



BRIDGING THE GAP: STORIES OF LIBRARIANS IN BRINGING LIBRARIES INTO USERS DOORSTEPS AMIDST COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

The enormous impact of the COVID-19 pandemic brought immense changes to the library and information services. Hence, this phenomenological qualitative study aimed to discover the stories of academic librarians in bringing the libraries into users' doorsteps amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers employed Key Informant Interview (KII) to ten (10) academic librarians from Davao del Sur in order to capture the challenges they encountered and the strategies they employed in providing library services to the library users during the pandemic. Results revealed that academic librarians faced challenges such as difficulty in library promotion and marketing, and adjustments to the new work roles. However, they still managed to cope with these challenges through attending webinars and online trainings, implementing new services, bringing libraries into user's doorsteps, and embracing change and being resilient. Based on the findings, it is highly recommended that school administrators should provide adequate support for their academic librarians' training, mental and emotional well-being to help them in continually performing their functions as well as their new work roles during the pandemic.

KEYWORDS: *Library and Information Science, Academic Libraries, Librarians, Challenges and Strategies, COVID-19 Pandemic, Phenomenological, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries established in institutions are the core sources of information for various types of library users. The information seekers belonging to any discipline of education rely so much on libraries to obtain the most appropriate and most reliable sources of information. Thus, the library acts as a bridge as it connects people and information. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, academic libraries, as part of the higher education institutions, faced various difficult situations ranging from minimal restrictions to full closure (De Groote & Scoulas, 2021; Fasae et al., 2020; The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA], 2020; Pearson, 2020; Tsekea & Josiline, 2021). Nonetheless, libraries and librarians must continue to support research, provide learning resources, and bring information to the users even amidst the pandemic (IFLA, 2020; Tsekea & Josiline, 2021). As a result, the roles of academic libraries have shifted in response to the changing needs of the library users (Devan & Tripathi, 2021; Gerbig et al., 2021; Kaba, 2021), posing varied challenges for academic librarians.

Several pieces of evidence have shown that library professionals were having difficulty in responding to the users' shifting information needs during the pandemic. In the United States, a study's findings revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic caused a dramatic decrease in library utilization, which posed a concern to academic librarians (De Groote & Scoulas, 2021). In Canada,

academic librarians struggled with the transition due to increased workload, steep learning curves, and increased need for flexible service hours (Gerbig et al., 2021). Moreover, a study conducted in Zimbabwe revealed that academic librarians were challenged in supporting e-learning during the pandemic due to the work from home arrangement and lack of internet connectivity to get in touch with patrons (Tsekea & Josiline, 2021). Furthermore, academic librarians in India faced challenges in providing online library services during the pandemic due to library users' lack of technological knowledge, unreliable internet connection and outdated systems and smart phones (Devan & Tripathi, 2021). In addition, in the Philippines as a developing country also experienced the same predicament (Angara, 2020; Delgado, 2020; Fresnido & Esposito-Betan, 2022). In Mindanao, particularly in Davao del Sur, it was observed that academic librarians struggled in providing library services during the pandemic due to work from home arrangement, increased workload (both in library and teaching tasks), and lack of technological facilities. These pieces of evidence confirmed that providing library resources and services amidst COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenge for librarians all over the world.

Despite the challenges that academic librarians experienced, they continually do their best in responding to the diverse information needs of the users during the pandemic. They invested their time and effort in updating websites to cater the new users' demands



(Awasthi et al., 2021; Chiderah & Iroze, 2021; Fresnido & Esposito-Betan, 2022; Kaur & Mahajan, 2020; Markovic, 2020). They began offering more online library services (Awasthi et al., 2021; Guo et al., 2021; Johnson, 2020; Kaur & Mahajan, 2020; Wang & Lund, 2020). Furthermore, they have also provided book and document deliveries to their library stakeholders (Awasthi et al., 2021; Connell et al., 2021; Fresnido & Esposito-Betan, 2022; Guo et al., 2021; Wang & Lund, 2020). These are some of the strategies that academic librarians have implemented in bringing their libraries to the library users during the health crisis era.

Apparently, several researches on academic librarians' challenges and strategies in providing library services amidst COVID-19 pandemic were conducted globally. However, these researches only reported the challenges and strategies that were relevant to their country's economic situation and university's capabilities. Moreover, no research has been conducted in the locality which addresses the challenges and strategies of academic librarians during the pandemic; thus, this study came into light to document the new and unique experiences of Filipino academic librarians in Davao del Sur while providing library services at the onset of COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the generated stories would then serve as reference when similar crises arise in the future.

Moreover, this study would be very useful as this would generate relevant information for Higher Education Institution (HEI) administrators to create programs beneficial for academic librarians, specifically in supporting their new plans and initiatives, as well as in enhancing their knowledge and skills to continually respond the evolving needs of the library users. In addition, this study would raise awareness among stakeholders on the continuous efforts of academic librarians in providing different library programs and services during the toughest time. Lastly, this study would serve as an inspiration to fellow librarians to be resilient and innovative in bridging the gap between information and users in the midst of uncertainties.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses related studies on the challenges and strategies of academic librarians in providing services to the library users amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. It comprises ample sources both from local and foreign literature which serve as background and basis for this research inquiry. The themes included in this discussion are the challenges of academic librarians and the strategies they employed in bringing libraries into user's doorsteps in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Challenges of Librarians in Bringing Libraries into User's Doorsteps in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on all educational institutions around the globe. Many schools, colleges and universities were completely closed due to COVID-19 lockdowns (Asimah, et al., 2021; Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, 2020; Tsekea & Josiline, 2021; UNICEF, 2021). In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED)

announced that schools and universities will no longer compel students to attend face-to-face classes (CNN Philippines Staff, 2020). According to the World Economic Forum, the closure of schools and universities in response to the COVID-19 has impacted 70% of the world population (Adoteyi, 2020). Thus, it has adverse effects on the teaching and learning activities of schools, universities and colleges (Aamir, 2022; Asimah, et al., 2021). Due to the sudden lockdowns, educational institutions are racing to shift their teaching and learning activities online (Smalley, 2021). In turn, it negatively affected many students, lecturers, researchers and other users of libraries (Aung & Khaing, 2015). Students are resorting to the use of digital libraries resources and researchers are also drawing chiefly on electronic resources for their research work, thereby making libraries to change their mode of operations (physical to electronic) (Tannaro, 2020).

Libraries, which have always been spaces for discovery and learning, are not exempted from the effects brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, it has made a profound impact on the library community (Delgado, 2020). According to International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the coronavirus outbreak has affected libraries all over the world (Aamir, 2022; Asimah, et al., 2021). Hence, it compelled libraries to close its physical premises and focus on digital services (IFLA, 2020; Tsekea & Josiline, 2021). Some libraries had to undergo complete shut down while others were operating with minimal services provided to end users in order to prevent transmission of the virus (Samanta, 2020).

Because of the changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries are in the process of transforming its operations and repurposing certain design features to address the new normal (Markovic, 2020). Hence, all types of libraries have implemented major changes in their operations in response to the health crisis beyond anything seen in recent history (IFLA, 2021). However, because the outbreak struck swiftly, there was little time to improve technological systems in order for librarians to carry out their work under fundamentally new operational assumptions (Wang & Lund, 2020). In fact, Adoteyi (2020) explained that despite the infrastructure unreadiness of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Africa, the sector was compelled to move onto online and prepare for a world where COVID-19 or other similar disasters may occur. With these in mind, libraries had to seek ways to supplement at least some services in a purely digital form despite its limitations in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic (Asimah, et al., 2021).

