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International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC): Exploring the Diversity and Strength of Participating Library Consortia

Arshia Ayoub
University of Kashmir, arshiaayoub786@gmail.com

Sumeera Amin
University of Kashmir, sumairadar7@gmail.com

ZAHID ASHRAF WANI Dr.
University of Kashmir, India

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Arshia Ayoub
Research Scholar,
DLIS, University of Kashmir
Hazratbal, Srinagar, 190006. Jammu and Kashmir. India
Arshiaayoub786@gmail.com

Sumeera Amin
Research Scholar,
DLIS, University of Kashmir
Hazratbal, Srinagar, 190006. Jammu and Kashmir. India
Sumairadar7@gmail.com

Dr. Zahid Ashraf Wani
Sr. Asst. Professor
DLIS, University of Kashmir
Hazratbal, Srinagar, 190006. Jammu and Kashmir. India
zahidrais@gmail.com

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Exploring the Diversity and Strength of Participating Library Consortia

Abstract

In this era of Cyberage, the information requirements of the users have grown so immensely that no individual library can fulfill their information demands on its own. This has urged the need for cooperation between libraries and information centers for sharing of their resources and information through networking. Thus consortia are considered as a vital move towards library cooperation. A library consortium combines the purchasing power of its members and thus helps to fulfill the requirements of users of all member libraries to greater extent. In a short span of time, numerous consortia have been formed all over the globe. With enormous increase in number of consortia, communication among the various consortia has become critical. Thus, a consortium of consortia was formed in the USA, known as the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) **(Huarng & yu , 2011)**. The paper explores the consortia of different countries participating in ICOLC.

Various features (viz., number of consortia, types and number of libraries participating, legal status and services provided) of participating consortia are keenly studied to have the in-depth study. It is observed that about 55 countries are participating in ICOLC and US is the major contributor (48.53%) as per the number of consortia. All types of libraries viz, academic, public, school and special are taking part in the consortia. These consortia vary in their legal status few are national while some are run by non-profit organizations while few others are administered by co-operative bodies.

Keywords

Consortium, cooperation, electronic resources, resource sharing, International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC).

Introduction

In this modern era of cybernetics, the information has become prerequisite of every individual and no library can fulfil these requirements on its own. This has compelled the libraries to create effective linkages and cooperation with each other for sharing of available resources. Resource sharing is basically the sharing of various resources among contributing libraries on the cooperation basis. In this scenario, the consortia can act as a milestone for library cooperation in sharing various resources. The consortium can play central role in the progress of national strategy for information provision for research **(Rahman, Nahar and Akhtar 2006).** The consortia aids the libraries to acquire resources at better prices for all member libraries and developing new services to meet their user's needs.

The term 'consortium' literally means "temporary cooperation of several powers or large interests to effect some common purpose" **(Concise Oxford Dictionary 1966, 260).** A library consortium is "a community (a cooperative) of two or more information agencies which have formally agreed to

coordinate, cooperate in, or consolidate certain functions to achieve mutual objectives" **(Narasimhan 2002, 556-564).**

In fact, "Library consortium is a community of value creating entities, generating value through an aggregation of library units within and across organizations. The value creation could be enhanced through resource sharing processes, products and service offerings of the participating library units in a consortium"**(Jayprakash and Koteshwar Rao 2006, 2-4)**. **"Library consortia refers to the co-operation, co-ordination and collaboration between and among libraries for the purpose of sharing information resources" (Moghaddam and Talwar 2009, 94-104)**.

In view of **Uttarkar and Gadagin (2017, 12-19)** "A consortium is an association of two or more individuals, companies, organizations or governments (or any combination of these entities) with the objective of participating in a common activity or pooling their resources for achieving a common goal". According to Dr. S. R. Ranganathan "Library is a growing organism" that drives the whole world towards consortium. When some library joins its hands with other libraries through consortium they can acquire greater user satisfaction with wide range of resources and services.

