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Resource Sharing and Networking among University Libraries in Northern Nigeria: A Proposal

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Abstract:

This paper attempts to justify and propose a resource sharing and networking arrangement among university libraries in Nigeria. It discusses the rationale for resource sharing and networking particularly in this present technological age, it also discusses benefits of resource sharing, the structure, areas of cooperation and funding. By and large, it outlines some of the constraints, prospects and advanced solutions to the problems.

1. Introduction

We live today in an era of increasing challenges and technological advancement which may be characterized as an age of cooperative venture in every field of human endeavour. In the field of librarianship, the concept of cooperation has taken the form of library resource sharing in the present century. The limitation of financial resources coupled with the proliferation of information has placed librarians on the horns of a dilemma. This situation has forced many libraries throughout the world to look towards cooperative resource sharing through networking. A large number of library networks such as OCLN, RLIN have been developed in many centuries in the past two to three decades.

Library resource sharing has been in the scheme of libraries in developing countries, (Nigeria inclusive). This is often met with considerable predicaments. The interesting point to note here is that, Nigerian librarians have since appreciated the need to embark upon this venture, but whether this has been successful or not is left for posterity to judge.

According to Abubakar (2007), resource sharing activities have been the most important obligations of libraries worldwide. It is because no library can ever be self sufficient or boast of having all the required resources for its users. The basic function of a library as a dynamic institution is the matching of its resources with the needs of its users. However, effective delivery of the library functions requires the service of competent library staff as well as the provision of relevant facilities to ensure the success and achievement of the set objectives of the library.

2. Definitions

Odini (1991) stated that resource sharing, library networking and library cooperation are used interchangeably in the digital age to mean sharing of resources of a library with users of other libraries. It is the process whereby the resources of a group of network libraries are made available to the sum total of the persons entitled to use any of those libraries. Resource sharing is a wide phrase embracing library cooperation, library systems and networking. It is an omnibus expression to cover cooperation, coordination, inter library loans, cooperative acquisition, cooperative storage and processing.

Muhammed (2012) views resource sharing to denote a working arrangement where two or more libraries make their stock available to their respective users and as well as many include the collective sharing of their respective function. In other words, resource sharing refers to activities that occur when two or more libraries work together to provide more developed services to their respective users. The emphasis is to provide more developed services to their respective users within their limited financial resources.

According to Nwalo (2008), resource sharing is defined as a cooperative association of different libraries and its purpose is to share human and information resources so that the collective strength of the institution facilitates the resource and learning of the member constituents.

3. Rationale for Resource Sharing and Networking among Libraries

Osman (2006) stated that the importance of resource sharing in libraries cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, it allows libraries and their users to access very wide variety of resources as well as other services they could not have otherwise been provided or have access to. The need for sharing of resources stems from three underlying trends of a modern society: the growth of all form of literature, the increasing reliance on information to enable society, function effectively and the increasing availability of technology.

Malumfashi (1986) has identified some variables at play that call librarians to resort to information networking in libraries thus;

1. Proliferation in the literature output. The increase in the volume of printed materials has been occurring at a fantastic speed after the Second World War especially in science and technical literatures. This tremendous increase could be perhaps attributed to the scientific and technological breakthrough world wide. At such a fast rate of information, it is very difficult for any library, however resourceful it may be to acquire all types of materials and making it impossible for any library to be self sufficient
2. Steady increase in the cost of materials. Reading materials, especially books and journals in science and technology are too expensive for libraries to acquire. Nigeria is no exception to this ever increasing cost of published materials.
3. Limited financial resources. Libraries budget has been on a continuous decrease as a result of inflationary trends in publishing industries. In Nigeria, government do not increase library budget so as to meet up with increasing cost of materials because people and the government are yet to recognize the relevance of library to nation building.
4. The advancement in both hardware and software computers, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have made networking much easier and practicable than conventional methods of cooperation.
5. The need for increased bibliographical access both intellectual and physical to information resources in the universe of documentary resources, so that the resources of participating libraries will be made available to each other thereby increasing their chances of using a larger database of information resources.
6. Unfavourable foreign exchange situation of the currency of Nigeria also necessitates resources sharing.