The drastic changes brought by the pandemic greatly impacted academic librarians. Hence, the complete closure of libraries was an unexpected turn of event which brought various challenges to the academic librarians specifically on the provision of services to the library users. Some of these challenges include disrupted habitual working patterns, technological problems, and decreased utilization of the library. Each of these challenges is discussed below.



Disrupted habitual working patterns. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to the work from home set up of workers. In fact, stay and work from home were enforced all around the world (Ayittey et al., 2020). In a research conducted by Brynjolfsson et al. (2020), nearly 34% of workers in the USA, who were previously required to work at a physical location, were now working from home. Also, in Saudi Arabia, educational institutions were advised to suspend academic activities and continue education through virtual learning (Al-Kadri et al., 2020; Tanveer et al., 2020). This unforeseen situation disrupted usual working patterns and prompted the necessity to implement alternative strategies using digital platforms. As a matter of fact, Tsekea and Josiline (2021) emphasized that the sudden change in work settings also affected developing nations in a way that employees working remotely have to use technology in order to stay in touch with their customers. However, according to Rysavy and Michalak (2020), there are often drawbacks to telecommuting compared to working at the office. They further explained that in order for remote working to succeed, companies must invest in technology to communicate effectively.

Moreover, Fernandez (2019) posited that the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated a crisis that can disrupt people's habitual patterns such that there is a need for embedded technologies to be used in novel ways as well as illuminating new ways to use overlooked technologies. Hence, transitioning from conventional face-to-face learning to online learning can be a different experience for the learners and the educators, which they must adjust to with little or no other choices accessible (Rodrigues & Mandrekar, 2021). Hence, this situation was specifically experienced by librarians. Since library facilities were closed, librarians continued to serve library users through the provision of virtual access to e-services via work from home set-up (Yu & Mani, 2020). According to Gerbig et al. (2021), the transition caused by the pandemic challenged librarians specifically in learning to use virtual reference tools and conducting reference interviews over chat or email. Moreover, Tsekea and Josiline (2021) opined that providing digital services to the library users when physical library is closed entails lots of work. Thus, the work from home set-up, as well as the transition of library services from traditional to digital platforms disrupted the usual working ways and patterns of librarians.

Technological problems. Because of the digital library services that were offered during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, several technological problems were faced by academic librarians in providing library services to their clientele. These technological problems include unreliable technology (Tsekea & Chigwada, 2021). Moreover, the limited bandwidth and power outage hinder the progress of e-learning and development of digital libraries in developing countries (Eke, 2010). Apart from these, the lack of resources and technical expertise are also some of the challenges that contribute to various technological issues (Eke, 2010; Sharifabadi, 2006). Moreover, findings from the study of Tsekea and Josiline (2021) revealed that librarians faced

a number of technological concerns such as the lack of internet connection at home, negative attitude by the community in using technology, lack of technical knowhow on using digital libraries, connectivity challenges with the servers, and expensive data charges. Ezeani and Igwesi (2012) also opined that when it comes to technological applications such as social media, librarians experienced bandwidth constraints, inadequate ICT facilities, poor internet access, lack of ICT skills, and lack of knowledge. This finding also corroborated with the study of Chewe et al. (2020) where it was revealed that academic librarians experienced network problem, poor connection, and low bandwidth. They further noted that academic librarians also lack social media literacy skills, lack of clear policy on social media implementation, and negativity towards the use of social media.

Decreased utilization of the library and its resources. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, academic librarians experienced a decreased utilization of library resources and services (Islam et al., 2015). Findings from the study of Aamir et al. (2022) revealed that there is a decline of usage in library services (printing, scanning, and photocopy facilities, interlibrary loan) and facilities (computer workstations, group study) due to the closure and unavailability of such services and facilities in order to curb the spread of the corona virus. Moreover, De Groote and Scoulas (2021) also reported that the closure of libraries during the pandemic resulted in limited utilization of printed textbooks, book borrowing and inter-library loan.

Adding on, most schools in the community are suffering from a lack of learning materials (Tety, 2016). Moreover, Beltran et al. (2019) stated that the utilization of printed academic books in the university library is slowly decreasing due to the pandemic. Furthermore, the students were just going to the library for digital use because students are not satisfied with the materials for their subjects because these learning materials do not have enough copies in the library (Ayolugbe, Ikuelogbon & Odo, 2019; Enidiok, Bassey & Babatunde, 2018; Tiemo & Ateboh, 2016). Moreover, some reason of low utilization was printed materials are outdated, weeding the library materials is needed and the library has different areas of library holdings to meet the needs of the users (Flaherty & Kaplan, 2016; Omallah, Maina, & Wamalwa, 2016).

Literatures reveal that libraries around the world are facing different difficulties and challenges in providing library services amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Libraries with existing online services and facilities were able to cope up with the pandemic by strengthening and adding more online resources and services. While other libraries in non-developed countries like the Philippines were toughly challenged with their poor ICT infrastructure and electronic resources that are needed to accommodate their clients in the digital platforms. The unprecedented crisis created abrupt changes to the usual library services and stretched out the capabilities and skills of librarians. The challenges were mainly towards the efficient use of technologies and the collection of e-resources. These are



concerns that are not yet flourished by many libraries. Despite the challenges, somehow they opened the door for librarians to learn and be more equipped with the use of technologies. These have actually helped librarians prepare and build their libraries for the digital world.

Strategies of Librarians in Bringing Libraries into User's Doorsteps in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic made drastic changes to the way academic libraries provide resources and services to its clientele. Hence, this catastrophic event paved way for the academic librarians to innovate and re-create in order to continuously deliver effective and quality information services to library stakeholders. As a matter of fact, many academic libraries around the world have been providing services even before the outbreak but are currently expanding and strengthening their presence to better serve their users through innovative services (Johnson, 2020). And many of them actually have showed agility, resilience, and innovativeness in rendering services amidst the pandemic (Calvert, 2020; Tsekea & Josiline, 2021).

With these in mind, academic librarians have implemented several strategies in delivering library services in the new normal. These strategies are the (1) provision of digital libraries; (2) provision of book borrowing services through pick-up and delivery; and (3) provision of library services through online and social networking platforms. Each of these strategies is discussed below.

Provision of Digital Libraries and Services. Libraries have transformed into spaces where users can connect to knowledge and information digitally rather than physically (Yuvaraj, 2020). According to Breeding (2020), academic libraries easily transform into all-digital services because they already have high proportions in electronic resources and facilities. Hence, various online facilities are delivered through digital library platforms to the faculty, staff, students and researchers including the provision of e-books, e-reference, e-journal access, document delivery, literature search, systematic reviews, research database, and online public access catalogue (OPAC) (Umukoro & Tiamiyu, 2017). Moreover, a study of Aamir, et al. (2022) revealed that librarians provided high proportions of electronic and digital collections to resources to support faculty, students, staff and researchers.

Most of the libraries in the United States have implemented digital libraries resources in order to deal with the new normal. For example, librarians at Penn State University are licensing more e-books and providing online access to course reserves materials (IFLA, 2020). Also, they assist instructors in finding textbook alternatives with the use of electronic databases and open educational resources (OER) (Penn State Libraries, 2020). In addition, research also revealed that libraries in Mumbai, India provided access to various electronic resources, online circulation, online research aid, and other library promotional activities (Chavan, 2020). Moreover, in the Philippines, a study

conducted by Fresnido and Esposito-Betan (2022) revealed that librarians provided their clientele extensive online services such as the provision of virtual library orientation or information literacy sessions and provision of e-reference services. As a matter of fact, academic librarians from Ateneo de Manila University (Santos, 2020) and Adamson University (Bundoc, 2020) showed how they turned the challenges brought by the pandemic into opportunities. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic does not hinder them to continue to serve their faculty and students. In fact, they provided onsite and offsite services such as online reference services, webinars, access to databases and learning resources, in-house digitization, indexing, finding aids and archival documents (Delgado, 2020). Ergo, the presence of e-libraries, electronic materials and database in library's collections became an advantage during the pandemic and the librarians responded quickly by providing electronic resources to the end users (Aamir, 2022).

