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An assessment of information service delivery at a Parliamentary library during the Covid-19 pandemic

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An assessment of information service delivery at a Parliamentary library during the Covid-19 pandemic

Abstract

The COVID 19 pandemic had an immense impact on libraries which led to some being closed and others offering reduced services to patrons. The new normal of the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated the need for access to information with less interaction with physical copies or being physically in the library. The purpose of this study was to investigate information service delivery at the Parliament of Zimbabwe library during the COVID-19 pandemic era. The research utilised both qualitative and quantitative approaches with semi-structured questionnaire and interviews as the research instruments. The findings of the study showed that most of the library resources were accessible only when the users physically visited the library and this was limited due the lockdown restrictions. The study concluded that the Parliament of Zimbabwe Library services were very limited due to limited online services, partial closure of the library and health risks. The research recommends that the Parliament of Zimbabwe library should adopt and utilise information and communication technologies (ICTs) to enhance both physical and remote access to resources.

Keywords: parliament libraries, covid-19, user needs, information access, information and communication technologies, e-resources

1.0 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on the global economy, education, enterprises, health, and employment, among other things. To survive the pandemic and minimise losses, most businesses and educational institutions went “virtual” – providing online services using various technologies. The emergency of COVID-19 saw normal life routines being put on hold and people had no option but to adjust to the new normal (Medawar and Tabet 2020). The novel COVID-19 virus meant less interaction of people, face-to-face meetings, and various activities were also banned to try and minimise the spread of the virus. The impact of the unexpected national lockdowns affected everyone, economically, physically, psychologically and socially because it meant that businesses and schools were closed, and physical social interactions were made impossible as the disease spreads faster through physical contact of people (ZimLA, 2020). In as much as the pandemic affected the business sector it also affected the education sector which automatically implies that the library field was also affected as people could hardly receive the services they had come to expect from libraries (Medawar and Tabet 2020, Petrowicz, 2020). Libraries were also affected, with some closely completely while others provided limited services online. The libraries were closed in order to minimize social contacts, thus preventing both users and staff from catching the virus. It has also been estimated that the virus could live on surfaces, such as book covers, from five to nine days (Haasio & Kannasto, 2020).

Agbo (2015) affirms that the function of every special library is to provide facilities and up-to-date information services for research and development of the parent organisation. Haasio and Kannasto (2020) point out that in some cases the libraries were able to innovate new forms of online services and the staff was able and keen to develop their skills in producing content on social media. Sultan (2020) concurs, adding that the COVID-19 pandemic prompted some libraries to reinvent and innovate in providing information services to patrons at home or wherever they may have been located. This was done through means other than the traditional one-on-one, face-to-face contact with patrons, that is, information and communication technologies (ICTs). However, the inability of some libraries to access and use these technologies in providing information services during the pandemic was (and still is) a huge deficiency and drawback for libraries and one which also poses a threat for the future (Sultan 2020). The ZimLA (2020) concurs, point out that libraries were caught off-guard and there was very little that could be done. This was especially the case in developing countries like Zimbabwe because when the national lockdown was announced, little innovation was possible due to limited resources and no disaster preparedness mechanisms. On the impact of COVID-19 on library operations in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Library Association (ZimLA) conducted a research that proved that the COVID-19 outbreak had a negative impact on the world and its effects even on local communities are beyond words (ZimLA, 2020). The ZimLA report made it clear that the pandemic had led to library closures, social life activities that people were accustomed to had totally changed. Another

aspect that that was noted was that even books that patrons had collected before lockdown would be difficult to recover, with many other factors that also affected proper service.

The Parliament of Zimbabwe library is a quasi-special library that caters for parliamentary staff, members, and approved external users. The library was founded in 1923, the year in which the country (Rhodesia) was granted self-governing status. By 1925, the library was a department of the Southern Rhodesia Legislature and an essential feature of the Parliament administrative pattern. The library has throughout history remained a major source of information and cooperated with other libraries in the country. The library aims to provide quality library and information services to satisfy its users. Services provided by the library prior to the pandemic included the loan of materials to registered users, the provision of facilities such as internet access to students, staff, and members of parliament (MPs) for their research and reading purposes, the offering of information literacy skills to users to enable them to easily interact with the library's collection and bearing in mind that no library is self-sufficient, the library also provided referral services where it refers users to other libraries for resources not in the collection (The Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2022). However, when confronted with the pandemic and its associated lockdowns and restrictions, the library had to try and adjust from the traditional ways of conducting daily business to a new method of digital service delivery.

