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Resource Sharing in Academic Libraries: A Tool for Collaboration

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Abstract

Resource sharing is an important and widely well-known concept in the field of library science. The concept is recognized by the term library networking which deals with the interconnection of libraries so that the participating libraries can share information and resources effectively. It aids to overcome the limitations like enormous cost of purchase, bibliography handling, storage of material etc. as a result of the exponential growth in the information produced. Resource sharing is a solution to optimize library resources. Thus, resource sharing in libraries has become essential in current scenario, and it commands world-wide acceptance. Based on the literature review it can be said that academic libraries, especially in developing countries should continue subscribing to information resources through the Consortium Building (CB) and explore their usage by ensuring total addressing of patrons information needs. Also government should earmark appropriate funds for the purchase of information technologies facilities needed by academic libraries for resource sharing. The paper recommended that the least forms of resources sharing like Inter library loan should be given priority especially for rare information resources that have high demand but their supply is low and exist in print format to start with. The work further recommends that academic libraries should formulate effective policies that will ensure library resource information sharing is properly conducted in academic libraries.

Key Words: Resource Sharing, Academic Libraries

Introduction

The concept of resource sharing refers to mutual agreement between libraries to share their resources for providing better services to their clients. Such resources may include: document collection, staff members, technical facilities and mechanical support among participating libraries (Mubofu and Chaula 2020). Song (2000) as cited in Ejedafiru (2011) was of the view that "no library can effectively satisfy all its users from the resources within its walls". We are living in a time where a library's worth is increasingly being measured by the services it offers in terms of helping clients to access universal information rather than its respective collection. Resource sharing is an important and widely well-known concept in the field of library science. The concept is recognized by the term library networking which deals with the interconnection of libraries so that the participating libraries can share the information and resources effectively. It aids to overcome the limitations like enormous cost of purchase, bibliography handling, storage of material etc. as a result of the surprising growth in the produced information. Resource sharing is a solution to optimize the library resources. Thus, resource sharing in libraries has become essential in current scenario, and it commands world-wide acceptance (Prakash and Janardhana 2017).

According to Speirs (2006), librarians are truly charged with creating, selecting, evaluating, managing and disseminating information, reaching out and exchanging information with others to satisfy users. Information providers can no longer stand alone to guard information resources without sharing them if they are to provide comprehensive services to patrons. Information users in the 21st century are more smarter than you think. They are aware of the glut of information available via Google and they will use them. This is the era of access to information and not ownership. It is no longer possible for a library to survive only as a passive

repository. Partnership and other strategies are key to making this ownership-to-access transition work effectively.

Resource sharing in the past has been on scarcity that resulted to reductions in the range and depth of information the individual libraries could make available. These reductions have been tackled through various initiatives, such as the union catalog, the inter-library lending services and the preparation of bibliography. Nevertheless, with the dramatic growth in the capabilities of computers and communication technology networks the process of resource sharing has radically been revolutionized, and it has brought about a fundamental transformation from the traditional approach to a modern approach (Usman, 2006).

Resource sharing according to Amigos Library Services (1995) in Blakes (2006) is comprised of transactions which a library makes its materials or copies of its materials available to the clientele of another library upon request. The purpose is to obtain, upon request of a library's primary user, materials not available in the local library. Furthermore, resource sharing does not relieve any library of the responsibility for providing collections necessary for its primary clientele, unless libraries have entered into special agreements with other libraries. Resource sharing ensures cooperative spirit between libraries to follow stated network protocols, or in the absence of stated protocols, exhaust local resources before requesting materials from other members. Libraries must be willing to lend if they wish to borrow. In other words, there must be supplying libraries as well as those requesting from them.

