

Disaster Management Awareness among Library Staff of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)

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Abstract

The increasing occurrence and severity of natural and human-induced disasters highlight the critical need for disaster management awareness across all sectors, including academic libraries. This study explores the level of disaster awareness and management among the staff of the Gabriel Afolabi Ojo Library at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), with a focus on their preparedness, understanding of risk assessment, and ability to mitigate and respond to disasters. NOUN, an open and distance learning institution, operates study centres nationwide, each with its own library. Data were collected using a self-designed questionnaire. Findings reveal a moderate (58.6%) level of awareness of potential disasters that could impact library operations. High majority of the staff indicated they can identify specific disasters that may affect the library, suggesting a high level of confidence in disaster identification. There are considerable shortcomings in current disaster management strategies, such as insufficient staff participation in training and disaster preparedness programs, the establishment of a dedicated disaster response team to enhance the library's resilience to potential disasters. The study concludes that while there is a general awareness of disasters within the Gabriel Afolabi Ojo Library, there is an urgent need for the library management to enhance disaster preparedness. This can be achieved by implementing the necessary disaster management frameworks and resources, recognizing that disasters can occur unexpectedly and at any time.

Keywords: Disaster awareness, Disaster management, Library disasters, Academic libraries.

Introduction

Numerous factors contribute to the rising frequency of disasters globally. Academic libraries, as vital learning environments within tertiary education, are not exempt from these risks (Kaur, 2009). They are vulnerable to disasters arising from natural, human-induced, or hybrid causes (a combination of both) (Akussah & Fosu, 2001). Eden and Matthew (1996) described a disaster in the context of libraries as any event that jeopardizes human safety while causing damage to the library's infrastructure, collections, equipment, systems, operations, and services.

A disaster as defined by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, (2024) is a sudden, catastrophic event that disrupts the normal functioning of a community, organization, or system, leading to widespread harm, loss, or damage to lives, property, and the environment, exceeding the affected entity's capacity to cope without external assistance. Disasters can stem from natural causes (e.g. earthquakes, floods, wildfires), human-induced activities (e.g., industrial accidents, conflict), or hybrid events that combine elements of both. Disasters are situations whereby environmental phenomena or armed conflicts produce stress, personal injury, physical damages or economic disruption of great magnitude. They are regarded as an overwhelming ecological disruption, occurring usually on a large scale (Mahmood, 2023).

There are two categories of disasters: natural disasters and man-made disasters. Natural disasters which include floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, biological reactions, hurricanes and tornadoes occurs because of their seemingly normal way of occurrence which have negative effect on man and his environment. Man –made disasters occurs due to human negligence, which includes fire, war, mutilation of library resources, book theft, terrorism, poor structure, unstable/ epileptic power supply, vandalism, riots, chemical spillage occurs because of the effects they have on library materials (Ngulube, Modisane & Mnkeni-Saurombe,2011).

Natural disasters encompass weather-related events such as floods, fires, earthquakes, storms, cyclones, hurricanes (Morgan & Smith, 2014), tornadoes, rainstorms, volcanic eruptions, and mudslides (Rasaki, 2019). Human-made disasters include fires, wars, civil unrest (Johnson, 1994), theft (Hussain, 2019), bombings, vandalism, negligence, power failures, and equipment damage (Akussah & Fosu, 2001). Regardless of their origin, disasters negatively impact economic, social, health, environmental systems, and service delivery within organizations and society at large. Effective disaster management plans and activities are essential to mitigating these effects (Eden & Matthews, 1996). According to Wong & Green (2006) common disasters that can happen and cause damage to library materials, operations, services are power outages, flooding, water leaks, severe weather conditions, earth quakes, fire and hazardous incidents. These disasters irrespective natural or man-made can completely or partially destroy or render the library's information resources and information inadequate, therefore, defeating the purpose of the library's existence.

Ngulube *et al.* (2011) cited a number of disasters that have occurred in libraries and information centres in the world such as the burning of the National Library and Archives of Iraq in 2003; in 2004, records at the Cayman Islands National Archives (CINA) were extensively damaged by Hurricane Ivan. In United States of America, Hurricanes Katrina

and Rita caused a large scale of destruction in many public library holdings of Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana.