A consortium helps to attain the economy, efficiency and equality in information accessibility and use. Participant libraries in a consortium have access not only to their own resources but to the resources of all member libraries. Hence, this can fill the gap between the libraries with varied collection of resources **(Pandian et al. 2002, 211-214).**

A consortium provides the opportunity for a library to gain access to more resources that they might never attain individually. Furthermore, a consortium is able to represent all participants as one voice before vendors, publishers/funders that helps in obtaining better deals, terms and conditions. Jointly planned activities enable member libraries to provide better quality and more services effectively. By sharing resources via consortium, libraries can

work together to create and enhance services to satisfy the requirements of their users efficiently. **(Uttarkar and Gadagin 2017, 12-19).**

Library consortia have grown globally over the past few decades. The increase in number of consortia, this movement has begun to mature that compelled the publishers and vendors to adapt their purchasing models. As such, the consortia expanded their agendas for action. Thus, the movement to globalize consortia is traced that help in communication between various consortia **(Hirshon 2002, 147-166).** With the rapid development of consortia, the need was felt to organize the activities of different consortia and to share ideas to improve management and coordination of their programs and services. Hence, in 1996, a group of consortium leaders began to meet informally at the American Library Association to discuss how to work more effectively. The group, initially known as the Consortium of Consortia (COC), eventually was named the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC). ICOLC is a self-organized and informal group of consortia leaders comprising approximately 200 library consortia in globally. The consortia include members from any type and sizes of libraries. ICOLC supports participating consortia by facilitating discussion on issues of common interest. It did not charge any dues and only fee is required for registration in meetings. The ICOLC keep its members abreast about new electronic information resources, pricing practices of electronic providers and vendors, and other issues of importance. ICOLC also publishes best practices or statements regarding topics which affect libraries and library consortia. This gives a strong voice to consortia and their members so as to influence the commercial centers and library networks **(Feather 2015).**

Thus, in general, Consortia are rescuer to libraries against the price hike of information resources. Library consortia act as an alliance between libraries, publishers and vendors. Thus, libraries have increasingly turned to consortia to be able to deliver greater number of resources and quality services with limited finances.

Review of Literature

Coming together of libraries at different levels for sharing resources has been the remarkable step **(Alexander 1998; Nfila 2002, 203-212; Xenidou-Dervou 2002, 120-125)**. To accomplish the combined objectives of libraries by co-operation and the sharing of resources, various group of organizations came together that lead to formation/development of a Consortium. **Hirshonin (1999, 147-166)** defines library consortium more broadly as a "generic term to indicate any group of libraries that are working together towards a common goal, whether to expand cooperation on traditional library services (such as collection development) or electronic information services". **Nifla and Ampen (2002, 203-212)** in their study defined the term "library consortium as a form of co-operation among libraries". They studied the needs that lead to formation of consortia and its types. They also studied the conditions underlying in the formation of the International Association of Library Consortia. According to **Biswas and Dasgupta (2001),** has stated that "A consortium refers to a temporary cooperation of a number of powers, companies etc, for a common purpose. It is an association of similar types of organization /institution who are engaged for producing and servicing the common things/for providing services for a specific purpose of its users". Consortium is a complicated organization in the sense that is not commonly understood, i.e. a consortium is not a library association, although some associations of libraries may engage in consortial activities **(Scepanski 1998, 271-275)**. **Allen and Hirshon (1998, 36-44)** in his study pointed out that the most important development for libraries during the present time has been the move from organizational self-sufficiency to a collaborative survival mode as indicated by the growth of library consortia. They emphasized on importance of IT to foster the level of cooperation that is much broader and deeper than ever before. Library consortia do not have any unique history, although it was during 1930's that consortial agreements begin to develop to administer interlibrary loans as well as resource sharing. It is worth mentioning that