Provision of book borrowing services through pick-up and delivery. The outbreak of the coronavirus did not prevent librarians from making their collections available to the users. Hence, it encouraged them to strengthen their book borrowing services even further. In fact, a university library in Mexico permitted users to request for physical books and pick them up at the library's entrance following safety health protocols such as physical distancing, minimal contact with the borrowers, as well as having scheduled specific time for pick-ups (University libraries, 2020). Also, the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in Christiansburg, Virginia, partnered with the first commercial drone delivery service in the United States, allowing students to check out books through the school system's library catalog, which are then delivered to their homes via drone (Johnson, 2020).

Thus, this made them the first in the world to deliver books via drone (Ford, 2020). In addition, some of the libraries in Netherlands adopted the click-and-collect or drive-through services to minimize direct contact while other libraries offered facilities by appointments (Jan & Ali, 2020). Moreover, in the Philippines, 39.75% of libraries even went out of their way to deliver books that students and faculty wanted to borrow (Fresnido & Esposito-Betan, 2022). Hence, this proved that amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, borrowing of books still continues to be a sought out service by the library users.

Provision of library services through online and social networking platforms. Studies have shown that academic libraries globally are increasingly adopting a multiplicity of social media apps to design services that allow them to enhance their communication, interaction and collaboration (Tripathi & Kumar, 2010; Onuoha, 2013). This shows that libraries around the world have been innovative and creative in using technology and social media tools in order to provide services during time of pandemic. In fact, a study conducted by Tsekea and Josiline (2021) revealed that in order to support e-learning during the COVID-19 lockdown, librarians used various tools such as library websites,



email lists, blogs; social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype, Twitter, and YouTube; and digital library and other learning management platforms. Also, academic libraries in Zambia are also increasingly incorporating social media to enhance their service delivery (Chewe, et al., 2020).

Furthermore, in Ann Arbor District Library, librarians continued to provide assistance through phone calls, emails, and online platforms, as well as market their library through social media like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Guevara, 2020). Similarly, New York City public libraries used social networking sites like Twitter to post library announcements, library service updates, details of remote library services, book and reading suggestions, events and other happenings, and COVID-19 news, hence, providing support to people in various aspects of life (Alajmi & Albudaiwi, 2020). Also, the OLD Dominion University (ODU) library in Virginia have scanned printed items and transmitted them to clients via email (Cox, 2020). Teachers are also provided with a list of references for respective subjects through email (Hoyt, 2020).

In addition, libraries in Europe have also designed the same strategies for their respective patrons, such that in Italy, where libraries adopted innovative services, including answering phone calls, video conferencing with clients, and communicating with them on social media (Tammara, 2020). Moreover, through the Microsoft Teams, the library staff at King's College in London provided guidance and bookable individual support sessions to academic personnel through skills training sessions using Zoom app and Teams (McCann, 2020). Apart from these, Universities in Assam, India also used social media to cope with the pandemic's effects on their libraries (Singh, 2020). In fact, according to research, 75% of university libraries in India used social media to provide reference services, 100% gave access to electronic resources, 50% utilized Facebook and blogs, 25% used Twitter and other social media platforms, and 100% used WhatsApp (Neog, 2020).

Moreover, in the Philippines, several libraries are also providing services via social media, instant messaging, email, websites, and other digital platforms (Delgado, 2020). The UP Diliman University Library, for instance, has been able to provide their community with guides to new normal library services and access to resources which are posted in their updated website. Another example is the Miguel de Benavides Library of the University of Santo Tomas, which has never stopped operating and providing various online library services (Angara, 2020). Adamson University library also rendered online services through e-mail and social media and provided flexible learning services like online tutorials on referencing and citation. The University of the Philippines Los Baños library provides as well a unique service which is the virtual front door dubbed ELVA, which stands for Electronic Library Virtual Assistant. Additionally, libraries in Mindanao, the Philippines' southernmost region, have established a variety of online services for students and teachers. For example, the University of Southeastern Philippines (USEP)

Library has used social media to create infographics on electronic resource access procedures, sent emails with library guides to electronic resources, consolidated and shared free links or databases from reputable service providers, provided access to the Online Public Access Catalog through their website, responded to queries via messenger or e-mail, and facilitated webinars to support educational needs (Nugas, 2020).

The various strategies and initiatives presented had demonstrated academic librarians' resiliency and adaptability in delivering both traditional and online services, most particularly in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, it proves that academic librarians have transformed themselves by bringing the library to their customers using different technological platforms in order to deliver effective, excellent, and quality services to their patrons. And it is worth noting that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, academic librarians remain committed to elevating the library's role in the community (Cleveland, 2020), thus, transforming people's perceptions of libraries and what they symbolize in the new normal (Braun, 2020).

Therefore, the ample literature and studies presented provide the researchers rich information which helped them established the topics being studied. It also deepened their understanding on the different challenges and strategies of academic librarians in providing library service amidst the COVID-19 pandemic; thus, strongly supporting the findings of this phenomenological qualitative inquiry.

THEORETICAL LENS

This study was viewed and explained through the lens of the Organizational Resilience theory by Mallak (1999) and Change Management Theory by Lewin (1959).

The Organizational resilience theory (Mallak, 1999) described as the organization's ability to "resist adverse situations and/or the ability to recover after disturbances and return to a normal state" (Horne, 1997; Horne & Orr, 1998; Robert, 2010). It is a concept of embracing, managing and responding to organizational changes. Moreover, it is the power of organizational units to endure, resume, recover, or positively adjust to catastrophic events (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003). In the context of this study, the adverse situation or disturbance that the organizations encountered is the COVID-19 pandemic. It is undeniable that the impact of the COVID-19 on business/schools' operations and finances was profound. In this sense, this theory explains how the academic library, as one of the organizational units, faced difficulties in continuing its operations and performing its functions in the midst of disruptions. Hence, these challenges urged the academic librarians to unleash their capability in implementing adaptive measures and behaviors that would respond to the current situation. Therefore, this theory is useful in understanding the academic librarians' capability and resiliency as they continue performing their duties and responsibilities, specifically their new work role of bringing the library services to their users' doorsteps amidst the pandemic.



Further, this study could be viewed through the lens of the Lewin's Change Management Theory (1959). This theory aims to understand why change occurs and what must be done to deliver change in the most seamless manner as possible. Also, this theory aims to demonstrate how people react when they face changes in their lives. This theory has three stages: unfreezing (the person has an existing state), moving or changing toward new ways of being, and then refreezing into a new state entirely (Aktas, 2021). In view of this study, academic librarians have their unfreezing/existing state in terms of their work functions and roles, specifically the process of delivering information and services to the users. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, most of these functions/roles were halted; hence, academic librarians need to undergo several changes. In the technical aspect, they need to change their old way of providing library services into something relevant and innovative in response to the new users' demands or needs. Apart from that, in their personal aspect, they must also move, adapt, and reinvent themselves to keep abreast with the societal changes brought by the pandemic. In the course of these changes, academic librarians may face various challenges, ranging from discomfort to uncertainty. Nonetheless, if they would be resilient and willing to accept and embrace the changes, they would be able to refreeze into a new state.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the stories of academic librarians in bringing libraries into users' doorsteps in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in Davao del Sur.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This phenomenological study would like to discover new ideas and knowledge on the stories of academic librarians in bringing libraries into users' doorsteps in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in Davao del Sur. Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges of academic librarians in bringing libraries into the user's doorsteps in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the strategies of academic librarians in bringing libraries into user's doorsteps in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic?

