

Global Economic Recession and University Libraries' Response to COVID-19 Pandemic in South-South, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study explored global economic recession and university libraries' response to the COVID-19 in South-south, Nigeria. The study was guided by four research objectives and one hypothesis using correlational research design.

Methods: The population of the study was 219 librarians in the university libraries of the 17 public universities in South-south, Nigeria. Total enumeration sampling technique was used for the study. A self-developed structured questionnaire was used as the instrument of data collection. The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

Results: The study found that the level of global economic recession on library response to COVID-19 pandemic was low; the level of coping with the COVID-19 global economic recessionary trends by the librarians was high; the university libraries operated during the COVID-19 pandemic period by reducing the library opening hours, performing reference services, cancellation of meetings, indefinite closure of the library, cancellation of trainings/conferences, and cancellation of local and international travels.

Conclusion: There is a significant relationship between global economic recession and university libraries' response to COVID-19. The study concluded an improvement in global economic as that may increase university libraries response to COVID-19 among others. It was recommended among others that university management should, as a matter of urgency, make librarians to be more responsive during emergencies since the level of global economic recession to COVID-19 was low.

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Introduction

The crucial role played by library in increasing the frontier of knowledge has been documented in national and global history. University libraries have supported universities in playing dominant roles in the nation's building and global development. University libraries all over the globe have been effective in supporting the sustainable development of some vital areas such as food security, provision of quality education, societal stability, ending poverty and hunger, etc. The mandate of the university libraries is to support their parent institutions in producing graduates equipped with high academic and moral standards that will contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation. This is done through the provision of required information and information resources (Amadi & Precious, 2015). However, the upsurge of COVID-19 has hindered university libraries from meeting their mandates as most of the libraries are either partially or completely closed, thereby preventing library staff from performing their functions.

Libraries experience tough times as COVID-19 compels libraries and librarians to change their lifestyles and reshape their daily routines. To curtail the spread of COVID-19 and to ensure normalcy in the operation of library activities, academic libraries count it as a point of duty to respond to the pandemic. However, one of the significant factors that hamstrung university libraries' response to COVID-19 in Nigeria is the current global economic recession that prevents libraries from meeting their financial obligations. Economic recession refers to a time identified with broad economic deterioration (Okere & Olorunfemi, 2018). The global economic recession is distressing every sector of society. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the global economy shrank severely in 2020 (*European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations*, 2020). Africa is anticipated to face the highest effects of post-COVID-19.

Academic libraries are not immune to being affected by the economic recession. The rise in economic recession and the spread of COVID-19 across the world has posed some unexpected difficulties for university libraries. Even though much has been written on COVID-19 and how the pandemic affected the delivery of library services (Adekoya & Fasae, 2022; Arapasopo & Adekoya, 2022), there is dearth of literature on how academic libraries in South-south, Nigeria responded to the pandemic. More importantly that the current global economic recession has vast implications on library budgets, there is a need to look at how global economic affects the responses of university libraries' response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is evident as the global economic recession may lead to an unprecedented rise in the cost of executing the major projects of the libraries. Meanwhile, university libraries within the context of Nigeria are typically encumbered with a range of activities that need sufficient funding.

Statement of the Problem

The unhindered rise in the spread of COVID-19 across the world has posed some unexpected difficulties for university libraries. Before the upsurge of COVID-19, university libraries in Nigeria played significant roles in the actualization of the aims of the universities through the provision of information resources for teaching, learning, and research. However, the advent of COVID-19 in Nigeria in February 2020 led to the comatose of all universities in Nigeria, including the libraries till October 2020.

World Health Organization (WHO) incidence statistics revealed that even though the COVID-19 vaccine has been produced and received by people, the cases of the pandemic are still on the increase all over the world. The same situation obtains in Nigeria. Preliminary investigation revealed that even though the COVID-19 experience is unexplored territory considering the extent of looming danger to library staff and patrons and the unsure duration of its outcome when the library closes, few libraries have codified procedures on how to respond to a pandemic of this enormity. This may be due to the current global economic recession that affects the library budget. Discourses on diverse quarters have reflected the shortcomings of the global economic recession which will lead to an unprecedented rise in the cost of executing the major projects of the libraries. Meanwhile, university libraries within the context of Nigeria are typically encumbered with a range of activities that need sufficient funding. This study, therefore, aims to investigate global economic recession and university libraries' response to COVID-19 in South-south, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. explore the level of global economic recession on library's response to COVID-19 pandemic;
2. investigate the level of coping with the COVID-19 global economic recessionary trends;
3. investigate how libraries in South-south, Nigeria operated during the COVID-19 pandemic period; and
4. ascertain if significant relationship exists between global economic recession and university libraries' response to COVID-19 in South-south, Nigeria.