during 1970's, the office of Education (US) with aim to provide guidance for libraries to form the consortia, conducted a nationwide study on the growth of the library consortia. This study identified 125 library consortia that largely focused on academic libraries, founded during a period from 1931 to 1972. Same study revealed that a significant number of consortia that is, 115 (92%) had been founded after 1960 depicting rapid increase in the number of consortia during this decade. This indicates that the formation of a consortium was an appealing solution to many institutions as it solved a number of longstanding problems **(DeLanoy, Diana D. and Cuadra 1972; Kopp 1998, 7-12)**. **Dong and TJ Zou (2009, 1-10)** tried to track the China's history and development in library consortia since 1980. They found that library consortia of China are mostly sharing resources in the areas of cooperative acquisitions, cataloging, reciprocal borrowing services, interlibrary borrowing, online document delivery, centralized staff training and technological development. **Thorton (2000)** studied impact of electronic resources on library purchasing and also provided a case study of Cleveland State University. He observed that the rising costs of electronic journals are swallowing out the maximum part of library budget. Many authors have stressed the need to establish national catalogue as it will provide a platform in carrying library consortia activities smoothly **(Abdul Kader 2009; Bashirullah and Xiomara 2006, 102-107)**. **Sayers (2004, 283-292)** performed a review of the consortium functions of special libraries consortium of Australia named as Queensland government libraries consortium. His study indicated that the financial savings of more than one million dollars was achieved by these consortium-combined libraries during 2002-03. Another study regarding Jordan consortium, also claimed same level of financial savings **(Ahmed and Suleiman 2013, 138-143).** Although library networks and consortia have been around for many decades, the recent rapid growth and interest in consortia was generally affected by the advent of widespread licensing of electronic information resources. It was in response to this phenomenon that stimulated the international consortium

community **(Hirshon 2002, 147-166).** It is worth to mention that despite the continuous growth in number of consortia, it was only after the development of other elements like evolution of mega-consortia and integrated library systems that expanded the involvement of libraries into consortial activities. **Horton and Pronevitz (2015)** studied over eighty consortia and founded that the top services provided consists of training/professional development, shared electronic content, group purchases, integrated Library systems, resource sharing and delivery. The study also noticed that financial unreliability have led to some difficulties for some library consortia and more than 65 consortia have been closed since 2008. Despite of these problems, 15 respondents reported about formation of new consortia since 2008. The new consortia were specific in their purpose and cater the needs of small group of libraries. An interesting evolution in consortia has been collaboration of multiple consortia to work together. "By sharing the experiences and the risk, this collective efforts brings with it the real potential to effect major changes in the market place" **(Allen and Hirshon 1998, 36-44).** One of the example of such collaboration is CRL (Center for Research Libraries) that was formed during the era of print resources and has now amplified its role as a centralized aggregator to cover new patterns of information exchange and access in collaborative activities such as collection development, digitization, licensing, and preservation **(Atkinson 2018, 11-33).** Gradually with the emergence of information technologies, the problem of electronic database licensing became crucial and many new groups have developed over the last two decades specifically to deal with it. These groups joined together and lead to formation of consortia of consortia or mega-consortia such as the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC). ICOLC is an informal consortium with over 60 member consortium organizations over the globe and it help the newly formed consortia to exchange ideas and address issues of common concern **(Wade 1999, 5-18; Feather 2005, 89-93).**

Problem

Today resource sharing is most vital advantage of consortia for libraries as the ability for users to access resources is more important than collection building within a particular library. Thus, the consortia enable libraries to gain the benefits of wider access to electronic resources at an affordable cost **(Singh and Singh, 2004).**With the rapid increase in number of consortia, it was thought to be essential to organize the activities and share ideas to enhance management and coordination of programs and services of consortia. Thus, the present study made an effort to explore the participating consortia in ICOLC and also endeavour to identify the services provided by different consortia to its member libraries.

Scope

The scope of the study is confined to participating consortia listed in ICOLC from different countries.