METHODS

The study employed a qualitative design using phenomenological descriptive tradition. According to Creswell (2022), phenomenological research involves understanding of the participants' lived experiences regarding the phenomenon being studied. Typically, interviews were conducted with a group of individuals who have first-hand knowledge of an event, situation or experience (Creswell, 2017). Phenomenology is the most appropriate approach to use because the researchers want to understand the lived experiences of the librarians in the private

sectarian and non-sectarian Higher Educational Institutions in the Province of Davao del Sur with regard to their challenges, and strategies in bringing libraries into the user's doorsteps in the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic. The participants for this study were 10 professional librarians from the private sectarian and non-sectarian Higher Educational Institutions in the Province of Davao del Sur. The librarians-participants were managing their libraries for the past 12 months during the time of COVID-19 pandemic. The 10 participants were invited for the in-depth interview (IDI). According to Creswell (2017) a homogenous group may vary in size from three to four individuals to 10 to 15. The following criteria were set: each participant must be a full-time librarian in the private sectarian and non-sectarian Higher Educational Institution; have at least active two years of experience in managing the libraries; and have provided the different programs and services of the libraries within the last 12 months during the COVID-19 pandemic. Excluded to participate in the study were those para-professional staff and librarians having an experience of one year and below.

Furthermore, we observed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to ensure the qualitative study's trustworthiness (Morse et al., 2002), to address the research's validity to check if the findings are accurate from the researcher's standpoint, the participant, or the readers (Creswell, 2014). Adding on, qualitative researchers depend upon access to data, which may involve people cooperating in various ways (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). Thus, we considered the ethical implications of any decisions we made, along with various constraints surrounding the research undertaking (Punch & Oancea, 2014). In conducting the key informant interviews, we ensured that the key informants voluntarily participated in the interview and assured that their identities would be kept confidential. An informed consent and codes were used to conceal the identity of the research participants. This is in the observance of the provisions of the Republic Act 10173 or the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Official Gazette, 2012), which emphasizes that personal data gathered must be for a declared, specified, and legitimate purpose. Thus, only the information collected based on the interview protocol and the significant responses from the research guide questions were utilized in presenting the study results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study results are presented in two (2) parts: the academic librarians' challenges in providing library services in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and its emerging themes, and their strategies to address the challenges in providing library programs and services. There were two (2) emerging themes on the academic librarian's challenges in providing library services, and three (3) on their strategies in rendering library services amidst trying times.



The challenges of libraries and librarians in providing programs and services in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic

When participants were asked about the challenges that they have encountered in implementing programs and providing library services during the pandemic within the private sectarian and non-sectarian HEIs in Davao del Sur, two themes emerged: difficulty in library promotion and marketing, and adjustments to new work roles.

Challenges in library promotion and marketing. One of the challenges that academic librarians primarily experienced in library promotion and marketing was how to reach out to library clients to effectively cater to their information needs during the pandemic. Librarians needed to plan and decide on what services to be offered during the pandemic where there are no face-to-face interactions with the students. As one participant said: *“Our struggle is how to reach out our clients and use social media especially the students since we are used to serve them physically.”* (PA7, Q1.2). In addition, one reason why librarians struggled in promoting their libraries is that they were trying to adjust with the situation, since they were used to see many students coming to the library before the pandemic struck. Another participant added: *“For me, nakakapanibago po kasi noong wala pang pandemic, I am used to seeing students come and go to the library; they even come as one whole class pa nga. That’s why we’d been thinking paano pa rin namin magagawang i-reach out yung mga students ngayong may pandemic.”* (PA5, Q1.1) (For me, I am trying to adjust with the new situation, since I am used to seeing plenty of students coming to the library before the pandemic. With this, we are trying our best to make solutions in reaching out the students during this pandemic).

Moreover, since students had shifted to distance learning, they would be relying mostly on online resources aside from learning modules. Because of this shift in learning modality, librarians were concerned how they would provide their library services to students, especially those living in areas with no internet connection. One participant commented: *“How we can reach out to our clientele since most of them don’t have internet connection and how are we going to cater and provide the library services without face to face.”* (PA2, Q1.1) Another participant added that they have difficulty in reaching out to students in far-flung areas to let them know about the library services during the pandemic: *“Our struggles are how to effectively market the services and reach out students especially in the far-flung places.”* (PA4, Q1.2). On the other hand, libraries offering online services were also experiencing internet connectivity problems. Although academic librarians have seen the need to provide online services during the pandemic, they could not effectively deliver these services to their patrons due to unstable internet connection. As one participant commented: *The challenge is the internet connection since the services are delivered Online. With this, a strong and stable internet connection is needed.* (PA7, Q1.1)

Furthermore, academic librarians experienced lack of support from the institution in promoting new library services. Most of the participants shared that the school administration made budget cuts in library operations due to decline in student population, which had resulted to reduced periodical subscriptions and no library collection development. One of the participants related its implications: *“It changed the way we operate the library due to low internet connection that could not provide access to online resources,”* (PA6, Q1.2). Eventually, librarians felt lack of support from teachers in encouraging the students to avail of the library services during the pandemic; thus, the services were not fully utilized. PA4 mentioned: *“Lack of cooperation from the administration with regard to the new online services, especially to improve the internet connection to effectively provide online services. For example, the use of e-books, etc.”* (PA4, Q1.3)

Adjustments to new work roles. Academic institutions were not able to anticipate and prepare for changes in their operations when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. In effect, librarians were trying to keep their presence relevant to the institution through re-alignment of job functions. However, some of the tasks given to them were outside the scope of library work. For instance, one participant shared: *“The librarians struggled to find new ways in delivering services to clients, were assigned ample subjects to be taught and given a new area which is the module reproduction.”* (PA1, Q1.3). Another participant added: *“Librarians have struggle on how to provide remote services to clients.”* (PA2, Q1.3). Amidst trying times, librarians were challenged to be innovative in providing services to answer the information requests of clients. Because of limited face-to-face interactions, librarians felt the need to strengthen their online presence to effectively provide library services. However, librarians have experienced challenges in providing online library services, including lack of online library resources such as subscriptions of e-journals and e-books. One participant shared: *“The pressure is on the online services, since we are mandated to offer online services and programs, so that our services can still be felt by the users because they are paying the library fee for the provision of electronic books. Also, there is a need to increase the internet bandwidth for internet usage.”* (PA7, Q1.3)

Moreover, it has been common among academic librarians to create Facebook pages as a means of communication to their library patrons at the onset of COVID-19 pandemic. Through social media, librarians can also post updates and announcements regarding the library’s activities, thus promoting the library along the process. Librarians have shifted their role to social media administrators since they started using Facebook to communicate with patrons during the pandemic. Although Facebook is a familiar platform for library promotion, managing the library social media page is still a challenge because of some technical considerations such as making the posts more engaging to patrons while complying with the institution’s policies. According to one participant: *“Kailangan pa po namin i-explore yung mga technicalities like assigning page admins, how we can get more followers sa page, how can we make our posts engaging for our*



followers, at saka ano yung patakaran ng school when posting in the library FB page dahil hindi po sya basta-basta.” (PA5, Q1.1). (We need to explore the technicalities such as assigning page admins, how we can get more page followers, how can we make our posts engaging for our followers, and what are the school’s policies when posting in the library Facebook page.)