4. The Proposed Network Structure: Mesh Network

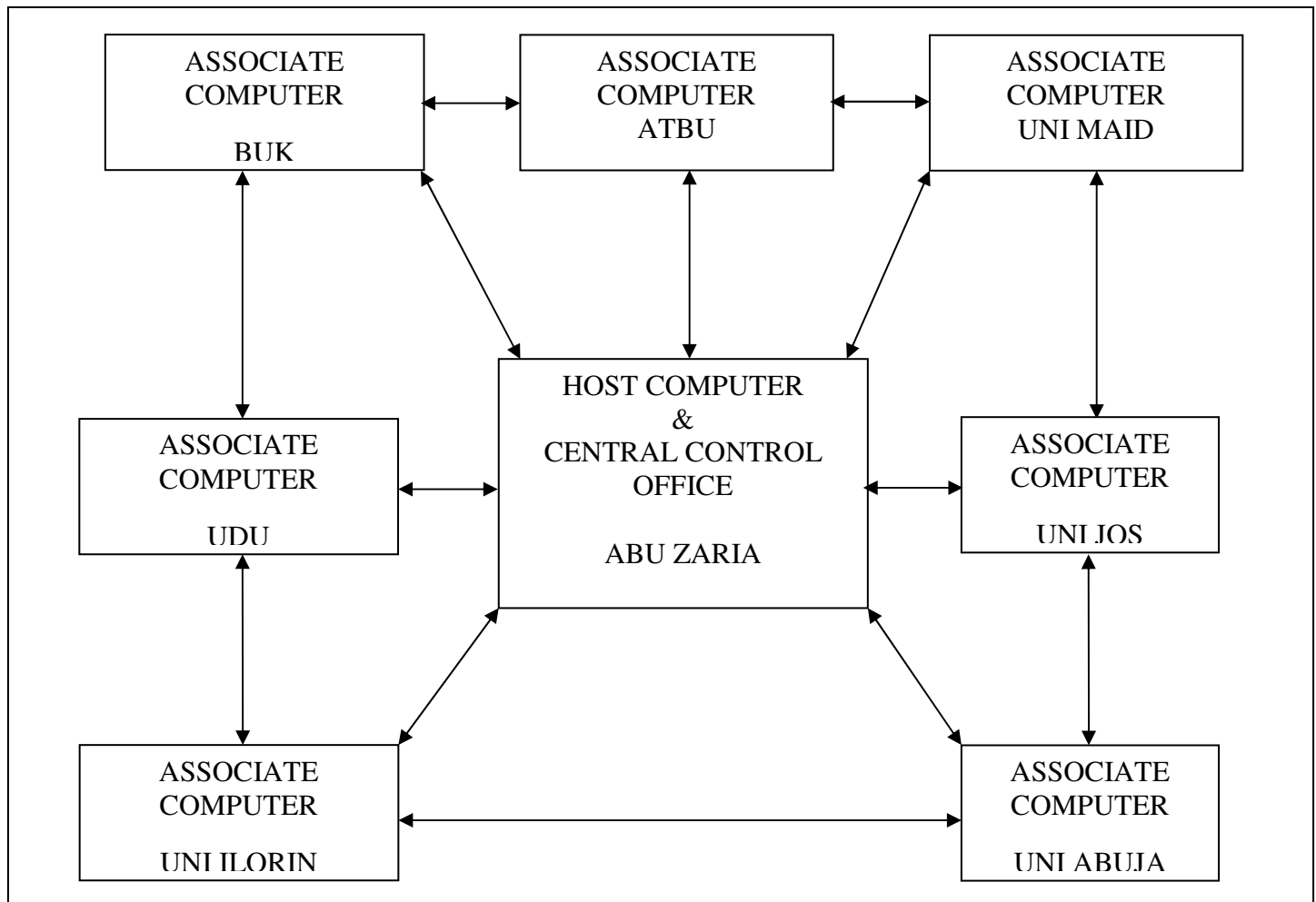


Figure 1

The structure allows the participating libraries to talk or communicate to each other and also communicate with host computer in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The Mesh Network is chosen in this proposal due to the following reasons:

1. They are within the same geographical area of the country, i.e. northern Nigeria.
2. The participating university libraries have the same subject interest, i.e. they are all conventional universities running almost the same programmes.
3. Possession of shareable resources.
4. Uniformity in library practices and services
5. They have the same index language (classification, cataloguing etc) to make access to their documents easily.
6. Ahmadu Bello University Library is chosen as the host computer because it is a first generation university and assumed to have larger collections than other university libraries in the scheme.