Objectives

1.   To find out the number of Consortia participating at country level in ICOLC.

2.   To identify the number of libraries that is part of various Consortia within ICOLC.

3.   To explore the library type participating in the consortia.

4.   To determine the diversity of participating consortia of ICOLC.

5.   To determine the main services provided by these consortia to their member libraries.

Methodology

This study explored the ICOLC consortium to achieve the above set objectives. The various phases of the study are as follows:

Phase I

The study explored the ICOLC consortium in-order to find out the number of library consortium contributing towards it at the country

level. The different types and number of libraries participating in these consortia within ICOLC are also studied.

<u>Phase II</u>

The study also harvested the data regarding the legal status of various consortia (i.e. whether the consortia is run by governmental organisation, non- profit organisation, research institutes, etc.) and the services provided by them to the member libraries so to fulfil the information requirement of the users of these libraries.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

   1. **Main Participating countries in ICOLC**

As the study is confined to ICOLC, a total of 204 consortia from 55 countries participate in ICOLC. Among the participating countries, the highest number of consortia is from USA (99, 48.53%) followed by Canada (17, 8.33%), Germany (8, 3.92%), UK (6, 2.94%), India (5, 2.44%), Australia & Multi-country (4, 1.96%) and Italy (3, 1.47%). Graph1 gives a bird's eye view.

The study depicts that from the list of countries participating in ICOLC, USA leads among all. As the USA has large number of libraries with sound financial backing. Therefore, collaborate together to form different consortia to offer wide range of information resources to users for achieving their educational and research pursuits.
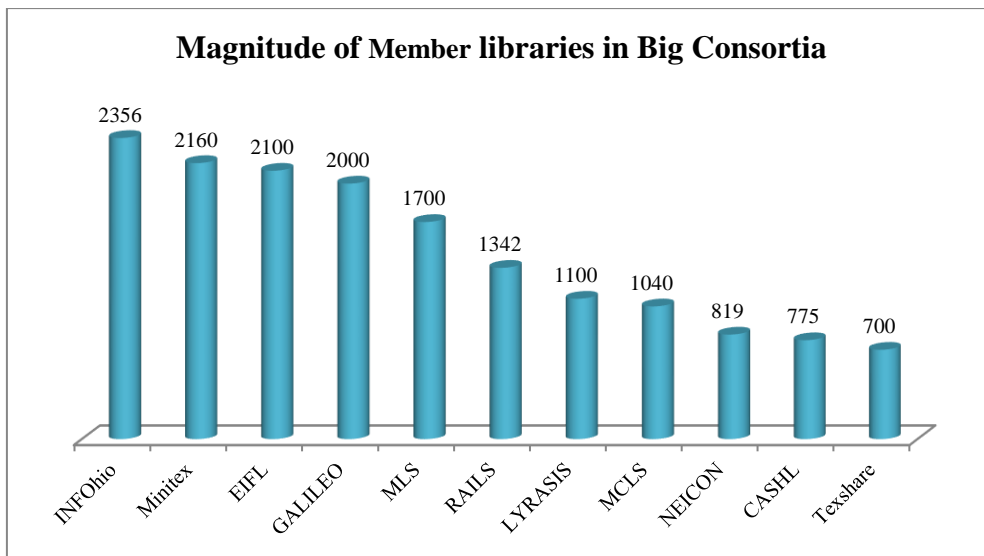
Main participating countries in ICOLC
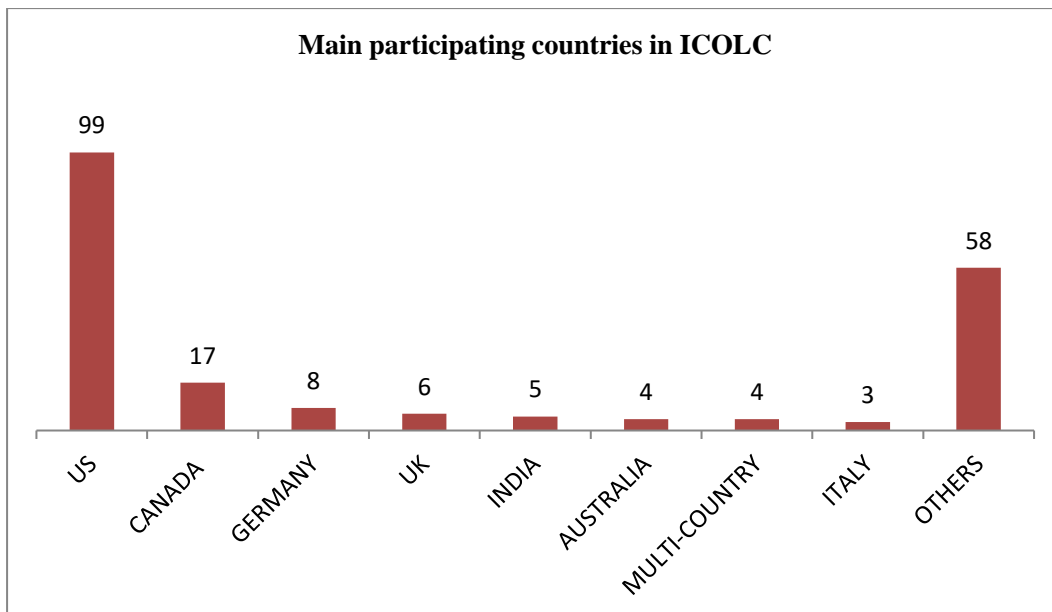
Graph 1: Main participating countries in ICOLC

