of the world (9%), showed that 89% of libraries were offering ebooks (2). This, Proquest argued, showed that a clear shift towards electronic resources was under way (8). One of the main reasons given for the move towards ebooks is the lack of space. Wells and Sallenbach maintain that changes in pedagogy and the move towards more collaboration and teamwork have led to a greater demand for physical space (170). Additionally, Moore reasoned that the increased demand for ebooks is due to the proliferation of online education and the need to provide library resources to students wherever they live (128). However, despite this shift to electronic resources, there is little evidence in the literature of libraries actively adopting epreferred collection development policies. The Proquest survey supports Moore's findings as their results show that although the budgets for ebooks were growing, 59% of the libraries surveyed did not have an epreferred collection development policy. This means that when purchasing, libraries still needed to make a choice between an ebook and a print book.

Awareness and Usage

In a Zhejiang University study to investigate students' awareness, usage and attitude towards ebooks, the results showed that while awareness and usage of ebooks by the students was generally low, awareness was higher for non-academic ebooks (Wang and Bai 249). Further, Wang and Bai reported that the discoverability of ebooks has a close relationship between awareness and usage (248). Studies support the view that the main reasons for low usage of ebooks are that students are unaware of them within their academic libraries or do not know how to access them at their institutions (Croft and Davis (550); Shelburne; Levine-Clark (291). Borchert et al., from their survey at Queensland University, found that although there was a high awareness among staff and students of the availability of ebooks, the usage was quite low. Research by Nicholas and White at The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, had similar findings showing that although, "67 per cent of the respondents were aware of the library's provision of ebooks, only 36 per cent had used the service" (6). Research has also suggested that awareness is impacted by the many public channels available to students, such as the search engines, to search for and read ebooks (Rowlands et al. (494); Camacho and Spackman (38); McKeil (146). Wang and Bai confirmed that postgraduate students tended to use ebooks for academic purposes including project assignments, research and self-learning. Further, they were more likely to use e-monographs, e-reference books and e-textbooks in their studies (256).

The findings of Wang and Bai also revealed that postgraduate students adopted ebooks more often resulting in a higher frequency of academic ebook usage by students due to additional years of study at the university (250). Eighty-five percent of the doctoral students surveyed used ebooks for research and learning purposes within their subject discipline. This correlates with the earlier work of Croft and Davis highlighting the results for undergraduates. They found that ebook usage for students in the early stages of their programmes was low as they had not yet conducted significant research or taken the time to explore ebooks (550). Casselden and Pears, however, contradict this finding by reporting that while the student's level of study had a distinct influence on the choice of sources, doctoral students were less keen on ebooks (7).

Oriogu et al. in their survey of undergraduate students at a Nigerian university found that 68% of students were only partially aware of the availability of ebooks in their area of specialisation, and 97% were confident and proficient in the usage of ebooks. The research by Al Saadi et al. supports these findings. Their survey of students at Sultan Qaboos University

(SQU) in the Sultanate of Oman found that 80.24% of respondents have experience using ebooks for the purpose of their academic studies (14). Usage was significantly higher when instructors included ebooks in their online course management system, course materials, reading lists, research and handouts, and when faculty encouraged students to use ebooks (16).

Preference

The review of the literature strongly conveys the preference by students for print books over ebooks (Hoseth and McLure 283; Smyth and Carlin 195; Lai and Li 462; Wilkinson 54; Millar and Schrier 183; Abuloum, et al. 93). Some of the reasons highlighted in the studies for the preference of print were students' intrinsic attachment to books, habit, dislike of reading from a screen, the ability to hand write notes in books, ease of use, and the view that ebooks were merely digital copies of the printed books.

Moore, discussing user preference and user behaviour with ebooks, notes that from "most surveys conducted, users expressed a clear preference for print books, although that preference varied by a number of factors, including the type and subject of the book; the age or grade-level of the user; and the purpose of reading the book". Moore also points out that the preference for print does not equate to low usage of ebooks (129). Notably, this point is supported by a study by Bozkurt et al. where, despite student preference to use print books, ebooks were widely used for academic work (671). Likewise, Li reported from a series of focus groups conducted with graduate students at the University of California Santa Cruz, that "the majority of the students indicated that they used and preferred print, although they all use ebooks extensively as well" and print books were used "for long and deep reading". The ebook features favoured between the two studies were accessibility anytime, anywhere; portability; and in-text searching. These factors have contributed to the strength of ebooks and have been documented by many including Abdullah and Gibb (603), Smyth and Carlin (192), Sieche et al. (479), Jacobs et al. (31), Mizrachi (310), Enis (17) and Casselden and Pears (616).

When Alhammad examined the results of two sets of interviews with students in 2017, she found a change in their preference for ebooks. In the first set, the recurring theme of student preference for print is documented; however, after being exposed to the technology and benefits derived from ebooks, in the second set of interviews students expressed positive

attitudes towards ebooks, and their preference shifted towards ebooks for all studying purposes. Alhammad concluded that prior technological experiences, knowledge and confidence re learning and decision-making associated with ebooks had an impact on student preference to use ebooks (276).

Throughout the literature it can be inferred that user acceptance of new technology impacts significantly on preference. The performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions of the technology are significant precursors of behavioural intention/preference towards ebook usage according to Maduku (14), Martins et al. (584), and Okocha (178). In examining the information behaviour of graduate students, Tracy, though noting students' preference for print books over ebooks, uniquely brings to the forefront the issue of shifting experiences between ebook platforms and shifting digital formats on applications and or devices not significantly discussed in earlier works. Tracy suggests this is a major factor in students' behaviour towards ebooks (48).

What about a preference for using a combination of print books and ebooks? In a more recent study by Makwanya and Oni, students' preferences for ebooks, print books, and for a combination of both formats for academic purposes were examined. The findings revealed a strong preference for print books and ebooks combined, outweighing the preference for solely print books or ebooks; when "given the third option of both formats, students preferred the combination of the two formats for academic study" (240). However, when given a choice between the options of either ebooks or print books, there was, as in earlier studies, a higher preference for print books over ebooks. When Al Saadi et al. asked students where they saw ebooks over the next five years, the majority saw both the print book and ebook standing side by side (17).

Challenges

For a number of reasons, the adoption of ebooks is seen as the future for many academic libraries, as the usage of ebooks amongst university students is high (Cumaoglu et al.128; Nicholas et al. 268; Zhang and Beckman 595; Li). However, Grady asserts that the revolution that was expected with ebooks never came, echoing the concern expressed by Slater in 2010 when he asked the question "Why aren't ebooks gaining more ground in academic libraries?" (305). Could the reason for this be explained by the many challenges users still encounter when using ebooks and that ebooks are not meeting users' expectations? Although the use of ebooks is increasing, it is not happening evenly across all disciplines. Research has shown

that there is a correlation between ebooks and high usage in business, computer science, engineering, technology and medicine (Nicholas et al. 3; Rafiq and Warraich 198). These findings are not surprising as these are the main disciplines in which current information is critical.

Zhang and Niu have identified discovery and access as significant barriers to the extensive use of ebooks in libraries, as many users claim that they have difficulties in identifying and locating relevant ebooks (212). Earlier research supports this conclusion (Millar and Schrier 182; Walters 103). The use of ebooks is dependent upon access either from the library's websites or via search engines. While users may be able to discover ebooks from a single interface, access to full text is made difficult because of the complexity of the interfaces on vendors' platforms (Walters 98). Access is also limited because of publishers' restrictions. Some etextbooks, especially those that are in high demand and recommended for courses, are made available for purchase only in print format, or to individuals and are not available for institutional purchase by libraries.

Digital Rights Management (DRM) restrictions negatively impact users' experience of ebooks. DRM varies between ebook providers and between individual ebook titles. These restrictions include limiting the number of simultaneous users and the number of pages that can be printed, copied or downloaded for off-line use. In a study of ebooks usage by the University of Guelph Library Ebook Strategy Working Group, restrictions on the ability to copy and paste was found to be a distinct disadvantage by users (Jacobs et al. 35). In other cases, the publisher limits access to a single user (Turnbull 24; Jacobs et al. 4). Cassidy et al. found that users had an expectation that library ebooks would be available to multiple concurrent users.

One of the concerns expressed regarding the use of ebooks is how it affects learning. Online reading does not support linear reading in the way print books do. This is important as some research shows that linear reading facilitates deeper learning and comprehension (Johnston et al. 67; Mizrachi 301). Research has also shown that users complain of eyestrain and reading fatigue after sustained reading from a screen (Gregory 269; Jeong 396). Li also refers to what she calls "the role of physicality in reading"; she believes that there is something about the structure of the text in print books that facilitates comprehension. It must be noted that recent studies have shown that digital learning can be taught so that deep learning can occur (Wolf

and Barzillai). This means that there is a need to provide better training and technology support to encourage students' digital reading and learning.

A study conducted by Cassidy et al. did not survey for perceived advantages and disadvantages of ebooks but asked users to rank the importance of ebook features. The results highlighted that the ability to search the whole text and to print were ranked as the most important features, followed by the ability to take notes and highlight text. Myrberg posits that taking notes and highlighting are functionalities that allow students to actively engage with the texts and this promotes learning. Many students identified difficulties with these two functionalities as influencing their preference for print (119-20).

A gap in the literature that the authors have found is the failure to address challenges in acquiring ebooks that are unique to areas like the English-speaking Caribbean. Books by Caribbean authors are the preferred texts for a number of courses offered by institutions such as The UWIOC; however, the authors have found that, in their experience, invariably these recommended books are not available as ebooks. Another challenge encountered in the region is the difficulty in acquiring some recommended books because of the imposition of country restrictions by publishers.

Methodology

The site of the study was The UWIOC, which at the time of the survey had a total graduate student population of 597. The participants for the study were drawn from that group.

A quantitative method was chosen for this study. An online survey was employed to critically look at ebook usage, awareness and perception of the graduate students of The UWIOC during the early period of the pandemic in the Caribbean. The use of this instrument was convenient as data can be easily gathered from the target group who are all online students. As staff of the institution, the authors took advantage of the relatively easy access to the students through the campus' Student Support Services, who distributed the questionnaire to all graduate students by email blast. It was administered during the months of June and July, 2020. Students were given a period of four weeks to respond to the survey. During this period, two reminders were issued.

Permission for the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of The UWIOC. All respondents were informed of the purpose of the research and that their responses would be confidential and anonymous. Survey Monkey was used in the design, delivery, and data collection for the online survey. A self-designed questionnaire, containing twenty-one items, was employed. The majority of the questions were closed-ended as participants were asked to choose from a list of possible answers. The survey also included demographic questions on participants' age, gender and programme of study. The questionnaire was pre-tested for logic and language, using three faculty members. Their comments and suggestions led to the revision of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was distributed to all 597 graduate students who were enrolled in postgraduate certificates, diplomas, masters and doctoral degrees at the time of the study. A total of 173 voluntary responses were collected giving a response rate of approximately 29%. Using SurveyMonkey's Margin of error calculator with a desired confidence level of 95%, a margin of error of 6% was derived. The authors believed this to be an acceptable level to continue the study. Data was analysed using SPSS Statistics 21.0. Frequencies, means and standard deviations were calculated to answer the research questions.

Findings

Demographics

Of the total 173 respondents, 16.2% (28) were males, 82.7% (143) were females and two persons did not respond. This data is not surprising as these figures correlate with the overall graduate student intake at The UWIOC; the gender distribution averages five females to one male. In terms of the age distribution of respondents, the largest number came from the 30-39 age group at 39.9% (63), followed by the 40-49 with 30.1% (52), the 20-29 age group with 15% (26) and the 50+ at 14.5% (25). This data reflects a general pursuit of higher education by mature students in which, according to GradSchool Hub, "the average graduate student today is thirty-three years old" ("What is the Average Age?").

Awareness

According to Zhang et al., some researchers have found that students do not always know the difference between resource types such as ebooks and ejournals (579). For the purpose of this study, the researchers felt that it was important to find out if students knew the difference between an ebook and an ejournal. One hundred and seventy-two students answered the question, 'Do you know the difference between an ebook and an ejournal?' One hundred and fifty-five students (90%) responded YES while only seventeen (10%) responded NO. Since the OCLIS has an epreferred policy for collection development, it was helpful to find out if the students were aware of this policy and also if they were aware that the policy also

included not acquiring required textbooks. To the question, 'Are you aware that the OCLIS has an epreferred policy?' There were 170 responses. One hundred and fifty-four (90.5%) of the respondents responded NO while only sixteen (9.4%) responded YES. Three students did not respond. With regard to the question on their awareness that the OCLIS did not acquire required textbooks, 127 of the respondents said NO while forty-six said YES. A number of studies, for example Zhang and Niu and Croft and Davis, have concluded that students are unaware that their libraries provided ebooks (Zhang and Niu 209; and Croft and Davis 550). To determine that students were aware that the OCLIS provided them with access to ebooks, the question "Are you aware that the OCLIS provides access to ebooks?" was asked. There were 173 respondents to this question. One hundred and twenty (69%) responded YES while fifty-three (30.6%) responded NO. This contradicts the findings as stated in the literature.

The researchers sought to find out how the graduate students of the UWIOC first became aware of ebooks. The question was asked, "How did you first become aware of ebooks provided by the OCLIS?"



Fig. 1. Source by which students became aware of ebooks.

One hundred and sixty-four students responded to this question. As shown in figure 1 above, eighty-three (48%) of the students surveyed first became aware of ebooks through their use of the OCLIS' discovery portal (UWIlinC), twenty-seven (15.6%) through library orientation, thirteen (7.5%) through classmates, thirteen (7.5%) through tutors and seven (4%) through
their reading list. Of the twenty-one (12.1%) students responded to 'other,' one student found out through this survey, two by happenstance, six through email and twelve were not even aware that ebooks were available. It is not surprising that the respondents who selected the "other" category and who indicated they were not aware that OCLIS provided access to ebooks are the same persons who responded 'NO' to the question, "Are you aware that the OCLIS provided access to ebooks?"

Preference

Using a five point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree, students were asked to choose which of the following formats they would like the OCLIS to provide books: only ebooks; only print books; or both ebooks and print books.



Fig. 2. Students' level of agreement of the format in which the OCLIS should provide books.

The overwhelming response, seen in figure 2 above, indicates that eighty (46.2%) of the participants strongly agreed that both ebooks and print books should be provided versus nineteen (11%) for only ebooks and eight (4.6%) for only print books. This trend of a strong preference for both formats is consistent with Makwanya and Oni's study (239). In that study when only given the choice between print books and ebooks, the preference for print books was higher than ebooks. In this study, the results for "strongly agree" and "agree" to the

OCLIS only providing print books was 5.8% below that of only providing ebooks at 19.1 %. Conversely, the results for "strongly disagree" and "disagree" to the OCLIS only providing print books was 73.4% above that of only providing ebooks at 56.7%. These findings support the view that, apart from the combination of ebooks and print books, the UWIOC graduate students prefer ebooks over print books.

The researchers thought it would be of interest to find out if there was any correlation between age and format preference among the graduate students. Moore concluded that although in most studies users expressed a preference for print, age was one of the factors that influenced which format was preferred (129). As shown in figure 3 below, all age groups indicated a preference for ebooks, with only a small number of the respondents preferring print.



Fig. 3. Correlation between age and preference for format of book.

In the 50+ age group there was an almost equal number of respondents preferring either format. Of note is the high number of respondents in all age groups who indicated that they had no preference for either format.

Usage

UWIlinC, the e-information portal of the OCLIS, is expected to be the main discovery and access platform for ebooks. The researchers wanted to find out if students were able to find ebooks easily when using this portal and asked the following question: "When searching UWIlinC are you able to find ebooks easily?" Of the 171 students who answered, ninety-seven (56.1%) said that they were unable to find ebooks easily when searching UWIlinC. However, seventy-four (42.8%) indicated that they were able to find ebooks easily. Students were also asked if they knew how to download ebooks in UWIlinC. Eighty (46.2%) responded yes to this question while ninety-two (53.2%) indicated that they were not able to download ebooks successfully.