5. Areas of Resource Sharing and Networking

Networks arise because individual libraries realize that they can no longer be self sufficient in respect of their information resources. The underlying assumption of a library network is that all participating members will share their resources and use the network. Networking is a joint venture and needs the cooperation of everyone involved. The following are the areas through which participating libraries can cooperate;

1. Cooperative Acquisition: Under this arrangement, a particular library engaged in networking maybe assigned to acquire books for all the participating libraries, or each library in the scheme maybe given the responsibility to acquire books in a particular subject of interest to all the participating libraries, or the host computer acquire some necessary books for all the participating libraries. This process will not only save money and manpower which are limited, but also save time.
2. Reference and information services: Under resources sharing, member libraries could benefit from the following reference services;
 - Selective dissemination of information (SDI)
 - Indexing and abstracting services
 - Current awareness services
3. Development of an inter-library loan or document delivery: This arrangement facilitate the process in which materials are borrowed out by libraries in the scheme, it could be by both online like e-mail and or by transporting the materials to another library, this could be by post or courier. Whatever one opted for, the security and the safety of the materials is in the forefront.
4. Technical Services: Here, participating libraries will cooperate in cataloguing, which has to do with the method of centralized cataloguing of all the libraries holdings, with a view to reducing the cost of such activities of the individual libraries and above all for standardization of records and format to avoid disparity of entry.
5. Interchange of Staff. These involve the interchange of professionals and sometimes non-professional staff under specific arrangements worked out by cooperating libraries. This is aimed at providing specific training or broadening the experience of the staff concerned.

6. Organization and Management of the Proposed Network

The management of the proposed networking scheme will be in a way that the management control will be vested with a governing body, with one or two members drawn from each of the participating university libraries. The governing body shall elect an executive director who will be presiding over meetings involving networking arrangement with democratic process. The sit of power is the host computer in Ahmadu Bello University Library, Zaria. The office shall be called, central control office and charged with the responsibility of coordinating and implementing network programmes among participating university Libraries.

The management functions of the governing body will include:

1. Formulating rules and procedures of the cooperating university Libraries
2. Framing of the cooperating university libraries budget
3. Reviewing performance of the Networking system from time to time
4. Defining the responsibilities of each participant in the cooperative activities
5. To improve document delivery capability
6. To improve on the standardization of bibliographic data format.

7. Funding

The funds for efficient management of the proposed networking will be through:

1. Internally generated revenue from institutional membership fee and also fees generated from services rendered to non members. This maybe monthly, quarterly, bi-annually or yearly depending on the decisions of the governing body.
2. Aids from meaningful organizations, associations, friends or philanthropists, state and federal government grants

For a successful operation of an effective resource sharing programme, Malumfashi (1986) highlighted that due attention must be paid towards the following requirements;

1. Willingness of librarians towards resource sharing
2. Possession of shareable resources and

3. Uniformity in Library practice and services.

Furthermore, a library resource sharing programme can be made successful only if it does not hurt the inner policies of the participating libraries. This is due to the fact that it is not possible for any library, however large and comprehensive to have the resources to satisfy the needs of all its users at all times. It is therefore, imperative for libraries to organize schemes for interlibrary lending.

8. Benefits of Resource Sharing

According to Speirs (2006), if libraries are truly charged with creating, finding, evaluating, managing and dissemination of information, reaching out and exchanging information with others is equally essential if they have to keep up with developments. Besides, the desire for ensuring economy in the operation of libraries has always been one of the most important reasons and that is why libraries must share their resources for the benefit of their clients worldwide.

