

Full Length Research

Resource Sharing and Information Networking Services in Academic Libraries in Africa

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Accepted 7 January 2023

Resource Sharing can be termed Inter-Library Loan. 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 equipment. The research explained that the objective of achieving a good resource sharing must be kept in mind while undergoing library networking and resource sharing, and increasing the accessibility and availability of resources in a way that each participating library contributes to the resources as the duplication in resources are eliminated. Resource Sharing and Information Networking can be done manually or by other modern means rendering a free flow of information. It is certain that effective resource sharing among academic libraries depends upon the strengths of individual libraries. One weak library cooperating with another weak library cannot promote effective resource sharing. We share our strengths, not our weaknesses. Driven by prevailing circumstances, sharing of resources is the only option left for academic libraries and librarians. The main goal of every academic library is to pull library materials together in order to give more satisfactory services to its users, by making more information resources available to them which is the goal of resource sharing.

Keywords: Resource Sharing, Information Networking Services, Academic Libraries, Africa

Cite This Article As: OLUBIYO, P.O., OLUBIYO, L.M (2023). Resource Sharing and Information Networking Services in Academic Libraries in Africa. *Inter. J. Acad. Lib. Info. Sci.* 11(1): 5-10

INTRODUCTION

Information resource sharing deals with the exchange of information among libraries and information centres to cater for dwindling resources especially in the developing economy like Nigeria. Resource sharing is a mutual agreement between libraries to exchange resources. Each library gives its own materials to other participating libraries and also receives same from them. For example, digital resource sharing is an improvement on manual resource sharing. To a great extent, it has removed rigors and inefficiencies, which characterized manual sharing. The internet exposes users to resources of world leading universities and

facilitates an unparallel degree of collaboration, resource sharing and information access. Information sources are located in different libraries all over the world. Such information sources have been packaged in digital formats. The libraries can therefore share online databases, electronic journals, online reference tools, web resources, electronic books etc. (Ilo,2008).

Resource Sharing can be termed Inter-Library Loan (Okeagu and Okeagu, 2008). A study by Muthu (2013) in Prakash and Janardhana (2017) defines resource sharing as 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

equipment. Sujatah, (1999) in Prakash and Janardhana (2017) explained that the objective is kept in mind while undergoing library networking and resource sharing, that increasing the accessibility and availability of resources in a way that each participating library contributes to the resources are the duplication in resources and it can be done manually or by other modern means rendering a free flow of information. It is certain that effective resource sharing among academic libraries depends upon the strengths of individual libraries. One weak library cooperating with another weak library cannot promote effective resource sharing. We share our strengths, not our weaknesses. Driven by prevailing circumstances, sharing of resources is the only option left for academic libraries and librarians. The main goal of every academic library is to pull library materials together in order to give more satisfactory services to its users, by making more information resources available to them.

History of Resource Sharing and Networking

Ali and Owoye (2010) in Onwuchekwa (2015) declared that John Harris, the Librarian of the University College, Ibadan (now the University of Ibadan) was the brain behind the introduction of resource sharing in Nigeria. Consequent to the 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. In 2004 the Committee of University of the Nigerian Universities (CULNU) formed the Nigerian University Libraries consortium (NULIC). The objectives were to:

1. Promote resource sharing among members Libraries.
2. Make the academic resources of each member library available to others.
3. Ensure that member institutions contribute meaningfully towards sustaining the consortium.

Ossai, (2010) in Onwuchekwa (2015) asserts that there have been more than a dozen initiatives over the past ten years to create interlibrary and interinstitutional networks through the National Research and Education Networks (NRENs). Participating organizations include: Nigeria Universities Management Information system (NUMIS); Nigerian Universities Network (NUNET); Nigerian Education and Research Network (NEARNET a collaboration of NUNET, poly Net and Teach Net); eIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries); National Virtual (Digital) Library Project (NVLP); Nigerian Virtual Library Consortium (VLC). These institutions are making significant impact in certain organizations, more work need to be done for a wide spread to other information

centers in the country. Mishra (2000) in Onwuchekwa (2015) explains that the concept of sharing is a need-based activity framed around the age-old concept of give and take. In general it is as old as the civilization. In “the field of libraries we might trace the history of resource sharing since their inception in various forms viz., shared cataloguing, library cooperation, interlibrary loan and union catalogue etc.

The term library resources include any and all of the materials, functions and services, which constitute a modern library system. It is amalgamation of people, processes, ideas, materials and money which forms the substance of a library and can be described as its resources. Resource sharing is a sort of implied agreement amongst participating libraries wherein each participant is willing to share its resource with other members and in turn is privileged to share the resources of its partners as and when the need arises. Geronim and Claudia 2005 posit that the first initiative to develop library networks came about in the United States, in the middle of 19th century, with the foundation of the American Library Association and the start of a cooperative cataloguing program. The delivery of catalog cards by the Library of Congress was the next step towards the development of library networks and consortia.