Global Economic Recession on Library Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

The level of COVID-19 economic recession in libraries is a matter of serious concern as the pandemic is impacting every area of national and global economy. The educational sector is one of the main sectors deeply struck by the recessionary trends of COVID-19. This is obvious in the face of university libraries across the globe, including Nigeria. University libraries in Nigeria are

likely to face bigger external ambiguities within a complex and persistently changing environment. Studies before the upsurge of COVID-19 had even reflected that Nigerian university library leaders were under immense pressure to act as they were obstructed by rising costs, budget cuts, competition, and dynamics which were the characteristics of contemporary times as a result of recessionary trends (Okere & Olorunfemi, 2018).

University libraries in Nigeria are predicted to be highly disturbed by the novel COVID-19 economic recession, leading to trembling social, industrial, and scientific conditions. Le (2015) identified five major challenges that affect libraries in a time of economic recession to comprise how to: express the library values to the academic community, manage the library under economic vagueness, retrofit obsolete library resources to have room for new services, maintain a balance between digital and print materials, and ensure the library staff are trained and current. There are tendencies that these challenges will be even more severe in Nigeria during the COVID-19 period.

There are possibilities that COVID-19 will bring massive economic privation and library budgets may experience some intrinsic features. Several items in the library budgets with inelastic characteristics such as building maintenance, labor and resources apportioned to operations to procure digital resources, cannot simply be re-adjusted to meet up with the new financial obligations (*European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations*, 2020). As such, downsizing library activities may accordingly end up with substantial budgetary cuts. This may result in the diversification of funding for libraries and the stimulation of current library activities within a diverse agenda.

One significant factor that shows that the level of COVID-19 economic recession in libraries will be high is that the university libraries are a dependent section of academic institutions as their financial potency depends on the parent bodies for funding (Ali & Gatiti, 2020). More so, university libraries run on annual budgetary allocation. The National Universities Commission (NUC) (2009) in Aboh, Oname and Isaac (2019) emphasised that a minimum of 15% of the recurrent budget of academic institutions should be allocated to the libraries, and also that 15% of internally generated revenue of academic institutions should be given to their libraries to finance library services and operations. However, in the post-COVID-19 era, university libraries will be under tremendous pressure to perform as they will be obstructed by budget cuts and change which are the features of modern times as a result of recessionary trends.

With the devaluation of the Nigerian currency, the depreciation of the naira, irregular exchange rate, and towering inflation rates, the Nigerian economy is experiencing a soaring intensity of fiscal turbulence which is diminishing the ability of the government to fund government agencies, particularly in the educational sector. Once the vast majority of the academic libraries in Nigeria are funded by the government, it is no doubt that there will be a

drastic reduction in funds coming from the government. This will conversely impinge on library operations as most libraries will not be able to meet their financial obligations. Acquiring library facilities and information resources that meet the need of the growing clientele is capital intensive. More so, libraries spend a vast portion of their budgetary allocations on the acquisition of relevant and up-to-date information resources. Since accreditation of academic programs in universities depends significantly on the available relevant information resources (books, journals, reference materials, etc.) in the libraries, universities cannot but consider the needs of the libraries.

COVID-19 and Library Operations

Globally, libraries have difficulties in providing services and in how to do so, which might range from apparent limitations to complete closure (IFLA, 2020). While COVID-19 persists, the great majority of people are thinking about the ideal methods the library can employ to provide library services (Hinchliffe & Worf-Eisenberg, 2020). According to Hansa (2020), there is no comprehensive data on library activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The director of the university library in Patras, Greece, Tsakonas, described what the library was up to during the period when all Greek academic institutions were closed. The library allowed extended time for book renewals; staff members wore disposable gloves and alcohol-based hand sanitizer; and even though the library was closed to the public, they were opening windows to let fresh air in for a few hours. Tsakonas (2020) asserted that the library programmed its circulation systems to avoid charging fines thus far their libraries were closed.

Libraries handled the epidemic in a variety of ways. According to Brown (2020), the majority of US libraries have closed their physical locations and launched online. The annual meeting of the American Library Association (ALA) was canceled for the first time in seventy-five years. According to Perrine (2020), the closing of libraries resulted in a 75% increase in the use of internet databases. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan, Ali and Gatiti (2020) outlined the three primary roles of the health sciences librarian. These include supporting researchers by providing the most recent information on the disease, encouraging and disseminating information related to preventive measures for public health awareness, and attending to the information needs of frequent library users.