1.1 Statement of the problem

The parliament library's main mandate is to assist legislators and a diversity of other patrons in the accomplishment of their work by catering to their information and research needs (Menard 2022). Hence as stressed by Mills (2020), the importance of parliaments to remain functional during the corona virus crisis, as pillars of democratic governance and oversight. Many libraries have had to modify their practices considerably to keep serving their users. The new normal of the COVID-19 pandemic era has necessitated access to information with less interaction with physical copies or physically being in the library. The library is one of the special libraries that have been operating traditionally and this made it very difficult for it to efficiently and effectively deliver services to end users when COVID-19 pandemic emerged. The lack of ICT resources and the underutilisation of those that existed exacerbated the problem. Considering the importance of parliament in that it is responsible for making laws to ensure good governance in Zimbabwe, timely information delivery to promote informed decision-making is necessary, even during a pandemic. It was the need to better understand the response of the Parliament of Zimbabwe Library to the pandemic that provided motivation for the study.

1.2 Aim and objectives of the Study

Given the above, the aim of this study was to investigate information service delivery at the Parliament of Zimbabwe library in the new normal of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The objectives of the study were:

- i. To identify the types of facilities and services provided to the users/patrons by the Parliament of Zimbabwe library and their usage during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ii. To ascertain the mode(s) of information dissemination and services used by the library during the pandemic.
- iii. To identify challenges encountered by librarians and users in information delivery.

1.3 Literature review

Menard (2022) posits that Parliamentary libraries play a crucial role in providing information support to decision-makers around the world. These institutions have faced an unprecedented situation with the COVID-19 pandemic and many have had to modify their practices considerably to keep serving their users. As pointed out by Ali and Gatti (2020) many libraries began transitioning from traditional libraries to modern information networks as a result of the pandemic. Numerous studies, across all sectors of society, have been conducted on the impact of COVID-19 since its outbreak in 2019, among them Menard (2022), Hussain, (2021), Dempsey (2020), Mills (2020), Watt (2020), Al-Badi (2020), and Tamaro (2020), among others. These are explored below articulating how libraries responded to the epidemic.

1.3.1 Information Services and Facilities during COVID-19

Digital libraries can ensure continuity of access to information and resources when physical access is not visible. With the library's building closed, the public could no longer access on-site resources until further notice. Nonetheless, information and research requests were answered remotely using digital collections and resources (Menard 2022). Information services provision comprises librarians offering services to library patrons through reference services, circulation services, and the provision of information literacy (IL) training among other services. In response to the pandemic and in order to promote proper service delivery, the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) devised policy plans for intellectual property laws to favour easy access (Connell, Wallis and Comeaux, 2021). Other examples of responses to the pandemic included the Australian Library Association and Libraries Ireland negotiating with publishers at the country level to provide the online access to satisfy their patrons (Hussain, 2021). Additionally, several publishers waived the licence costs for their online content (publishers in Canada being one such example) (Hussain 2021). France also urged publishers to make content available online for free. The UK's Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) supplied some open access content, which is considered a great move for global intellectual property. The American Library Association (ALA), the largest association of librarians in the world, proposed that effective initiatives for library users might be paired with a modest government-level economic stimulus. Some funders like the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the United States of America (USA) also offered help to enhance extra flexibility (Hussain, 2021).

According to Dadhe and Dubey (2020), the types of services provided in the education sector in India emerged as a tonic to address the restrictions imposed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors opined that subsequently, libraries have been exploring the potential of e-resources and providing remote access to users in support of their academic and research activities (Dadhe and Dubey, 2020). In an earlier work, Ali (2018) opined that many libraries have significant digital services; some have even introduced multi-mode access to resources in order to deal with the demand. Some of the significant services and facilities provided include remote access to e-resources, special library services, safety information, access to printed materials, assistance in information search and organising virtual events. Other libraries were offering access to zoom subscriptions in order to help library users stay in touch with friends. These services and facilities became handy during the Covid period as most libraries resorted to providing services online.