Also, librarians strive to strengthen their online presence by providing 24/7 online services. They would usually encounter patrons sending queries in accessing the library resources even beyond library hours. In effect, they had to adjust with their work by extending up to evening to accommodate users’ queries. One of the participants shared: “Challenge pud sa amua na kanang answering queries gud nga naa na gud ka sa inyong balay, diba kay kung normal lang, pag out og five wala na kaya no, pero pag kanang kini nga online bisag naa ka sa inyong balay, sa gabii nine, mag serve japon ka, murag 24/7 imong service.” (PA9, Q1.1) (It is a challenge for us to answer user queries beyond office hours, even if we are already at home; we still cater to their needs as if we are rendering 24/7 online services). Since the pandemic started, some librarians have adopted the work from home arrangement. Despite the perceived convenience, working at home is still a struggle for librarians because of their responsibility to extend their services beyond office hours. Another participant shared its implication in achieving work-life balance: “Isa rin pong challenges yun sa work from home kasi parang iba rin po kung mag araw-araw kang magtatrabaho kasi may case na 24/7 po ang aming online services, kahit na midnight pinipilit po naming sumagot sa aming mga client so yun po yung nagiging parang, ako po sa aking experience, nadating ako sa point na hindi ako nakakatulog pagdating ng twelve hanggang alas tres kaya nagigising na ako di na ako nakakatulog.” (PA8, Q1.1) (One of the challenges for me is the work from home scheme of the school. There was a case that even at midnight I answered the queries of my clients because 24/7 service is part of our responsibility and with that I was not able to go back to sleep anymore).

The shared responses of the participants reflected that alongside making the library’s presence known to patrons, academic librarians were also concerned on how they can provide effective and efficient library resources and services during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, librarians needed to adjust with the changes in the library service environment to cope with the challenges brought by the pandemic.

The strategies employed by libraries and librarians in providing programs and services in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic

When participants were asked about the strategies they have done in providing programs and library services, three themes emerged: attending webinars and trainings, bringing libraries into users’ doorsteps, and embracing change and being resilient.

Attending webinars and trainings. The COVID-19 pandemic has opened opportunities for librarians to pursue continuing

professional development by attending webinars. Through these online trainings, librarians learned new knowledge and skills while staying at home or at work. They also get ideas and strategies on providing effective library services during the pandemic, which can be applied in their respective workplaces. As one participant shared: “Attending webinars is a big help because librarians talk with each other and share ideas on how to cope with the pandemic, not just in the local scene but also abroad.” (PA7, Q3.4). Another participant noted that: “Library programs and services are heavy to carry and hard to take but, by benchmarking and attending webinars, you’ll find many concepts and ideas.” (PA1, Q3.2). Aside from webinars, librarians also learned from the best practices of other academic libraries in providing services during the pandemic through benchmarking with other institutions. Another participant added: “Kailangan namin i-apply yung mga natutunan naming new skills like assigning page admins, how we can get more followers sa page, how can we make our posts in social media” (PA5, Q1.1). (We need to apply our newly learned skills like assigning page admins, how to get more followers in our page, and how to make posts in social media).

Moreover, participants learned how to use various technology facilities in the library in delivering programs and services as well as for professional growth. They shared that: “We learned pod kanang answering queries through social media and use various technology like websites, etc, nga nakat-unan ra sad namo.” (PA7, Q3.4) (We learned how to administer social media and how to use various technologies in providing services in the new normal). Adding on, one participant noted that through webinars and online trainings, they learned many things and capacitated themselves and noted that these were very helpful for their professional growth. “Thru webinars, I was able to provide programs and services in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic: learning new things at work in handling some actual services as part of my professional growth”. (PA8, Q1.1). Also, academic librarians received opportunities and benefits from rendering online library skills because there are a lot of professional skills that they get to develop along the way.

Bringing Libraries into Users Doorsteps. The most common strategy implemented by academic librarians in providing library services during the pandemic was the use of social media platforms such as Facebook. Librarians considered social media as a useful means of communication to library patrons during the pandemic to inform them about the library updates and announcements. Library websites were also used as a platform for accessing online information resources and accommodating patrons’ queries. As one participant related: “Our school director encouraged us to make a Facebook page and library website for us to keep in touch with our library patrons thru online services. By doing such thing, we were able to attend the library’s patron queries as well as cater what they wish to know and providing them an open free access peer-reviewed articles or fictional stories that are useful in sharpening their vocabularies and to get knowledge from their research.” (PA1, Q2.1). Another participant added that through social media, librarians would let



the patrons feel their presence and see the significance of the library in their lives even in the virtual environment: *"We shared links to open access sites where they can download free e-books, suggested pages related to their learning activities, posted motivational quotes to inspire them and cheered them up. We wanted them feel our online presence every day."* (PA7, Q2.2). Librarians also sent updates through the group chat of the library committee. In this way, there was collaboration between the librarians and faculty in formulating library policies and programs in the new normal setting. For instance, one participant shared: *"After we drafted the Library New Normal Policies, Guidelines and Services, we disseminated the soft copy to the Facebook messenger group chat account of the Library Committee and the quorum was held to discuss the matters and finalize them. Then we posted it to our Facebook page."* (PA7, 2.2)

Furthermore, academic libraries offered new services which were relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic such as module printing, tutorial services, online delivery of information, and virtual information literacy sessions. Other librarians continued their onsite library services to cater to faculty and staff who still come to school physically. As one participant mentioned: *"Always open for the possibilities coming to your library, making the library open Monday to Friday for the faculty and staff use, and visit the library while observing the safety measures to avoid and stop the viruses."* (PA6, Q2.3)

Moreover, academic librarians also extended their services even outside the corners of the library through bringing libraries into user's doorsteps such practices implemented such as book drive-thru, electronic delivery services, and book delivery services to different parts in Davao del sur. To avail the book delivery service, students would send to the library Facebook page the title of the book that they would like to borrow, together with their address and contact information, and the book would be delivered straight to their homes. Then after two weeks, the library personnel would come back to get the borrowed book. The book delivery service was considered a unique strategy according to one of the participants: *"It's really helpful lalo na po sa mga students na hindi makapunta personally sa library para makahiram ng libro, dahil sa quarantine restrictions like underage sila."* (PA5, Q2.2) (It's really helpful especially for students who cannot go to the library to borrow books because of the quarantine restrictions). Through book delivery services, librarians were able to bring the library to the users' doorsteps. This has also given them the opportunity to reach out to students who were learning within the comfort of their homes. The same participant added: *"When our library started to offer book delivery service, I had the opportunity to get out of the office to reach out to our clients. Kumbaga, I was able to perform my library duty sa field, aside from the usual na nasa loob lang ng office or ng counter."* (PA5, Q3.3) (When our library started to offer book delivery service, I had the opportunity to get out of the office to reach out to our clients. I was able to perform my library duty in the field, aside from being inside the office or counter.)

Another participant noted that: *"We also have the LODI (LRC Online Delivery of Information where we send copy of ebooks and scanned portion of the book to our students and faculty thru their email."* (PA3, Q3).