* Others include 47 countries viz, China, Japan, Iceland, Ireland, Austria, Denmark, Oman, Pakistan, Turkey, Nepal, Brazil, South Africa, Russian Federation, etc.

2. Magnitude of Member Libraries in Big Consortia

Consortium is the collaboration of different member libraries to provide access to different type of resources. The study revealed that INFOhio is the leading consortium with 2356 member libraries collaborating in it, followed by Minitex (2160), EIFL (2100), GALILEO (2000), MLS (1700), RAILS (1342), LYRASIS (1100), MCLS (1040), NEICON (819), CASHL (775) and Texshare (700). Graph 2 gives an overview of the study.

The study deduced that INFOhio is the leading consortium with great number of member libraries associated with it. These member libraries provide different type of services to its users so to fulfill the needs of their users.
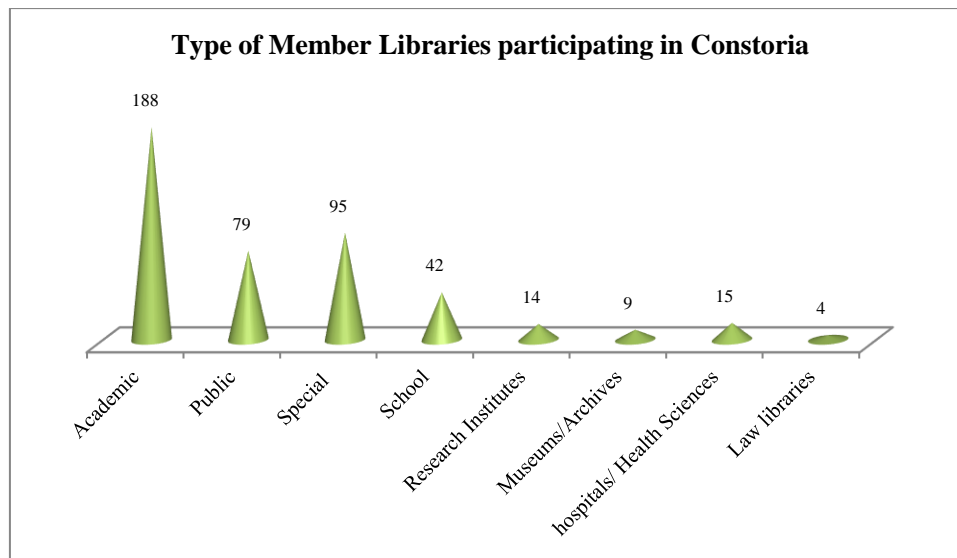
Magnitude of Member libraries in Big Consortia