As alluded to above, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of publishers and information service providers made their content publicly available by, for example, providing login and password information for online publications. Easier ways for public libraries to buy and access e-books for lending were devised by Macmillan and Penguin publishers and some audio books were made available to the general public. The Internet Archives also made an effort to assist researchers by supplying vast volumes (Ali and Gatti 2020). In Kenya the Kibera and Kakuru public libraries launched an innovative programme through social networks like sharing books and story times to help lighten the sober atmosphere initiated by the virus (IFLA 2020).

In Canada, the Library of the National Assembly of Quebec offered remote reference services which emphasised the importance of digital libraries in service delivery regardless of circumstances (Dempsey 2020). Because of the unexpected nature of the outbreak, various changes were made to the library service offerings, emphasising the need for marketing the available library services and resources. As Dempsey (2020) points out, libraries must continue to demonstrate their worth as their communities change. The library's services were thus altered to meet the evolving requirements of its patrons.

There were various topics which needed to be embedded in library service provision during the pandemic ranging from preventing transmission to general instructions on using masks, hand washing, the use of sanitizers, avoiding handshakes and various other ways to control the spread of the virus (Ali and Gatiti, 2020, Fasae et al. 2020, Adomi and Oyovwe-Tinuoye, 2022). For successful public health strategies during the pandemic, people needed information on the following: measures for school reopening, remote working, home isolation and monitoring the health of symptomatic individuals by telephone or online health consultations (Heymann and Shindo, 2020; Iyanda, 2020). It was and remains the mandate of every library to fight misinformation by offering true and up-to date information as a quality service (Iyanda, 2020).

Al-Badi (2020) conducted a survey on thirteen parliamentary libraries which include the Parliament of Malaysia, New Zealand Parliament, and Federal Parliament of Nepal among others. The research found that the libraries were offering online services although some had to close because they were operating traditionally. The parliament libraries were providing

online reference services, information and computer literacy programs, providing information to patrons, Wi-Fi services when sit in services were available (Al-Badi 2020). According to Watt (2020) “as the pandemic demanded swift and radical policy choices, there was a parallel requirement for informed parliamentary scrutiny and approval – the need, and potential demand, for quality information and research services increased, they could not simply be suspended.”

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been found to be of tremendous importance in improving the services provided by special libraries as a result of the inability of the existing traditional manual methods to cope effectively and efficiently with the increasing volume in the library as articulated by Iyanda, (2020). This becomes even more necessary during the new normal (the COVID-19 pandemic era) especially for decision makers like parliamentarians where they still have to be provided with information regardless of the closure of libraries and other related information centres. However, the Commonwealth Parliament of Australian failed to operate during the lockdown unlike other libraries and the European Union Parliament which continued to operate nevertheless, though it was online (Mills 2020).

Chisita and Chizoma (2021) carried out a review of the responses of special libraries in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their study revealed that special libraries and publishers had risen to the occasion by offering more free content and curating personalized collections to enable citizens to have uninterrupted access to content and learning; the digital libraries in South Africa were considered vital access points to high-quality e-books, journals and educational content, including open educational resources. Digital library services had also enabled academic libraries in South Africa to excel in providing online services, therefore ensuring that learning, research and teaching continued during the pandemic (Chisita and Chizoma, 2021).

Dadhe and Dubey (2020) opined that the installation of seamless document/information delivery systems around all India’s libraries of higher education system helped to provide services and access to collections to users who have been displaced due to COVID-19. Libraries were offering e-resources also, through highlighted links of free and expanded resources on their portal to facilitate visibility of these options available for users. This had enhanced the possibility of users availing the virtual services and hence, visiting library portal frequently. Dadhe and Dubey (2020) went on to say that open access had also made information service delivery easier for libraries. Scholarly e-resources freely available included Directory of Open Access Books (DOAB), and the SAGE journal platform. Some libraries had gone an extra mile to gather information from those different sites and make it available for users of their library (Dadhe and Dubey 2020).

Chigwada (2020) assessed librarians' readiness to provide library services in the event of a Corona Virus outbreak in university libraries in Zimbabwe and the results showed that librarians were willing to work from home and provide services. However, the lack of internet connectivity and clients' unwillingness to use online services posed the biggest problem. Except for one institution that was supporting library personnel with internet charges, the majority of librarians were not connected. The other libraries were all closed

(Chigwada 2020). The study further observed that in as much as the university library tried to serve its patrons, the clientele base was very broad to be attended to by personal WhatsApp facilities. In traditional libraries where information could only be accessed if users physically visited the premises, the pandemic greatly affected the usage of library resources and service delivery due to lockdown regulations. Also, inasmuch as the use digital platforms may have been helpful, it was not feasible in developing countries like Zimbabwe because there is need for user training first and some users don't even want electronic resources (Chigwada 2020).