From the foregoing, it is evident that libraries are not immune to disasters. In Nigeria, there have been incidences of disaster in an academic library for example, on the 27th March, 2013 a fire incident occurred at the University of Jos Bauchi Road Campus library. The incident started at night, and engulfed a part of the library's facilities and materials, though fortunately the fire was brought under control with the assistance of the Fire Service on duty before it could spread further. On the 8th October, 2016 another fire incident happened at dusk at the Naraguta Campus Library, unfortunately the fire ravaged the entire library including all the library resources inside the library building (Nwokedi, Iyabo, Panel & Samuel (2017). Oluwatola; Ogbuiyi, Oriogu & Ogbuiyi (2015) reported a fire disaster at the President Kennedy Library of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria where some collections of the library were damaged. According to Alegbeleye (1993) the two common types of disaster experienced by most libraries are fire and floods.

Disaster awareness refers to an informed understanding of potential disasters and their implications (Eden and Matthews, 1996). It serves as a critical foundation for disaster preparedness, requiring library staff to first recognize the risks disasters pose to their libraries and collections. This awareness enables them to take proactive steps to prepare for and respond effectively to such events. Disaster management on the other hand refers to as the actions taken by an organization in response to unexpected events that are adversely affecting people or resources and threatening the continued operation of the organization (Ezenyilimba, Maduagwu & Eze, 2018). Disaster management is the systematic process of planning, organizing, coordinating, and implementing measures to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. It aims to minimize the adverse effects of disasters on human lives, property, the environment, and societal functions by ensuring a structured and effective approach to dealing with such events. It encompasses prevention and mitigation, preparedness, control, response, recovery, and solutions tailored to various disaster scenarios (Himayatullah *et al.*, 2008).

For libraries, disaster management and preparedness are crucial to minimizing the impact of such events (Eden & Matthews, 1996). Librarians and staff must prioritize disaster planning, training, communication, and collaboration to reduce risks and manage library functions effectively during crises (Fortson, 1992; Harvey, 1993). Proactive measures to prevent and address disasters are integral to safeguarding library operations and resources. It is expected that academic libraries would also develop a disaster response manual containing a detailed plan, procedures and processes to respond to and recover from disasters.

Statement of the Problem.

Research has shown that academic libraries are vulnerable to disasters. Unfortunately, many academic libraries in Nigeria fail to prioritize disaster awareness and management, often lacking adequate planning and preparedness. This oversight places library resources at significant risk of damage or destruction. Currently, the level of disaster awareness and preparedness among library staff in Nigerian universities remains unclear. This study aims to evaluate the state of disaster management awareness among library staff at the Gabriel Afolabi Ojo University Library, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

Research Objectives

1. To assess the level of disaster awareness among library staff at the National Open University of Nigeria.
2. To determine library staff participation in disaster awareness programs,
3. To evaluate the disaster management strategies currently in place within the libraries at the National Open University of Nigeria.
4. To explore how training and capacity-building programs can improve disaster preparedness and response among NOUN library staff.
5. To identify the perceived challenges faced by library staff in implementing disaster management plans at NOUN.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of disaster awareness among library staff at the National Open University of Nigeria?
2. What is library staff participation in disaster awareness programs?
3. What disaster management strategies are currently in place within the library at the National Open University of Nigeria?
4. How can training and capacity-building programs improve disaster preparedness and response among NOUN library staff?
5. What are the perceived challenges faced by library staff in implementing disaster management plans at NOUN?

Method

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, aiming to gather input from the library staff of Gabriel Afolabi Ojo Library at the National Open University of Nigeria. The target population consisted of 50 academic and non-teaching library staff. Data were collected using a self-designed questionnaire distributed through a Google Form link. A total of 29 staff members responded, and their submissions were successfully retrieved. The gathered data were analyzed using simple descriptive statistical methods with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS IBM 2023).

Results

Demographic information

The demographic data reveals that the sample comprises more females (55.2%) than males (44.8%). Most respondents have significant work experience, with over 75% having worked for at least 11 years. Additionally, the study is academically inclined, as three-quarters (75.9%) of the respondents are academic staff. These findings suggest that the sample consists of seasoned professionals, primarily from the academic sector, with a fair gender representation.