Studies, for example, Croft and Davis, have found that the main reasons students used ebooks were for research and coursework (553). The researchers wanted to find out if the same was true for the graduate students at the Open Campus and the question "For what purpose do you read ebooks?" was asked. Participants were required to select all that applied from a list of possible responses. The most popular reason for using ebooks was for research; coursework followed. The least popular reason was for recreation (see fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Students' purpose for reading ebooks.

The follow-up to question 4 was "Where do you find ebooks for your research?" Again, selections were to be made from a list of possible choices (see fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Where students find ebooks for research.

One hundred and thirty-nine (80.3%) of the participants who used ebooks for their research found their ebooks using search engines such as Google, while 110 (63.6%) of the participants found their ebooks using the OCLIS' e-information portal, UWIlinC. This supports previous research which concluded that both the library and search engines are the starting points for accessing ebooks (Croft and Davis 548; Wang and Bai 250).

In terms of how often participants used ebooks for research, they were given a choice of regularly, sometimes, rarely and never. Eighty-eight (50.9%) of the respondents checked 'regularly', sixty-four (37%) checked 'sometimes', seventeen (9.8%) checked rarely, while only two (1.2%) checked 'never'. Two students did not respond to the question (see fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Frequency of use of ebooks for research?

When asked which statement best describes their preference towards books for research, eighty-five (49.1%) of the participants indicated that they preferred using ebooks when doing research while sixty-three (36.4%) indicated that they had no preference and twenty-four (13.9%) preferred using print books (fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Students format preference for research.

The authors wanted to find out how UWIOC graduate students search for information within ebooks. There were 170 responses to this question as below (fig. 8).



Fig. 8. How students search for information within ebooks.

The findings showed that a majority of the respondents, 117 (68.82%), read only the sections that they were interested in, thirty-four (20%) skim read while thirteen (7.65%) read ebooks cover to cover for in depth understanding. These findings are similar to the patterns of use for ebooks found in the research which reports that very few students read ebooks from cover-to-cover and the majority skim through or read only parts to find bits of information (Marques de Oliveira 547; Zhang et al. 590).

Search and navigation features are critical to users' acceptance of ebooks for scholarly research (Zhang et al. 591). Studies, for example, Gregory 270; Staiger 355; Zhang and Niu 215, also show that users have difficulty navigating these features. Participants were given a list of ebook features from which to select those they commonly used. The results are presented in Fig. 9.



Fig. 9. Ebook features used by students.

The most popular features were in text search, table of contents, ability to download and the use of citations. Whereas researchers, including Hobbs and Klare 256; Zhang and Niu 210; Turnbull 4, have shown that students usually value printing, only thirty-six responses indicated printing as a feature commonly used.

Challenges

Several studies, for example, Zhang and Niu; Cassidy et al.; and Gregory, have found that students experience a number of challenges when using ebooks, which negatively impact the user experience. Participants were asked to select from a list, all the challenges they experienced when using ebooks, their responses are shown in figure 10.



Fig. 10. Challenges experienced by students.

The most common challenge was having to create a user account. This was followed by inactive dead links and having to join a queue to access ebooks. Other noteworthy challenges were the length of the loan period and the length of time it took to download an ebook, lack of experience with the online environment, and poor visibility/eye strain. Twenty-two respondents indicated that they did not experience any challenges when using ebooks.

The researchers sought to find out what characteristic(s) of ebooks UWIOC students perceived as most valuable. A 5-point Likert Scale was used, with 1 being least important and 5 extremely important. With a mean of 4.29, convenience was considered extremely important and therefore most valuable to the respondents. Access to all books from any device followed with a mean of 4.06. Greater security, reduced book loss and damage as well as enhanced functionality and interactivity were respectively perceived as less valuable to UWIOC graduate students (see table 1).

Table 1

Most Valuable Characteristics of Ebooks

Characteristics of ebook		Frequency	Percent	Mean	Standard deviation
	No response	7	4		
	1- Least important	3	1.7		
Enhanced functionality and	2	8	4.6	3.8	1 256
interactivity	3	44	25.4	5.0	1.250
	4	48	27.7		
	5 -Extremely important	63	36.4		
	No response	6	3.5		
	1- Least important	4	2.3		
Access to all	2	8	4.6	4.00	1.267
device	3	25	14.5	4.00	
	4	42	24.3		
	5 -Extremely important	88	50.9		
	No response	7	4		
	1- Least important	3	1.7		
Greater security,	2	9	5.2	2 02	1 270
and damage	3	32	18.5	3.95	1.279
	4	47	27.2		
	5 -Extremely important	75	43.4		
	No response	5	2.9		
	1- Least important	3	1.7		
Convenience	2	2 3 1.7		4 20	1 15
Convenience	3	19	11	4.29	1.15
	4	39	22.5		
	5 -Extremely important	104	60.1		

With the OCLIS policy being e-preferred for books, it was important to the authors to find out the level of students' satisfaction with the number of ebooks available for their studies. Eighty-three (48%) who responded were satisfied, eight (4.6%) were very satisfied and seventy (40.5%) were dissatisfied.

COVID-19

The final question of the survey sought to ascertain whether the COVID-19 pandemic had any effect on UWIOC students' use of ebooks. With a response rate of only 70.6% (122), approximately 64.2% (111) of the students who responded indicated that the pandemic had no effect on their use of ebooks. The main reason cited was that the distributed and online operations of UWIOC prior to the pandemic allowed students to continue as usual. Other reasons included:

I have always loved the easy access that comes with using ebooks. It is most useful as I can use text to speech features for even quicker reading.

With research predominantly conducted remotely ebooks are convenient sources and once current are great additions to ejournals. Convenience that matters.

Only 6.4% (11) of the responses indicated that the pandemic affected their choices. Some reasons included:

The library was closed and I was forced to use ebooks.

I would have used the library for hard copy books. COVID-19 has helped me to see the ease with which I can use e-books and have multiple books easily.

Analysis of Findings

From the findings of this research, it can be concluded that the majority of postgraduate students from the UWIOC who participated in the study were unaware that the OCLIS has an epreferred policy for ebooks. The findings showed that they know the difference between an ebook and an ejournal, are aware of having access to ebooks provided by the OCLIS and they also showed a stronger preference for the ebook format over print.

There is a significant preference among UWIOC graduate students for access to a combination of ebooks and print books. This finding concurs with Makwanya and Oni (239); however, unlike their findings, this study showed that, if given the choice of the sole use of print books or ebooks, the prevailing choice by the UWIOC graduate students is for ebooks. This preference is reflected across all age groups. The findings of this study contrast with existing literature where print books were preferred over ebooks (Hoseth and McLure 283; Smyth and Carlin 188; Lai and Li 455; Wilkinson 54; Millar and Schrier 174).

One of the objectives of this study was to determine the level of students' awareness of ebooks. The research revealed that at the UWIOC, graduate students' awareness was significantly high. It was noteworthy that students admitted they first became aware of ebooks provided by the OCLIS while using the e-information portal. This may be a direct

result of the librarians driving students to the e-information portal, UWIlinC, rather than the vendors' platforms, when providing reference services, information literacy sessions and library orientation. Also, more than 87% of the respondents indicated that they used ebooks regularly or sometimes. The finding parallels with earlier research by Croft and Davis (550) which concludes that the main reason for low usage of ebooks correlates with the fact that students were unaware that ebooks were available from their libraries (552). The participants highlighted that a higher level of awareness of ebooks available from the library translated into a higher level of usage.

Many of the findings of this research were similar to those found in the literature. One such finding is that postgraduate students used ebooks mainly for research and coursework (Wang and Bai 252; Cumaoglu et al. 129) and read ebooks by reading only the relevant parts (Abdullah and Gibb 601; Walton 95). Additionally, search engines were found to be the most popular source for finding ebooks, Google being the first port of call for students (Casselden and Pears 6). It is significant to note that the e-information portal closely followed search engines as a source for finding ebooks. A cause for concern, however, is that the majority of students shared that they could not find ebooks easily using the portal and did not know how to download an ebook from the portal. Being able to download was a functionality students valued most in ebooks and saw the vendor's requirement for the creation of an account as an unnecessary and frustrating step and their biggest challenge when accessing ebooks. Although the OCLIS e-information portal allows for search and discovery from a single interface, there is still the challenge of being dependent on vendors' platforms to access ebooks.

Students identified a number of other challenges that made their ebook experience less satisfying including inactive or dead links and having to join a queue to access a book. The OCLIS has as its default, the single user option in the acquisition of ebooks. This means that if a book is in use or has been checked out by a student, students who wish to access that title would have to join a queue and wait for the title to become available. The OCLIS may need to rethink its default user option.

According to Moore (128), the trend towards ebook use comes with online education and the need for the library to provide resources to students wherever they are; and as such, the environment in which the UWIOC graduate students operate must be taken into account when speaking to their preference. In an online environment, students' information

technology skills have been noted as a contributing factor in their preference for ebooks (Maduku 15; Alhammad 8; Martins et al. 585; Okocha 178). In this study, the lack of experience with the online environment was only noted by twenty-five of the 173 respondents. To say whether prerequisite information technology experiences had a positive influence on their preference for ebooks would need further investigation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The geographically distributed nature of the UWIOC has meant that an epreferred policy for ebooks was the realistic option for the OCLIS to provide resources to the UWIOC community. This became even more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it was found that while students generally embraced this, there was still a strong preference for a hybrid collection supporting the observation by Gregory of the need for the two formats to coexist to support different purposes and learning styles (271). At the start of the research, the authors found that globally, not many academic libraries had formally adopted epreferred policies for collection development. This quickly changed in mid-March 2020, with the onset of conditions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. From anecdotal evidence, the authors have found that these conditions have propelled many academic libraries towards adopting epreferred policies for collection development. Some have indicated that the move is temporary, while for others it is permanent.

If the OCLIS is to assist students to overcome the challenges faced with accessing ebooks, the UWIOC librarians should adopt the measures suggested by Staiger (199) and make a greater effort to improve students' information literacy (IL) skills so they can get the maximum from ebooks. At present, information literacy is in the form of one-shot sessions. This needs to change as the researchers believe for IL to become more effective there should be collaboration between the UWIOC administration and the OCLIS to embed IL in the curriculum. In addition, to improve the user experience, librarians should impress upon publishers the need to provide less complicated access to ebooks.

This study would have been enhanced if a mixed method approach was employed. A focus group or interviews would have given further insight into students' choices. The population size for this survey may have been impacted by enrolment during the summer period. During the summer, some students may opt not to register because of the shortened teaching period.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

1. What qualification are you pursuing? Post Graduate Certificate

Post Graduate Diploma

Masters or MPhil

Doctoral or PhD

Please specify programme (example: Educational Leadership in Higher Education)

2. Age

20-29

30-39

40-49

- 50 and over
- 3. Gender Male

white

Female

4. Do you know the difference between an ebook and an ejournal? Yes

No

5. Are you aware that the OCLIS provides access to ebooks? Yes

No

- Are you aware of the OCLIS epreferred policy? Yes
 No
- 7. Are you aware that the OCLIS does not normally acquire ebooks that are listed as required on the reading lists?

Yes

No

8. How did you first become aware of ebooks provided by the OCLIS? Classmates

Library Orientation or Library staff Tutors Using the Library's discovery portal (UWIlinC) Reading list Other (please specify):

9. Select your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The OCLIS should provide only ebooks	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc
The OCLIS should provide only printed books	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc
The OCLIS should provide both ebooks and printed books	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc

- 10. When searching UWIlinC, are you able to find ebooks easily? YesNo
- 11. Do you know how to download ebooks in UWIlinC? YesNo
- 12. For what purpose(s) do you read ebooks? Select all that apply

13	Where do	you find ebook	rs for your res	earch? Select all	that apply
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UWIIinC
Search engines (example: Google, BING etc)
Other (Please specify)

14. How often do you use ebooks for your research? Regularly

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

15. Which statement best reflects your preference towards books in terms of your research work?

I prefer ebooks for doing research I prefer printed books for doing research

I have no preference

16. Select the statement that best describes how you search for information within ebooks. I read only the sections that I am interested in

I read ebooks cover to cover for in depth understanding

I tend to skim read ebooks

Other (please specify)

18.

17. What features of ebooks do you usually use? Select all that apply.

How satisfied are you with the number of ebooks available for your studies? Not satisfied

Satisfied

20.

Very satisfied

important and 5 is extremely important.

19. What challenges do you experience when using ebooks? Select all that apply.

\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc
e of the que se explain.	estions wo	uld have b	een differe	nt before
	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc
\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc	\bigcirc

Please indicate what you value most about ebooks on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is least

THE UWI MONA LIBRARY'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A REFLECTIVE JOURNEY

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper shares practitioners' reflections on the experiences of The University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona Library while navigating the COVID-19 pandemic during the first five months. The paper zeros in on the efforts of the Mona Library to utilize existing resources in the provision of digital services and rework processes for easy transition from face-to-face learning to remote learning. Insights are presented from the activities of the liaison librarians, the novel tablet/laptop distribution project; and a webinar in which several Caribbean academic librarians shared how they responded to the pandemic in their respective libraries. The successes, challenges and possibilities for the way forward are included.

Design/Methodology: The paper adopts a non-empirical research approach using reflection. In utilizing the reflection-on-action as a technique, three library practitioners (the researchers) reflected on the Mona Library experience during the first five months of COVID-19, and shared an analytical account of the library's shift to predominantly online services.

Findings: Despite the constraints of access to print resources, the Library maintained its alignment to the University's Triple 'A' strategic objectives of *Access, Agility* and *Adaptability* in its support of quality education through the online learning modality. Within a short turn-around time, the library bolstered its resources to support teaching and learning. It moved to ensure a seamless transition to online services in the shortest possible time, and to eliminate the interruption of service as the University transitioned to fully online learning.

Limitations/Implications: The study is limited by context (an academic library in the Caribbean) and time (the first five months of the COVID-19 pandemic). However, the study highlights the need for librarians to engage in systematic reflection to facilitate improvement in practice and professional development.

Practical/Social Implications: This study suggests that there is merit in engaging in periodic reflection and assessment of practice. The lessons learned and new knowledge uncovered have implications for the repositioning of the University and the library throughout the 'new normal' and well into the future. Sustaining the 'new normal' however, is predicated on both staff and user buy-in.

Originality/value: The shared experiences contribute to marketed trends in evidence-based practice in times of crisis such as COVID-19. This holds value for academic libraries not only in the Caribbean, but from other jurisdictions with similar limitations.

Keywords: UWI Mona Library; COVID-19; coronavirus; libraries and PC tablets; Caribbean academic libraries; digital libraries; handheld technologies in libraries

Introduction and Background

The University of the West Indies (UWI) is the premiere university in the English-speaking Caribbean. The UWI had its inception at Mona in Jamaica in 1948 as the College of the University of London. Its first cohort of students comprised twenty-three (23) men and ten women. In 1962 university status was granted. As the student population increased and diversified, learning opportunities were made available in Trinidad in 1961 (the St. Augustine Campus); and in Barbados in 1963 (the Cave Hill campus). The Open Campus, the fourth campus with headquarters in Barbados, opened its doors in early 2000s. On May 27, 2019, approval was granted for the establishment of a fifth campus, and its fourth landed campus, the Five Islands Campus, located in Antigua and Barbuda.

Today, The UWI is a fully accredited tertiary-level institution serving 16 countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean. A wide range of undergraduate and graduate programmes are offered in Humanities and Education, Science & Technology, Agriculture, Engineering, Law, Medical Sciences, Social Sciences, and Sports. The UWI is ranked as the number one university in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is also ranked in the top four percent (4%) of universities worldwide, according to the Times Higher Education Rankings. In an article in the *Jamaica Observer*, published on Sunday, October 20, 2019, its Vice Chancellor, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles states:

This upward trajectory into the top four per cent of the world's best universities reflects the extraordinary effort of the management team and The UWI family to

honour the pledge within the strategic plan to be an excellent global university rooted in the Caribbean ("UWI Moves to Top 4%").

The strategic plan of the University is based on its Triple 'A' strategic objectives of Access, Agility and Adaptability, and embraces Digital Transformation as a key initiative.