Funding for academic libraries in Nigeria for instance had been very inadequate. This has drastically affected library services and provision of information materials. Mohammed (1999) in Blakes (2006), asserted that some academic and research libraries have engaged in

some co-operative ventures within the country, to pool resources together for general use by participating libraries. These initiatives include inter-library loan, exchange and compilation of Union lists of serials. It was further revealed that these cooperatives were not all that successful because they were done with the traditional manual tools, and faced with other problems such as poor communication and information infrastructure, and negative human/organizational attitudes. Those failed resource sharing co-operatives would have succeeded but for the manual systems used and other constraints. However, investment in IT infrastructure is the answer.

Resource Sharing

Ali, Owoeye and Anasi, (2010) described that the terms library cooperation, library networking, library linkages, library collaboration, library consortia, interlibrary loan, document supply, document delivery, access services, are used interchangeably and synonymously to describe formal and informal cooperation, partnership and resource sharing activities in libraries. In addition, Bouazza (1986) accepted that that the meaning of library resource sharing, library networking, and library co-operation are nearly the same; therefore it can be use synonymously.

Resource sharing is nothing but sharing of library resources by certain participating libraries among themselves on the basis of the principle of co-operation. This is applicable in sharing of documents, manpower, services, space and equipments. Increasing cost of books and subscribing periodicals, high cost of new technology for information processing and dissemination are some of the fundamentals factors which require information resource sharing among the libraries. The activities that result from an agreement, formal or informal, among a group of libraries (usually a consortium or network) to share collections, data, facilities,

personnel, etc., for the benefit of their users and to reduce the expense of collection development is known as resource sharing (Muthu, 2013). Besides entering into inter-library practice, libraries also engage in resource sharing in many other areas, such as co-operative acquisition, co-operative cataloguing, co-operative classification, etc. Inter-library loan has been practiced as one of the most popular resource sharing activity amongst libraries.

Various consortia arose in response to the increasing calls for the establishment of interlibrary loan programs. Some of these involved many small libraries which wanted to increase their base of available resources without increasing their budgets but many of them also evolved as a response to government sponsored initiatives. The groups of libraries who cooperated in this way of interlibrary lending were often similar types of libraries as the shared holdings would therefore have appeal to the similar types of patrons from these libraries. For instance, a group of university libraries could arrange to share their resources and therefore reduce the necessity of holding all of the titles on a particular subject area while at the same time their students and faculty members would have access to them. Public library consortia that use interlibrary loans extensively are very common in the United States with many having the books and other items transported between the libraries on a daily or even more frequent basis. The shift from ownership to access began with this type of interlibrary cooperation. One no longer had to buy and hold ownership of information in order to access and use it so the focus began to change from ownership to access (Speirs, 2006).

Brief History of Resource Sharing

Martey (2002), Edwards, (1999) in Ali, Owoeye and Anasi, (2010) reviewed that the Centre for Research Libraries was built in Chicago in the 1960s. This centre was to coordinate cooperation among 162 institutions to acquire; store and preserve less frequently used but very expensive research materials for the institutions needs. In the 1970s costs of library materials began to go up while library budgets remained almost stagnant. As a result, in 1974 the Columbia, Harvard, and Yale research libraries and those of the New York Public Library founded resource sharing cooperation in form of Research Library Group (RLG). This was born out of the belief that no library can be self-sufficient to satisfy the information needs of all its patrons materially and service-wise. RLG provided databases of library holding created cooperatively by member libraries. Also, Canada has the Information Network for Ontario (INFO). Nearly 300 public libraries are connected between South Ontario library service and Ontario library service, using a choice of access by Internet, standalone PC or CD-ROM.