1.3.2 The Mode(s) of Information Dissemination and Services Used in During the COVID-19

COVID-19 information has been disseminated through a variety of sources , such as friends, colleagues, family members, neighbours, government health workers, magazines, journals, the Internet, and social media (Bedford, 2020). Ali and Gatiti (2020) assert that the World Health Organisation's WhatsApp group is one of the most reliable sources of information in the current crisis. They further argue that librarians are sharing the WhatsApp links with library users in an effort to counter rumours and fake news. Similarly, Bedford (2020) states that in the UK, the government had created a web page on COVID-19, compiling a list of all the government publications on the topic, as well as a page of information for the public.

Ali and Gatiti (2020) and Hu et al., (2020) posit that some libraries in USA, the UK, Canada, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand had initiated online webinar sessions to keep in touch with their users via Google Classroom, Google Hangouts, Skype, or Zoom. The use of television and radio programmes has assisted in closing the gaps in providing information, learning and education on preventive mechanism of COVID-19 in the country.

Ometere and Onekutu (2021) and Sultan (2020) observe that libraries generally adopted virtual services as strategies to disseminate information and services, noting that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been used to simplify availability and access to information. These encompass the following complementary technologies: telephone, software technologies, web-browser and servers, multimedia systems, and peripherals. These tools and resource are used to communicate, create, process, disseminate, share, store and manage information and have become even more useful, important and necessary for proper library operation in the COVID-19 pandemic era (Sultan 2020).

According to Ali and Gatiti (2020) and Reynolds (2020), virtual awareness service is one of the library services offered to develop new thinking and information about COVID-19. Effective virtual awareness services of the general public especially library users on the danger of COVID-19 through electronic resources, computers, databases, electronic books, electronic journals, electronic encyclopaedias and other digital resources would assist to minimize the spread of the virus. These awareness services need to be imbedded into the library activities to ensure that preventive mechanisms are disseminated to users on a daily basis.

Social Media Services

Social media refers to online information services that are designed to facilitate in-depth social engagement, community building, collaborative opportunities, and collaborative work (Friday, Oluchi and Ngozi, 2020). They are tools for creating awareness in preventing the spread of COVID-19 in libraries cannot be overemphasized. Social media has become one of the modes of dissemination to deliver library services to the intended users even though they cannot physically visit the library due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Examples of social media platforms include: Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, WhatsApp, Ning, YouTube, Wikis, among others (Friday et al, 2020) According to IFLA (2020) some libraries have also worked to develop new possibilities to be in contact with librarians remotely. For example, Johannesburg public libraries in South Africa run video competitions to encourage young users to share digital skills with parents and grandparents, as well as to develop their own digital literacy abilities, and sharing the results on their Facebook page (IFLA 2020).

Internet services

Internet services in libraries have been utilised to deliver electronic resources (e-resources) to assist librarians in bridging the prevailing information provision gaps in the teaching, learning and research needs of the users (Chan et al 2020). The COVID-19 has brought drastic change in information dissemination and the emergence of the Internet has opened opportunities for libraries to provide health information (Ali, 2020). Libraries from developing countries have also joined their counterparts from the developed countries to provide effective library services with Internet with the view to remain relevant in the digital era.

Internet services assist librarians to facilitate easy access to information beyond the traditional service delivery. Libraries have been transformed into digital and virtual environment where books and journals are now available as e-books and e-journals (IFLA 2020). Despite the importance of the Internet services to help librarians to promote public health awareness by creating and disseminating information relating to preventive measures and to support research by providing information regarding the latest developments on COVID-19 challenges of learning new technologies with Internet services still posed challenge persist in developing countries and Africa in particular due to expensive bandwidth, poor Internet connectivity and poor power supply (Ali 2020).

Whereas some libraries have evolved and adopted the digital way of operation some libraries still prefer the traditional way of library operation in the way of accessing information, service delivery and information usage, the. In Nigeria for example, when the dawn of COVID-19 came libraries in Kogi State tried to adjust to make sure information services are delivered to the end users. This saw the library making use of the WhatsApp platforms to assist users, the group mail facility to receive and send periodicals and newspapers (Ometere and Onekuti, 2021).