2356 2160 2100 2000 1700 1342 1100 1040 819 775 700

INFOhio Minitex EIFL GALILEO MLS RAILS LYRASIS MCLS NEICON CASHL Texshare

Graph 2: Magnitude of Member Libraries in Big Consortia

3. Types of member libraries collaborating in Consortia

In participating Consortia of ICOLC many libraries collaborate that may be either dedicated to only specific type of library or may contain amalgam of various types of libraries viz academic, public, school and special, etc. The study portrays that academic libraries are taking part as members in most of participating consortia (188) followed by special libraries (95), public libraries (79), school libraries (42), hospitals/health libraries (15), research institutes (14), museums/ archives (9) and law libraries (4). Graph 3 offers a lucid view.

The data divulge that due to large number, diverge needs and lack of financial resources in academic libraries, these are involving more in the venture of consortia so that they can provide access to wide variety of resources required by the users.

Type of Member Libraries participating in Constoria

188
79
95
42
14
9
15
4

Academic Public Special School Research Institutes Museums/Archives hospitals/ Health Sciences Law libraries

Graph 3: Types of Member Libraries participating in Big Consortia

4. Services provided by Consortia

The consortia provided various services to its member libraries to achieve their goals as depicted in the graph 4. Electronic content licensing is provided by the highest number of consortia (171, 84%) followed by Training (121, 59%), interlibrary loan (86, 42%) and Union list/ shared online catalogs (74, 42%). Some consortia also provide facility for sharing of collections (55, 27%), electronic content loading/ presentation (49, 24%) and preservation (49, 24%). Only few consortia provide storage facilities (26, 13%) and cataloguing services (15, 7%).

The data depicted that most of consortia provide the electronic content licensing service; this may be due to the tremendous growth in number of electronic resources and the high affinity of the users towards these resources due to their global access.
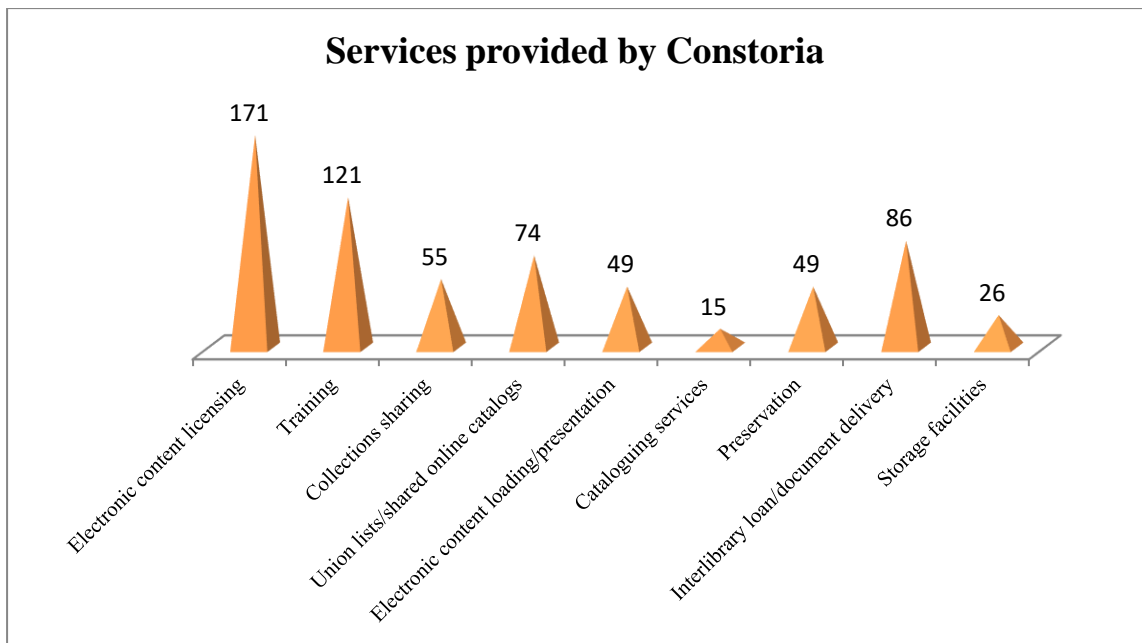
Graph 4: Functions provided by Consortia