Adding on, by offering new library services to patron was another strategy implemented by the participants, as they noted their experiences: *"We innovate new library services by offering different online platforms to faculty and offer module printing that would cater their needs in this time of pandemic."* (PA4, Q3). Librarians also offer tutorial services to students and strive to provide innovative services amidst this pandemic, as PA 9 noted: *"Naa gyud mi na-assign na specific person na mu-answer ani, if the request is ebooks ako ang na-assign, ako mag-provide, sa videos and journals among head, or magconduct ug tutor sa mga students."* (PA9, Q2.1) (There is a specific person assigned to answer the queries of students, provide videos, link to ebooks and even conduct Tutorials to them). Another participant shared that: *"We conducted also online orientation, naka-video, virtual or live video. Sa amin ang ginawa naming doon sa orientation, question and answer."* (PA 6, Q3). (We conducted online orientation using videos and having question and answer method as strategy). Similarly, another participant noted that: *"Sa amuang information literacy session, nag-create na mi og video recording so para pagmag enter mi og klase, i-play nalang to namo, ang problema, nagkuan ang mga estudyante walay interaction, so among gibuhay, gi-live nalang namo, discuss gyud mi."* (PA5, Q3). (In our information literacy session to students, we created a video recording so that we can discuss many things in the online classroom).

In this time of pandemic, online library services provide convenience to librarians and their clients. Amidst trying times, the academic librarians have continued to provide services through online, and clients can conveniently avail them while home quarantined.

Embracing change and being resilient. Librarians' resourcefulness and openness to adapt the changes amidst the COVID-19 pandemic help them in coping with and implement strategies in providing programs and services to the clients as the participants noted that: *"We cannot stop on what we are doing, so dapat as a librarian, we are being an initiative. So from time to time, dapat ang librarian, they have an initiative how to support the students, especially sa ganitong sitwasyon as we all know that technology is the useful."* (PA6, Q3). (We cannot stop in providing services to our users, so we librarians need to initiate and be open to adopt changes and use technology). Also, another participant noted that: *"Although these difficulties are challenging but we have no other recourse but to accept the changes, be open to embrace it, and to look for solutions."* (PA9, Q3). Maintaining resilience is one way for librarians to cope with the changes in providing library services in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. For them, it is necessary to adapt to the changing situation for them to keep up with their work and stay productive even in these trying times. As one participant said: *"Resiliency*



and maintaining emotional and physical composure to cope the negative realities that comes on our way. Resiliency is very important in pandemic time because we would know how to adjust, adaptive to the new normal environment that perceived to be stressful.” (PA6, Q3.2). (We have to be resilient and maintain emotional and physical composure to cope with the negative realities that come our way. Resiliency is very important in pandemic time because we need to adapt to the new normal environment that is perceived to be stressful.) Along with embracing these inevitable changes, librarians realized the importance of being resourceful and proactive in creating solutions to provide relevant library services during the pandemic. For instance, part of the process is learning and applying new skills, as one participant shared: *“I myself am not a techy person, but in these times where you cannot rely much on the IT personnel because they are also busy doing virtual programs and recording, so, it is us librarians who will do and develop our websites and Facebook page.”* (PA7, Q3.2)

Librarians also learned to be flexible and innovative so that they could give value-added library services in the midst of the pandemic. They hoped that their patrons would see the library’s worth to the institution as they adapt the new normal environment. Another participant stated: *“I think napatunayan ko sa aking sarili na I can learn more and I can adapt, I’m flexible in the new normal, we innovate our services. Kung meron kaming existing na services, dapat dagdagan pa talaga para mas ma-feel ng user na ginagawan talaga sila ng paraan kung saan talaga sila comfortable.”* (PA9, Q3.2) (I think I have proved to myself that I can learn more and adapt, and flexible in the new normal. We innovate our services by adding more aside from the existing services so that our users would feel that we are finding ways to make them comfortable [with their library experience].)

Moreover, librarians cultivated a sense of optimism as they strive to cope with the challenges in their workplace brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. They considered the pandemic as a time to grab opportunities for their professional growth and further development of their libraries. One participant gave this advice: *“Always have a positive mind so that whatever may be the challenges will come along in your journey, it will just pass. Move forward because as you go along the way, you will see a lot of opportunities and ways to grab and who knows that it will be applied or applicable to your own library.”* (PA1, Q3.2). (Always have a positive mind to whatever challenges that may come along our way; they will just come to pass. We need to move forward as a lot of opportunities are ready to be grabbed that can be applied in the library.) For academic librarians, the COVID-19 pandemic was not a hindrance to continue serving the students and other library patrons. Although the pandemic had changed the course of library operations, librarians were finding ways to bring the library to the users’ doorsteps by providing relevant services despite the limitations in access to learning resources, thus showing the significance of libraries even in these challenging times.

DISCUSSION

The revealed emerging and clustered themes from this study are thoroughly discussed in the context of the academic librarians’ lived experiences in bringing libraries into users’ doorsteps during the COVID-19 pandemic in Davao del Sur with supporting literature and related studies in the Philippines and in other countries. The discussions also explain the reasons for the emerging themes as a result of the participants’ lived experiences.

The Challenges of Librarians in Providing Programs and Services in the Midst of COVID-19 Pandemic

Academic librarians have experienced some challenges and difficulties in bringing libraries into users’ doorsteps amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. These include their difficulty in library promotion and marketing and adjustments to new work roles.

Difficulty in library promotion and marketing. One of the challenges that academic librarians experienced was how to let the patrons know that the library continued to offer services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their responses indicated that librarians experienced difficulties in promoting and marketing the libraries programs and services during the pandemic. This relates with the report of Dempsey (2020) that librarians are challenged to continue proving the library’s value as communities’ change. But along with the libraries’ efforts to show their relevance to the school community, participants experienced lack of support from teachers. Thus, to increase library’s visibility, Mandrekar and e Rodrigues (2020) recommended that librarians should create a solid marketing plan to lay down marketing strategies for the academic community to develop interest, and eventually, support the library programs which can help patrons maximize the use of library resources.

Aside from challenges in planning, academic librarians also expressed lack of support from school administration and faculty in promoting the library services during the COVID-19 pandemic. This resonates with the findings of Chisita et al. (2022) which revealed lack of institutional support to enable the academic librarians to work from home and to use social media in delivering services and promoting the library in the process. Still, librarians strive to meet their communities’ needs during the pandemic through new and creative means (Bowie, 2020). For instance, librarians implemented innovative ways in marketing and promoting their library services through technology. Some participants mentioned that their libraries started using social media platforms like Facebook to deliver remote services. This relates with some studies which revealed that Facebook and WhatsApp were the most used social media platforms to share announcements, communicate to patrons, and deliver library services amid Covid-19 pandemic (Mandrekar & Rodrigues, 2020; Neog, 2020; Koulouris, Vraimaki, & Koloniari, 2021).

Such studies imply that social media has played an essential role in marketing and promoting library and information services during the COVID-19 pandemic since it has helped establish the library’s visibility in the media space and facilitate online



learning (Mandrekar & e Rodrigues, 2020; Bhuyan & Bipasha, 2021). But despite the cited advantages in the use of social media, participating librarians in this study admitted that they still need to learn how to effectively use the social media as a tool for promoting their library services. This relates to the findings of Chewe et al. (2020) that even if the use of social media for personal purposes was very high, its application to facilitate library service delivery was nonexistent due to lack of social media literacy skills. Thus, librarians are recommended to enhance their digital literacy skills to improve the delivery of information resources and services especially in the virtual environment (Chewe et al., 2020; Ifijeh & Yusuf, 2020; Chakraborty & Jana, 2021; Dube & Jacobs, 2023).