Digital or Online Reference Services

Accessed s an Internet service, the role of digital reference resources to research activities during COVID-19 has great impacts on library development. Report by IFLA (2020) states that digital reference resources generation and transmission of information for research has long been recognised as essential tools for librarians' to solve academic or research problems.

According Watt (2020), librarians now use knowledge of online reference services to access, search, browse, navigate, retrieve, index, store, organise and disseminate digitised information. Digital or online reference services provide current information services via the Internet including DVDs, electronic dictionary (e-dictionary), online encyclopaedia, and chat reference and virtual reference services.

1.3.3 Challenges encountered by librarians and users in information delivery

Various challenges and opportunities were met while adapting virtual services, including redefining document handling and improving team communication, and re-skilling, amongst others. Effective service depends on close contacts with Members and their support staff and those interactions and contacts were disrupted hence new methods of remote contacts had to be strengthened or invented for continuity. Watt (2020) emphasises that Parliamentary library services often have unique collections/expertise normally accessible only in-person. The pre-existence of digital services in most Parliamentary libraries allowed continuity of delivery (at some level) even where the onset of the crisis was very rapid, than in situations where digital services were less developed (in terms of resources and infrastructure). Al-Badi (2020) posit that libraries shifted towards providing their services via the Internet, which supports the trend prevailing among many libraries around the world, as those libraries have initiated their services via Internet through their websites or via e-mail.

However, Al-Badi (2020) observed that libraries during this time faced many challenges such as:

- Technical challenges.
- Setting up a workable space at home and balancing work and family responsibilities
- Copyright issue for digital books
- Librarian needs to be more creative and do online promotion.
- Raising the library users' awareness about the electronic services
- Majority of library users are not aware of services that have been shifted to the online platform

1.4 Research methodology

The current study utilised both qualitative and quantitative techniques and data was collected through a questionnaire with open and closed ended questions was distributed to members of Parliament and external users and interviews with library staff/personnel. The target audience for this study comprised Members of Parliament, parliamentary staff, external users, and librarians. The main reason for this kind of sampling was the COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines such that it was not possible to meet all the expected participants at the time of data collection. The study used convenience sampling sixty questionnaires were thus distributed of which fifty were returned. This was made up of responses from 8 Members of Parliament; 32 Parliamentary staff, and 5 external users, who accessed the library during the

lockdown. The demographic data in terms of gender shows that data was gathered from both male and females with a percentage of 26 (58%) and 19 (42%) respectively. Of the 5 target librarians, 4 participated in the study. All the librarians were qualified and experienced personnel who had an appreciation of the library technologies expected in a library even though they might not be there. Data analysis for questionnaire was done using SPSS software for proper calculations of frequencies and thematic presentation and coding was used for interview responses.

1.5 Results and Discussion

The section below discusses the findings of the study.

1.5.1 Services and facilities

The respondents indicated that they were aware of the resources housed at the Parliament library, mostly printed as shown by 43(96%) for the Hansard; Newspapers 44 (98%), Reference materials 30 (67%), Journals and Books 39 (87%). For electronic Hansard 30 (67 %) were aware of the resource. 18 (40%) agreed that they are aware of a library database.