The Mona Library was established at the inception of The UWI in 1948 as the intellectual hub of the university. In 1952 it was transferred from its first home in a wooden building, still known as the Old Library, to its current site now known as the Main Library. The extension to this building and the further expansion with the establishment of four branches, Science & Engineering, and Medical in 1973, the Western Jamaica Campus in 2008, and Law in 2011, have resulted in an intricate library system, known as the Mona Library.

Jamaica confirmed its first COVID-19 case on March 10, 2020; classes at The UWI, Mona were suspended on March 13, 2020. Thereafter, The UWI, Mona moved swiftly towards putting systems in place to facilitate a seamless transition to online teaching/learning. By March 19th The UWI, Mona Library had created a comprehensive list of online resources and services; these were then advertised through The UWI intranet system, social media, and other online platforms. The services and resources included, but were not limited to:

- Information Literacy (IL) video tutorials;
- The creation and operation of a YouTube channel;
- A quick links page and homepage banner on the library's website, which provided links to several vital library resources;
- Online thesis consultation requests via the library's website (a service provided through Mona Information Literacy Unit (MILU). MILU, the teaching arm of the Library, delivers training programmes to The UWI community, with its key goal being collaboration between librarians and faculty to assist in developing the critical thinking and information seeking skills of The UWI students;
- Promotion of the online chat service;
- Online interlibrary loan facilitation.

By March 23, 2020, The UWI moved to online learning only and the Mona Library shifted to predominantly virtual access. This move was accompanied by active and consistent marketing initiatives via various online platforms to alert users to the closure of the buildings, and the opening of the virtual / digital spaces. At its core, the messages were meant primarily

for The UWI community, however several presentations were designed to reach outside The UWI community, to share ideas, experiences, training, and coping strategies during the period.

This paper reflects on the experiences of The UWI, Mona Library as it tried to navigate the first five months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper zeros in on the efforts of the Mona Library to utilize existing resources to provide digital services and to rework processes to align with the transition from face-to-face learning to predominantly remote learning. Insights are presented on the activities of liaison librarianship: the assignment of a librarian to each academic department to foster and maintain collaboration and communication between the library and the departments, and to provide support for teaching, learning and research. In addition, the paper provides an overview of the novel tablet/laptop distribution project at the Mona Library; and a webinar in which several Caribbean academic librarians shared their responses to the pandemic in their respective libraries, with emphasis on the successes, challenges, and possibilities for the way forward.

Literature Review

Academic libraries as support service units are the centre of research and scholarship. Academic libraries strive toward "connecting users with the latest resources aimed at advancing intellectual inquiry and discovery" (Dodds et al. 51). In recent times, the processes to this end have been profoundly impacted by technology and other societal factors; the latest and perhaps the most impactful being the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a UNESCO press release on March 24, 2020:

[T]he number of students whose academic activities have been affected by academic institutions' closures in 138 countries has nearly quadrupled to 1.37 billion, representing more than 3 out of 4 children and youth worldwide. In terms of teaching personnel, nearly 60.2 million teachers are no longer in the classrooms (UNESCO, "1.37 billion students").

Learn and work from home is the 'new normal' as pandemic figures grew exponentially and universities physically closed their doors. These unexpected and unparalleled happenings gave rise to the use of more digital-based library services and the adaptation of virtual strategies to connect with and meet the needs of users, who in some instances, found themselves in crisis.

Libraries Providing Authentic Information

As was predicted, the impact of the outbreak of the COVID-19 is extraordinary and global. In noting the extent of the effect of the virus on all, UNESCO reports that "Khassoum Diallo from the World Health Organization (WHO) underlined that preparedness has to be strengthened in all countries, stressing the need for intersectoral approaches" (UNESCO, "1.37 billion students"). The onus is on librarians, as information professionals, to know the facts about this public health crisis, keep the public informed, and identify innovative ways to disseminate the reality of the crisis to the community. As users turned to libraries and librarians for authentic and research-evidenced updates, libraries' websites pushed COVID-19 alerts and health guidelines. In the United Kingdom, for instance, academic libraries used the "signposting approach" to mitigate the new wave of mental health issues that arose as students struggled to adjust to their dependence on online resources only (Cox and Brewster 6). Cox and Brewster further explained that instead of dealing with the issue directly, libraries use their websites and other social media platforms to direct students to the relevant service points for assistance (6).

Adapting Services to the Shifting Needs of the Community

At such a critical and transformational time in the history of higher education, the rhetoric of student-centred learning redefined how libraries showcased their services and resources. Effective library websites, for instance, should be:

- a. providing a single point of access to library resources
- b. allowing teaching staff to direct students to useful resources more easily
- c. promoting the resources held by the library, including subscription
- d. improving navigation of library resources
- e. improving access to scholarly and educational web-based resources
- f. providing more efficient access to e-resources
- g. improving information service delivery
- h. providing library services 24/7
- i. facilitating access to library and information services remotely (Gbaje and Kotso 6).

Temiz and Salelkar conducted a content analysis of thirty-nine (39) academic libraries in Sweden to determine the digital services that were being provided in response to COVID-19. The study revealed that the "smart libraries ... were using technologies to ensure that there is: availability of information; accessibility of resources; collaboration with other actors; increased use of existing services...." (373). Across the globe, the websites of universities

were "reworked to reflect closures, provide continual updates on the status of services, offer information on the suspension of the circulation status of physical materials, and give prominent placement to digital content and service offerings" (Breeding 3).

With the abrupt closure of classes and the cessation of traditional services, libraries re-envision liaisonship as a shift from subject librarianship to embedded librarianship. In this regard, librarians partnered with academia in instruction in "helping with searching and locating resources for assignments; (2) teaching users how to use these resources; and (3) supporting their educational needs" within the curriculum (Ifijeh and Yusuf 3). Such a new form of multi-skilled partnership between librarian, teaching staff and IT staff is indispensable to the formulation of meaningful learning experiences.

Handheld Technologies in Libraries

Over the last decade or so libraries have been meeting the needs of digital users through the integration of handheld technologies (mobile devices) in library collections. Through technologies, libraries have evolved from "traditional libraries to hybrid libraries, and then to automated libraries, mediated by digital archiving, library 2.0 and [in recent times,] mobile phone services" (Ocran 4). Mobile technologies are a combination of hardware, operating system, networking, and software that facilitates the sharing of content, social and learning platforms and various applications in mLearning (UNESCO, "UNESCO Mobile Learning" 4). These vary from cell phones, tablets, PDA, handheld computers, e-readers, to name a few. They are used by students in communication, and access to diverse services. There is now an "unprecedented growth in access to mobile phone subscribers worldwide... [and] access to mobile networks is now available to 90% of the world population (UNESCO, "UNESCO Mobile Learning" 4). Therefore, "if librarians are to continue to make substantial contributions as information disseminators, they will have to understand and exploit current ICT infrastructure and emerging technologies in delivering services to their clientele" (Ocran 4).

Noting the advancements in distance education in response to the emerging technologies, Acheampong and Agyemang stated that many "academic libraries are changing their traditional functions to respond to the changing information needs of their users who are more technologically inclined and prefer remote and timely access to scholarly information" (1). Academic libraries all over the world, especially those in advanced countries, are implementing and incorporating mobile technologies in offering innovative services and giving unlimited access to electronic information. This move is in an effort to enhance quality and equitable education.

Tablets were originally designed as a means of communication, but they have now found their way into mainstream educational systems as tools that support teaching and learning (Ansarin et al. 2017). While the early use of tablets in libraries was for the marketing and dissemination of information relating to library services and resources, with improved functionalities librarians have been using tablets to enhance library instruction. Confirming this observation is the push by librarians from McGill University to conduct information literacy workshops to empower students and faculty in the use of tablets for research (Canuel et al.). Hawkes and Hategekimana, questioning why institutions are investing in the push to mobile learning, found an answer in a 2002 report from Stanford Research Institute. Paraphrasing the report, they list:

- To improve academic success;
- To increase equity of access of digital resources;
- To increase regional economic competitiveness by preparing students to effectively use technology in the workplace; and
- To effect a transformation in the quality of instruction. (qtd. in Dodds et al. 53).

For many academic institutions, it was the advent of the COVID-19 crisis, which forced libraries and academia to consider handheld technologies in formal academic life. Despite the steep learning curve that might be involved for some students, many academic libraries are taking advantage of mServices, which include mobile OPACs, SMS messaging, mobile friendly databases, interface for mobile library instruction and tours (Ocran; Ifijeh and Yusuf, 2017). According to Ocran, a number of studies reveal an increase in students' use of and preference for app versus smartphone web browser for communication and social media (Ocran). These findings have implications for academic library services. With a mobile app, students have the library in hand and on the go.

The experiences of academic libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic are in many ways unprecedented. The pandemic has brought new challenges for all societies since most of the world's population had never witnessed such upheaval. Gaps will likely emerge in many areas of library research, as libraries are facing many of the challenges of service and resource provision, for the first time. We still face many unanswered questions about the pandemic itself that will take time and research to resolve. Libraries, like other sectors of society, will continue to face an evolving learning curve on how to deliver services and resources.

Caribbean academic libraries often operate with less access to online resources and technologies than their counterparts in developed nations. Therefore, while we can learn from those counterparts, recording our experiences and reflecting on the ways we can adjust and have the most impact, is critical. Furthermore, given the resource challenges of Caribbean academic libraries, it is also important that we make our individual experiences available to each other; our shared experiences may be the catalyst for the development of solutions that meet our unique needs. Accordingly, this research paper purposed to:

Research Objectives

- 1. Describe the early experience of The UWI, Mona Library as it shifted to largely online services;
- Discuss the outcomes of online services developed or reimagined as a consequence of the pandemic;
- 3. Reflect on the experiences with the purpose of providing insights for professional growth and improvement in practice.

Methodology

Reflection-on-Action: A Non-empirical Technique

With several months of history of COVID-19 in Jamaica behind us, and the unprecedented shift to chiefly online learning by The UWI, it is timely that library practitioners pause and retrospectively think about the experience while navigating the pandemic. Since the 'Interpretive Turn' in the 1980's, non-empirical approaches have been accepted as lenses through which researchers elucidate and understand "epistemic acts about ones lived experiences" (Mortari 3). Non-empirical studies "consider that reflection, personal observation and authority/experience are just as valuable for knowledge acquisition as empirical data" (Dan para. 1). Accepting this position, this study endorses the notion that there are multiple ways of knowing and non-empirical approach is only one way.

In recent times, there has been increased interest in reflection as a way of knowing and reflective practice as a mode of operation. However, in librarianship, reflection is often taken

for granted (Vong 462). In practice, librarians sometimes reflect, look back or think about their actions and spoken words during routine duties. Critical or analytical reflection, however, is more than looking back. Analytical reflection is intentional and action oriented. It is the "ability to gain understanding of specific issues in practice through critically contextualizing, observing and analysing to generate new knowledge and insights which can enhance practice" (Jayatilleke and Mackie 309). The librarian reflects on the experience, provides a clear description of the experience, and analyses his or her feelings and thoughts about the entire process. Finally, a plan of action for a future occurrence of the same or a similar situation is suggested. Reflection is a key element in gaining insight for professional growth and improvement in practice.

While reflection is emphasized in education as a learning strategy (Vong 462) and mandatory in fields such as medicine and midwifery (Grant 156); in librarianship, reflection tends to be in the "form of performance review ... staff reminiscence ... looking back ... often in a nostalgic way" (Vong 462). Librarians generally provide descriptive summaries of the experience or the activity under consideration. Schron's seminal work on reflective research in professional education asserted that practitioners perform either of two techniques - reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action for performance development (qtd. in Mortari 4). Both techniques lead to new understanding and appreciation, but while "reflection-in-action is the act of reflecting during the incident or experience, reflection-on-action is a reflective practice post-incident or experience" (Vong 461). Reflective practice according to Miller releases stress and the risk of burnout. At the end of the hectic first five months, the librarians in this study paused to reflect on the processes and achievements thus far.

This study adapted the reflection-on-action technique as it is envisaged that COVID-19 might be around for a long time and that there is a need to understand what worked and what did not.

The UWI, Mona Library COVID-19 Experience

Upon the suspension of face-to-face classes in March 2020, librarians at the Mona Library quickly shifted their focus from serving patrons in the physical library space to finding additional ways to respond to their needs in the virtual space. Several services, previously available in-person only, were quickly transitioned to the online environment to leverage access to online and other resources, and to spread the news that the Library remained open

in cyberspace and was ready to help meet the information needs of The UWI, Mona community. These services/resources included, but were not limited to:

- Video tutorials that augmented teaching and learning
- Extended live chat hours for online reference service
- Quick links on the library's webpage to point users to the most critical resources, services and how to get assistance
- A library course container in OurVLE, which is The UWI's course management system, for hosting digital learning artifacts created by the library
- Social media tools: the addition of a YouTube channel and the utilization of Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to share informational flyers and videos.

New Policies and New Services

The new environment also called for the formulation of new policies and the amendment of policies, procedures and guidelines that were already in existence. In fact, the opportunity arose for staff and users to have access to clear directions and guidance as they navigated the new space. For example, the technology policy that governed the loan of laptops and tablets pre-COVID-19 proved inadequate during the COVID-19 period; therefore, a new technology policy was developed. There was also a need for clear and specific guidelines regarding the treatment of library loans returned to the library during the pandemic. Also, guidelines for the use of Zoom, which was becoming our main meeting and teaching platform, had to be formulated.

Parallel with the formulation of new policies was the introduction of several new initiatives, some of which can be identified as trends of the pandemic. While not an exhaustive list, these initiatives included:

- The tablet/laptop distribution program
- Curbside pickup of library resources
- Online thesis consultation
- Online Information Literacy (IL) sessions
- E-delivery of critical items/documents scanned upon request by faculty
- The curation of online content for aggressive marketing and dissemination through the University's intranet, social media, and other library platforms
- Webinars aimed at sharing information within the global academic space

As the intellectual hub of the University, the library had long operated a hybrid model in the dissemination of information and service delivery. However, with the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, The UWI, Mona Library had to find innovative ways to continue to meet the information needs of The UWI, Mona community. It was important that users were reminded of the existing online services. These were highlighted on The UWI's intranet and on various social media platforms. Additionally, new services were advertised through the same media as they became available online. The cadre of librarians worked with the outreach librarian to ensure that information and updates were shared with the community in a timely manner.

New opportunities also arose out of old relationships and allowed for improved access to online resources over a period of three months. These were, for the most part, additional trial databases provided by publishers or free access to their resources; there was also collaboration between the Library and stakeholders such as Jamaica Library Service (JLS), the body responsible for the operation of all public libraries in Jamaica.

Liaison Librarians Ready to Help

To implement the changes, the entire staff complement played an integral role. In particular, liaison librarians took on proactive roles in the support of research and online teaching and learning. Their first course of action was to satisfy the information needs of faculty and graduate students. The liaison librarians located and customized the information requested by faculty. Resources that were considered critical to the students' successful completion of a course, but were in print format only, were loaned to faculty and/or graduate students for the entire semester. Additionally, based on the new COVID-19 copyright policy allowance and at the request of faculty members, the Library scanned and uploaded one to three chapters of books to their online course containers. With the suspension of face-to-face services, this service, a new initiative of the Mona Library, was embraced. As shown in Table 1, which follows, there was a spike in the number of requests in early March 2020, as faculty prepared for teaching through the online modality.

Critical Resources Scanned

Period	Requests	Pages
March 23 – April 27	103	2083
May 4 – June 1	25	531
June 2 – June 30	6	188
July 1 – July 31	6	135

Extended Loan of Resources

In relation to printed resources, the challenge was not only how to provide access, but also how to manage the impact of the uncertainty of the national containment efforts. It was recognized that students would experience difficulties in returning materials in circulation in a timely manner and would consequently attract overdue fines. As such, the decision was taken to extend loan periods for all categories of users, for the semester; and to waive all overdue fines. Additionally, all materials returned to the library were placed in quarantine for three days, then treated against the spread of COVID-19 before being re-integrated in the library's collection.