Walden, 1999 in Onwuchekwa (2015) explains that during the last six to seven years, library and information activities in Libraries and Information Centres have entered a new era. Individual libraries are coming out of the proverbial “Berlin Wall” around them. They are trying to form a larger community in an effort to tackle the ever increasing demands for better services, quantitatively and qualitatively, in an environment that are already over strained by financial pressures. Forced, motivated, or logic driven, the librarians are coming out of their shell in large numbers. This has resulted in discernible change in the information scenario. Thus, resource sharing today invites libraries to cooperate as members or partners and not impose a centrally set out organizational structure. It invites cooperation based on the library’s strengths and needs. Computer technology now makes the prospects of resources sharing brighter because it brings together resources of libraries separated by great distances.

John-Okeke (2013) in Onwuchekwa (2015) confirms with other researcher in this research that the invention of computers and the advancement of information communication technology have moved cooperative activities to the next level. The development of machine – readable cataloguing (MARC) by the LC in the 1960s was a landmark event in the automation of library operations. Today, new library online services are also becoming the focus of library sharing. The development of Z39.50 standard, World Wide Web (WWW) browsers and client/server technology has revolutionized the way information is being transferred. Siddike (2011) in Onwuchekwa (2015) opines that the rise of the Internet

and the National Information Infrastructure (NII), geographic barriers are finally broken and equal access to electronic information is increasingly affordable. For library users the information super highway is becoming a primary way of accessing information. The ultimate aim of introducing information communication technology processes into networking and resource sharing is to provide the right information expeditiously to the user as at when required. According to Dizon (2010) in Onwuchekwa (2015), some latest trends and applications for which networks have been used in Library and Information Centers are:

- Online Inter-Library Loan and Document Delivery Service
- Common E-book platform (EBL, NetLibrary, Ebrary, MyiLibrary, etc.)
- Online ILL of E-books Resource Sharing and Networking in Library and Information Centres
 - Electronic journal articles sent via IM and Email (check license agreement)
 - Shared off-site storage system, preservation, and digitization
- Computerized organization, access and retrieval system
- Cooperative scanning and digitization
- Cooperative data warehousing Internet connectivity is very expensive in Africa considering her economic condition.

This necessitated the formation of bandwidth consortium to reduce unit cost per megabyte, increase Internet speed and encourage ICT infrastructural development.

Echezona and Ugwuanyi (2010) in Onwuchekwa (2015), confirm that countries such as Kenya, Cameroon, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia have made some significant moves in Internet connectivity, nationally, regionally and internationally. Though these efforts are still very little, they are in no doubt steps in the right direction. In the same vein, bandwidth consortia are springing up in order to resolve the issue of high cost bandwidth access by saving cost through economies of scale across Africa. With the emergence of Internet, information kept in different locations has become an asset to the world community. In fact, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is an indispensable part of modern information systems development for resource sharing

Resource Sharing and Information Network

Consortium of library resource has become very necessary for the generation of the present academic libraries. The consortium will ensure that each library has access to the OPAC of other libraries, CD-ROM

databases, electronic journals, full text databases, reference resources and important document of other libraries. With this collaboration, the use of ICT as a medium of learning gives learners personal empowerment skills independently. In the library, as researchers are allowed to personally search for information online, they easily gain the skill better on their own and this helps them develop confidence on the use. As such library users need computer and information literacy skills to effectively use the rapidly growing and changing information resources. However, some library users believe that keyboard and mouse operations only enable them to effectively utilize electronic information resources. Unfortunately, this is not the case. A person who knows all computer hardware and software, and every key stroke may not be information literate at all. Although there are some overlaps between Information Literacy (IL) skill and computer literacy (CL) skills. These are different concepts.

Computer literacy skills relate to computer hardware and software (keyboard, mouse, printer, file management ,word processing, spread sheet ,data bases, internet etc) while Information Literacy focuses on efficient and effective use of information sources to obtain required information. Hence, lack of information literacy skill has been pointed out as one of the major causes of underutilization of electronic information resources in many African libraries (Emmanuel and Sife, 2008). As a result of this, university libraries are acquiring different ICT facilities to meet up with the new challenges especially in this 21st century and ensuring to educate the users on the importance of ICT skill for competency in information search and use.

The world has been witnessing a knowledge and information explosion during the past few decades. Over 10 million journal articles are published every year besides news items, editorials and articles that are appearing in popular print media, Ani and Deepak (2010). The importance and utilization of information cannot be overemphasized; access to information holds the key to development. Libraries which are store houses of knowledge and information, and information centers which disseminate knowledge and information formed the two important components of the present day society.