Figure 1 below presents the results

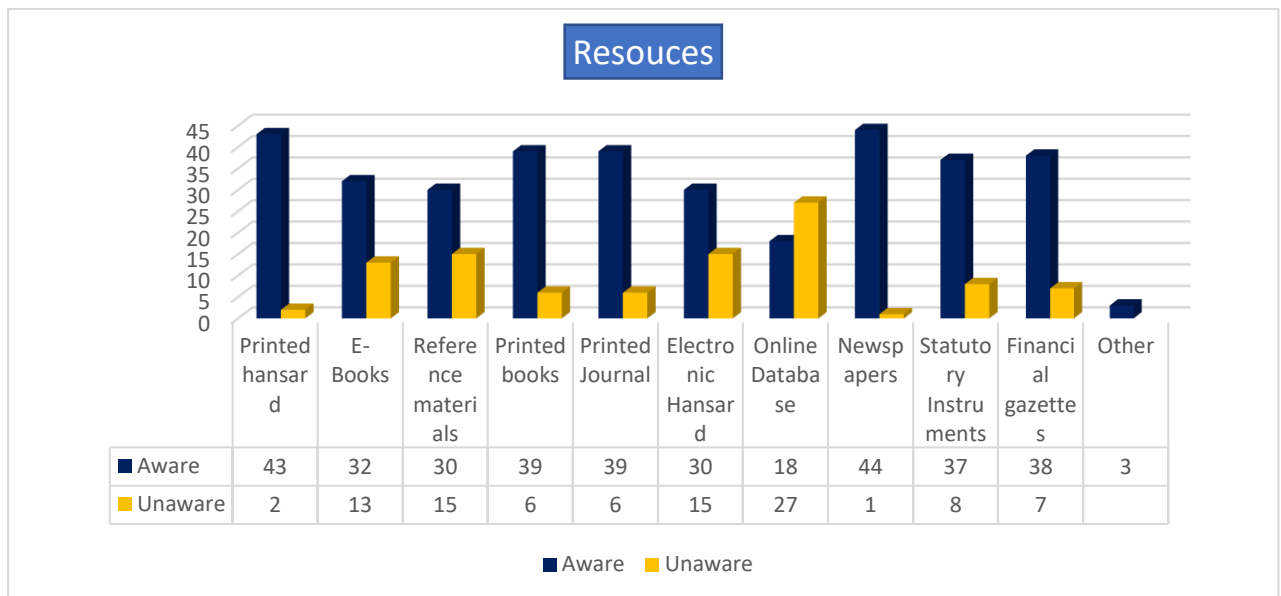


Figure 1: Awareness of Library resources at the Parliament of Zimbabwe

From the results of the questionnaire it is clear that the library collection mainly has physical copies of information resources in the collection as evidenced by the high percentage ranking of Hansard, books, journals, newspapers, financial gazettes, statutory instruments and reference material. Having identified the resources available at the Parliament Library, the respondents were asked to indicate facilities and services that were available to them during the lockdown against what would normally be provided.



Figure 2: Library facilities that were available during lockdown

With regards to online assistance, 17 (38%) of the respondents were aware of, while 38 (84%) respondents confirmed the availability of e-newspapers. Library personnel mentioned that there were facilities that were being provided during lockdown like e-newspapers, work group email, pdf gazettes, which was also acknowledged by the library users through the questionnaire, Figure 2, although they were limited. Also provided were e-resources and e-paper news reading via the E-library facility. Library personnel also indicated that besides online services, they also provided physical book loans to those who would come to their offices in the parliament building, like top management, for critical researches and telephone services. Due to the restrictions imposed during the lockdown, the Parliament library did not provide any sit-ins to library users, with the facility limited to a few staff of parliament working from their offices. The above observations concur with authors like Al-Badi (2020) Sultan (2020), Watt (2020), ZimLA (2020), who observed the pandemic prompted libraries to re-configure their services, adopting new innovations for continued support to the library users. Menard (2022) observed that besides providing information the topics covered by parliamentary monitoring committees, Reference librarians also attended webinars organized by parliamentary research chairs or inter parliamentary organizations where parliamentary staff from around the world shared their experiences.

On rating of the services shown in Figure 2, out of 45 respondents 26 (58%) said they were poor, 10 (22%) indicated that they were good, 5 (11%) said they were very good and 4 (9%) were undecided. In response to this, library personnel indicated that: *“Users are fully satisfied now but during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown it was very difficult for them to pursue studies and related works without the library”*

1.5.2 Modes of Information Dissemination

This question and sought to explore and understand the modes of information dissemination that were used by the Parliament library during the COVID-19 and also the rating of those methods of dissemination.

The Table 1 shows that library users acknowledged use of the following: 31 (69%) used telephone to received services from the library, 22 (49%) received face to face services, 42 (93%) acknowledged the use of email to receive library assistance. It is also important to note that a significant 22(49%) actually visited the library during this period. Only 7(16%) were helped or used WhatsApp to obtain library services.

Table 1: Modes of Information delivery

MODES	YES		NO	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Telephone	31	69	14	31
Actual visits to the library	22	49	23	51
Email services	42	93	10	7
WhatsApp	7	16	38	84
Parliament library website	20	44	25	56
Zoom	4	9	41	91
Libraries Apps e.g. Mylibrary	5	11	40	89

Twenty (44%) respondents used the Parliament website as a mode of service delivery, 4 (9%) acknowledged to use Zoom to receive library services and 5 (11%) respondents said they used a library application to access library services.