A study on "*Library services during COVID-19 period: Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta experience*" was conducted in Nigeria by Onifade (2020). The study discovered that 25% of the library staff were required to work one day a week, while some were required to work from home. Additionally, all visitors to the library were required to wear face masks and wash their hands with liquid soap, running water, and hand sanitizer provided at the entrance. The

library also reduced the amount of physical contact by providing users with remote access to e-resources.

As the pandemic continues, academic libraries in Nigeria have a greater opportunity to provide invaluable assistance for online learning. The primary obstacle, nevertheless, is the transition from offline to online information service delivery. Academic libraries have a number of technical, economical, and social difficulties. Academic libraries present unusual situations to examine in the pandemic due to their lack of collaborative projects, institutional repositories lacking in some libraries, and deficiencies in wide-scale technological applications and digital efforts. As a result, academic libraries face significant difficulties in providing the information that their patrons require. A study on the "experience of an academic library during the COVID-19 pandemic" was conducted by Kasa and Yusuf in 2020. The study discovered that social media was used to disseminate information sources and resources among library users. The university library consumers in Nigeria were unfamiliar with this. Customers were asked to get in touch with the library via email or any of its social media accounts in order to receive services.

Materials and Methods

The study employed correlational research design. The population of the study was the entire 219 librarians in the university libraries of the 17 public universities in South-south, Nigeria. These include seven (7) federal and ten (10) state universities. Total enumeration sampling technique was used for the study because the population was not too large, making it manageable for the researcher. The research instrument used for this study was a self-developed questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: A-D. Section A sought demographic information of the respondents such as the name of the institution. Section B was on the level of global economic recession on library response to COVID-19 pandemic. Section C was on the level of coping with the COVID-19 global economic recessionary trends. Section D: university libraries' operation during COVID-19 pandemic period. Section B and C was assigned on a 4-point scale of Very High Level (VHL), High Level (HL), Low level (LL) and Very Low Level (VLL). Section was scaled on agree and disagree. To ensure the face and content validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was designed by the researcher and given to a lecturer in the Department of Library and Information Science at Delta State University, Abraka for criticism. A lecturer of Measurement and Evaluation at Delta State University, Abraka also validated the research instrument.

To determine the reliability of the instrument, thirty copies of the questionnaire were administered to librarians at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, which was outside the sample of this study. This was done within two weeks. The paired scores generated from the test were analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha method through the Statistical Package for

Social Science (SPSS) version 25. The indexes of correlation obtained using Cronbach Alpha method are: level of global economic recession on library response to COVID-19 pandemic $r=9.33$, level of coping with the COVID-19 global economic recessionary trends $r=9.67$, and university libraries' operation during COVID-19 pandemic period $r=9.76$. These translated to high reliability of the instrument. As such, the instrument was considered adequate for the study.

The researcher and two trained research assistants administered the questionnaire to the respondents within two weeks. Out of the 219 copies of the questionnaire administered, 148(62%) were filled and retrieved. The data generated from the respondents were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics (PPMC) and the results were presented in Tables. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used for the research study.

Results

Objective One: Level of global economic recession on library's response to COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1. Level of Global Economic Recession on Library Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Level	VHL	HL	LL	VLL	Mean
Reduction is revenue allocated for human capital development	33	32	34	49	2.33
Cutting down of the staff strength	19	50	38	41	2.32
Embargo on staff recruitment	26	31	47	44	2.26
Reduction in acquisition of library equipment	18	39	49	42	2.22
Reduction in information resources purchased	21	37	41	49	2.20
Reduction in the acquisition of ICT infrastructure	20	32	42	54	2.12
Reduction in library finance and budget	7	42	43	56	2.00
Non-payment of staff salaries	4	25	55	64	1.79
Getting information resources on credit	4	24	55	65	1.78
Sales of library assets	0	21	51	76	1.63
Grand Mean					2.07
Criterion Mean					2.50

Key: VHE – Very High Level, HL – High Level, LL – Low Level, VLL – Very Low Level

As revealed in Table 1, the grand mean ($\bar{x}=2.07$) is less than the criterion mean ($\bar{x}=2.50$). This means that the level of global economic recession on library response to COVID-19 pandemic is low.