In Nwosu, (2004) as cited in Ali, Owoeye and Anasi, (2010), in the Nigeria case, John Harris, the then Librarian of the University College, Ibadan (now university of Ibadan) was the brain behind the introduction of resource sharing in Nigeria. Consequent to conference held by the International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) in Grenoble, France, in 1973, the National Library of Nigeria (NLN) was charged with the responsibility of being the clearing house for all the existing libraries in the country. And by October 1973, an inter-library lending unit was set up in the National Library of Nigeria. However, Ubogu (1992) in Ali, Owoeye and Anasi, (2010) summed it up when he asserted that all effort at efficient resources sharing in Nigeria have not yielded enough

Cases of Resource Sharing

Speirs, (2006) opined that it soon became clear that users needed some sort of finding aid for remote documents and texts and this is when union listing became even more sophisticated. A union list is an index which can lead the researcher or librarian to the needed documents held by a lender. Some of the largest of these in the world are the National Union Catalog (NUC) of the Library of Congress or the large catalogs of OCLC or RLIN. Some of these types of lists began as hard copies consisting of many bound volumes but now most of them have evolved into digital databases. One can search the databases to find where a document is located and if they have the eligibility they can borrow either the original hard copy or perhaps even a scanned version of the original. Closer to home, several projects have been initiated here in Nigeria which have as their goal in the sharing of information. Some of these according to Speirs, (2006) are:

• Nigerian Periodical Index (NPI) : A resource sharing project of the Committee of University Libraries of Nigerian Universities (CULNU). All Nigerian Universities are expected to participate with each being responsible for indexing serial titles in a given field.

• National Documentation and Library Centre for Science and Technology (NADICEST): The project aims at providing access to current and retrospective information on science and technology to facilitate research. Academic and research libraries are expected to be members. It is made up of eight Nodal Centres in the country to which special subject areas were allocated for development. However, no matter how effective these types of resource sharing projects are, they depend on the movement of paper documents across space. When this happens there are potential problems of damage or loss to the original item. One way around this is for the

documents to be transferred into digital documents which can be transmitted and copied without the fear of losing the original. However, many of the networks formed have made significant contributions to the realization of the electronic libraries, both through the continuing evolution of library management systems and the creation of large shared bibliographic databases, which have contributed to the reduction in original cataloguing (Usman 2006).

Speirs, (2006) asserted that this shift of having to actually own an item and having access to information located in nearby libraries began the revolution towards the virtual availability of information resources which we see today in electronic documents. Today the access of free information available via the World Wide Web has widen the concept of having to go to the neighborhood library and turn the pages of a book with paper pages in a conventional library. This is not to say that some of our best information and our most important texts are not to be found in hard copy. The challenge here is to transmit even these hard copy texts to a patron who might not be standing in front of you through electronic means, and that is resource sharing. The digitization revolution is moving ahead and we have probably all heard of the project that Google has undertaken with five large libraries in Africa in order to scan and digitize many of their holdings, a scanning project that will bring millions of volumes of printed books into the Google Print database for open public use in order to expand resource sharing.

Resource Sharing in Electronic Enviroment

(Kaul, 2001 and Manjunath and Shivalingaiah, 2003) in Igbo and Imo (2017) expressed that Electronic Information Resource sharing has been identified as the critical factor for effective functioning of libraries in this present ICT dispensation.

All over the world, universities have banded together in both national and regional consortia to not only realize economics of scale in purchasing and managing Internet bandwidth, but also in pushing telecom frontiers (Etim,2006). This digital age, library resource sharing is enhanced according to Rahman and Kumar (2000) in Blakes (2006) by "the technological development in the field of information technology and telecommunication which have paved the way to form local, regional and international networking of libraries to share their resources.

Digital or electronic information with the use of telecommunications has paved the way for local and global resource sharing, and library/information networks. Grosch (1995) in Usman (2006) identified the following reasons as the characteristics of the library resources sharing in the digital environment: broadening access to materials, lowering the per unit cost of cataloguing, document delivery, bibliographic utilities and their role, co-operative acquisitions, copyright, governance and other development based ventures. Also, Akintunde (2002) and O'Brien (1998), in Blakes (2006) corroborated this fact in his work, that, it is the only way to make available library resources in the format of the digital age. Information and Communication Technologies has provided the following merit for resource sharing:

- Significantly higher transmission speeds

- The movement of larger amounts of information

- Greater economy; and

- Much lower error rates than analog systems.