5. Consortia - Diversity

The consortia are run by different institutions varying from government organizations to cooperative and non-profit organizations. As depicted in the graph 5, highest number of consortia are run by non-profit organizations (64), followed by government bodies (30) while some are functioning as a part of particular university (24). Cooperative institutes (17) also run some consortia followed by associations (12), incorporated (11) and unincorporated institutes (10).

Thus, we can deduce that most of consortia are run by non-profit organizations to provide the maximum benefit to the member libraries without having to pay high subscription fee to become member of the consortium.

Constoria Diversity
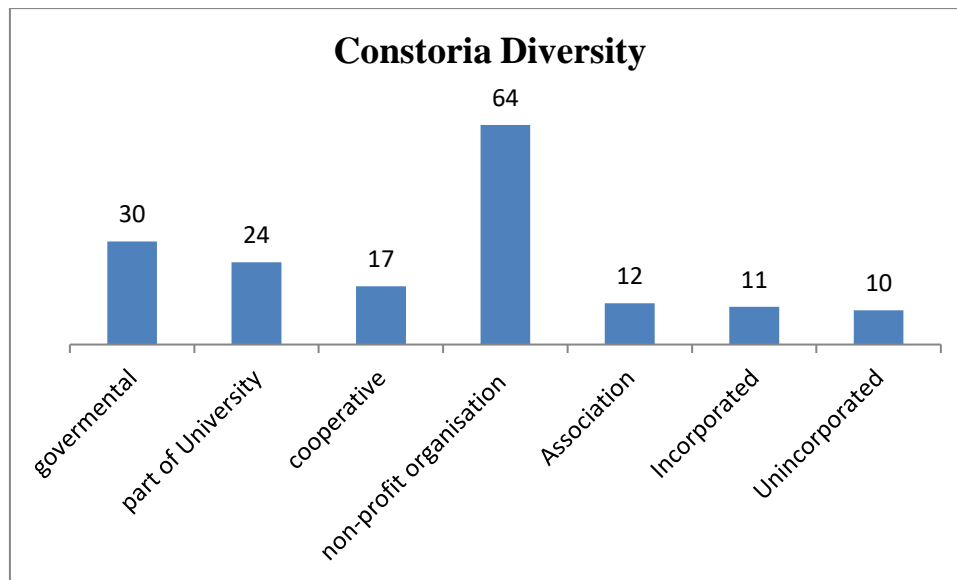
Graph 5: Legal status of Consortia

Conclusion

Thus we can conclude from the study that ICOLC is a mega consortium with 204 consortia from 55 countries around the globe contributing to it. The highest number of consortia belongs to the USA that depicts that this country is highly active in catering information needs of its users than rest of countries in the world. It has also been noticed that the users of academic libraries require access to large variety of information resources, thus the more number of academic libraries are found associated with these consortia which helps them to fulfil the information requirements of their users.

Further the study concludes that different types of organizations run these consortia varying from non-profit organizations to government bodies and associations, etc. The different consortia associated with ICOLC provide various services to its member libraries like electronic content licensing, collections sharing, interlibrary loan, union lists, etc. so that users can easily facilitate these services. Thus, ICOLC is a gateway to different types of consortia providing them more visibility and recognition at global level.

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