Objective Two: Level of coping with the COVID-19 global economic recessionary trends.**Table 2. Level of coping with the COVID-19 global economic recessionary trends**

Global Economic Recessionary Trends	VHL	HL	LL	VLL	Mean
Charging fees for library services	36	74	23	15	2.89
Reduction in staff recruitment	36	74	23	15	2.89
Reduction in staff training and development program	36	72	24	16	2.86
Downsizing library activities	29	75	29	15	2.80
Budget cut	31	71	31	15	2.80
Reduction in conference and seminar attendance	32	71	26	19	2.78
Abandoning of ICT projects	33	64	30	21	2.74
Reduction in acquisition	29	70	26	23	2.71
Reduction of dispensable services	29	58	34	27	2.60
Cuts in library acquisitions	25	66	29	28	2.59
Consortiums	25	64	31	28	2.58
Changes in staff structures	17	67	42	22	2.53
Development of new competitive goods and services such as cybercafé	6	68	34	40	2.27
Introduction of new technologies	9	54	47	38	2.23
Fund raising	2	31	79	36	1.99
Downsizing/Retrenchment	7	19	77	45	1.92
Grand Mean					2.57
Criterion Mean					2.50

Key: VHE – Very High Level, HL – High Level, LL – Low Level, VLL – Very Low Level

Table 2 reveals that the grand mean of 2.57 is higher than the criterion mean of 2.50. This means that the level of coping with the COVID-19 global economic recessionary trends by the libraries is high.

Objective Three: Library operations during the COVID-19 pandemic period.**Table 3. University libraries' operation during the COVID-19 pandemic period**

University Libraries' Operation	Agree		Disagree		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Library opening hours were reduced	148	100	0	0	148	100
Reference services were performed	145	98.0	3	2.0	148	100
Meetings cancelled	143	96.6	5	3.4	148	100
Indefinite closure of the library	142	95.9	6	4.1	148	100
Trainings/conferences cancelled	139	93.9	9	6.1	148	100
Cancellation of local and international travels	139	93.9	9	6.1	148	100
Communication done through social media	138	93.2	10	6.8	148	100
Meetings conducted through social media	134	90.5	14	9.5	148	100
Library is open for staff	33	22.3	115	77.7	148	100
Online awareness campaign	32	21.6	116	78.4	148	100
Digitization service for faculty	29	19.6	119	80.4	148	100
Provision of emergency emails/numbers to users	28	18.9	120	81.1	148	100
Staff working from home	28	18.9	120	81.1	148	100
Provision of access to library repositories	26	17.6	122	82.4	148	100
Online services delivery	19	12.8	129	87.2	148	100
Provision of collection on health crises emergencies	18	12.2	130	87.8	148	100
Attending online classes during the pandemic	16	10.8	132	89.2	148	100
Online answering of library users' request	11	7.4	137	92.6	148	100
Provision of digital information sources /reference/ information literacy sources	10	6.8	138	93.2	148	100
Staff rotation	8	5.4	140	94.6	148	100
Library opening hours extended	0	0	148	100.0	148	100
Normal opening hours of the library were maintained	0	0	148	100.0	148	100
Full performance of technical services	0	0	148	100.0	148	100

Table 3 shows how the university libraries in South-south, Nigeria operate during the COVID-19 pandemic period. The majority of the respondents claimed that the university libraries’ opening hours were reduced (148, 100%). This was followed by reference services were performed (145, 98%), meetings cancelled 143, 96.6%), indefinite closure of the library (142, 95.9%), trainings/conferences cancelled (139, 93.9%), and cancellation of local and international travels (139, 93.9%). However, the respondents stated that the university libraries’ operation during the covid-19 pandemic period did not entail provision of access to library repositories (26, 17.6%), online services delivery (19, 12.8%), provision of collection on health crises emergencies (18, 12.2%), attending online classes during the pandemic (16, 10.8%), online answering of library users’ request (11, 7.4%), provision of digital information sources/reference/information literacy sources (10, 6.8%), staff rotation (8, 5.4%), library opening hours extended (0, 0%), and normal opening hours of the library were maintained (0, 0%).

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between global economic recession and university libraries’ response to COVID-19 in South-south, Nigeria.

Table 4: Relationship between global economic recession and university libraries’ response to COVID-19

		Global economic recession	University libraries’ response to COVID-19
Global economic recession	Pearson Correlation	1	.133
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.025
	N	148	148
University libraries’ response to COVID-19	Pearson Correlation	.133	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	
	N	148	148

From Table 4, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient $r = 0.133$. Since the significant value (Sig. 2-tailed) is 0.025 (which is less than 0.05), it can therefore be concluded that there is significant relationship global economic recession and university libraries’ response to COVID-19 in South-south, Nigeria. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This implies that an increase in global economic recession may lead to an increase in university libraries’ response to COVID-19.