Marketing

Library outreach sought to promote library services and resources generally to The UWI community it served, and specifically to those who would not otherwise use the library. However, suddenly being pushed into a largely online only environment, meant that all of our users needed to be guided as to how their various information needs would be met. Mona Library outreach utilized social media, the intranet, the library's website, and networking to communicate relevant information to users. The library posted regularly on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter; some of these posts, where relevant, were shared on website banners. Events advertised on social media for instance, would often have corresponding banners on the library's website to facilitate registration. A YouTube channel was created, and content regularly uploaded. Videos and flyers were mostly created in-house. Facebook and YouTube were also used to facilitate live streaming of some library events.

In addition to sharing information on how to access available online resources and how to contact the library, there was consistent communication to assure users that even though the library buildings were closed, the library remained open in the virtual space, to assist in any way possible. To ensure the widest possible reach, information was shared on the library's platforms as well as through the various student groups, for example, The UWI Mona Guild of Student, and various WhatsApp student groupings. Prior to the appointment of an Outreach Librarian, there was no system in place for evaluating the impact of outreach activities. With the employment of an Outreach Librarian, a systematic approach to evaluating the impact of outreach activities was developed. The number of library followers grew on the various social media platforms, and interactions on those platforms: students sent direct messages to ask questions about library services and to seek research help; they also sent commendation messages to praise the library on initiatives implemented. As the posts were shared, they inspired similar posts by other users. Additionally, through the social media platforms colleagues from other academic libraries, sought advice from the outreach librarian on how some of what was shared could be replicated in their setting.



Fig. 1. Sample Flyer Shared on Mona Library Platforms

The Work of the Mona Information Literacy Unit (MILU)

The Mona Information Literacy Unit (MILU) of the Mona Library is responsible for coordinating the delivery of training to The UWI community. As the name suggests, emphasis is placed on the teaching of information literacy as well as research skills. The unit gives support to several foundation courses taught at The UWI and designed to help undergraduate students garner the core competencies needed by an information literate individual. These classes, which were delivered in face-to-face mode prior to the pandemic, were now delivered online and via the ZOOM platform. Unless mandated otherwise, students could choose to join a live presentation or watch a recorded presentation in their own time.

In addition to special requests from academic departments on Campus, other open information literacy instructional sessions were spearheaded by MILU. Based on relevance, participants were drawn from organisations outside of The UWI community, such as Library and Information Association of Jamaica (LIAJA) and The Mico University College Library.

MILU, like other library sections, had to reimagine and reengineer these sessions for effective online pedagogy. MILU staff redesigned the sessions and conducted training amongst librarians in the efficacy of the platform, and the delivery of meaningful online learning. It is important that librarians increase their teaching capacity to guide researchers (students and faculty) through the complex processes of information seeking and evaluation in the online environment.

In fulfilment or partial fulfilment of their course of study, students are required by The UWI to present a final paper that may take the form of a thesis/dissertation or a research paper. These papers pull together numerous sources that need to be documented, in keeping with standards set out in *The UWI Thesis Guide*. The guide provides for several quality control checks, including the input of librarians, who are charged with the provision of information literacy. According to Robinson et al., "Theses scrutiny is a natural and logical linkage as a measure of quality control of these products" (13). The Mona Library provides support in two ways, namely, thesis consultation and thesis scrutiny. Thesis and gives general feedback on consistency with guidelines for formatting the paper and referencing the sources. Thesis scrutiny, on the other hand, is a more in-depth review of the extent to which the paper conforms to both UWI guidelines, and conventions of the recommended citation style

adopted by the student's respective department. The thesis scrutiny process takes a longer time (about three weeks, and the request is made by The UWI's Office of Graduate Studies and Research (OGSR) as a student prepares to submit a work for final assessment). MILU coordinates the process by which these works are assigned for consultation or scrutiny. Prior to the pandemic, librarians received physical copies of the works to be reviewed and aspects of the processes required in person interaction. As a consequence of the pandemic, MILU no longer accepted the printed copies of theses/dissertations for consultation or scrutiny. Both services were moved to an online mode. Table 2 shows work on theses/dissertations between March and May 2020.

Table 2

Thesis Consultation and Scrutiny

Thesis Consultation	Туре	
	MA/MS/MPhil	PHD
March		
April	3	-
May	3	3
June	17	5
July	32	10

Thesis Scrutiny	Туре		
	MA/MPhil	PHD	
March	1	4	
April		1	
May		1	
June	3	2	
July	3	5	

Research and Reference Assistance

Assisting clients with their research and information needs is one of three core services of an academic library. During the pandemic, this function was carried out primarily through

emails, telephone, web-form, WhatsApp messages, live chat, and offline messages through the library's virtual reference service, named "Ask Mona". Questions were submitted through the UWI email addresses of liaison librarians as well as via social media. As the Outreach Librarian communicated with the community of learners, reference and research queries were submitted. Liaison librarians were generally responsive: they provided direct response, and where needed, forwarded the queries to the public services librarians who might be better able to respond. The capacity to accept/respond to the online reference queries was augmented by assistance from paraprofessional staff, while other levels of staff helped with various projects to improve safety, carry out long overdue maintenance work, and improve the Library's overall offerings. The effective delivery of reference services necessitated collaboration, commitment and industry.

Halls of Residence Librarian Programme

The Halls of Residence Librarian (HRL) programme was developed in 2013 as an initiative to take library services to students on campus residence. It targets primarily first year UWI students who may feel a little intimidated by the new university environment. The idea is to meet the students where they are and present the HRLs as their academic allies who are willing to:

- introduce and answer questions about the library and its services
- assist with navigating the library's online resources
- offer advanced research assistance for individuals or study groups
- give guidance on the use of citations styles (APA, Chicago, MLA, ACS and others) and citation management software (e.g. EndNote)
- provide support through in-person consultations, email and chat; provide reference and research services; and help students become comfortable with the Library generally (Nicholas et al. 323)

Despite the dorms being largely vacant, plans were made to shift the HRL programme to social media and online meeting platforms using live as well as recorded sessions. The idea was that the librarians in charge of the varying halls would meet the students in these online spaces for live chat sessions or instructional lessons. Pre-recorded instructional video sessions would help students understand the basics of various citation style manuals used on the campus. Students would be able to access these recordings at their convenience.
Curbside Pickup

Curbside pickup became a trend of the pandemic. It may have been pushed originally by commercial entities trying to find ways of maintaining their customer base. However, it became a useful option in the delivery of goods and services in various sectors, including libraries. It was utilized by the Mona Library in its tablet/laptop project and in the delivery of printed resources to customers. Although some branches did not receive requests for this service, it proved essential for the Law Branch Library, the Science & Engineering Branch Library and the Main Library. Delivery points varied from pick up windows, to at the door, to users' vehicles. The service allowed both library staff and users to feel a sense of safety, especially as studies regarding the spread of the virus were in their early stages and were pointing to certain indoor conditions impacting its spread.



Fig. 2. Curbside Pickup, Law Branch Library

The Tablet/Laptop Distribution Project

As The UWI transitioned to full online teaching and learning in March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, its administration immediately recognized that, due to economic circumstances, a significant number of students would be at a disadvantage if there was no intervention on the part of The UWI. Some students were without computer devices and relied heavily on on-campus access to computer resources and Internet. Furthermore, some

students living in rural communities either did not have access to broadband Internet or where there was access, it was intermittent. In order to continue providing quality education via distance learning, the loan of tablets and laptops became a critical part of the teaching and learning process.

By mid-semester, a total of 543 new devices (tablets and laptops) were integrated into the Mona Library's collection. Another three tablets (used) were donated by a private donor. The breakdown of devices received is shown in Table 3, which follows.

Table 3

Devices Received

Type of device	No. of Tablets/Laptops	Location
Tablets (new)	513	UWI Main Library
Laptops	15	UWI Main Library
Laptops	15	UWI Western Jamaica Branch Library
Tablets (used)	3	UWI Main library
Total	543	

In partnering with the parish libraries under the aegis of the Jamaica Library Service (JLS), the devices were distributed to the students across Jamaica. Upon requests made through faculty or the Office of Students Services Department, The UWI, Mona, a device would be pre-charged to the student's library circulations account and packaged for pick-up either at the Main Library on the Mona Campus or at the parish library nearest or most convenient to the student, via the JLS.



Fig. 3. The Issuance of Tablets and Laptops by Parish (parishes are geographical divisions in Jamaica; similar to counties in the USA)



Fig. 4. Devices Issued by Faculty

KEY to Fig 4:

FHE – Faculty of Humanities & Education FST – Faculty of Science & Technology FSS – Faculty of Social Sciences FMS – Faculty of Medical Sciences FOL – Faculty of Law

Of the 458 devices loaned to students, 33% (151 tablets) were issued to the Faculty of Social Sciences. 24% (110) were loaned to the Faculty of Education; 22% (101) were loaned to the Faculty of Medical Sciences; 18% (84) were issued to the Faculty of Science & Technology (including the Faculty of Engineering); and 3% (12) went to the Faculty of Law. Additionally, tablets were issued to a few faculty members.



Fig. 5. Type of Users

Figure 5 illustrates that more than half (348) of the devices were loaned to undergraduate students, and a total of 104 students at the postgraduate level benefited. Six staff members borrowed a device to support teaching.

Students' Satisfaction with the Tablet/Laptop Distribution Project

In a few instances, librarians went the extra mile and personally delivered devices to students in rural parishes (see fig. 6).



Fig. 6. A Librarian Delivering a Tablet to a Student in the Parish of Clarendon, Jamaica (approximately 47 kilometres from the Mona Campus)

Some students had connectivity issues including, but not limited to:

- being unable to afford data services
- no access to Wi-Fi and unstable Internet connection
- challenges (e.g. size) working with some of the devices issued

Notwithstanding, the students expressed satisfaction with and appreciation for the service provided. The following are a sample of responses to two questions posed to students as they returned their tablets on July 3, 2020.

1. How useful or helpful was the tablet to you?

Responses from students:

a. I found it very useful to be able to attend my online classes on Blackboard and also to study for my exams and do my exams.

- b. The tablet service was extremely helpful. It helped me submit my essays on time, to edit and everything.
- c. I found it extremely useful and helpful in the COVID-19 period and I ask that you continue doing so [beyond COVID-19].
- d. The service itself was very useful; it allowed me to complete my examinations because initially I was using my cellular phone to complete most of my tasks and assignment. The tablet definitely allowed me... to fulfil all the stuff that I needed to complete my semester.
- e. The tablet was beneficial to me because at the time my laptop was messed up, so I was able to use it to get online to complete my course [of study]. I'm really grateful to UWI ... and I thank them very much.
- 2. Would you recommend or tell other persons about what we are doing here?
 - a. Yes, sure because even without a memory card, it [the device] has a lot of space to download the slides on OurVLE and everything.
 - b. I would. Without a computer of your own, here is the opportunity [to get work done]

*(OurVLE is the course management system)

Webinars Aimed at Sharing Information within the Global Academic Space

The Library reached out to The UWI community and beyond in the form of training and informational webinars more than we would have, had there not been a pandemic. One of many webinars was entitled *Agility and Adaptability: The Caribbean Academic Library Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic.* This webinar facilitated the sharing of responses and ideas among academic libraries in Jamaica and other parts of the English-speaking Caribbean, including Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and Grenada. The UWI, Open Campus Library also participated.

Tables 4 and 5, which follow, extracted from documents produced after the webinar, provide a snapshot of the findings. It should be noted that the libraries that were present represent only a subset of Caribbean academic libraries; notwithstanding, the data provides an idea of some of the measures that were implemented in the region despite various constraints as parent institutions moved to online classes only. In many respects, our responses were similar and the extent to which we could address certain issues was directly linked to available resources. The tables provide a snapshot of how some Caribbean academic libraries managed the transition to online services, as well as the measures put in place to connect users with online services and resources.

Table 4

Caribbean Academic Libraries' Response to the Pandemic: Transition to Remote Work

Table 1A: Snapshot of Caribbean Academic Libraries' Response to the Pandemic		
Transition to Remote Work		Small Libraries
Use of VPN technology to access network	•	
Procurement of remote technology (video-conferencing, project		•
Staff Training in the use of remote technology		
Provision of requisite equipment/tools (laptops, software)		
Implementation of flexi-hours		•
Regular virtual/remote planning meetings		•
Instrumental support to address collective trauma resulting from the pandemic	•	•

Table 5

Caribbean Academic Libraries' Response to the Pandemic: Transition to Online Teaching and Learning

Table 1B: Snapshot of Caribbean Academic Libraries' Response to the Pandemic		
Supporting Transition to online teaching and learning		Small Libraries
Upgrading ICT and systems	•	•
Expanding/Implementing virtual reference services (emails, vid-	•	•
eo-conferencing, video calls, instant messaging, social media)		
Forming partnerships with vendors, corporate entities to pro- vide additional resources to patrons	•	
Expanding the electronic collections (free trials, e-books, etc.)	•	•
Bolstering Liaison Librarian Services (personal emails to faculty,	•	•
emails, video-conferencing, video calls, instant messaging,)		
Aggressive promotion of library's e-resources and remote ser-	•	•
vices (website and social media posts, quicklinks & thumbnails,		
online newsletter)		
Selective digitization of critical course material for faculty	•	
Laptop & tablet loan project		
Curbside delivery	٠	
Waiver of fines on overdue books	•	•
Waiver of document delivery charges	•	•
Provision of research support (thesis consultation, IL tutorials,		
research skills tutorials, etc)		
Provision of instrumental support to students (study tips, stress	•	
relief tips, positive/inspirational messages)		

Caribbean academic libraries, and specifically The UWI, Mona Library, made the best use of available resources to meet user needs and to ensure that users had access to online resources. The Mona Library then went beyond the provision of resources only and set to work, as the second semester ended, imagining September 2020 to ensure that whatever mode of reopening the new academic year presented, we would be ready for it. All our programmes were re-engineered to provide online as well as safe, in person options.

Reflecting on the Mona Library COVID-19 Experience

Although library staff did their best to meet the needs of users, the efforts were not without challenges. From the perspective of management and staff, it was challenging to get everyone involved in the various initiatives because of connectivity issues and, in some instances, because day-to-day tasks required more hands-on than virtual work, as was the case with staff from the Bindery Unit and some technical services staff, for instance. Staff found that

working remotely challenged traditional boundaries between work and personal time. Persons became more prone to a sedentary lifestyle and had to mitigate it. Also, some were challenged by the fact that school for their children had moved to the online mode and parental supervision was needed during work hours. For others, their workload became heavier as they were tasked with putting the services in online format. Some members of staff also did not enjoy working in the online environment because they missed the interaction with colleagues and users. The stress and physical inactivity brought by working from home, led to some persons desiring to return to work physically, although the option existed to work from home.

The pandemic brought additional financial challenges for students and the university. As it relates to the conversion of certain services to online access, the Library did not receive any additional resources to facilitate the changes required. Whereas additional software or hardware would have been ideal, persons had to innovate and use what was already in-house, make use of personal devices, mobile applications, and access open-source software, where possible. Although the university helped needy students with devices, those devices did not fully satisfy all the functional needs of some students. Additionally, the university was not able to provide data or Internet connectivity for students remotely. Based on the sample responses from students who benefitted from the tablet project, we recognized that maintaining the programme into the future, as well as negotiating avenues for future connectivity, would be beneficial.

The strategies used by the Mona Library to sustain the new normal were similar to those adopted by librarians at the National University of Lesotho Library. There they broke the digital divide, maintained teamwork and reflection throughout the process, sustained human contact with clientele, shifted mode to online support, and considered and minimized the cost of the digital infrastructure through open-source resources. "Some personal contacts were provided. The chat facility on the website, which would be answered by reference service, was set to meet that need" (Mbambo-Thata par. 40). However, at the Mona Library, in addition to bolstering our chat services, we made every effort to circulate email contact information for our liaison and our halls of residence librarians. We provided a cellular phone number equipped with WhatsApp chat while some librarians shared personal cellular phone contact information so that users could contact them directly. Outreach became key to reaching and staying in touch with our users. We utilized our social media platforms to

provide access to information in various formats and to connect with our users in a way that a large segment of them already used in their day-to-day interactions.