Historically, Usman (2006) asserted that libraries have had a long tradition of resources sharing and networking. These have been greatly expanded by the rapid development of computers, telecommunication, networking and digital technologies. It is common now for the

libraries to be members of several consortia at the same time for various types of co-operative work and resources sharing. The best example of this is the On-line Computer Library Catalog (OCLC) in United States. Wang (1996) in Usman (2006) considers the Online Computer Library Catalog (OCLC) as a model in the evolution of resources sharing in the digital age. OCLC grew from a regional co-operative network in the State of Ohio, United State of America to a national network in the USA, and further grew to what it is now an International network- Libraries and Information Centers in sixty three (63) countries and territories. The Online Computer Library Catalog (OCLC) maintains not only the largest computer and telecommunication Center in the world, but also the world's largest database of bibliographic records and location of information. The OCLC database, known as the OCLC Online Union Catalog, currently consists of over 35 million bibliographic records, covering all the subject areas in 370 languages and in the following nine formats: books, serials, sound recording, visual materials, maps archives, music scores, manuscripts and computers files.

Similarly, Abdulkadiri (1995) in Usman (2006) explained that, in Nigeria one can remember the growth of the resources sharing in electronic environment or digital age from 1990, when the World Bank intervened with a loan to improve the institutional capacities of the Nigerian Universities. Before then, the 1987 conference, jointly organized by the National Universities Commission and the British Council, it was recommended that the Management Information Systems (MIS) should be introduced into Nigerian University system. The Management Information System (MIS) project commenced with a workshop in 1989 for the academic Planners of the Nigerian Universities, followed, in 1990, by the setting up of a technical Committee to design the hardware and software prototypes for the project. These initiatives, along with the World Bank intervention, eventually led to the introduction and

development of the University database through the Nigerian Universities Management Information System (NUMIS) and the electronic connectivity through the Nigerian Universities Network (NUnet) which led to a significant change in the resource sharing in libraries.

Research has shown that, in the current digital and networked knowledge age, the size of information resources on the web is growing exponentially. Usman (2006) opined that no one really knows exactly the number of web pages that are added every second. The latest statistics of the Internet hosts numbered is close to two billion, and is growing fast at the speed of light. Most of the frequently used Internet Search Engines have also expanded their index sizes and bounds. For example, according to the November 11, 2004 report of the Search Engine Watch, Google claimed to have indexed 8.1 billion web pages, Yahoo 4.2 billion web pages and MSN 5.0 billion web pages which have led to creation of databases in academic libraries. While the immediacy of information provision has certainly improved in the digital age, many approaches have re-surfaced in the digital environment different from the traditional approach of resource sharing.

According to Usman (2006), the dramatic growth in the capabilities of computers and communication technology networks has not only radically revolutionized the process of resource sharing, but has also brought about a fundamental transformation from the traditional approach to a modern approach. These modern approaches of resource sharing are made possible through:

i. **Internet**

The Internet has been regarded as the most important way of communication in digital age. Internet is a global network connecting millions of computers and databases. It has opened

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up numerous possibilities for doing resource sharing at the local and global levels of libraries' environments. It enables the libraries and the librarians to interact with each other. Information on latest journals, books, articles and discussions on library routines can be exchanged directly through the internet. Because of the continual developments in the society at large, internet is no longer new as a technology among many; it has become an invaluable and integral part of library. The main uses of internet are for information dissemination, e-mail, file transfer, education research activities and sharing of ideas and resources in the libraries.

ii.   **Electronic Mail**

Electronic Mail (e-mail) is the most prevalent and successful form of person-to-person resource sharing approach. Anyone who has an e-mail address can send electronic mails to another with e-mail address on any computer in the world connected to a network. E-mail software, such as Eudora pro, can create and send electronic messages and attachments. The attachment function is used to send any type of document such as text, spreadsheets, images, database files etc.

