

THE LIBRARY IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD: REPOSITIONING LIBRARY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES AMONG HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (HEIS)

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Abstract

Libraries are changing. Library leaders envision the library of the future as a hybrid institution that seamlessly integrates both digital and physical book collections. This reflects a shift towards a more user-centered approach, where libraries cater to the evolving preferences of patrons who value access to information in both traditional and digital formats. The study is aimed at describing the various strategies of academic libraries in repositioning their programs and services in a post-pandemic environment. The study utilized the qualitative research design particularly thematic analysis by Clarke and Braun. In qualitative research, thematic analysis (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) is a method for identifying and analyzing recurring patterns or themes within data. In this particularly study, thematic analysis was used to describe the strategies and challenges that academic libraries experience in repositioning their programs and services in the midst of a pandemic with the view of suggesting measures on how to redesign library programs and services into a post-pandemic environment. Including all Central Luzon Digital Library Consortium members in the study minimizes margin of error, enabling population characteristic inferences. Data gathered have been analyzed using the thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) which involves six phases.

Keywords: *Libraries, library programs, library services, higher educational institutions, thematic analysis*

Introduction

Libraries play a critical role in national development by serving as engines of education and social progress (World Bank, 2023). As central learning hubs, they offer a diverse collection of resources in various formats to cater to the curricular, instructional, and information needs of students, faculty, and researchers (American Library Association, 2024).

The American Library Association (2024) defines a library as a curated collection of resources, organized by information professionals. These professionals ensure convenient access (physical, digital, bibliographic, or intellectual) and provide targeted services and programs designed to educate, inform, or entertain diverse audiences. Ultimately, libraries serve the dual mission of fostering individual learning and propelling societal advancement (UNESCO, 2023).

In today's information landscape, libraries serve as essential hubs for curated resources, meticulously organized by information professionals (American Library Association, 2024). These resources exist in various formats, ensuring convenient physical, digital, bibliographic, or intellectual access for users. Beyond access, libraries offer targeted services and programs designed to educate, inform, or entertain diverse audiences (UNESCO, 2023). Ultimately, libraries play a transformative role, fostering individual learning and propelling societal progress.

Libraries are not static entities. Ezeala (2018) emphasizes that libraries must continuously innovate and reinvent themselves to stay relevant. Innovation entails introducing new ideas or methods, while reinvention involves presenting existing services in fresh formats.

The Lyon Declaration (2019) emphasizes the power of information access in empowering individuals. Libraries play a crucial role in equipping users with valuable skills like information searching, web design, and data entry. These skills enable users to make informed decisions, actively participate in society, and contribute to solutions for development challenges. Additionally, libraries promote transparency, good governance, and progress tracking towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

For instance, Sustainable Development Goal Four emphasizes quality education. Libraries support this goal by offering early literacy programs, lifelong learning opportunities, and equitable access to information and research resources (United Nations, 2023).

S.R. Ranganathan, the "father of library science," famously stated that libraries are "growing organisms" (Rubin, 2016). This aligns with Cassell's (1999) observation that libraries are constantly evolving. Reinvention is paramount for libraries to thrive in a dynamic environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted higher education, including student learning practices. The shift to online lectures, library closures, and altered communication channels necessitated adjustments in teaching styles, assessments, workloads, and student performance (Aristovnik et al., 2020). This new normal compels libraries to adapt their programs and services to meet the evolving needs of higher education institutions (HEIs) in a post-pandemic world.

It is for this reason that the researchers felt the need to study how academic libraries reposition their programs and services in response to the global crisis and describe the issues and challenges they experienced in the delivery of library services amidst the pandemic for sustainability.

Statement of the Problem

The study aims to describe can academic libraries best reposition their programs and services to meet the evolving needs of higher education institutions (HEIs) in a post-pandemic world.

Method

Research Design. This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically thematic analysis informed by the framework of Creswell and Plano-Clark (2018). This framework was chosen due to its emphasis on identifying recurring themes within data, which aligns with our objective of understanding librarians' experiences and strategies. The study utilized semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth data from participants.

Participants. Seven (7) librarians working at member institutions of the Central Luzon Digital Library Consortium were chosen to participate in the study. The researcher selected librarians with diverse roles and experience levels to capture a broad range of perspectives.

Instrumentation. An interview guide containing open-ended and probing questions was developed to explore the strategies and challenges faced by academic libraries in repositioning programs and services during the pandemic. The interview guide was validated by two experts: a library and information science (LIS) professor from an international university and a library administrator. Their feedback ensured the clarity and relevance of the questions.

Data Gathering Procedure. The interview guide was used to conduct semi-structured interviews with the participants. Interviews were conducted online and over the phone depending on participant preference.

Data Analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview data. Recordings were transcribed verbatim. Codes were then grouped into emergent themes that captured the librarians' experiences and insights.

Ethical Considerations. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, emphasizing the voluntary nature of their participation and confidentiality of their responses. Participant names will not be disclosed in any publications.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the themes emerged from the participants' responses highlighting their experience in repositioning their programs and services as well as the issues and challenges in delivering library programs and services during the pandemic.

Responsive Programs Promote Library Sustainability. The need to make the library programs and services relevant and responsive to the needs of the academic community has been emerged. Librarians need to think of ways on how to transform their services that will cater to the needs of the clients they serve either virtually or remotely especially the students and faculty members.

