

# Resource Sharing in Academic Libraries in Nigeria: A Digital Imperative

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper examined the past efforts made by Nigerian libraries towards sharing of resources and enumerated the benefits accruing from such ventures. It also identified the necessary conditions for digital resource sharing such as fund, computers, internet availability, constant power supply, standard and up-to-date union catalogue, and proper maintenance skills among others. The poor state of these conditions in Nigeria were highlighted and the recommendations include generation of fund for digital facilities, review of library school curriculum, staff training, and acquisition of computer skills and maintenance of standards.*

*Keywords: Resource sharing, academic libraries*

## Introduction

Academic libraries are the nerve centre of the activities of the universities. They are charged with the responsibility of providing materials for teaching, learning and research. It is imperative that these libraries provide materials in all formats for the actualization of the objectives of the parent body. Ogunsola (2004) describes these libraries as the heart of the university, which is expected to maintain standard books, journals and audio-visual collections and services.

Academic libraries in Nigeria were hitherto funded adequately as a result of the oil boom. It was therefore easy for them to acquire varied information resources, which were processed and organized according to their coverage in relation to the needs of the different category of users. Today, universities are not left out in the economic crunch, which has eaten deep into the Nigerian economy. The result is gross under funding which is manifested in all areas of the university activities and

programmes. The library is not left out. The library budget is so meagre that acquisition of materials becomes a Herculean task.

Odogwu (2008) quoting Isaak (2002) posits that the problems that weaken African libraries include financial constraints, lack of human resources, outdated materials and poor use.

Odini (1991) avers that low budget makes it difficult for libraries to provide optimum resources for their users. The inability of the government to stock libraries with relevant materials has a great implication for teaching, learning, research and development. Omekwu (2004) maintains that it is difficult for a single library to have all the resources it requires to meet the information needs of its actual and potential clientele. He therefore proffers solution through resource sharing.

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. Odini (1991) quoting Ridings (1977) defines resource sharing as the process by which the resources or network of libraries are made available to the sum total of persons entitled to use any of the resources in those libraries. Nwalo (2008) also defines resource sharing as a formal arrangement by a group of organizations that have common interests, to pull their material and human resources together so as to meet clientele needs much more than they could have done if they were to depend on individual efforts. At inception, inter-library lending constituted the major aspect of resource sharing. Today, it embraces many more activities. Oyelude (2004) identifies the types of sharing as interlibrary loans; joint acquisition; central cataloguing; exchange of library materials; computerized cataloguing schemes; awareness services and joint storage of materials.

Generally, resource sharing is geared towards satisfying the user by giving the less privileged libraries opportunity to get richer materials from their colleague's. It is through sharing that those resources or networks of libraries are made available to people who desire them. Sharing therefore makes information available at low cost and consequently reduces frustration of information users. Malhot (1989) avers that sharing breaks down institutional barriers since librarians identify libraries that have what they need and obtain these resources from them. Exchange of collections, equipment, manpower and experience makes libraries richer and more productive.

### **Past attempts towards resource sharing in Nigeria**

Different attempts were made in the past to enhance exchange, collaboration, or trade off in terms of men, materials and technology. Ubogu et al (1992) observes that the first attempt at library cooperation was made in 1963 when the national union catalogue was conceived. The meeting was attended by a total number of eighty-five libraries. Another attempt was made in 1974. Nwalo (2008) quoting Isa and Oyeleke (2000) traces this attempt of library cooperation in Nigeria to the meeting of the Working Group on interlibrary Lending held at the National Library of Nigeria. Each of these participating libraries sent a copy of their main holdings to the national library of Nigeria. On another development, the interlending group held a meeting in Ile-Ife in 1974 to discuss the modalities for inter-lending of materials. At the end of the meeting, they recommended the establishment of a national bibliography, a lending centre and also a policy for co-operative acquisition. The Committee of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities made efforts to acquire government publications as a way of improving resources meant for sharing. Attempts to share resources were also made in the areas of continuing education and workshops, training, storage, circulation, management, and retrospective conversion. These efforts were however not complemented because of unavailability of necessary conditions.

Different types of libraries as well as individuals came up with different suggestions and attempts on how best to exchange library resources and practices. However, most attempts made towards the sharing of resources could not yield tangible results because of lack of cooperation and poor communication. Nwalo (2008) quoting Aina (2001) attributed the failure to the fact that emphasis was laid on ownership of resources instead of access to resources.

Some librarians who really determined to share resources by traveling to other libraries were hampered by bad roads. As for Postal services, they were also sluggish and slow. Ubogu et al (1992) maintains that reasons for the failure in resource sharing include negative attitude to automation, lack of policy, inadequate experimentation, lack of union catalogues, inadequate photocopying services, slow document delivery, inadequate funds and poor communication infrastructure.