The challenges of the pandemic brought out the best in Library staff in general. In some instances, we took our cues from developing trends and blogs of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), but in several instances we had to innovate and learn what works through trial and error. The experience has provided an opportunity for us to do some much-needed maintenance work both physically and online and has caused us to reflect on the changes or improvements necessary as we move forward. Extensive collection development work was carried out including shelf-reading and weeding of the various open shelf collections. Several issues with our website were identified which caused us to take a closer look at how we meet user needs electronically and to consider the need for a website redesign. Additionally, the pandemic conditions prompted the formulation of important policy documents covering a range of issues including access, seating, COVID-19 protocols, and the treatment of returned library materials, and they brought to the fore flexibility and in-house creative solutions that were not considered previously. For instance, staff utilized smart phone apps and open-source software to make instructional and other types of videos to replicate virtually what users would have experienced physically. Many of the staff involved in these initiatives had no prior experience in video production. The various activities necessitated more collaboration with different levels of staff and opened new paths that will inform how we do things well into the future.

As the librarians tried to imagine September 2020, there were uncertainties, confusion, and concerns. In anticipating some level of face-to-face interaction for the new semester, best plans for a mixed modality with the "new normal" in mind were put in place. University-wide orientation activities for the new 2020/2021 academic year were held virtually. For the library, this included virtual tours of our facilities and the use of a LibGuide to act as our orientation website, connecting clients to information previously provided during physical tours. The university eventually decided to offer all classes online, at least for the first semester. The library, however, decided to open with new safety measures for those who might still want to access in-person services. The protocols of the Ministry of Health and Wellness along with The UWI's guidelines steered the way. The library also produced its own policy document to guide all aspects of the September 2020 reopening.

Prior to COVID-19, librarians took time to plan and consider alternatives and best practices before implementing changes or new services. During the first five months of COVID-19, decisions were made and implemented on-the-fly. Policies were altered as the need arose and based on what seemed workable at the time. In August 2020, during the summer break and hence a lull in services offered, the practitioners reflected, and examined what was accomplished and how the decisions made might have positively or negatively contributed to the overall experience of the Mona Library. Questions of what could have been done differently and how a different approach could have positively impacted service provision were raised.

In hindsight, it was the commitment, ingenuity, and flexibility of the library staff (at all levels) that brought success. Librarians and faculty cooperation was critical at this juncture, and it happened. Librarianship evolved as librarians adapted to the unique situation. This period further concretised the indispensable value of academic libraries to teaching, learning and research. The Library could not have asked for more from the staff under the extraordinary circumstances caused by the pandemic. These stories will be chronicled for librarians and historians in years to come.

However, from a management perspective, not everything went as smoothly as anticipated. The key initiative brought about by the pandemic that had to be revisited was the tablet/laptop distribution project. The Library had offered laptops for loan prior to the pandemic, but on a smaller scale and without having to identify those who would be best served based on need. Under the COVID-19 tablet/laptop distribution project, other stakeholders (Faculty, the Office of Student Services and Development, and the Bursary) had a vital role to play in determining whether a student should receive a loan or not. This meant a lot of productive time was spent either awaiting approval, acquiring additional details about the borrower, or undoing a loan that was already done. Considering these challenges, the process was re-examined for the following semester and recommendations and measures put in place to mitigate further reoccurrence. Implementing some ideas on-the-fly allowed some critical data to be overlooked. These omissions were addressed urgently as data drives our research, decisions and service provision. These situations underscore the need to think through the processes carefully before embarking on the execution of a project of this nature.

Implications for Future Plan of Action

The COVID-19 experience has implications for practice and research in librarianship. The Library team had operated a hybrid model for years and was used to providing some online support, but never on the scale required when all classes became virtual. Librarians had to rely on feedback from students and faculty regarding issues with access, as well as perform internal evaluation. Except for regular staff meetings, which provided a forum for discussion and the chance for librarians to reflect and critique approaches and processes, library services were not systematically evaluated. Going forward, we will need to be responsive and open to both internal and external criticisms and suggestions to improve our service delivery. Data capture of the new ways in which we now interact with our clientele is also important. Continuous feedback from user surveys is a critical part of moving forward as well. Understanding user experiences will assist with responses that are customised to their needs.

Creativity and innovation are critical strategies that will help staff to develop and maintain sustainable models of online service delivery in the 21st century. This calls for teamwork and collaboration. Based on the economic impact of the pandemic so far, it is possible that the digital divide may widen as students' access to technology narrows based on high cost. But by demonstrating positive attitudes, librarians can continue to provide possible solutions as we look for alternative ways to fund initiatives. As libraries continue to experience resource challenges, looking to open-source resources to serve as main textbooks will be a new norm even post-COVID-19.

Findings from this experience would suggest that if library practitioners capitalize on the benefits of non-empirical techniques, academic libraries will be better positioned as a learning organisation, ready to cope with unexpected challenges brought on by crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. There is merit in intentional reflection as a means of improving practice and competency. Periodic reflection and assessment of practice will uncover new knowledge that will have implications for repositioning the University and the Library as they seek to remain competitive in the global environment. However, sustaining the new normal is predicated on buy-in from all stakeholders.

At The UWI, liaison librarians are required to support faculty members; librarians are embedded in courses and programmes, assist in teaching research skills; and periodically engage in systematic review of new courses. Providing these services along with other core duties can increase stress and lead to burnout and underperformance, but reflection is an escape route. A study of 106 medical librarians who reported that they are either reflective practitioners or that they consciously spent time reflecting, concluded that reflection can "support self-care by helping to reduce stress, which can lead to burn-out, and improve morale and commitment to work" (Miller 27).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Many persons focus on the challenges of the pandemic, and there have been many. Opportunities were also many, and The UWI, Mona Library seized them, seeking alternative ways to respond to the needs of the community, which it serves. It did not merely leave users to go ahead and access resources and services previously available online, but created and curated additional resources and services to meet users' needs. The Library went to great lengths to make users aware of new and previously existing resources and services and played a key role in helping to bridge the digital divide by managing the tablet project. It revised, as best as possible, its website to provide information and access and used social media to assure users that the library was open 24/7, 365 days of the year online. It also provided various avenues to offer help and access through plural contact options.

Mona Library has been very innovative in its service offerings to The UWI community. This study shows that the library has the capacity to incorporate mobile technologies into the library collections as a means of providing access to the Library's resources, services, and access to information literacy. As mobile technologies are now an integral part of the everyday life of students, the library should optimize its service delivery by making the library's website more mobile friendly. This should be a priority going forward, as a mobile friendly website will provide students with better connectivity and meaningful learning experiences.

Professional Development

Library schools and professional development programmes should include reflectivity as a part of mainstream curriculum or a thread in the training programmes. Educators in the 21st century are being called to be reflective practitioners, and reflective practice is a "mandatory competency" in nursing and midwifery (Grant 156).

The wealth of knowledge gained from this study, suggests that there is a need for a more comprehensive study. Consideration should be given to a cross-faculty, mixed method

exploration of stakeholders' (faculty and students) perceptions of and their experiences with the library services since the first case of COVID-19 was identified in Jamaica. Such a study should further incorporate both empirical and non-empirical techniques that will enable the exploration of the phenomenon from a wide range of participants but also gather an in-depth, rich understanding of the issues under consideration.

Looking back, we feel incredibly proud to be associated with such innovative opportunities. The team remains committed to continuing to find ways to support users as we journey through the pandemic. Circumventing the pandemic required great sacrifice and perseverance. As one librarian it, the process of sorting the tablets for dispatch to the parishes was "back breaking and painstaking". But we persevered, knowing that it was not about the librarians but about the faculty and students we serve. Librarians at the Mona Library are committed to excellent service and would do the same and more for the students and faculty if the need arises again.

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THE UWI CAVE HILL LIBRARY'S RESPONSE TO SERVICE DELIVERY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper documents the response of the Sidney Martin Library of The University of the West Indies (UWI), Cave Hill (Barbados) to service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social/Practical Implications: A gap exists in the literature on the response of Barbadian academic libraries to the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper documents the experience of a Barbadian academic library, in respect of: steps taken, lessons learned, and recommendations proposed on the possible way forward for library services.

Methodology/Design: This non-empirical study used the integrated reflective cycle approach to provide an account of the experience of a Barbadian academic library during the first ten weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings: Clients appreciated the new services, notwithstanding critical limitations, such as: (a) the need for digitization of resources; (b) limited access to ebooks, and (c) additional tutorials to support information literacy instruction

Originality/Value: This paper describes the impact of the Coronavirus on a medium-sized academic library in the Caribbean, making it the first study of a Barbadian academic library's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The experience described, provides valuable insight into the approach taken to transition from a largely paper-based service to online delivery

Keywords: COVID-19; Caribbean academic libraries; Coronavirus; Barbadian academic library; online library services; Sidney Martin Library

Background

Outbreak of COVID-19 Pandemic

The Coronavirus was first detected in Wuhan Province, China and a report on the virus was submitted to the World Health Organization in December 2019. Shortly after the start of the second semester of the 2019/20 academic year in January 2020, the WHO declared the Coronavirus "a public health emergency of international concern" (WHO, *Emergencies*

Preparedness). In February 2020, The UWI established a COVID-19 Task Force in response to COVID-19 (UWI, "UWI Establishes"). Campus administration also announced in February 2020 that face-to-face classes would cease, and teaching would transition to online delivery format (UWI "Letter"). By March 2020, the virus had reached the Caribbean, with cases reported in Jamaica, March 1, 2020; and Guyana, March 12, 2020 (CARICOM, "Tracking"). The first two cases of the virus in Barbados were reported on March 11, 2020 and announced on the front pages of two major newspapers ("Covid is Here"; "Two Cases Confirmed"). Recognizing that the situation could rapidly deteriorate, The UWI issued Covid Protocols and Procedures to staff (UWI, "Covid Protocols").

On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared the virus a global pandemic (WHO, *WHO Director General*). In response, on March 23, 2020, Cave Hill campus, The UWI, informed staff that the campus would be closed to public access (UWI, "Campus Closure"). Six days later, on March 29, 2020, the Government of Barbados implemented stage three of the COVID-19 Preparedness Plan which outlined guidelines for the closure of all educational institutions, the private sector and restricted public movement of its citizenry. This brought all major commercial and educational activities to a halt.

Overview of the Cave Hill Campus and Library

The Cave Hill campus is one of five campuses of The University of the West Indies (The UWI). Established in Barbados in 1967, it is the third campus of The UWI. The other campuses are Mona (Jamaica), St Augustine (Trinidad and Tobago), Five Islands (Antigua and Barbuda) and the Open Campus, which is a virtual campus. There are six faculties at Cave Hill: Culture, Creative and Performing Arts; Humanities and Education; Law; Medicine; Science & Technology; and Social Sciences. The student body primarily comprises undergraduates; during the 2019-20 academic year, the campus had an enrolment of 5,655 undergraduates, and a total enrolment of 6,164 student (UWI, *Statistics*). The Sidney Martin Library, formerly known as the Main Library, was established in 1967, in the same year as the Cave Hill campus. It is the largest library in Barbados, with a collection of approximately 200,000 print titles, and a staff complement of eight librarians and twenty administrative and technical staff. The library has a unique collection of printed material on Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean. Both the library and the campus can boast of a wireless environment. The library offers a range of spaces and facilities to support study, including an open seating area with large tables, carrels for individual study, discussion rooms for postgraduates and

undergraduates, a computer lab and a 24-hour study area. A recently created space called "The Gallery" is used by staff and students for special literary occasions such as a book launches and meetings. Additionally, a range of information services are provided. Services include: an online catalogue, reference assistance, access to course reserve materials, inter library loan and information literacy instruction. Students and staff also have access to binding and repair services, photocopying and printing services. The library's catalogue, UWI Libraries Information Connexion (UWIlinC), is a web-based information portal which provides access to The UWI's resources in all formats including The UWI's intellectual output, subscribed resources (ejournals, databases, and ebooks), and the library catalogues of the four UWI campuses. The catalogue is available through the library's website. The library established a presence on social media through Facebook. A presence is also maintained on the Cave Hill campus' Chill App through the site Chill Libraries, which is used to post information on library services of interest to students. The library also has a well-established liaison librarian service which provides information and instructional support to faculty and students. Information literacy instruction is provided at the foundational level and course or subject level.

Literature Review

The *New Oxford Dictionary of English* defines pandemic as an "outbreak of a disease prevalent over a whole country or the world". The definition explains the scope of what occurred but, understandably, does not address the repercussions on the people and institutions affected by the pandemic. This review seeks to identify scholarly resources on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the provision of academic library service, access to resources and the use of library spaces.

The earliest mention of measures taken by libraries to control the spread of a viral infection of pandemic proportions is captured in newspaper accounts of the steps taken by the New York Public Library to prevent the spread of the Spanish flu in 1918 (Taylor Research Group). The measures taken bear great similarity to those documented in the literature regarding the management of COVID-19. Guidelines were provided for social distancing requirements, the establishment of sanitising workstations, the installation of "flu screens" and the wearing of face masks. A search for "pandemic and Caribbean libraries" produced articles written by David Killingray, whose extensive research on the impact of the Spanish flu on British colonies, included an account of the social impact of the Spanish flu on several

Caribbean territories. It had a devastating effect on several island populations, but surprisingly had a comparably minimal impact on the population of Barbados. Killingray mentions that an estimated 0.1% of the Barbados population succumbed to the virus in comparison to estimated percentages of 1.0% for Jamaica, 3.8% for British Guiana and 4.6 for Belize (81).

Although libraries were established in Barbados in 1847 (Jordan), an account of the effect of the Spanish flu on libraries in Barbados was not included in Killingray's research. This omission highlights the existence of a gap in the academic library pandemic literature and reinforces the need for this paper and the importance of documenting the COVID-19 pandemic experience of Caribbean libraries.

The outbreak of a viral disease which affects entire countries all around the world will have disastrous consequences on the workplace. However, viral pandemics are rarely mentioned in library disaster preparation and planning documentation. Robertson's article on pandemics and academic libraries, published almost 14 years before the COVID-19 pandemic, is invaluable and seems to be one of the few, and possibly the only scholarly work written prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic on libraries and viral pandemics. Consequently, the paucity of scholarly literature available at the start of the pandemic meant that libraries sought guidance from websites of regional and international organisations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The WHO was the first organisation to issue bulletins warning of the consequences of the coronavirus while the CDC was one of the first to provide guidelines on the risks associated with COVID-19 and institutions of higher learning (CDC). The CDC report provides useful information and sound recommendations on the approach that should be adopted generally, but not specifically by academic libraries. Resources on the COVID-19 pandemic were available to all libraries through the websites of the American Library Association (ALA), the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), the Library Association (UK), and the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA).

Before the end of 2020, several scholarly articles on the academic library pandemic experience became available. The effect of the virus on service delivery and efforts to ensure the continuation of library services such as information literacy instruction and online database access is a recurring theme in these articles. This review attempted to examine the

response of libraries in developed and developing countries in the areas of information literacy instruction, inter library loan, and the transition from use of internal library spaces to online access.

Walsh and Rana documented the University of Toronto libraries' successful transition of all services to online access. The steps taken are described as those intended to "assess, modify and expand online offerings rather than start from scratch" (238). Recognizing the benefits of a hybrid approach to instruction, they were largely successful in transitioning information literacy instruction to online delivery. The support provided by the availability of a strong infrastructure allowed remote access to course materials to support teaching (238). Guo et al. noted training sessions for librarians in China should be strengthened to allow more efficient support of reference services. This suggests that online reference service and possibly online information literacy instruction may not have been fully operational during the period of closure. Ishtaq, Sehar and Sahid highlighted the dependence on traditional service delivery and the consequences for digital literacy in Pakistan and Nigeria (14). Ifijeh and Yusuf acknowledged the transitionary effect which the pandemic had on library instruction but felt that a blended format of instruction would be considered going forward (3). The importance of free access to electronic resources to facilitate access to ebooks was highlighted by Guo et al. The Canadian libraries did not lack infrastructural support, but mention was made of the importance of providing access to digitized resources through the library's website (Walsh and Rana). Additionally, their decision to suspend lending fees to allow wider access to their digital collection during the pandemic signals both their recognition and willingness to render assistance to libraries with even greater challenges (242). The closure of library buildings, limited access to print resources, highlighted the need for online access to information resources. Walsh and Rana reported an increase in the use of their virtual reference service (239). Similarly, Guo et al. highlighted the positive impact of virtual reference service offered by libraries in China.