A key principle for library services is to cater to user needs, as emphasized by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2009). This allows libraries to adapt and remain relevant.

P1's quote exemplifies this principle. Rephrase it for better readability:

Librarian P1 demonstrates this approach by actively reaching out to students. They created and maintain a Facebook page to keep students informed about library resources and availability.

I made a Facebook page and keep it updated for the students to know that I am [and the library is] available. I also gave them my contact details in case they need to ask me o their academic needs". (P1)

"You need to shift from print to online since there is no face to face classes/services." (P2)

"I was pressured and surprised because we have to adjust our budget and the collection." (P3)

"Challenging in delivering service to the clientele." (P4)

"You need to strategize and think of ways on how to respond to the challenges brought by the pandemic" (P5)

"In terms of accessibility, [the library] needs to acquire a system that will make its collection accessible remotely. As to library service, [you] need to exert effort on how to reach your clients and need to promote services online. " (P6)

To ensure long-term viability, academic libraries must prioritize sustainability and remain a core component of the academic landscape (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2023). Librarians can achieve this by developing their own sustainability metrics or adopting existing ones from other university departments.

Aligning library services with user needs is crucial for repositioning libraries in the current landscape (American Library Association, 2024). Proactive library services necessitate a thorough evaluation of existing resources, user demands, and future trends.

Library Adaptability Builds a Culture of Positivity. Despite the challenges brought by the pandemic, librarians see a lot of opportunities on how to make their library adapt into the new normal. With a strong support of the school administration, librarians hope that the challenges they have experienced will be properly addressed.

"The administration needs to be supportive." (P1, P2, P5)

"These are the challenges: we have this no work modality, some of my staff resigned, manpower is limited and the collection, low productivity or accomplishment due to the imposed quarantine schedules." (P3)

"The challenges are the Internet connection, power interruption, adjusting of clients and staff in the new platform." (P4)

"We have limited time, staff, operation and services. Virtual or online collections are limited because our budget is also limited since the library fees were adjusted by 50% so we cannot afford to purchase more digital collection at this time of pandemic..." (P7)

Hybridization and Proactivity as the New Norm. Hybridization of library collections and proactive programs and services become the new norm in a post-pandemic world. Many libraries are seen to be providing more digitized content especially to students, who are considered digital citizens, and other clients who are digital migrants, while maintaining their traditional services with limitations.

"Maybe most libraries are digitized in forms and materials." (P1)

"With the strong support of the administration, the library can become a digital library with no boundaries." (P4)

"The roles of the libraries in to continue providing services either digital or physical." (P5)

A key factor in library transformation is a clear vision for its future positioning. Yoo-Seong's (2012) model, introduced at the 2005 IFLA Management and Marketing Section satellite meeting, offers a framework for libraries to consider. This model outlines four positioning strategies:

- Proactive Partner: This quadrant represents libraries actively collaborating and building relationships with users and stakeholders.
- Proactive Provider: Here, libraries take a proactive approach in developing and offering services tailored to user needs, with less emphasis on collaboration.
- Reactive Partner: This strategy focuses on collaborating with users when approached, but may not actively seek out partnerships.
- Reactive Provider: This quadrant represents libraries primarily responding to user needs as they arise, with limited proactive service development.

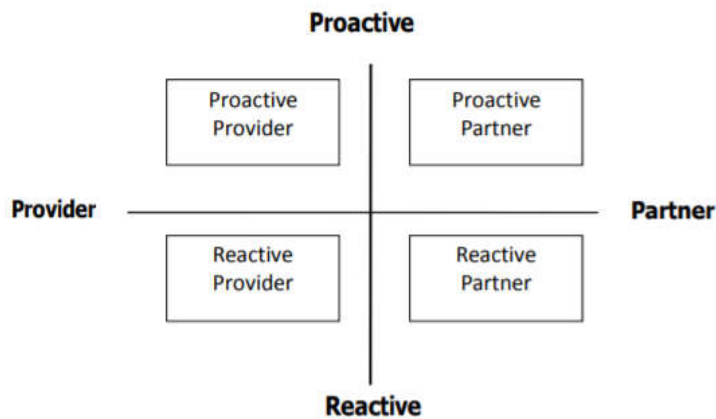


Figure 1. Yoo-Seong's Library Positioning Model

The library in a post-pandemic world is seen to be more of a proactive collaborator, partner and provider particularly in communicating its value and providing relevant and responsive programs and services consistently. In creating a value proposition, Yoo-Seong pointed that the library's strategic direction are expertise-based service and proactive partner.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Library responsiveness and adaptability require continuous improvement and rethinking. Creativity and innovation play an important role in maintaining and advocating for library relevance. Hybridization of library collections and proactive programs and services become the new norm in a post-pandemic world and will continue to flourish. The presence of the library is appreciated based on how librarians perform their role.

Librarians should continuously look for various ways to provide proactive library programs and services in the new normal such as, but not limited to, library virtual assistance, creation and curation of open educational resources (OERs), online tutorial, and research assistance. School administrators should provide direction and strong support to library sustainability initiatives that contribute to the effective and efficient delivery of relevant and responsive programs and services.

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