In the view of Martey (2002), the need for resource sharing in libraries can be categorized as follows:

- To Individual Library User And Staff
 1. Enhancement service through access to more information services available in consortia member libraries.
 2. Cheaper and more effective services.
 3. Document delivery services.
 4. Selective dissemination of information and current awareness services.
 5. Electronic conferences.
 6. Increased human cooperation.
 7. Skills development for opportunities available through cooperative arrangements.
- To Institution Library
 1. It increases cooperation and sharing.
 2. Improved purchase of electronic information and library collection management.
 3. It reduces library subscription.
 4. It provides education and library services.
 5. It increases support for the library especially partners in development (donors) that prefer group rather than individual institutional levels.
- To National Level
 1. It increases growth of a national information society.
 2. It leads to improvement on technology development.
 3. It helps standardization of library services across the country.
 4. It ensures standardization of library training facilities.

9. Constraints of Networking/Resource Sharing in Nigeria

There is no doubt that information Networking programme have significant role to play in Nigeria, especially with regards to human, material and financial aspects. Lack of adequate funds has been ranked as the greatest problem affecting resource sharing. This is because a networking arrangement of libraries is bound to fail if adequate funds are not made available, Nwalo (2002).

Nwalo (2006) further states that most failed projects on the adoption of cooperative resource sharing activities are as a result of money strategies. Fostering cooperation among libraries in Nigeria has failed because important steps are not taken while the libraries lack faith in the proposals. Similarly, Blakes (2006) states that it is clear that resource sharing activities have a significant role in African countries especially in Nigeria. However, most libraries in Nigeria face many constraints in their efforts for sharing resources. The factors are corruption, mismanagement of resources, inflation, which has eaten deep and negligence of libraries and failed institutions. The financial support for most libraries in Nigeria has been on the decline. In fact, it is barely enough to pay for staff salaries. This unfortunate situation has drastically affected all aspects of library and information services in the country. There is also the absence effective national information infrastructure in the sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria; thus affecting resource sharing among libraries.

Odini (1991) has identified some most significant constraints as;

1. Lack of firm national policy of libraries, thus information service is seldom rated among many priorities. As a result, library budgets are correspondingly low, thus making it impossible for libraries to provide their dues under cooperative scheme due to gross underfunding and annual decreases in budgetary allocations.
2. Some libraries lack the data on present library situation and this constitute a serious obstacle to effective planning whether of library development in general or of resource sharing programme.
3. Another constraint is lack of basic infrastructure for rapid communication, e.g. poor state of electricity supply (PHCN), poor telecommunication (NITEL), poor postal services (NIPOST), poor internet connectivity are great threats to networking/resource sharing.

10. Prospects

Resource sharing cannot be possible when resources are as limited as to be only adequate for the immediate use of local clientele, as this is the most common characteristics of libraries and information centres in developing countries. The success of any resource

sharing arrangement depends not only on having appropriate goals and objective, but also on creating and operating a service within the right legal, administrative and fiscal frame work.

In future, Nigeria and indeed Nigerians will appreciate the resource sharing network in our libraries if all constraints aforelisted are tackled and removed. On the part of government, necessary commitments should be provided, both financially and otherwise to our libraries to purchase all necessary equipments, and then the proposal will come to reality. Librarians should also appreciate automation, embark on training and retraining programmes so as to have technical know how and show how. When this is done, library and information services will improve efficiently and effectively.

11. Conclusion

By and large, no library not even the largest libraries like the British Museum of United Kingdom, Library of Congress in the United States of America, National Bibliotheque of France can claim to be self sufficient and self reliant. This is so because of the present age of information explosion. Therefore, libraries and librarians should not fold their hands together, but rather, we should all join hands together and share our limited resources for the benefit of our users and parent body so as to achieve the aims and objectives of setting up bylibraries in Nigeria.

Libraries in Nigeria should endeavour to further aid the advancement of social, scientific and technical knowledge through effective networks. They should contribute directly to the formation and implementation of various government policies by providing timely information from whenever it is available in the country.

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