Modes of delivery used by library staff as acknowledged by users included: online, telephone, social media (WhatsApp), Parliament website, Knowledge Management portal, scanning, e-mail, visits to the library for critical issues only but to a limited number of users. These observations concur with the services mentioned by users as shown in Figure 2 above. Hussain (2021) encourages that libraries have to try and adapt to the prevailing new normal, in the same vein, the use and importance of forms of dissemination, i.e., technologies and social media concurs with studies by Devi and Verma, (2019), Al-Badi (2020).Friday et al (2020) and Iyanda (2020)

When further asked on whether they were satisfied or not with the modes of delivery used. Responses indicated that 31 (68.9%) respondents indicated that they were not satisfied, 12

(26.7%) were satisfied while 2 (4.4%) were undecided. This observation also concurs with Figure 2, where 26 (58%) of the respondents rated library services as poor.

To further determine the methods of information services delivery the respondents were asked if the same facilities were being used after the lockdown or the library had reverted to the traditional delivery ways like library visits or sit in services. Thirty-three (73%) respondents agreed that the library had reverted to traditional modes of operations and 12 (27%) respondents indicated that the library is still using digital modes of operations to date. These include increased adoption of social media apps, Zoom and increased usage of email for communication.

1.5.3 Impact of COVID-19 on the library operations

When asked the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the library operations of Parliament of Zimbabwe, the librarians indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic affected staff and normal operation and the library had to adjust to the new normal. One respondent indicated that: *“The Parliament has been disturbed but however E-library has been introduced and also with the advent of EBSCO, accessing information has been made easier”* while the other mentioned that: *“The implementation of the E-parliament service was introduced because of the COVID-19 pandemic. So it was a blessing to the information fraternity as more innovations came out. It triggered people to think of possible new ways to continue with Parliament library”*

The study also asked librarians to comment on the preparedness of the Parliament of Zimbabwe library with regards to working from home, the arrangements and capabilities. The first librarian indicated that:

“... the library was 90% prepared to deal with the COVID-19 lockdown” while the other 2 librarians said that *“... the library was relatively prepared and with the situation as it came and according to administrations regulations. The services were affected because administration opted to stop external users from accessing the library services to minimize the spread of the virus”*.

1.5.4 Challenges in Accessing Library Services

The majority of library users (26, being 58%) mentioned the challenges they faced in accessing library information services during the COVID-19 and these are the responses.

- Poor service delivery, network problems, failing to access the library due to working from home
- Online platforms took long to be launched, delay in service delivery; physical visits were limited, poor internet connectivity, expensive data,
- Movement to the library was difficult; responses via email were very poor as most of the information required library visits and failing to access information.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges to stakeholders across the divide and libraries were not spared either (Dube or Jacobs 2023). Issues on complete lockdowns, lack of preparedness, poor infrastructure (internet and connectivity) and high costs of data were highlighted in studies by Ali (2020), Dadhe and Dubey (2020), Salim Al-Badi (2020) Chakraborty and Jana (2021). Martzoukou, (2021), in the same way observed in the current study

1.5.5 Conclusions and Recommendations

The finds of the study reveal that inspite of the pandemic, the Parliament library continued to provide services, albeit limited. The study also shows that parliamentary library users sought information from the library although they were not many in terms of numbers. Despite the parliament library having ICT challenges, the library did provide some services through email, telephone and social media platforms. This was however inhibited by slow networks and high cost of data. While the library continues to offer traditional services, the wake of the pandemic demands an updated library system at parliament. Digital libraries in service delivery are very important regardless of circumstances and the library should positively embrace such approaches, in particular the e-parliament services introduced during the pandemic. As pointed out by Watt (2020) for libraries that had not adopted technology applications, the pandemic crisis showed the value of digital investments and the longer-term consequence. The study further recommends that the library addresses the challenges highlighted in terms of service utilisation and ICT infrastructure and the adoption of the different modes of information delivery at their disposal.

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There is a need for a digital strategy, not limited to e-books. A digital strategy should aim at the transformation of libraries, with an innovative vision of service. To develop new digital paradigms for libraries, libraries need to critically answer the following questions:

- _ How has online access to libraries evolved over COVID period?
- _ Are users lost? Are new ones acquired?
- _ Does the perception of the library vision change in the collective imagination and – if yes – how? (Tammaro 2020)