A system of collaboration and resource sharing was successfully employed by Italian libraries where a collaborative network to support inter-library loan services was implemented during the pandemic (Tammaro 218). This level of cooperation was also evident in China among academic libraries (Guo et al.).

Hinchcliffe and Wolff-Eisenberg conducted one of the earliest studies on the effect of the pandemic on American libraries. They sought to gather information on the first six months of the pandemic. In later surveys, they sought feedback on the move to online delivery of courses, online reference services, and remote working arrangements. These surveys provided insight into the approach adopted and revealed some similarities in the approach taken by libraries worldwide.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Jamaican academic libraries was covered by Harris ("The Coronavirus Pandemic"; "Covid-19 Impact"). Both papers discussed the impact of the pandemic within the first six months. The first analyses the impact of the pandemic on library employees, the effect of covid protocols on library staff and the ability of libraries to continue to support research. The second paper undertakes a comparative analysis between the results of Hinchcliffe and Wolff- Eisenberg study of American academic libraries and the experience of Jamaican libraries. The similarities and differences in approaches to the closure of buildings and provision of online services were brought to the fore. The preparations made by Jamaican academic libraries for the arrival of the pandemic and approach taken towards the management of staff and resources were discussed.

Except for Harris' papers, no other study has examined the effect of the pandemic on academic libraries in the English-speaking Caribbean. This highlights the gap in published research available on the experience of libraries in the English-speaking Caribbean. This paper provides insight into how one Barbadian academic library navigated this period of social and economic upheaval. Accordingly, this paper seeks to:

- Provide insight into preparations required to support transition from face-to-face to online service delivery;
- Reflect on the successes and failures of new products and services introduced; and
- Identify new areas and opportunities worthy of further exploration.

Methodology

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on library services worldwide illustrates the far-reaching effect of the virus. The comparatively sparse availability of examples that record the Caribbean academic library experience makes documenting the experience of the Sidney Martin Library worthwhile. This response will add to the body of literature on the pandemic and provide an invaluable record of that lived experience. To effectively capture this, the

Integrated Reflective Cycle was adopted. Based on the Gibbs Reflective Cycle, the Integrated Reflective Cycle provides a framework that encourages the researcher to describe the experience, to learn from that experience and to develop a plan for the way forward. Providing an accurate record of the series of events and planning for future events not only ensures that an accurate record is developed but supports the development of an effective strategic plan.

The Experience

With the exception of the Open campus, all of the campuses of The UWI were designed to facilitate face-to-face instruction, administrative functions and the delivery of library services. With the imminent arrival of the Coronavirus, the campus prepared to transition instruction to an online platform. Training sessions were held for lecturers on the use of elearning platforms (Moodle, Blackboard); Microsoft Teams 365 and SharePoint were loaded on to computers to facilitate remote communication; and the library staff received training in the use of Microsoft Teams.

Measures to prevent spread of the virus were established throughout the Campus. (UWI, Covid 19 Protocols). Hand sanitizer dispensers were placed on all floors and near to service points/circulation/information desks. Posters presenting information on procedures for hand washing, sanitizing and social distancing requirements were placed on notice boards and along frequently traversed areas. The campus administration recommended that the number of persons on campus should be monitored and kept to a minimum to control spread of the virus. Staff was allowed to work remotely for 2-3 days per week. The library created a schedule to reduce the number of employees on site. Additionally, opening hours for the Sidney Martin Library and the Faculty of Law Library were reduced. The Office of Marketing and Communications (MACOMMS) issued a press release informing staff of the information resources available from the Sidney Martin Library during closure (UWI, "Notice to Campus Community").

The full complement of Sidney Martin Library staff at the time of the library closure included nine librarians, twenty-four administrative and technical staff (ATS) and fourteen student assistants. The tasks of the ATS staff included provision of administrative support, shelf-reading, re-shelving of library materials, maintenance of book stacks, assisting with

book loan and return, administering course reserves, booking discussion rooms, undertaking book repair and monitoring library security requirements such as insertion of security strip in books. Student assistants assist with all library functions except financial matters (e.g., payment of fines) and bookbinding; they also provide supervisory assistance in the computer training room for users requiring assistance with printing and other computer related functions.

The unavailability of the physical study spaces (computer lab, discussion rooms) and access to printed resources meant that alternate approaches to providing library services had to be identified. This included (a) Identifying services for transition for online delivery, (b) continued access to the online resources portal (UWIlinC), and (c) identification and development of new products and services for online delivery.

Transitioning to Online Access for Services

The services identified for transition to online access were information literacy instruction and reference support. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, information literacy instruction was delivered in a two-hour training session held in the library's computer lab. In the first hour, students were shown a PowerPoint presentation which covered search techniques, use of the online resources portal (UWIIinC) and referencing. The second hour provided practical exposure on search techniques. A worksheet was designed to highlight the essential steps in the search strategy and to give students the opportunity to practice searching.

Because the closure of the library halted the usual two-hour in-house training session, the PowerPoint presentation was replaced with a voice over instructional PowerPoint. The presentation along with the worksheet was emailed to the coordinator of the Academic Literacies Programme for posting on the elearning platform for asynchronous access by students. Instruction at the subject or course level normally provided by librarians was prepared and presented using Zoom technology. Sessions covered database search techniques and resources of relevance to their subject or course. These sessions were conducted for undergraduate and postgraduate students. To assist students unfamiliar with search techniques used by subscription databases such as EBSCOHost and ProQuest, short instructional tutorials and videos, prepared by the vendors, were posted on the library's website.

Maintenance of Access to Online Information Portal and Databases

The library's web-based information portal (UWIIinC) and its subscription databases were pre-existing online information services, and students and staff had received training on how to use the UWIIinC prior to the COVID-19 lockdown.

Free Access to Electronic Resources

During the pandemic, several database vendors provided free access to their resources for the remainder of the academic term. The online resources included ebooks and scholarly full text articles, including some publishers of Caribbean materials. Some vendors also extended the length of access for databases on trial. This allowed the library to provide additional e-resources. The library informed the campus of the availability of additional electronic resources through notices circulated by MARCOMMS. (UWI, Updates on Library Services).

Development of New Products and Services

New products and services included: Thesis Consultation Service, COVID-19 libguide, and an index of newspaper articles which appeared in the local press on the COVID-19 pandemic in Barbados.

Thesis Consultation Service

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, postgraduates could consult with their faculty liaison librarian regarding reference styles and formatting their theses. Given the closure, an online request form was prepared, which allowed students to submit a request for assistance via the library's website. This service led to the development of an online Thesis Consultation Service. The library's webpage was revised to include an online Thesis Consultation Request Form, and consultation meetings were arranged and held with students using Teams or Zoom software. See Appendix 1 for specimen online Thesis Consultation Request form.

Preparation of COVID-19 Research Guide (libguide)

The library also recognized that preparing a resource which electronically captured and stored documents on the Barbados COVID-19 experience would be beneficial to researchers. A team of librarians worked on identifying requisite information resources and the research guide was prepared and launched during the period of closure.

Ask a Librarian/Online Chat Service

Prior to the pandemic, the library provided an email driven "Ask a Librarian" which allowed students to send an email to their liaison librarian requesting assistance. With the onset of the pandemic and physical closure imminent, the campus moved to introduce an online chat service to allow the students to contact departments, student services and the library to request "realtime" or immediate assistance. The Kayako live chat software was selected for this purpose and librarians were trained in its use. Shortly after the national lockdown, the software was suspended for technical reasons and remained inaccessible for the remainder of the lockdown. The campus identified another software, Pure Chat, which was installed in late June, after the campus reopened. The library's "Ask a Librarian" online chat service resumed in September 2020.

COVID-19 Newspaper Index

Prior to closing, the library began to prepare a subject and title index of the articles which appeared in the local press on the COVID-19 pandemic. The compilation of the index was started but had to be suspended when the library closed.

A summary of the various products and services is presented in Table 1 (below).

Table 1

Breakdown of Products Developed and Services Provided During the Ten-week Period of Closure

ACTIVITY	SERVICE/PRODUCT
a. Continuation of existing online access	 Access to web-based catalogue UWIInC Access to electronic databases Responses to information queries given through the "Ask a librarian" service by liaison librarians Document Delivery Services. Lecturers contacted the library by email with requests for articles. The library used its subscription to Resource Sharing services to request and purchase articles requested.

b. Transition to online access	 Information literacy instruction module prepared and delivered asynchronously to first year students registered in the in the Academic Literacies programme PowerPoint presentations on searching databases, using the online catalogue and writing the literature review were prepared and presented by liaison librarians.
c. Development of new products and	Thesis Consultation Service. Requests were submitted online by
services	 Requests were submitted online by postgraduate students through an online request service on the library's website. Assistance was provided on formatting and citation styles. Online Chat Service. This service although started was suspended before the end of the period of closure due to technical difficulties with the software. Index of COVID-19 newspaper articles. A title and subject index to Barbadian newspaper articles on COVID-19 pandemic was prepared for offline consultation. Suspended after physical closure of the library. Remote research assistance and instruction provided using remote software (Zoom) tutorials on research methods. Preparation of a Research guide (library guide) on COVID-19 pandemic.

Reflection/Analysis/Observations

The Sidney Martin Library can reflect on a pandemic experience which resulted in more successes than failures. Of the five new products and services identified, only two, the Online Chat Service and Index of the Newspaper Articles, had to be suspended.

The successes, such as additional access to subscription databases, repackaging information, literacy instruction and providing online research assistance. The library's website should be revised as it has the potential to perform as a hub for online resources. An impact analysis of the usage of the website and other social media platforms should be conducted to obtain an appreciation of the effect of the new services.

Since a large section of the library's collection is in printed format, the closure of the building made much of the library's physical collection inaccessible. This included access to audio and video resources, microfilm, maps and photographs. The impact cannot be quantified; however, feedback from discussions with lecturers suggested that the unavailability of Caribbean resources, most of which are in print or hard copy only, proved problematic especially when it came to supporting classes which were delivered online. Active consideration should be given to the online storage and accessibility of resources in a post pandemic environment. When the library reopened in June 2020, new protocols for hygiene, sanitization and social distance requirements meant that the library would operate at a reduced capacity. While not considered an immediate problem due to the cancellation of summer school and a low demand for in-house use of physical spaces, it should be considered.

The library's online and social media presence through Facebook and the UWIchill app provided another outlet for communicating with the student population. The Sidney Martin Library's social media experience appears closer to that of libraries in Nigeria as they too mention the challenges encountered with establishing an online and social media presence (Ifijeh and Yusuf 4). Nevertheless, the benefits of a social media profile should be explored and expanded to include other platforms such as Instagram. Social media should be integrated into library outreach and used to inform users about library training sessions.

The use of Zoom technology to support meetings and instruction provided tangible evidence that libraries can provide distance training. Prior to the closure, the library hosted book launches and seminars but such events ceased when the physical building closed. The opportunity to deliver seminars via an online platform would have provided an excellent opportunity for the library to engage the campus community in meaningful discourse.

The role of student assistants in the library requires additional evaluation. Attention should be given to assigning tasks to student assistants which expose them to the library's resources and allow the library to use their skills to accomplish project related tasks.

Social and Practical Implications

The move towards frequent use of online access to information resources suggests that patrons have an increased comfort level with electronic resources. These changes should be addressed as part of the strategic planning process. This also suggests that the format for library collections will transition from one that is primarily printed/hardcopy to a digital format. This transition to an online format will have access and storage implications. The introduction of automated services which allow patrons to make online requests for course reserve material as well as services such as booking a discussion room, computer labs etc. release staff to be retrained to perform other functions. A digitization programme would require an investment in software and equipment to support the digitisation of collections and resources.

Recommendations

The literature review captures the shift of libraries worldwide towards expanding online access to their collections. Although services were hastily implemented, the pandemic provided the opportunity for libraries to expand the range of online services offered, embrace innovative approaches towards service delivery, develop new products and repurpose learning spaces. Based on the services highlighted in the literature review, several libraries focused on expansion of information literacy instruction, increased online assistance, expansion of virtual reference services, increased social media presence and development of additional electronic resources. Continuation of this process will require a paradigm shift away from the traditional methods of service delivery.

The transition from a largely print-based collection of resources to an electronic format will guide policies and procedures for the acquisition and storage of material such as ebooks and ejournals, databases, films, audio and video recordings. The capacity to store and stream

audio and video recordings and provide access to electronic material will require financial input to support purchase of appropriate equipment. The collection development policy should be revised to include a digital content policy which would address the acquisition of non-print resources. Services such as access to course reserve material, document delivery/inter library loan, and payment of overdue book fines should transition to online access.

Information literacy instruction is a critical area of library support to the academy. The transition to online delivery should be further expanded to allow for embedded instruction in courses at all levels. Consideration should also be given to the development of a course on research skills designed by librarians for students at the introductory or first year level. Tutorials and guides that support the undergraduate and post graduate student should be developed by the library to support instruction provided by the liaison librarians.

Increased access to electronic resources should be supported by an active digitization programme. Given the concern expressed about the inaccessibility of Caribbean resources when the building was closed during the pandemic, a plan to digitize archival and special collection material should be drafted and a shift towards acquiring resources in electronic format should be considered. A digitization plan would also support the development of new approaches towards storage of, and access to resources. The development of an information portal, which allows online access to digitized collections and the development of digital learning objects, would increase the visibility of the library and improve its reputation as a research institution.

Transitioning to an online format will support the reorganisation of physical library spaces. Libraries should develop spaces which encourage discussion, creativity and reflection. The opportunity to partner with faculty to provide spaces which support projects would be a "win-win" situation. Spaces could be provided to support a language lab, technology projects, a writing clinic and a movie theatre. These are all viable possibilities which would enhance student knowledge and allow the library to expand its reach and impact on the academic community.

Conclusion

When the coronavirus was declared a global pandemic in early 2020, no one imagined the impact that this would have had on our lives and livelihoods. Although closing the physical

building was a difficult decision, it resulted in the development of new opportunities for resource sharing and the dissemination of information. While there was hope for a return to life as it was before the pandemic, after reopening, it soon became evident that developing innovative approaches to providing library services would become essential to survival in a highly competitive and "information conscious" post-pandemic society. Students and lecturers have become accustomed to accessing resources online and are unlikely to revert fully to what obtained before the pandemic. Consequently, libraries must aggressively market their services and collections as providing essential support to teaching and research. Outreach activities focusing on high school students and overseas researchers will provide opportunities for the library to market its collections and services to potential users in arenas outside of the traditional library setting and may provide the opportunity for online revenue generating products to be developed. The Sidney Martin Library's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic is one of resilience. With a small complement of librarians, the library managed to successfully increase access to electronic resources, transition from in-house instruction to online delivery, and repackage research support into an online consultation service. The process of preparation was challenging but the experience, invaluable. The shift to online delivery of information services has ushered in a new era which will determine the growth, development, and relevance of libraries. The use of technology to package and deliver services will transform the approach taken by libraries to providing access to their collections. The importance of marketing library services is also a critical component of product success and essential if libraries are to be recognized as integral players in a competitive and information sensitive world. The pandemic has ushered in an era of transformation where the concept of a 24 hour library is now a realistic option and one which makes providing information services in a post pandemic environment both exciting, varied and filled with opportunity.

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Appendix 1 Thesis Consultation Request Form

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THE INITIAL RESPONSE OF SELECT LIBRARIES WITHIN THE JAMAICA LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION NETWORK (JAMLIN) TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Purpose: This quantitative study sought to examine the initial response of select libraries within the Jamaica Libraries and Information Network (JAMLIN) to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Design/Methodology: Select libraries within JAMLIN were surveyed, using an online questionnaire, to determine the building status, services, challenges, and recommendations on the way forward for Jamaican libraries.