Level of disaster awareness among library staff at the National Open University of Nigeria

Table 1: Level of disaster awareness among library staff at the National Open University of Nigeria

S/N	Statements/Questions	VLE	LE	HE	VHE	MEAN
	I am aware of the potential disasters that could impact library operations to a	10.3	31.0	37.9	20.7	2.69
2.	I can identify specific types of disasters (e.g., fire, flood, data loss) that may affect library operations.	13.8	3.4	34.5	48.3	3.17

VLE- Very Low Extent, LE- Very Low Extent, HE- High Extent, VHE - Very High Extent

When simply asked the level of disaster awareness among library staff at the Gabriel Afolabi Library, the analysis was based on responses to specific questions assessing their knowledge, training, and perception of disaster preparedness. As shown in Table 1, On the general awareness of disaster risks, the responses indicated slightly above half of the library staff (58.6%) are aware of potential disasters that could impact library operations, with 37.9% reporting a high level of awareness and 20.7% indicating very high level of awareness. However, 41.3% of respondents (VLE = 10.3% and LE = 31.0%) reported low awareness, suggesting that while many staff members recognize disaster risks, there is still a significant proportion with limited understanding. The mean score for this statement is 2.69, which is slightly above the midpoint (2.50), indicating a moderate level of awareness overall. Similarly, 82.8% of staff believes they can identify specific disasters that may affect the library, with a mean score of 3.17.

Table 2: Participation in disaster awareness programs,

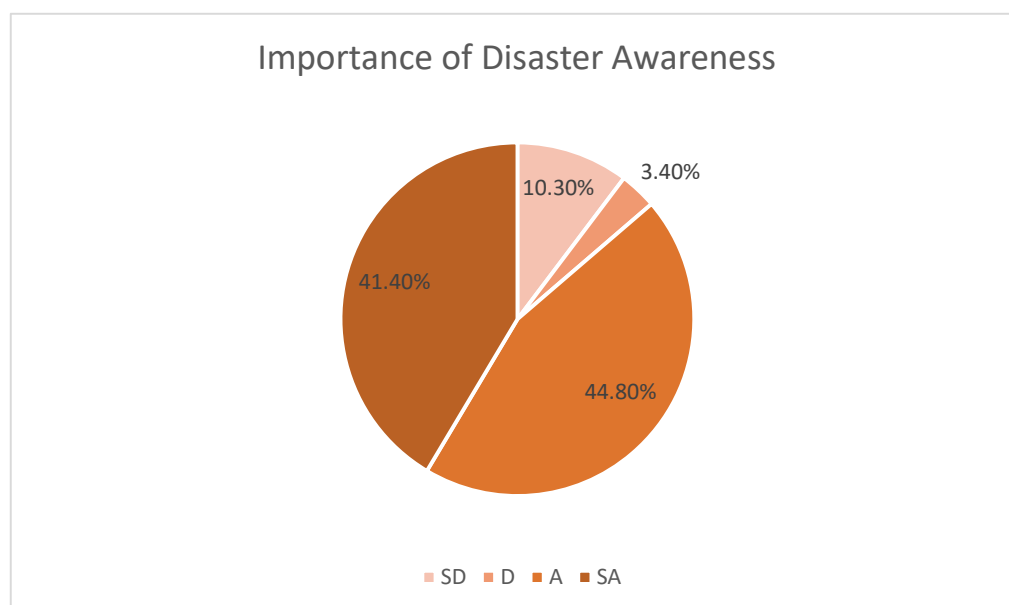
S/N	Statements/Questions	VLE	LE	HE	VHE	MEAN
1.	I frequently receive information or training about disaster risks in the library	31.0	41.4	24.1	3.4	2.00
2	I have participated in disaster awareness programs organized by NOUN.	20.7	41.4	34.5	3.4	2.21

VLE- Very Low Extent, LE- Very Low Extent, HE- High Extent, VHE - Very High Extent

The responses shown in Table 2 indicate that a large percentage of staff (72.4%) reported receiving little to no training or information on disaster risks, with 31.0% stating they receive very little information and 41.4% receiving low amounts. Only 27.5% indicated receiving moderate to high levels of training. The mean score for this item is 2.00, which is below the midpoint, indicating that training and information dissemination on disaster risks within the library are insufficient.

As also shown in Table 2, a significant portion of respondents (62.1%) reported low participation in disaster awareness programs organized by NOUN, with 20.7% very low or no participation. Only 37.9% have participated in such programs to some extent. The mean score is 2.21, indicating that participation in disaster awareness programs is relatively low.