### **Potentials of resource sharing**

The need for resource sharing in libraries cannot be overemphasized. The benefits accruing from it include:

1. *Provision of access to different libraries and resources.* Through this, researchers have opportunity to see materials written by experts in their fields and where they can be found. Library patrons can apply for these materials through their librarians. Where the libraries are near, they can avail themselves of the resources through direct consultation and personal contact.
2. *Resource sharing affords librarians the opportunity to exchange services with other libraries in terms of manpower and programmes.* Rosemberg (1993) opines that if libraries share work to be done, collections, equipment, manpower and experience, then each library will be richer.
3. *When libraries have challenges with specific users' requests, resource sharing helps them to identify libraries that have such materials.* The librarian can then make arrangements on how to obtain these resources for the users. This indirectly saves the time, energy and money that the user would have spent in going to such libraries to source for the materials by them.
4. *While libraries share materials, the sharing of experiences and ideas is important.* Librarians are faced with challenges in the daily execution of their work and no librarian can boast of having all the wealth of experience needed to face present and future demands in the library. It behooves libraries therefore to share work, expenses and also benefits. Each library gains from the money and efforts accruing from active participation. While exchanging materials, libraries with fewer resources have the privilege of enjoying the resources of bigger ones. In addition, it provides wider platform for mutual benefit, irrespective of institutional size and capacity.

Libraries that share resources stand a better chance to provide robust materials for their readers. This stems from the fact that materials in different formats are pulled together so that each participating library accesses them. Ikpaahindi (2006) quoting Rahman(2000)summarizes the need for resource sharing thus

- to promote free flow of information resources
- to ensure better aces to information resources

- to ensure maximization of information resources
- to save resources and avoid duplication of efforts
- to ensure faster provision of information and literature support to users.
- to facilitate reciprocal exchange of local publications

### **Digital age as a facilitator for resource sharing**

The advent of information and communication technology, which characterizes the digital age, has brought a turn around in resource sharing. Digitization of resources is designed to support the creation and preservation of digital contents. Oladapo (2006) observes that in digital sharing of resources, the use of computers and telecommunications facilitate the exchange of information resources. This means that the emergence of computers through the internet and online services has brought an improvement in the sharing of resources. Information and communication technology has brought to bear new dimensions in the methods of generating, processing, storing and disseminating of information. Digitization brings the information to the user whether in the office or at home. Once the user has a computer connected to the internet, he does not need to visit a library building to access resources. One way of doing this is by placing digital resources on a network so that it becomes available to all participating libraries. It also encourages updating of information on regular basis.

Oketunji (2000) defines information and communication technology in the library parlance as the application of computers and other technologies to the acquisition, organization, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information. The different access points provided to users informs them of the avalanche of literature existing in their fields. Ilo (2008) quoting Mosuro (2001) observes that by providing different access points for users to locate required information, the world has become a global village and everyone linked to an electronic neighbour. With ICT, the resources of the libraries participating in co-operation can be accessed online. This affords users ample opportunity to harness a vast sea of information without necessarily investing on energy and time. The generation of information and the distributor of the same is facilitated by ICT. Nwalo (2008) noted that ICT encourages communication and exchange of information among co-operating libraries and information centres. Digitization removes geographical and time constraints



associated with traditional access to materials.. Since materials are not in their physical format, there is no checking out, stealing or wrong shelving of items.

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 ununparalleled 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.

Ibrahim(2008) quoting Eardly (1989) notes that the outcome of ICT in libraries include improved quality of information in terms of accuracy, level of details, timeliness and increasing efficiency through the sharing of common database either in the same library or externally. Ogunsola(2004) notes that technology removes the barriers between school and home. Many learners have used audio visual devices to transmit educational materials over long distances.

Information regarding the in-house activities carried out in the library such as acquisitions, cataloguing, classification, journal and newspaper indexing and loan services can also be stored in digital form. Information on these activities is stored in the system to be consulted as the need arises. This, no doubt, helps libraries organize their resources during sharing. The use of computers and internet connectivity has made it possible the uploading of bibliographic records on the online public access catalogue (OPAC) to the internet for global access.

Digitization enhances preservation of rare publications, dissertations, artifacts etc. Physical handling of items during exchange is avoided thus ensuring preservation of such materials. Digital resource sharing helps participating libraries to eliminate duplication. Through interconnectivity, it is possible to see the holdings of each participating library at a glance. It therefore provides a clue on what is available and therefore helps participants to concentrate on the acquisition of very relevant ones, thus freeing scarce financial resources for alternative uses.

### **Conditions for effective digital resource sharing**

Practical and effective resource sharing devoid of lip service requires certain prerequisite conditions to thrive and for sustenance. These include;

#### *Funding*

The acquisition and maintenance of the relevant equipment required for digital resource sharing all depends on the availability of fund. Fund is also needed to connect to the internet, subscribe to the various online databases and obtain software licenses. Mole (2006) observes that most libraries do not have enough funds to install and provide on-line services for their clientele.

#### *Computers*

The need for computers in the sharing of resources stems from its ability to receive and store large volumes of information. Internet accessibility is made possible through the use of computers. The computer is employed in the processing of data needed for exchange. It is used to access the OPAC and also share online classification.. Nkiko and Ilo (2006) posit that when computers are networked and integrated, they play vital role in the performance of routine activities. Such activities include acquisitions, cataloguing and classification, and indexing of materials. Some libraries exchange the performance of in-house activities through networked computers. Despite the fact that computers and allied technology have been used to enhance sharing, many libraries have not embraced it.