Findings: The findings indicate that the majority of the libraries closed their buildings and restricted access. Despite the closure, efforts were made to maintain and offer new services using, for example, email, virtual reference software, and social media. The findings also indicate that increased resources were required to operate during the pandemic. Notwithstanding the challenges, most libraries embraced their role as "stewards of accurate information", disseminating information about the virus through various media.

Research limitations/implications: The study focused on the response of libraries during the first four months of the pandemic (March to June 2020), and as such, does not provide a complete picture of the response to the pandemic. The study focused on libraries within GLINA, COLINET and Public and School Libraries Networks of JAMLIN and as such some larger university libraries and corporate libraries in Jamaica were not included.

Originality/value: The study offered insight into the initial response of selected libraries in Jamaica to the pandemic. It provides useful information to libraries as they seek to develop and respond to the ongoing pandemic.

Theoretical/social and practical implications: This study contributes to the area of disaster management and response in libraries. It also contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the response of libraries, specifically libraries in JAMLIN, to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research on how libraries respond to crises, can provide lessons for current and future crisis response and resilience.

Keywords: JAMLIN; COVID-19; coronavirus; pandemic; Jamaican special libraries; Jamaican corporate libraries; Jamaican government libraries; Jamaican public libraries

Introduction and Background

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus; scientists are still trying to determine its exact cause and origin (Ducharme para. 1). The first human case of COVID-19 was reported in Wuhan, China, in late December 2019. By March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic, pointing to "over 118,000 cases of the coronavirus illness in over 110 countries and territories around the world and the sustained risk of further spread" (Ducharme para. 1). The full clinical picture of the virus is not yet evident. However, according to the WHO, most people infected with the virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness. Older people and those with underlying medical conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more susceptible to serious effects of COVID-19 (Ducharme para. 1).

To contain the spread of this highly infectious disease, governments across the world implemented a range of restrictions and safety measures. On March 12, 2020, after recording its second imported case of the virus, the Prime Minister of Jamaica announced the closure of all categories of educational institutions and their transition to emergency remote learning. By March 18, 2020, a range of other safety measures was implemented under the Disaster Risk Management Act (DRMA) 2020, including the closure of Jamaica's borders to incoming travellers, work-from-home orders for all non-essential work in both the public and private sectors, social distancing in public spaces, and restrictions on public gatherings. These measures and restrictions and similar ones globally had a tremendous impact on the operations and services of libraries across the world with many closing their doors or restricting access to their facilities.

The Jamaica Libraries and Information Network (JAMLIN)

The Jamaica Libraries and Information Network (JAMLIN) comprises libraries, archives, information and documentation units, grouped into sectoral networks according to subject areas to ensure the effective and efficient sharing of knowledge resources in Jamaica. Its focal point is the National Library of Jamaica, which has been mandated to coordinate the

development of JAMLIN. The sectoral networks of JAMLIN include: (i) Government Libraries Information Network (GLINA) which consists of special libraries both government and a few private institutions; (ii) the College Libraries Information Network (COLINET) which includes academic libraries operating in universities, teachers' and community colleges, private colleges, and other training institutions; (iii) the Public and School Libraries Network (PSLN), which provides service to public and school libraries islandwide; (iv) The University of the West Indies, Mona, Information Network (UWI-MINET) which is a network of libraries on the Mona Campus of The University of the West Indies (UWI) and other affiliated libraries, with the Main Library as its focal point; and (v) the Government Records and Information Managers (GRIM), a network of records and information managers in the public sector.

The information on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on libraries is still emerging. There have been studies, panel discussions, blogs and articles documenting the response of libraries globally. While there is growing scholarship on the response of libraries in Jamaica and the Caribbean, the focus has been on the larger academic libraries. Against this background, this study sought to fill a gap in the literature by focusing on government libraries, special libraries, smaller college libraries and the public library network in Jamaica. Consequently, the study focused on libraries within JAMLIN particularly GLINA, COLINET and Public and School Libraries Networks and excluded some larger university libraries and corporate libraries.

Objectives

The objectives of the study, which focused on the period March to June 2020 when the initial stay-at-home order was issued in Jamaica, were to:

- 1. Examine how select libraries in Jamaica responded to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- 2. Examine the services and programmes offered by these libraries during the pandemic;
- 3. Identify the challenges faced by libraries during the pandemic; and
- 4. Identify opportunities and the way forward for libraries in a post-COVID-19 world.

Research questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1. What was the initial response of JAMLIN to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 2. What services and programmes were offered by JAMLIN during the pandemic?
- 3. What were the challenges faced by JAMLIN during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 4. What are the opportunities and the way forward for JAMLIN post COVID-19?

Literature Review

Libraries' Roles and Responses During a Disaster/Crisis

Libraries responding to disasters or crises have been discussed widely in library literature with the focus on disaster response and mitigation. A crisis can be defined as a "difficult or dangerous situation that needs serious attention" (Alajmi 466). A disaster on the other hand is "an unexpected occurrence inflicting widespread destruction and distress and having long-term adverse effects" (McKnight and Zach 60). A disaster or crisis can occur at any time and have a significant impact on libraries. There are a variety of roles and interventions that can be undertaken by libraries during a disaster or crisis. Featherstone et al. identify eight roles of libraries in disaster response; these are: "institutional supporters, collection managers, information disseminators, internal planners, community supporters, government partners, educators and trainers, and information community builders" (2).

Libraries and librarians have a distinctive role in disseminating information generally, but more so during a disaster or crisis. Bishop reported that public libraries in response to tornadoes in the United States served more as an "information hub to direct users about where to get resources and less as a responder providing resources" (10). Studies such as (Alajmi 468 and Zach 407) noted that although libraries are not usually included in local emergency preparedness and response activities; they can play a much greater role beyond their traditional one of providing access to collections and to a physical space in times of crisis. "Libraries need to leverage their position as a primary source of trustworthy information by providing quick and easy access to those looking for information about what to do in the event of an emergency" (Zach 411).

Welsh and Higgins noted that outside of providing information services, public libraries in the United States of America also provided additional services such as listening, volunteering, donating money or materials, and providing comfort and consolation after Hurricane Katrina. The Ferguson Municipal Public Library, served as an "ad-hoc" school replacing schools that were closed during a period of social unrest in Missouri, United States of America. The library also hosted programmes and activities in support of small businesses that were affected" (Alajmi 471). However, one criticism of the role of libraries during a disaster is that "the focus [of libraries] has been turned inwards toward the institution rather than outwards toward the community; information professionals have often missed the opportunity to provide essential support to a wide range of users in response to natural or accidental community-wide disasters" (McKnight and Zach 82).

Libraries can also serve as vital partners with health authorities in health crises and pandemics. Harris et al. (151) looked at the extent to which public libraries in Ontario, Canada were able to respond to inquiries for health information during the 2003 outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Featherstone et al. examined the pandemic information needs of hospitals and the efforts of health sciences libraries in meeting these needs during the 2009 H1N1 influenza outbreak. The study noted that given the urgent need for current information during the response phase of an epidemic, librarians can anticipate using news sources, government websites, and social media to answer information requests (105).

Libraries Worldwide Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the normal operations and services in many libraries across the world. Libraries either closed their buildings or restricted physical access to the facilities. Kosciejew through a documentary analysis of the statements released by the world's leading library and information associations, noted the emergence of major themes such as information provision, maintaining services, digital migration of services, workplace arrangements and concerns, amongst others. The study noted that libraries remained relevant and urgently needed in the global health crisis. Peete, reported on a survey carried out by Hinchliffe and Wolff-Eisenberg's which sought to gather real-time data on the response of the academic library community to the pandemic. It reported that libraries were implementing a range of prevention and mitigation measures, such as increased cleaning, provision of hand sanitizers to patrons and cancelling public events. The biggest change libraries made was to work from home (para. 4). Libraries in Pakistan managed to "provide virtual support to their users such as the provision of references, document delivery, literature searches and systematic reviews as well as online webinars" (Ali and Gatiti 160).

The pandemic also resulted in the proliferation of misinformation, disinformation or even information overload, resulting in what the WHO termed an "infodemic". Yu and Mani found that Medical/Health Sciences Libraries (MHSLs) in the US were addressing this infodemic by "curating resources, supporting clinical care, providing education and outreach to the public" (8). There was a greater promotion of online resources as well as communication with the community for libraries during the pandemic as noted by Tammaro (3). There were various efforts by academic libraries to support online learning through a variety of virtual resources and services. Similarly, Chinese academic libraries released COVID-19-related information through their websites. The majority switched their services to either partially or entirely online to include services such as: reference, e-books and research support (Guo et al. para. 16). The library at the Bridgewater State University in the United States of America adapted some existing services into a digital format and explored new initiatives and practices to support the university's full online teaching and learning during the pandemic (Mehta and Wang para. 1). These studies have highlighted the essential role of academic libraries as a support for faculty and students.

Challenges Faced by Libraries Responding to the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated sudden changes in the delivery of library services as a result of lockdowns and physical distancing measures, especially in the early stages of the pandemic. This created a myriad of challenges for libraries. Like other social institutions such as schools, the first major challenge many libraries faced was deciding which services to offer and how to continue to meet the needs of their users, based on the restrictions in place. This was a challenge faced by libraries globally as indicated in studies such as Ifijeh and Yusuf from Nigeria, Mehta and Wang from the United States of America, Tammaro from Italy and Guo, et al. from China. The response of libraries ranged from minimal restrictions, cancelling public events to complete closure of the library building. This created challenges for library managers who had to constantly adjust workflow processes in response to the pandemic. For libraries that remained opened fully or partially there was anxiety and uncertainty amongst staff. Additionally, those that remained opened had the arduous task of ensuring the safety of both staff and patrons. This meant the implementation of sanitization measures, which would reduce the spread of the virus but increase their expenditure on sanitation products. Libraries also had to grapple with methods of sanitizing resources without causing damage to them, while ensuring staff would not become infected with the virus by handling them. Mehta and Wang posited that library staff were unaccustomed to the in-house hygiene practices and it created the anxiety of being infected with the coronavirus (para. 7).

Other challenges to the operations and services of libraries included remote working policies and procedures. Some libraries did not possess the resources or the capacity to provide some services while working from home. As stated by Mehta and Wang "telecommuting is a sudden decision for library staff who are not prepared for the drastic change and required computers to do so"; they pointed out the misconception that everyone has a PC at home (para. 10). Even with the required resources in place, some tasks could not be conducted from home as this meant removing valuable collections, equipment, and other resources from the library to their homes to perform certain functions. This posed another obstacle, although the staff was required to work from home, in many instances some could not.

Many libraries had to transition to full or partial digital services. While in some countries there already existed a strong digital infrastructure, in some developing countries, libraries had to move to create or access digital resources in response to the pandemic. The public libraries in Italy unlike the academic libraries are far behind in digitization (Tammaro 1). Even concerning their location, the characteristics of the libraries in Italy differ with southern libraries being far less equipped than the libraries in the north (Tammaro 1). In Nigeria, the capacity of university libraries is such that services had to be utilized on campus. Services are carried out traditionally, and only a few had electronic databases due to poor infrastructure and maintenance issues (Ifijeh and Yusuf 5). Due to these problems, during the early outbreak of COVID-19, some libraries were unable to adequately meet the needs of their users.

The COVID-19 pandemic also created financial constraints and concerns for libraries. There has been a significant need for libraries to shift their focus to e-resources. In a survey of youth services in public libraries conducted between April 3, 2020 to May 5, 2020, most libraries surveyed indicated that budgets remained the same although resources are being shifted to e-format (School Libraries Journal, para. 2). This may pose a challenge for library budgets, as although in the early stages of the pandemic some publishers provided access to e-resources at a reduced cost or free, electronic resources are more expensive than print materials. Additionally, it is the expectation that budgets would have been drastically reduced for the 2020-2021 fiscal year. Academic libraries in the United States of America expected that with reduced enrolment for at least the Fall Semester, budget cuts for libraries would be unavoidable. Many academic libraries implemented hiring freeze, furloughs, or layoffs (Peete para. 1). In Nigeria, university libraries faced financial constraints arising from the global economic meltdown and currency inflationary crisis, and the inability of the government to

increase budgetary allocation to education (Ifijeh and Yusuf 5). These challenges will be further exacerbated by the fallout from the pandemic.

Opportunities and the Way Forward for Libraries After COVID-19

While the challenges abound, COVID-19 presented many opportunities for libraries and librarians. One of a library's core function is to disseminate information. COVID-19 provided libraries with the opportunity to showcase this function and to highlight that not only are libraries providers of information but also a reliable and credible source of information on the current pandemic. With the early onset of the virus, a dearth of information existed; and with the rapid spread and increase of infection rates, there was an increase in the dissemination of information surrounding the virus from a multiplicity of sources. Chisita noted that COVID-19 provides an opportunity for libraries to reassert their role as indispensable institutions in the fight against an "infodemic or information disorder" or "Covid info-deluge" (12). Generally, the COVID-19 emergency highlighted the need for libraries, to not only focus on information services but also to foster relationships with their communities.

Some library managers used the crisis of COVID-19 to not only reinforce their ability to provide access to resources virtually but also to increase the quantity and category of resources. Library websites and social media pages were the main media utilized (Guo et al. 544). New contracts were negotiated with publishers of ebooks to allow more flexibility in lending and to make more resources available in the virtual domain (Cox para. 5). Scanning and digitization of books were done within the copyright limits to create repositories and in some instances digital collaboration emerged to increase the volume of e-resources available to patrons. Mehta and Wang noted that "the pandemic creates a good chance to promote e-resources to library users, especially undergraduate students that tend to use Google to satisfy all their course study and research needs" (para. 23). Libraries will also need to allocate more time and resources to developing their electronic collections. They will also need to "develop new strategies for negotiating better deals with publishers and lobby for greater access to streaming media and ebooks" (Cox para. 6).

Albeit COVID-19 provided the opportunity for libraries to ramp up their virtual services. "Libraries should also increase their contribution to emergency planning and response activities and not only see their primary role as protecting collections and maintaining normal services" (Zach, 407). For instance, librarians at the San Francisco Public Library in the United States of America volunteered as contact tracers and were seen as suitable for this role due to their research skills. Other services libraries offered outside of the norm were: assisting patrons to apply for benefits online; providing links to food distribution sites, COVID-19 test sites, and virtual entertainment amongst other activities. The pandemic provided an opportunity to encourage remote professional development particularly with many employees working from home.

The last major pandemic was the Spanish Flu of 1918, however documentation on the response of libraries during that period is limited. With the COVID-19 pandemic occurring during the technological age, libraries and archives, being memory institutions and conservationists, can utilise their skills to ensure that this pandemic is well documented and preserved to ensure the information is available for future reference. The University of Utah, as highlighted by Neatrour et al., is only one example of one institution which sought to capture and preserve how people responded to the various measures implemented during the pandemic to keep them safe. This project sought to document and preserve this time in history and the authors considered it a valuable resource for future researchers (403). It is important that other libraries elsewhere continue the work of documenting the response to COVID-19 as it unfolds presenting many perspectives in many voices for future generations.

There is no doubt that the current pandemic has presented the profession and institutions with many challenges. However, amidst all the trials, there have been areas of improvement as libraries have adapted and implemented new services that will benefit patrons and organisations now and into the future.

The information on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on libraries is still emerging. There have been studies, panel discussions, blogs and articles documenting the response of libraries globally. While there is growing scholarship on the response of libraries in Jamaica and the Caribbean, the focus has been on the larger academic libraries. This study sought to fill a gap in the literature by focusing on government libraries, special libraries, smaller college libraries and the public library network in Jamaica. At the time of this research there was very little research on the impact and response of these libraries. Consequently, this study focused on libraries within GLINA, COLINET and Public and School Libraries Networks of

JAMLIN and as such some larger university libraries and corporate libraries in Jamaica were not included.