Adjustments to new work roles. The participants' responses showed that coping with institutional challenges was part of librarians' adjustments in their functions to provide programs and services in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results corroborate with Babbar and Gupta (2022), wherein the unpreparedness of educational institutions in handling this health crisis had raised questions in terms of their flexibility, sustainability, and readiness to accept change. Cox (2020) further revealed that academic institutions had experienced displacement of students, transition to online, and the exposure of institutional deficiencies during the pandemic. And despite having the necessary skill sets, many library administrators get overwhelmed because of the lack of abilities, experiences, and knowledge necessary to guide their library through crisis events (Newman, 2021). Esposito-Betan and Fresnido (2022) added that in effect, the libraries' implementation of innovations and changes to respond to the pandemic was most likely done in haste and may have lacked careful planning.

Academic library positioning has been a challenge, with the many changes experienced by their parent institutions such as shifting higher education environment which prompted libraries to define their new roles to establish its relevance to the institution. As information specialists, academic librarians had played a significant role during the COVID-19 pandemic by offering online resources to support researchers and providing COVID-19 related information while maintaining the traditional library services with safety measures (Adigun et al., 2020; Ali & Gatiti, 2020; Okonoko et al., 2020; Petrowicz, 2020; Deol & Brar, 2021). In the case of Father Moses Library in India, librarians had become collaborators with education sectors through conducting webinars, and established connection with the users by organizing reading competition, review writing competition, and virtual book clubs (Devan, 2021).

On the other hand, Davao del Sur academic librarians had cited instances where school administrators could not see the relevance of librarians during the pandemic, thus assigning them with tasks which are not in the line of their practice. This is in contrast with the supporting literature in which the added roles of librarians during the pandemic were somehow related to their function as information professionals. Since the pandemic started, adapting

flexible work arrangements including work from home setup had been encouraged as a safety measure among library staff and in compliance with government orders to contain the spread of the virus. However, some findings revealed that such work arrangement had caused digital divide between employees who have ready access to computers and internet at home and those who do not; thus, some librarians would still go to the library physically to complete some essential official works (Chakraborty & Jana, 2021; Hosoi et al., 2021). Although librarians struggled in remote work because of the needed adjustments in their work routine, they still exhibited high productivity while working from home (Bennett et al., 2020; Rodarte & Moore, 2022).

Also, based on the common experiences shared by academic librarians from Georgia, they were able to achieve work-life balance while working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bennett et al., 2020). Such instance is opposite to the experiences of our participants who would extend their work even at night, which can relate with Ibacache et al. (2021) that as much as possible, librarians may be contacted on the virtual Ask-a-Librarian desk even on extended weekend and evening hours. Moreover, working off-campus can offer numerous distractions and can be stressful at times especially with lack of in-person connection and networking (Fatmawati, 2021; Hosoi et al., 2021). To address these challenges, suggestions were offered such as building a conducive quality of work-life in the library, establishing shared values within the library organization, and providing proper infrastructure to support the mission to offer library services while in a remote environment (Chakraborty & Jana, 2021; Fatmawati, 2021; Hosoi et al., 2021).

The Strategies Employed by Librarians in Providing Programs and Services in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Academic librarians have employed different strategies as they work on the provision of services and resources amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. These include attending webinars and trainings, bringing libraries into users' doorsteps, and embracing change and being resilient.

Attending webinars and trainings. The responses revealed that one of the emerging strategies utilized by academic librarians in Davao del Sur is through attending webinars, benchmarking best practices from other libraries and online trainings. Also, benchmarking and attending webinars help librarians gain ideas on providing library services and have created a plan to ensure sustainability of the library services during the pandemic. This reflects that academic librarians still need to learn new strategies and get ideas from other libraries to effectively implement new normal library services. This is being supported by the study of Connell, Wallis, and Comeaux (2021), which revealed that academic libraries can defeat the COVID-19 with the application of powerful and renovated technology tools for community support and satisfaction through adopting various new tactics to overcome the pandemic difficulties and keep the users stay with the world of knowledge and recreation. Furthermore, another



study conducted by Temiz and Lakshmi (2021), confirmed that the role of academic librarians is not limited to an information provider and academic supporter but also the provision of activities and services magnified by intellectual advancement, creativity, social commitment, personal growth, technical and digital knowledge intensification of its clientele especially the students. Also, the redesigned and redefined activities strengthened the user participation leads path ways to defeat the lockdown related stress and loneliness which modified the traditional concepts, methods and theories of providing library services (Istiaq, 2020).

Amidst the pandemic, academic librarians did not only realize about the need to constantly develop their services but also about developing their own professional knowledge and skills, particularly on the technological facets and always be open to new learning opportunities. It implies that academic librarians need to improve on their attitude towards technological innovations, should acquire more ICT skills, and keep themselves abreast with the latest technologies through attending to trainings, conferences and seminars. The findings are supported by Asif and Singh (2020) who found out that during the pandemic, a lot of webinars for librarians and information professionals were organized and offered for free and the academic librarians mentioned that they considered attending to such webinars and applied the learnings in their own libraries. Also, from the conducted webinars, librarians can get opportunities, improve their technological skills and become more competent and confident in digitally managing their libraries (Anderson, 2021).

Academic librarians also mentioned about the need to develop their professional skills in doing research especially in this online mode of learning where the librarians are the ones searching for resources to be sent to clients. In a recent study about the research knowledge and skills of academic librarians in Northern Philippines, it revealed that they were in a competent level, however there are challenges that need to be addressed and their knowledge and skills can still be enhanced by attending trainings, workshops and other professional development plans (Austria & Cabonero, 2020). With the use of technologies and online databases in rendering online library services, academic librarians need to enhance their research skills to provide accurate and substantial information to researchers.

Bringing Libraries into Users Doorsteps. The responses showed that the COVID-19 pandemic had prompted academic librarians to innovate library services, since face-to-face library transactions were suspended as precautionary measure. Most of them used social media, particularly Facebook, to effectively reach out to their clients and provide online library services during the pandemic. Facebook utilization was evident in some academic libraries to help librarians engage with clients, post library updates, promote online library services, and provide a channel to access online resources (Achanya, 2020; Awoyemi et al., 2020; Mandrekar, 2020). Academic librarians also mentioned creating library websites, which Hussaini et al. (2021) considered

as online portals to provide clients with one entry point that will incorporate all library resources and services which eliminate users' difficulty in remembering multiple log-ins. The creation of all-inclusive online library platforms is also practiced in some Indian libraries which have enhanced their visibility during the pandemic by providing an online one stop shop to all of their resources and services (Dadhe & Dubey, 2020; Kaur & Mahajan, 2020). These were among the best practices considered by Ifijeh and Yusuf (2020), along with the adoption of blended librarianship model, in order for academic libraries to cope with the changes in teaching methodologies in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has also changed the way librarians interact with patrons and conduct information literacy initiatives. Most academic librarians mentioned using Zoom or Google Meet in offering virtual collaboration rooms for students in replacement of the discussion rooms in the physical library. This is supported by other studies showing that librarians maximized Zoom and various online platforms to provide reference and research assistance and open multimodal learning opportunities (Ma, 2020; Stimpson, 2020; Devan, 2021; Ibacache et al., 2021). In addition, the use of virtual support to patrons increased during COVID-19 as reflected by the maximized usage of virtual communication methods such as email, chat reference interactions, and online meetings (Abubakar, 2021; Connell et al., 2021; De Groot & Scoulas, 2021). Moreover, academic librarians engaged in other activities such as offering tutorial services and providing related information on COVID-19, which resonates with Beglou and Akhshik (2023) where they identified strategies for social responsibilities of the library during the pandemic, which also include documentation of events, preparation of guidelines, current awareness, physical and mental health care programs, and providing medical information about COVID-19.