Figure 1: Perceptions on the importance of disaster awareness,



Perceptions on the importance of disaster awareness is shown in Figure 1. A majority of respondents (86.2%) agree that disaster awareness is essential for library staff, with 44.8%

agreeing and 41.4% strongly agreeing. The mean score for this statement is 3.17, indicating a strong positive perception of the importance of disaster awareness.

Disaster management strategies currently in place within the library at the National Open University of Nigeria

Table 3: Disaster management strategies currently in place within the library at the National Open University of Nigeria

S/N	Statements/Questions	SD	D	A	SA	MEAN
1.	My library has a documented disaster management plan.	20.7	37.9	34.5	6.9	2.28
2.	I am aware of the steps to take in case of a disaster in my library.	13.8	27.6	44.8	13.8	2.59
3	Regular disaster drills are conducted in my library.	24.1	51.7	20.7	3.4	2.03
4	There is designated team or personnel responsible for handling disaster management in my library.	24.1	51.7	20.7	3.4	2.03
5	The existing disaster management strategies in my library are effective.	17.2	37.9	37.9	6.9	2.34

Weighted Average is 2.25

Table 3 shows that the majority of respondents (58.6%) disagree that their library has a documented disaster management plan, with a mean score of 2.28. While 68.6% of staff agree and strongly agree they are aware of steps to take in case of a disaster, a significant proportion (41.4%) disagree or strongly disagree, leading to a moderate mean score of 2.59. Regular disaster drills are not commonly conducted, as 75.8% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. The mean score of 2.03 indicates inadequate emergency preparedness training. Similarly, 76% of staff reported that there is no designated team or personnel responsible for handling disaster management in the library, with a mean of 2.03, showing a lack of clear disaster response leadership. Only 44.8% believe the existing disaster management strategies are effective, while 55.1% disagree or strongly disagree, with a mean score of 2.34.

How training and capacity-building programs improve disaster preparedness and response among NOUN library staff

Table 4: Training and Capacity-building programs improve disaster preparedness and response among NOUN library staff?

S/N	Statements/Questions	SD	D	A	SA	MEAN
1.	I have attended disaster preparedness training in the past year.	17.2	48.3	31.0	3.4	2.21
2.	Disaster management training is beneficial for my role as a library staff member.	6.9	0.0	62.1	31.0	3.17
3	I am willing to participate in future disaster preparedness and response programs.	10.3	3.4	51.7	34.5	3.10
4	The topics included in disaster management training are relevant to my role.	13.8	3.4	65.5	17.2	2.86
5	Disaster preparedness training programs should be organized more frequently for library staff.	13.8	0.0	44.8	41.4	3.14

Weighted Average is 2.90

Following a 5-point Likert scale, Table 4 revealed that only 34.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had attended disaster preparedness training in the past year, leading to a low mean of 2.21. 93.1% of respondents agreed that disaster management training is beneficial to their role, with a mean of 3.17. 86.2% of respondents expressed willingness to attend future training sessions, with a mean of 3.10, indicating a high level of interest in disaster preparedness programs, 82.7% of respondents agreed that disaster management training topics are relevant to their roles, with a mean of 2.86. This shows that the training content aligns well with their job responsibilities and 86.2% of respondents agreed that disaster preparedness training should be organized more frequently, leading to a mean of 3.14.

The perceived challenges faced by library staff in implementing disaster management plans at NOUN

Table 5: Perceived challenges faced by library staff in implementing disaster management plans at NOUN?

S/N	Statements/Questions	SD	D	A	SA	MEAN
1.	I face challenges in understanding the disaster management plan in my library.	3.4	48.3	31.0	17.2	2.62
2.	There are sufficient resources (e.g., funds, equipment) to implement disaster management strategies in my library.	24.1	37.9	31.0	6.9	2.21
3	Library management provides adequate support for addressing disaster-related issues.	20.7	27.6	44.8	6.9	2.38
4	Accessing training on disaster management is difficult.	6.9	44.8	27.6	20.7	2.62
5	Communication between staff and management is effective during disaster management activities.	24.1	20.7	48.3	6.9	2.38

Weighted Average 2.44

Librarians were simply asked to their perceived challenges faced by them in implementing disaster management plans at NOUN. The weighted average of 2.44 indicated that library staff encounters notable challenges in implementing disaster management plans (Table 5). It was revealed that 48.3% of respondents disagreed that they faced difficulties in understanding the disaster management plan, while 31% agreed. This suggests that while a significant proportion of staff understands the plan, some still struggle with it. Insufficient resources (funds, equipment) 62% of respondents disagreed that there were sufficient resources to implement disaster management strategies, with a mean of 2.21. This highlights a critical gap in financial and material support.