Methodology

Given the foregoing, the survey method was selected to obtain data on the response of select libraries in JAMLIN during the first four (4) months of the COVID-19 pandemic. An online questionnaire, prepared using Google Forms, was disseminated, via email, to gather the data. The online survey offered greater flexibility and was considered the best way to reach the target population which, at the time, was engaged with various forms of remote work. The questionnaire consisted of twenty-six closed and open-ended questions, thirteen of each, divided into five (5) sections. Section 1 sought information on the status of the library building; Section 2 sought feedback on the response and services offered by the libraries during the four months of lockdown; and the other three sections of the questionnaire focused on the challenges faced by libraries, the opportunities presented, and the way forward. Before dissemination, the instrument was piloted to a small sample of government librarians. As a result of the pilot, some minor changes were made to the questionnaire mainly to ensure greater clarity.

Purposive sampling was used to select 50 of the 94 libraries within the target population based on JAMLIN's directory. This included a subset of libraries from each of the following networks of JAMLIN:

- Government Libraries Information Network (GLINA) consists of fifty government special libraries:
- College Libraries Information Network (COLINET) made up of thirty universities and community colleges; and the
- Public and School Libraries Network (PSLN) consisting of fourteen public libraries of the Jamaica Library Service

The other networks, Government Libraries Information Network Associates (GLINJA), Government Records Information Management GRIM); JAMLIN Focal Point; and The University of the West Indies, Mona, Information Network (UWI-MINET), were not included.

The questionnaire was disseminated to librarians from the 50 selected institutions and the survey period lasted for three weeks in September 2020. Twenty-seven libraries responded,

representing a 54% response rate. Of the responding libraries, 12 (44 %) were special libraries, 8 (29%) were public and 7 (26 %) were academic libraries. The data was analysed, tabulated and is presented using graphs and diagrams.

Presentation of Findings

The responses to the question regarding the status of the library building during the lockdown are presented below (Fig. 1).



Fig.1. Status of the Library Building During the Lockdown

33% of the libraries indicated they were closed, while 11% remained opened during the lockdown. All the college libraries surveyed were closed except for one which indicated that some locations were closed. 22% of libraries indicated they were partially open, while another 22% selected "other", specifying reduced opening hours throughout the week. The lockdown was lifted by the Jamaican Government on June 1, 2020. In response to the question of reopening, 37% of libraries reopened between June 1 and 8, 2020; 15% reopened before June 1, 2020; and only one library reopened in July. 7% of libraries did not reopen to the public after the lifting of the lockdown. 11% had not closed, and other libraries indicated that reopening was partial, that they were opened only on select days or that they had reduced hours.

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All the libraries surveyed communicated with their users during the lockdown. 78% of libraries indicated that they managed or contributed content to their organisation's social media pages; however, only 26% had used social media, along with other methods, to communicate with their patrons. Five libraries did not contribute to, or manage their organisation's social media pages, and one library did not respond to this question. 22% of libraries used emails and WhatsApp to communicate. Although 14 libraries indicated that they had a role in the management of their library's or organisation's website, only one college library had used its website to communicate changes in library operations to library patrons. Likewise, only one library indicated that it used the face-to-face method and one to using a public notice in the newspaper to communicate to patrons. 85% of libraries disseminated information related to COVID-19; 15% did not. Of the 85% who disseminated information related to COVID-19, 26% did so via email, 29% via display and 18% via website, 14% used flyers and posters, while 11% used bulletin boards or circulars; one library reported using social media to disseminate information; 11% indicated that they disseminated information on the pandemic via presentations or webinars.

During the lockdown, the most popular services provided were reference services, research assistance, selected dissemination of information (SDI), online story hour and online database access. A few libraries offered homework assistance, document delivery or training for students. Normal services continued to be offered by 7% of libraries as they were not closed. 63% of libraries introduced new services during the first four months of the lockdown. A breakdown of the new services is presented in Fig. 2 (below).



Fig. 2. New Services Offered During the Lockdown

Reference services via social media, synchronous virtual reference, electronic document delivery service, book drop and online story time were some of the new services introduced. Only one library reported online access to databases as a new service. Twenty-two percent of libraries reported that they did not implement any new services. When asked to reflect on what possible services they could have implemented during the lockdown, the following services were named: curbside services, virtual reference services, online clubs (such as book and chess clubs), expansion of outreach programmes, creation of social media pages, electronic access of databases, and online tutorials.

To garner information on the welfare of library staff during the pandemic, respondents were asked to indicate what special sessions, if any, were organised to assist library staff cope during the pandemic; the responses are shown below (fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Special Sessions Organized to Assist Staff Cope During the Pandemic

Fig. 3 illustrates that 41% of respondents indicated that general presentations or information sessions were held to assist staff to cope; 26% reported that no sessions were held; 22% indicated that there were special staff meetings or updates from management; 11% reported that webinars were held; and one library did not respond. 37% reported special training sessions were held for staff during the period; 59% had no special training sessions, and one did not respond. All the libraries indicated the implementation of staff safety measures such as: the installation of hand-sanitizing dispensers, protocols for reopening the library, limited contact with patrons, and reduced onsite working hours for staff.

Most libraries indicated that they had to make financial adjustments in response to the new circumstances. The changes are shown below (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Financial Changes Made in Response to the Crisis

The majority of libraries (63%) identified the implementation of safety protocols as the major financial adjustment made in response to the pandemic. This was followed by "the library collection", "changes to services" or "no change at all". Other financial adjustments included professional development, programmes, and staffing. One library indicated "no overtime would be a financial change". The initial response of 22% of the libraries required no changes to finances. Respondents were also asked to indicate what financial changes they anticipated libraries making in the next few months. Sixteen libraries identified the implementation of safety protocols, followed by services with 51% (14) libraries anticipating that it would be a financial issue in the next few months. Other major financial concerns included the "Collection Budget" 33% (9); "Programmes" 30% (8); and "Professional Development Funding" 22% (6). For all the other options, only a few libraries indicated that they did not think there would be any financial changes in the coming months.

Another challenge which the study sought to identify was the availability of equipment and resources to meet the needs of users. 41% (11) libraries reported that the resources and equipment provided during the lockdown were adequate, while 55% reported that resources

and equipment were not adequate; one library was not sure. For those libraries indicating that the resources and equipment were inadequate, the study sought to identify the resources required; these included: virtual reference software (59%); laptops (52%); tablets (22%); subscriptions to online databases (19%); one library indicated "other", citing Internet connection. The librarians were also asked to provide their perspective on the type of in-person access they were envisioning in the subsequent few months. 59% indicated that a mixed modality of services would be offered: online, curbside, and limited in-house. Other types of in-person measures identified were the implementation of social distancing policies such as reduced seating capacity in reference areas was suggested by 52% of the respondents; 29% suggested service by appointment only; 26% suggested document delivery to patrons; and 11% suggested full reopening, online and curbside service. One library indicated "other" stating "the installation of scanning devices to allow self-check-in and check-out". 88% of the libraries surveyed indicated that they had or would have to implement health and safety protocols such as deep cleaning of interior spaces, sanitation of/quarantining material, and maintaining social distancing of patrons. Nine respondents indicated that they would be having new or revised support services such as remote work or trauma response.

Finally, for the future, most respondents perceived that there would be an increased offering of e-services, followed by reduced working hours onsite, remote work, training of staff to work remotely, and a reduction in the number of physical locations. Interestingly, while some predicted reduced budgets, others predicted increased budgets due to the surge in demand for online services.

Analysis of Findings

The pandemic has had a tremendous impact on the normal operation and services of libraries globally; Jamaica is no different. The findings indicated that most of the libraries within JAMLIN had to close their doors during the first four months of the pandemic; however, a few special libraries remained opened. A possible explanation for difference is that special libraries, with their generally small staff complement, specialized clientele, as well as the limited access to the library space by the general public, may have found it relatively easier than their academic or public library counterparts to monitor and restrict the movement of patrons. Additionally, the majority of special libraries would have been challenged to provide resources and services online during the lockdown as their collections are largely in printed format and as such require in-person access. The pandemic has brought to the fore the need

for increased digitization efforts by libraries in Jamaica, underscoring Cox's assertion that "there may be a shift from digitized content being a method of preservation or preview, to being the primary access point for the collection" (para. 8).

With most libraries on the island having to close their doors, a variety of ways had to be utilized to communicate changes in services to patrons. Emails, social media, and WhatsApp emerged as the most popular means to communicate and engage users. This finding is consistent with the literature, for example, Mehta and Wang, and Tammaro, who found that libraries were proactive in getting information out to their patrons and, although libraries were physically closed, they were still open to meet most of the needs of their clients. Except for the public library network, which falls under one umbrella organisation, the majority of the libraries surveyed only contributed content to their organisation's social media or website pages. As such, communications specific to the operations of the library were not visible on these pages. However, the majority of the libraries surveyed relied on emails, WhatsApp and printed notices to communicate changes in user programmes and services. The pandemic has demonstrated the need for libraries to create and include in their disaster management plan, crisis communication which would determine who will communicate what and how to reach its users. As noted by Fasae et al., "libraries should have a policy on emergency communication plans that the library can implement when a major crisis of this nature occurs" (para. 28).

Libraries were not only concerned with communicating changes in the library's operation but also embraced their roles as "stewards of accurate information". The majority of the libraries surveyed used displays, posters and social media among other means, to disseminate COVID-19 related facts and guidelines. One special library created a webpage on its organisation's website, with COVID-19 protocols. The findings highlighted similar trends to those reported in the literature, for example Kosciejew, and Wang and Lund, which noted that libraries have a critical role to play in the dissemination of information (Kosciejew para. 30; Wang and Lund 291). As Wang and Lund pointed out, "many libraries were not merely concerned with providing information about the library itself, but also embracing their role as disseminators of quality information about the pandemic to their patrons" (290). In the present study, of the few respondents who indicated that they were not involved with the dissemination of COVID-19 information, some explained that this activity was the responsibility of other departments within their organisation, such as Human Resources or Public Relations. As noted by Young, there is a need for general guidelines on how the response of libraries to internal library disasters (such as mould) should be different from community-wide disasters (such as a pandemic) (35).

The libraries surveyed not only maintained traditional services but also offered new services to creatively meet the needs of their patrons. In contrast to Tammaro's Italian study, which indicated that for the first-time libraries used social media intensively, but mostly to push information and not to interact with communities (4), the libraries in this study used social media to not only communicate with patrons, but also to provide reference and outreach activities. The public libraries were able to provide outreach activities, for example, online story hours and virtual summer library programmes, using social media applications such as YouTube and Facebook. Asynchronous virtual reference service and electronic document delivery were also popular newly introduced services. Prior to the pandemic the Government Libraries and Information Network, formerly the Social and Economic Information Network (SECIN), sought to implement a virtual reference service consortium among government special libraries, with varying levels of uptake and interests by librarians and patrons. Cole-Phoenix reported "mixed responses among the participants regarding the preferred face-to- face interactions with the clients as it was felt that this provided opportunity for clarification and further probing to adequately satisfy the users" (10). However, the current crisis might be the impetus needed for a buy-in of virtual reference services across government libraries. As the world and libraries adjust to this new normal, it is critical to examine ways to innovate, to remain relevant and to meet the needs of their patrons.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented several challenges and opportunities for libraries. Library and information professionals in JAMLIN had to adjust to new routines and working styles. This resulted in the need for training and upskilling of librarians to operate in the new environment. Several special training sessions focusing on reopening protocols, use of technology and general health and sanitation guidelines were organised for staff. As it relates to the long-term impact of COVID-19 on the staffing and operations of libraries in Jamaica, the majority of the respondents felt that there will be a greater focus on the digital infrastructure of libraries. There was also a perception among the librarians that there will be the need for the expansion of digital content in the form of ebooks and online databases, as well as libraries creating their own content. Going forward, libraries within the network will need to provide more virtual or non-contact services while simultaneously increasing the

training of members of the library staff for them to effectively and efficiently operate in this new environment.

COVID-19 brought to the fore the gaps in information technology infrastructure and the resource constraints faced by many of the libraries within the network. This issue was similarly reported by Ifijeh & Yusufin, who noted "the gross inadequacy of technological infrastructure in Nigeria has stalled deployment of initiatives that could have better projected the services of librarians leading to quality service delivery in support of virtual teaching and learning during the pandemic" (5). Almost half of the libraries surveyed felt that their resources were inadequate to respond to the lockdown; most required laptops, virtual reference software and subscriptions to online databases. Additionally, most libraries reported that they had to make financial adjustments to accommodate health and safety protocols, such as sanitizing materials and rearranging seating to facilitate social distancing. Other areas that required financial adjustments were extending online services, and staff training and development. While it is too early to determine wholly the financial fallout from COVID-19 and how it will affect library budgets, it is the expected that there will be budget cuts although many felt there may also be budget increases to facilitate the libraries meeting the demand for online services.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study contributes to the area of disaster management in libraries. It demonstrates that decision and administrative theories can provide the framework for examining the response of libraries to the pandemic. One of the major challenges has been the lack formal pandemic policies. As noted by Corsillo, "the COVID-19 phenomenon is unchartered territory in terms of its level of imminent danger to staff and patrons and the uncertain duration of its resulting library closings, few libraries possess codified procedures for how to deal with a situation of this magnitude" (para. 9). Thus, the importance of libraries documenting what worked and what did not during the pandemic so that they can improve their readiness and response to this and other crises. Overall, the study offered insight into the initial response of libraries in JAMLIN to the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has created unique but also related experiences, challenges and opportunities globally as it relates to libraries. This study contributes to the collective understanding of the roles and response of libraries worldwide to the pandemic. It is important to note that there is no one size fits all approach to the operations and response of libraries to this unfolding crisis. As noted by Kosciejew "whilst

sharing similar objectives and issues, [libraries] are diverse with their own local considerations, capacities and concerns" (para. 39).

The study has practical implications for the libraries in JAMLIN. Most of the respondents are of the view that libraries will need to adjust and offer more virtual services and programmes going forward. Librarians, therefore, need to see this as an opportunity to adopt emerging technologies as a means of expanding digital services and resources. The findings will also be useful to libraries as they update or, in some cases, develop disaster management plans that not only focus on protecting the library resources, but also on meeting the needs of their patrons during crises similar to the current COVID-19 pandemic. The need for a policy on emergency communication plans to be implemented by libraries, particularly for major crises which affect the wider community, should also be addressed.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

A limitation of this study is its focus on libraries within JAMLIN, thereby excluding some of the larger university libraries, and special libraries attached to private institutions. Additionally, of the 50 libraries targeted, only 27 responded to the survey and the study focused on the response of libraries during the first four months of the pandemic, when the tight restrictions were put in place by the Jamaican Government affected the operations of some libraries.

The study also highlighted a number of areas for further research such as the impact of library closures on users, the documentation of best practices for disaster and crisis situations, and the migration of services and resources to digital format. Also, it brings to the fore the need for research into the role of libraries in national plans such as the much-touted digital transformation and the bridging of the digital divide in the country. The study focused on the initial response of these select libraries, however, as the pandemic persists and libraries adjust to the 'new normal', it would be useful to see how the responses of the libraries evolve and transition through the disaster life cycle.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the status, services, challenges and the way forward for selected libraries in Jamaica in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, the JAMLIN libraries in the study pivoted and sought to maintain a level of

service despite lockdowns and social distancing measures. New services and new modes of communication were used to reach out to and meet the needs of patrons. A range of health, safety and sanitation measures were put in place to protect the health and ensure the wellness of staff and patrons. The findings of the study could be compared with the responses of other libraries across the Caribbean. This and other studies done so far have illustrated the need for a greater focus on the creation, curation and delivery of digital resources. The expectation is that going forward, libraries in Jamaica and the region will need to focus on leveraging technology to promote and deliver digital library services.

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are being made:

- Libraries within the network should look at creating formal digital collections to meet the surge in demand for e-resources triggered by the pandemic. There is also the need for greater focus on and investment in upgrading the IT infrastructure within these entities. Greater collaboration among the libraries in the network to create and increase online services such as virtual reference and subscriptions to online databases should be pursued.
- 2) There exists a need for guidelines and procedures to guide the response to the pandemic within a local context. These polices should guide space, seating and layout requirements to facilitate social distancing, handling and quarantining of library materials and crisis communication.
- 3) Libraries will not only need to re-examine their programmes and services, but also their workflow processes to adjust to the 'new normal'. Remote working policies within libraries will also need to be examined along with the need for retooling and upskilling of library and information professionals to meet the needs of the new environment.

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