The participants' responses further indicated that academic libraries continued the physical library services while offering additional services like bringing the libraries to the user's doorsteps through book delivery services, electronic delivery, and other means to cater to the information needs of students who cannot visit the physical library due to health protocol restrictions. The findings were in line with Guo et al. (2021) wherein 12% of studied libraries still provided print materials services during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, physical distancing and non-contact delivery methods were implemented as safety measure for library staff and patrons who would come to the library to minimize the risk of infection due to the virus (Talamo, 2020; Guo et al., 2021; Shoaib et al., 2022). This measure supports the findings of Okonoko et al. (2020) where library users expected various online services such as electronic access to resources and reference services and at the same time, a spacious study hall is opened where users can observe physical distancing while studying in the library.

Some academic librarians mentioned book delivery services as their unique strategy in providing library services in the midst of



COVID-19 pandemic wherein requested books would either be delivered at the students' homes or door to door delivery or picked up at the school's guard house. Online book borrowing and reservations were made beforehand since clients cannot visit the physical library due to quarantine restrictions. Many libraries are offering this service to answer the need to continue the book lending service for clients who really wanted to read print books. The librarians of Montgomery County Public Schools in Christiansburg, Virginia implemented a similar strategy, but through a drone delivery service where students check out books at the school system's library catalog and then delivered to their homes via drone (Ford, 2020). Other libraries also allowed borrowing of print books through pick-up services, wherein users would make online requests and notified if the book requested is ready for pick-up. Library staff maintained physical distancing to minimize direct contact with the borrowers, and have scheduled specific time for pick-up either at curb side or library entrance (Talamo, 2020; University Libraries, 2020; Decker, 2021). Moreover, remote clients may physically return the books by placing them in a drop-off area at the library and after which, books would undergo quarantine for a certain period of time (Talamo, 2020; Tolppanen, 2021; Dube & Jacobs, 2023). The cited strategies agree with Ishtiaq (2020) that academic librarians have strategically developed some convenient library services in both traditional and online means.

Embracing change and being resilient. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the operations and services of the library organizations and the academic librarians shared how they showed resiliency and embracing changes by responding to the changes it brings to the library operations and made constant innovations. The responses showed that academic librarians realized the need to be resilient and always embrace the changes around them in this time of pandemic. It indicated that academic librarians must adapt to the changes, initiate on developing alternatives and must make actions in rendering library programs and services in order to support the information needs of the academic community in spite of the difficulties they encountered amidst this COVID-19 pandemic and be able to satisfy the classroom related research of the library users. As Filipinos, the academic librarians in Davao del Sur showed the Filipino culture of resilience which comes from their value for family, faith, hard work and positive acceptance to different situations (National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2020). Resilience amidst trying times is also manifested by librarians from other countries including the librarians in Kazakhstan where they showed their passion of extending their services amidst the pandemic. They responded to the crisis by providing online reference services and improving the access to online databases, book deliveries, scanning services and many other online services (Yap & Manabat, 2020).

The Mallak's Organizational Resilience theory (1999) mirrors the resilience and readiness of academic librarians in Davao del Sur to embrace changes amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, which is a concept of embracing, managing and responding to

organizational changes. It is the individual or organization's capability to immediately create and apply adaptive behaviors that would match the current situation, while sustaining the difficulties it brings. The theory of organizational resilience also conceptualizes the positive response to the occurrence and severity of crises and natural disasters that would affect the organization's operations (Kantur & Say, 2015). Furthermore, Lewin's Change Theory (1959) reflected the academic librarian's readiness to accept the expected changes, which necessitated them to step out from their comfort zone (Juneja, n.d.; George, 2020; Weinper et al., 2022). Following the stages in the change process, librarians first had to make adjustments to their work roles and devise new strategies in library operations. Then, they implemented new library services and continued to innovate as they move towards transition to the new normal, with the learnings from webinars and benchmarking for more innovative strategies as their anchor.

The emerging themes from this study were thoroughly discussed in the context of the academic librarians' experiences with supporting literature and related studies in the Philippines and in other countries. The discussions also explained the reasons behind the emerging themes obtained from the lived experiences of the participants. The theories reflect the need for academic librarians to constantly innovate their library resources and services to stay relevant with the changing needs of clients during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need to be resilient in managing and responding to organizational changes. Eventually, academic librarians are urged to revisit and update their library policies in managing their library like personnel, collection, facilities, procedures, and services as they adapt to the new normal.

Limitations of the Study

The study explored the experiences of academic librarians in rendering library programs and services in the private HEIs in Davao del Sur during the COVID-19 pandemic. Selection of academic libraries in the province was based on the availability of programs and library services through checking their Facebook page, website or web page.

In as much as the researchers would want to gather data from many libraries with existing programs and library services, there were limitations encountered during the conduct of the study caused by pandemic and health protocols implementation in the private higher educational institutions in Davao del Sur. There were private HEIs in the province that did not send or respond any feedback about our intention to conduct an interview with their academic librarian. There were also two participants who confirmed for the interview but failed to coordinate online. Moreover, the data gathered only covered the experiences from the academic librarians regarding their encountered challenges, strategies used and insights in providing programs and library services during the pandemic.



Implications of the Study

Based on the results of this study, academic librarians had experienced challenges, developed strategies, and had new insights as they rendered programs and innovative library services during the pandemic. Since library services are more essential today among the libraries in the province to support the information needs of the academic community, this study has provided insights which may be shared as learning experiences for other librarians and information professionals who would like to follow the strategies and reflect on the needs of rendering physical and online library services in this new normal to bridge the gap between the libraries and users. Thus, we encourage academic institutions, professional associations and library professionals in embracing or boosting the library innovations on providing new library and information services amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, school administrators of the private sectarian and nonsectarian HEIs may implement new library services and support digital innovations as important actions in developing their academic institution especially their library or learning resource center. Library leaders may ask support from the school administrators to enhance and upgrade their technological infrastructure and the skills of their staff in order to create and strengthen the programs and strategies both the traditional and online library services. Professional association officers and leaders may plan for professional development activities, webinars, and trainings for their colleagues to advance their technological knowledge and skills in rendering library services in the new normal.

As librarians strive to innovate their programs and services amid COVID-19 pandemic, students are encouraged to avail the new normal library services which can be beneficial in their academic pursuits even if they could not go physically to the library due to the distance learning modality. The support of faculty is also needed to promote these new library services to their students, as well as the use of online resources for research and course requirements, thus, further help increase the online utilization of the students.

Moreover, this study can also serve as bridge for further research, especially on the implication of rendering online library services in private and public universities, colleges, schools and research hubs in other provinces. Since the study is only limited to the librarians' experiences in providing programs and services in academic libraries in Davao del Sur, it could be used as the basis for future researchers to conduct another in-depth study on the implication of library services to the extent of student access of the library resources and career progression of academic librarians.

CONCLUSIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic had tested the academic librarians in managing the library with limited resources and services. The online mode of delivering library services demanded their

technological knowledge and skills, digital infrastructure, and open access to electronic resources. But despite the struggles working amidst the technological issues in transitioning to online, this study reflected that resilience and openness to change prevailed among Davao del Sur academic librarians as they were able to cope with the challenges of working during this COVID-19 pandemic.

This study also gave a view on how academic librarians in the private HEIs in Davao del Sur continued to open the library to their patrons even in the midst of the pandemic. Although there is a necessity of positively embracing the digital and virtual environment, librarians still found ways to bridge the gap in the perceived information divide and managed to bring the library to users' doorsteps during the pandemic.

Through this study, librarians should provide continuous innovation for their programs and services; academic libraries still stand as the heart of any academic or research institution even in the midst of a health crisis. Therefore, academic librarians can justify their relevance in this ever-changing world by adding more value added services and resources to the institution as a whole.

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