Discussion

It was found in this study that the level of global economic recession on library response to COVID-19 pandemic is high. The study revealed that to cope with the recession, the library charged fees for library services, reduced staff recruitment, reduced staff training and development program, downsized library activities, and embarked on budget cuts. This aligns with the stance of the *European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations* (2020) that there is high level of possibility that COVID-19 would bring massive economic privation and that library budgets might experience some intrinsic features. As such some of the items in the library budgets with inelastic characteristics such as building maintenance, labor and

resources apportioned to operations to procure digital resources, cannot simply be re-adjusted to meet up with the new financial obligations. In that regard, downsizing library activities may accordingly end up with substantial budgetary cuts. However, the finding that the level of global economic recession on libraries' response to COVID-19 pandemic is low is in disagreement with that of Okere and Olorunfemi (2018) and Fasae et al. (2021) that the high level of expectation of libraries to perform under tremendous pressure usually leads them to respond very greatly to global economic recession as they may be obstructed by budget cuts and change which are the features of modern times as a result of recessionary trends.

In terms of the level of coping with the COVID-19 global economic recessionary trends, this study found that the libraries were able to cope with the COVID-19 global economic recessionary trends. They did this by downsizing library activities, reducing budget, reducing conference and seminar attendance, abandoning of ICT projects, reducing acquisition, and reducing dispensable services. *European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations* (2020) advised that to meet up with financial obligations during recession, items in the library budgets with inelastic characteristics such as building maintenance, labor and resources apportioned to operations to procure digital resources have to be re-adjusted. More so, given the inflationary trend in the year 2023, coupled with the devaluation of the Nigerian currency as well as the increase in exchange rates, the Nigerian economy is experiencing a soaring intensity of fiscal turbulence which is diminishing the ability of the government to fund government agencies, particularly in the educational sector. As such, libraries have to make tremendous adjustment in their budget to cope with the COVID-19 global economic recessionary trends.

This study found that the university libraries' opening hours were reduced during the pandemic period. Also, reference services were performed, meetings were cancelled, there was indefinite closure of the library, training/conferences were cancelled, and there was cancellation of local and international travels. Nonetheless, the study equally found that the university libraries' operation during the COVID-19 pandemic period did not involve provision of access to library repositories, delivery of online services, provision of collection on health crises emergencies, attending online classes during the pandemic, online answering of library users' request, provision of digital information sources/reference/information literacy sources, staff rotation, and extension of library opening hours. Meanwhile, Hansa (2020) claimed that there was no collective information on library operations during the COVID-19 time. The findings of this study regarding the operations of the libraries are in line with that of American Library Association (2020) which surveyed the public library community to know the impacts the COVID-19 pandemic had on their operations, staffing programs, and services, and found that most libraries reported building closure during the period. However, the findings are not in compliance with those of Jaskowska (2020) who investigated the operation of Polish academic

libraries during the COVID-19 lockdown and found that the majority of academic libraries in Poland provided information and library services during the lockdown, though to a limited extent, and that very few of the libraries investigated were completely closed to the readers but were still providing online services.

Conclusion

This study explored library leadership, global economic recession and university libraries' response to the COVID-19 in South-south, Nigeria. The study concluded that democratic, transformational and transactional leadership styles are suitable in managing libraries, while autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles portend danger to libraries. Even though libraries are conservative in nature, the current global economic recession and COVID-19 pandemic that have ravaged the world necessitate the adoption and use of transformational and democratic leadership styles which are considered flexible and visionary in nature. As such, librarians and libraries must adhere to leadership styles that can offer positive and pragmatic results during the COVID-19 pandemic period. During the period, the university libraries' opening hours were reduced and meetings were cancelled in response to the scourge of the pandemic. In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. University management should, as a matter of urgency, make librarians to be more responsive during emergencies since the level of global economic recession to Covid-19 was low.
2. The university management in south-south Nigeria should make provision for access to libraries repositories, online awareness campaign, provision of emergency e-mails, online services delivery and online answering of library users' request.
3. There should be an improvement in the global economic recession as that may increase university libraries response to COVID-19.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the intellectual discussion underlying this paper, literature exploration, writing, reviews, and editing.

Data Availability Statement

Data available on request from the authors.

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Ethical considerations

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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