#### *Internet Availability*

Ikpaahindi (2006)observed that that internet as a technological innovation is used to disseminate all kinds of information. The quest of the academia to explore different fields of study through research is satisfied by the vast sea of resources found on the internet. The online public access catalogue (OPAC) of libraries is also posted on the internet for participating libraries to access their resources. Oladapo (2006) maintains that internet connectivity is critical in any library resource sharing activity. Information on online cataloguing, classification and indexing practices are shared using the internet. However, poor state of the internet poses a challenge to the attainment of global connectivity. The few available internet facilities are concentrated on urban areas. The

problems associated with the internet in Nigeria range from poor telecommunication infrastructure to lack of search skills needed to navigate through the internet so as to harness the avalanche of available literature.

*Standard and up-to-date union catalogue*

Catalogues shows a record of resources on cards or machine-readable formats. It reflects holdings of libraries sharing resources. It gives users opportunity to search the collections of other libraries. Union catalogues facilitate sharing of catalogue data and library resources through inter-library loan. The goals include among others the provision of links to document suppliers and electronic journals and the maintenance of accepted standards. It also helps libraries to avoid duplication of resources since they can easily see what is available in each cooperating library. In Nigeria, many libraries do not send their holdings for inclusion in the national union catalogue.

*Proper maintenance skills*

Component parts of computers easily break down as a result of incessant power failure and constant usage in the processing of data. Sustainable digital resource sharing needs skilled men who will carry out necessary maintenance operations.

Nigeria is characterized by poor maintenance culture. There is also scarcity of maintenance personnel and spare parts for various items of ICT equipment in use. This results in the malfunctioning and breakdown of electronic gadgets necessary for effective digital resource sharing.

*Computer literacy:*

Many academic librarians graduated from library schools without acquiring computer and ICT skills. This makes it difficult for them to embrace technological innovations. However, opportunities abound for trainings nowadays but many have not taken advantage of these for reasons ranging from lack of fund to their inability to accept change. Nok ((2006) observes that many librarians are conservative and traditional and suffer computer phobia. Lack of ICT skills places a serious restriction on the progress of sharing of resources.



*Constant power supply*

It is imperative that power must be available before ICT facilities can function effectively. Effective use of the Internet and proper networking between one library and another are brought to reality through efficient power supply. Digitizing and uploading the OPAC to the internet and accessing the holdings of other libraries which are vital aspects of sharing can only be achieved with the availability of electricity.

Constant power outage, which characterizes power supply in Nigeria, is detrimental to digital systems. Regular supply of power facilitates the use of computer and internet facilities. Unfortunately, most libraries in Nigeria do not have standard generators to ensure steady supply of power in times of outage. This challenge has impacted negatively on resource sharing efforts in Nigeria.

*Personnel and equipment for completion of projects*

Some academic libraries that started automation in their libraries abandoned the project due to lack of personnel and equipment for effective execution of the projects. Proper automation is necessary if electronic resources must be adequately shared.

**Recommendations**

In recognition of the diverse challenges that hinder effective resource sharing in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made as a way out.

There is every need for proper funding of academic libraries for effective resource sharing.. The parent body should see the library as the hallmark of the institution and also understand that the benefits accruing from resource sharing can only be enhanced if enough fund is made available for the purchase of the facilities and the resources that are needed for exchange. Apart from that, academic librarians can intensify efforts towards in-house generation of fund. They can also liaise with international donor agencies for sponsorship in the development of ICT in their libraries as income generating drive. Such strategies include reprographic services, lamination and printing. They can also purchase bindery facilities and bind materials belonging to staff and students for a fee.

There should be a review of the curriculum used for the teaching of library and information science in tertiary institutions. Practical and

theoretical courses on information and Communication technology (ICT) should be included.

Training and retraining sessions should be organized on regular basis for all categories of staff involved in digital resource sharing. The success of the operations of ICT facilities used in sharing depends on the ability of the staff involved to carry out the required implementations. The training among other things should cover the techniques needed to input data in the computer, surfing information from the internet and using different telecommunication facilities to exchange information.

The National library of Nigeria and the Nigerian library Association (NLA) should be involved in maintaining standards in resource sharing. They should ensure that co-operating libraries update their catalogue and send them for inclusion in the national union catalogue. They should also ensure that libraries acquire ICT tools for effective library operations and resource sharing.

Maintenance, efficiency and the life span of computers hinge on the availability of electricity. There is therefore the need for standard standby generators to serve the computers and other facilities in times of power outage. Practicing librarians should also be encouraged to imbibe the need for the use of computers and the acquisition of skills needed to operate computer in every aspect of their job.

### **Conclusion**

The era of information and communication technology (ICT) is an important one in the history of librarianship. It has brought to bear digitization of resources thus making digital exchange necessary. Through this, documents are liberated from the constraints of traditional access methods. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is an age that lays emphasis, not on the availability of materials, but on the accessibility of available materials. All hands must therefore be on deck to ensure that library resources are digitally exchanged.

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