The respondents were asked if library management provides adequate support for addressing disaster-related issues, 48.3% of respondents felt that library management does not provide adequate support for disaster-related issues, with a mean score of 2.38. This suggests that staff perceive a lack of institutional commitment to disaster preparedness. In a bid to further access the level of training on disaster management and communication between staff and management is effective during disaster management activities 48.3% of respondents agreed that accessing training is difficult, with a mean of 2.62. This implies that opportunities for capacity-building in disaster management are limited and 44.8% of respondents felt that communication between staff and management is ineffective, with a mean of 2.38. This indicates that poor communication is a barrier to effective disaster response.

Discussion of the findings

The main purpose of the study is to determine the disaster management awareness of library staff in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Findings indicated that on the general awareness of disaster risks, over half of the respondents (58.6%) indicated a moderate level of awareness of potential disasters that could impact library operations. However, a significant proportion (41.3%) are with limited understanding. Equally, a very high majority staff believes they can identify specific disasters that may affect the library, suggesting a high level of confidence in disaster identification.

There is no doubt that staff training plays a significant role in disaster awareness and disaster management. Robertson (2005), emphasized that staff training helps raise employees' awareness, safety and security issues and prepares them to handle disaster when they occur. Only about one third of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had attended disaster preparedness training in the past years. This suggests that training opportunities have been limited or underutilized. However, high majority have a positive perception of the benefits of disaster training. They agreed that disaster management training is beneficial to their roles. This reflects a strong acknowledgment of the value of such training. A very high percentage of respondents expressed willingness to attend future training sessions, indicating a high level of interest in disaster preparedness programs. Equally, a high percentage of respondents agreed that disaster management training topics are relevant to their roles and they agreed that disaster preparedness training should be organized more frequently. This shows that the training content aligns well with their job responsibilities, and highlights the demand for continuous professional development in disaster management.

Majority of the staff (58.6%) disagreed that their library has a documented disaster management plan. This suggests that formal disaster preparedness documentation is lacking. Majority agreed they are aware of steps to take in case of a disaster. However, a significant proportion (41.4%) disagreed. Regular disaster drills are not commonly conducted, there is also report of inadequate emergency preparedness training, no designated team or personnel responsible for handling disaster management in the library. This showed a lack of clear disaster response leadership. Only 44.8% believe the existing disaster management strategies are effective, while highlighting weaknesses in the implementation of disaster management strategies.

Limited resources and inadequate funding are significant barriers to disaster management implementation in the library and the library management's support is perceived as insufficient, making it harder for library staff to effectively implement disaster management plans. The library staff revealed training opportunities are not readily available, which affects their preparedness. Poor communication between the library staff and their management hinders effective disaster response. Overall, the findings suggest that while some staff in the library understands disaster management plans, implementation is hindered by financial constraints, lack of support, limited training, and communication gaps.

Recommendations

To improve disaster management awareness and preparedness of staff of NOUN Library the following are being recommended:

1. The University management should have structured policies that will guide the implementations of disaster management plan in the university library.
2. The University management should ensure disaster management preparedness by increasing funding of acquisition of disaster management tools and for training of staff.
3. The University library management should designate response teams, and organize regular drills. This will increase the staff preparedness for disaster management.
4. The University library management should also organize regular capacity-building programmes for the staff. This will increase their awareness and skills in disaster management.

Conclusion

The study underscores the importance of raising disaster awareness and enhancing disaster management efforts in the library. Considering the critical role of academic library collections in supporting the library's mission of providing easy access to information, it is vital to safeguard its resources and infrastructure. The findings from this study reveal moderate awareness but poor implementation of disaster management strategies in NOUN's library. Lack of training, insufficient resources, weak management support, and poor communication are key challenges. More frequent disaster preparedness programs are needed to enhance staff readiness and response capabilities.

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