iii. **Digital Library Approach**

Digital libraries are being created for resource sharing today for diverse communities and in different fields e.g. education, science, culture, development, health, governance and so on. With the availability of several free digital Library software packages at the recent time, the creation and sharing of information through the digital library collections have become an attractive and feasible proposition for the library and information professionals around the world. Digital libraries bring significant benefits to the users through the improved access, wider access,

improved information sharing and availability. Many digital libraries are on the internet or produced in Compact Disc Read-Only-Memory (CD-ROM).

iv. **Teleconferencing and Video Conferencing**

These are the extensions of the conventional telephone conversations. These systems allow numerous people to be simultaneously connected so that discussion can take place, even though they do not meet physically. This can take place either within the organization, or externally and even on an international basis. Professional librarians can exchange ideas on new approaches in library management.

v. **Office Automation**

Office automation is now used for the information processing tasks in the offices and libraries. They enable people to perform their work, such as research findings, storing and processing of data through databases and communicating through the e-mail. The office automation technology includes a wide array of software application tools. These technologies enable the members of a group to interact with each other, organize their work and share resources. The technology has improved the communication and the sharing of information across the globe.

Challenges to Resource Sharing in Academic Libraries

Extending this sharing responsibility farther than the conventional library activities involves sharing library resources with the patrons of other libraries. However, some libraries let the fear of having their resources be stolen or misused influence their sharing responsibilities, thus, they run away from resource sharing (Speirs, 2006).

(Vervliet, 1979; Banjo, 1984; Edoka, 2000; Nwazuoke, 2001 and Ejedafiru, 2003) in Ejedafiru, (2010) expressed that efforts at efficient resource sharing in Nigeria seem to have come to naught. This is tied to the inadequacy of existing resources, lack of information about them, inadequate security of materials, uncooperative attitude of parent bodies, lack of policies, inflation ,and unstable budgetary allocation. In addition, Ejedafiru, (2010) asserted that Librarians unanimously agreed that the reasons for the failure of resource sharing in their libraries were poor communication infrastructure, negative attitude to automation, not being technically ready, lack of cooperative spirit, inadequate photocopy services, slow document delivery system, inadequate funds, lack of policy, and lack of union catalogue.

In a study by Assante, et. al., (2014) in Prakash and Janardhana (2017), it was opined that major challenges in the resource sharing and library networking in digital age are

- The limited Information Technologies and networking infrastructure facilities

- The limited availability of funds

- Lack of skilled personnel for Database development

- The limited Skills for networking

- Missing Standardization framework which unifies various libraries divided by geography

- Lack of agreement among potential participants

- unwillingness for Co-operation amongst the libraries

Sampath, Kumar and Biradar, (2010) in Prakash and Janardhana (2017) expressed that the availability of necessary facilities like sufficient number of computers, Internet connection and E-mail facilities in libraries pose as a basic challenge for electronic access and recovery of

information resources sharing. Although many of the academic institutes in developing countries do not have a sophisticated IT and networking infrastructure, thus, a large chunk of these institutes do have limitations in these facilities meaning that some libraries do not even have computers to start with. Many academic libraries profoundly lack in the infrastructural facilities like hardware and software among many other. Comprehensively, the fact remains that not only in Nigeria but the libraries in entire Africa; are yet to explore the full potential of IT and internet technologies in resource sharing.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the literature review it can be said that academic libraries, especially in developing countries should continue subscribing information resources through the Consortium Building (CB) and explore their usage by ensuring total addressing of patrons information needs. Also government should earmark appropriate fund for the purchase of information technologies facilities needed by academic libraries for resource sharing. It can be recommended that the least forms of resources sharing like Inter library loan should be given more priority especially for rare information resources that have high demand but their supply is low and exist in print format to start with. The work further recommends that academic libraries should formulate effective policies that will ensure library resource information sharing is properly conducted in academic libraries.

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