According to Miamibo (2002) in Onwuchekwa (2015), in Africa, the notion of cooperation, de-scribed as a "universal language spoken in different dialects," emerged as libraries explored each other's common strengths and limitations and as they realized that, together, things can be done better and greater resources could be made available. Many library leaders saw the utilization of electronic networks as the means to expand access for research and study purposes, and to meet more general information needs of their clientele. In the past, different resource sharing practices have been undertaken in different African countries. Detailed practical examples of some countries experiences in

resource sharing are described below: Kenya Library and Information Services Consortium (KLISC) were established in 2004 and currently have a membership of about 75 institutions. Their objectives are as follows:

- To share information resources in stock;
- To facilitate capacity building in libraries and information centers in Kenya;
- To share procurement costs of information resources;
- To promote the use of ICTs in information management;
- To promote development of local content;
- To enhance dissemination of information for research and national development.

KLISC collaborates with several national and international organizations in the implementation of its programmes. Members benefit in various ways both at institutional and individual levels from this collaboration. From time to time, researchers from Kenya published articles in international Open Access journals and are still in the process of collaborating with information providing organizations. Ethiopia Ethiopia is Africa's oldest independent country. The concept of University Library Consortia in Ethiopia is very fertile one, but the success of consortia like other cooperative efforts depends on the proper mix of enthusiasm, innovative thinking, and caution and skepticism. I Category: Information Resources Management Resource Sharing and Networking in Library and Information Centres 3874 The major objectives of the Ethiopian consortium are:

- Increase the cost benefit per subscription.
- Promote the rational use of funds.
- Make sure the continuous subscription to the periodicals subscribed by the consortia without any failure.
- Guarantee local storage of the information acquired for continuous use by present and future users.
- Build up technical capabilities of the consortia staff in operating and using electronic publication databases.
- Planned alliance with academic and public library institutions that have common interest resulting.

Following first contacts during the IFLA conference in Durban, and a short visit and workshop in December, the consortium of Ethiopian academic libraries CEARL are partnering with eIFL in strengthening their consortium and exploiting more fully access to electronic resources, as well as becoming actively involved in the eIFL-FOSS program. Ethiopia already has access to a range of e-resources through INASP, and looks forward to partnering with the consortium in making the most of these and new resources

Recently, a wide range of programmes and projects on ICTs in Education in Africa have activities that involve one or more African countries in varying numbers and a lot of them have been steered towards the direction of resource sharing in the libraries, some examples are:

- The African Virtual University (AVU): Initially a project of the World Bank is now an independent intergovernmental organization. The AVU works with universities based in Africa and other countries such as the US and Australia to provide academic programmes and short courses through open and distance e-learning. The AVU also boasts of a digital library that provides resources to African academics and students.

- eGranary Digital Library: Supported by partnership between the Hewlett Foundation, USAID, and the McArthur Foundation, among others. The eGranary Digital Library provides millions of digital educational resources to institutions that do not have adequate Internet access. They deliver digital education resources by gaining permissions, copying Web sites, and delivering them to intranet Web servers in their partner organizations in Africa and other developing countries

- Free and Open Source Software Foundation for Africa (FOSSFA): FOSSFA was launched in February 2003 as a network of practitioners, professionals, and organizations gathered with the aim of promoting the use of free and open source software for Africa's development. FOSSFA has an education subdivision focused on the promotion of open source solutions in education in Africa.

- Africa-Connect project: Research and Education (R&E) networks are high-speed data-communications networks, independent of the commercial Internet, that are dedicated to meeting the needs of the academic and research communities. They allow researchers, teachers and students to share information electronically in a reliable and timely fashion, enabling them to collaborate more efficiently and improving their access to the best possible resources.

- National Research and Education Network (NREN): In the late 1990s African universities and research institutes started forming national "associations" or bandwidth consortiums to address issues Internet affordability and access. NRENS were originally a product of academic research to find efficient and cost effective ways to share scarce, expensive computer resources, to communicate and to collaborate by research. With advent of a new 'broadband abundance' environment, there is logical evolution of both NRENS and their role in education networking. Active RENs essentially established in Northern, Southern and Eastern Africa are: TENET (South Africa),KENET (Kenya),EUN (Egypt), MARWAN(Morocco),RNU(Tunisia),CERIST(Algeria),MAREN(Malawi), SUIN (Sudan) and Emerging NRENS Advanced initiatives include: ZAMREN (Zambia), NAMREN (Namibia), NgREN (Nigeria),GARNET (Ghana). Active processes are ongoing to strengthen the networking projects in the organization.

- Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL): EIFL works with libraries to enable access to digital information in developing and transition countries. eIFL was formed in 1999 as a joint project of the Soros Foundation's Open

Society Institute and EBSCO publishing, with the aim of fostering library consortia and e-content services in countries with limited online information infrastructure. Today, EIFL partners with libraries and library consortia in more than 60 developing and transition countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Information for Libraries (eIFL) is a particularly good example.

Challenges And Prospects Of Resource Sharing And Information Network

The major challenge faced in the path of resource sharing not only in Africa but worldwide is the one with resource building. Also a Substantial gap is seen in the area of resource sharing among libraries which is a result of the digital divide. It should also be noted that the extent to which the Internet and networked information is provided is minimal when considering the public and academic library scenario in Africa at present. Underling the facts in a similar manner is a study by Sampath Kumar & Biradar, (2010); Assante, et. al., (2014) in Prakash and Janardhana (2017) which says that major areas of concern in the resource sharing and library networking are: The limited IT and networking infrastructure; limited availability of funds; Lack of skilled personnel for Database development; limited Skills for networking; Missing Standardization framework which unifies various libraries divided by geography; the inagreement among participants.

In Rabi (2012) as cited in Onwuchekwa (2015), the author noted amongst other researchers that the major problems militating against the application of Information and Communication Technologies to knowledge sharing are: operational orientation, problems of financial base, lack of library web page, computer system failure, low budgetary allocation, low human capacity building, Low bandwidth of connectivity, lack of basic infrastructure, and lack of political will by the ruling government. While, Aina (2013) in Onwuchekwa (2015) in his write-up stated some other issues and challenges which he said are operational, strategic or attitudinal in nature to include:

1. Access control (online database and Internet connectivity with ID logging password, IP authentication and licensing policies)
2. Personnel and workload
3. Overlapping coverage of the same title by multiple vendors
4. Cost implication of e-resource subscription and other collection development issues (print and digital)
5. Complexity of virtual library, e- resource computing facilities (appropriate hardware and software requirement)
6. Poor Power supply
7. Poor Funding.

Apart from the challenges of e-resources, streamlining the challenges to the Nigerian Libraries, Adam and Usman (2013) in Onwuchekwa (2015) in their work "Resource sharing services in academic library services in Bauchi, Nigeria" identified some resource sharing problems in Nigeria as: inadequacy of existing resources, lack of information about them, inadequate security of materials, uncooperative attitudes of the parents body, lack of policies, inflation and instable budgeting allocation and lack of union Catalogue. All the challenges stated above are similar and share the same characteristics in various African countries and need urgent attention.

It has been observed that the concept of resource sharing is not very effective among libraries and Information Centre in Africa. Most of the libraries are still working on the policy of "self-sufficiency." For instance it has been found that Libraries are spending substantial amounts from their budget on the subscription of same journals and procurement of same books, whereas they can easily share their resources with each other. Therefore, there is a need to motivate librarians and information professionals for resource sharing and networking of libraries to ensure optimum utilization of available financial, physical and manpower resources.

Knowledge transfer and sharing of information resources are two main factors that must be prevalent in society in order to successfully adapt external innovations for societal advancement. In the light of this, to create and sustain a formidable resource sharing network, it is necessary that each library should plan to organize and maintain a resource sharing department. A qualified staff member who will organize and manage the department should be employed. The staff member should design a functional, practical managerial structure for resource sharing. He or she should work out strategic alliances and foster collegiate relationship with other libraries and information centres. Such relationships will not only help to formalize collaboration but will also facilitate the creation of the necessary organizational structures that will allow resource-sharing programmes to function effectively.

In light with the recommendations in her write up, Ossai (2010) as cited in . Onwuchekwa (2015) came up with the following suggestions for an effective implementation of resource sharing in Nigeria and these will be extended to fit the libraries and information centers in Africa:

1. Administrators of libraries need to create locally the mechanisms needed to foster participation consortia building, including programs for adequate staff training, ICT infrastructure development, institutional information policy development, and adherence to bibliographic standards.
2. The library management, as much as possible, should insist on adequate funding, maintenance of hardware and software upgrades, and staff training in ICT services.
3. Library Associations in different African countries should

solidify its key role in promoting consortium building, and seek government support of these initiatives.

4. Collectively African libraries, following the model of OCLC's World Cat, need to standardize and adopt one primary classification system that will harmonize the peculiarities of Library materials that are unique to the African continent.

5. Locally and collectively, head of library need to continually advocate and pressure other agencies and utility companies to provide a broader and more reliable electrical grid and support in the provision of information.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, some literature reviewed points out that the African libraries are slowly and steadily readying themselves for resource sharing undertakings although there are a huge number of them deprived of basic internet access and an array of shortcomings are on their way; the initiatives from various sources like the government, the parent universities, the library networks, the publishing industry, etc. are being made to resolve the above issues and open the restricted doors of local libraries to a wide open world of information.

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