Problems and prospects of consortium building in academic libraries in Nigeria

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Abstract
This paper focuses on the problems and prospects of consortium building in academic libraries in Nigeria. It discusses the essence of consortia - that no library can boast of acquiring all the published literature in the world to render effective and efficient services to their users, concept of consortium building and library consortium. The paper highlights the past effort of six universities at forming a consortium which was later abortive and unsuccessful. The challenges of consortium library was identified to be unreliability of electronic infrastructure, inadequate ICT skills, sporadic access to internet facilities, lack of staff training and lack of access to electronic materials; the prospects of consortium were highlighted such as sharing existing resources, collaboration on collection development, sharing of electronic resources, alongside with some of the ingredients to make library consortium function effectively and efficiently, such as trustworthiness among libraries.

Key words: Academic, Consortium building, libraries, Problems and prospects of consortium

Introduction
Academic libraries all over the world are established to provide support to the teaching, learning, research and community service functions of their parent institutions. In performing their numerous functions, the academic libraries acquire information resources in diverse formats, organize, preserve and disseminate them to users through a plethora of user-oriented services. The extent to which the libraries can provide services in meeting the information needs of their users depends on a number of factors that include funding, staffing, quantity, depth, and recency of the collection; general support and goodwill of the management of the parent body, environmental factors and consortium building (Nwalo, 2008). The main goal of every academic library is to provide satisfactory services to its users, by making more information resources available to them (Gang, 1980). Access to information is a fundamental right of all library patrons in Nigeria. Since no individual library has adequate resources to meet its patrons needs, libraries therefore participate in resource sharing services. It is pertinent to note that these services supplement and greatly expand local collections and remove geographic barriers.

Successful resource sharing services in academic libraries depends on the ability to locate, identify and promptly deliver specific items to its patrons (Ejedafiru, 2011) when libraries cooperate and make their resources accessible to one and another. The justification for resource sharing is hinged on the fact that no library, however large could be completely self-sufficient in provision of resources. According to Nwalo (2008), a library consortium is any local, regional or national co-operative association of libraries that provides for the systematic and effective co-ordination of the resources of schools, public, academic, special libraries and information centers, for improving services to the clientele of such libraries. In another dimension, Kumar (2014) observed that consortium facilitates the libraries to get the benefits of wider access to electronic resources at affordable price and to the best term of licenses, the consortium to its...
collective strength of participating institutions has highly attracted discount rate of subscription with most favourable terms of agreement.

Concept of consortium building and library consortium
According to Folorunso and Folorunso (2010), there is no particular date that can be cited as the beginning point of library consortium. The concept of consortium as an association or partnership has long been a tenet of librarianship. A consortium is a (singular) form of consortia (plural) which literally means fellowship, association and togetherness. The term “consortia” can be translated to mean alliance, collaboration, cooperation or partnership. Consortium, on the other hand, could be referred to as an agreement, combination of groups either companies formed to undertake an enterprise beyond the resources of any one member (Webster dictionary). In similar vein, Oxford advanced learners dictionary (2006) defined consortium as a group of people, countries, companies, who are working together on a particular project. Consortium is an association of two or more individuals, companies, organizations or government agencies or it could be combination of these two entities which objective of participating in a common activity or pooling the resources to achieve a set goal Kumar (2014). Consortium could also be seen as a group of organizations who come together to fulfill a combined objective that necessarily requires joining and sharing of resources. Ramesh and Kelkar (2008) described consortium as a group of organizations which come together and combine objectives that are full use of advantage and profit producing which requires cooperation and sharing of the resources with a clear mutual goal in order to ascertain satisfaction fulfillment in services delivery. Nwalo (2008) referred to consortium building as forming an alliance, association, co-operation, resources sharing confederation, while networking has to do with a formal arrangement by a group of organizations (in this case libraries) with common interests in order to pool their materials and human resources together to meet their patrons needs or demands much more than they could have done were they depend on individual efforts. Consortium is an association of independent libraries and library systems established by formal agreement usually for the purpose of resources sharing.

The concept of library consortium developed as a result of the aspirations of libraries to reach out to more users and to satisfy their information needs from time to time. Library consortium as a generic term, is used to indicate any group of libraries working together towards a common goal whether to expand co-operation on traditional library services in the area of collection development or electronic information services. According to Jerome, Esse and Odeshi (2016), library consortia imply the coming together of two or more libraries in a formal agreement to share their resources. This is because no library can boast of acquiring all the published literature in the world to render effective and efficient services for their users. As noted by Panchakshari and Mumbai (2008) the purpose of library consotium is to share human and information resources so that the collective strengths of the institutions facilitate the research and learning of the member’s constituents. Library consortium is a group of libraries that work together to achieve common goals; it provides library users through their member’s libraries cost-effective, essentially electronic collections and services. Consortium enables libraries to provide services that they could not provide on their own and to share expertise and best practices amongst its members (www.eiflinet/consortium-mamgement-resources).
A library consortium is a group of libraries which partner to coordinate activities, share resources and combine expertise. They form alliance for sharing resources and collaboration on shared goals which often enable them to deliver higher quality services than they could be able to deliver on their own. Figure 1 shows how group of libraries engage in resource sharing resources through consortium through internet connection. According to Harrison (1999), library consortium, as a generic term, indicate any group of libraries that are working together towards a common goal, either to expand cooperation on traditional library services, information services as collection development or electronic. However, the common thing of all the definitions and consequently the subject matter is the coming together of libraries having common interest, needs and purposes to achieve a common goal that is beyond what an individual library can achieve on its own (Okeagu & Okeagu. 2008). To this end therefore, library consortium is an organization of libraries formed to realize the benefits and opportunities of collaborative activity. It is an alliance of libraries to share human and information resources.
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**Literature review**

Academic libraries in Nigeria believe in the principle that sharing is a sound practice. Ibrahim (2006) noted that the need for resource sharing stems from three underlying trends of modern society: the growth of all forms of literature, the increasing reliance on information to enable society function: effectively, the inflation in the cost of materials coupled with the increasing availability of technology. Song (2000) was of the opinion that no library can effectively satisfy its patrons 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. Song (2000) further emphasized that we are living in a time where the level of utilization of information resources has become the yardstick to determine a country’s economic advancement and strength.

Miambo (2002) asserted, that cooperation between libraries is a universal language that is spoken in different dialects. Jerome, Esse and Odeshi (2016) noted that library consortium is a group of two or more libraries that have agreed to cooperate with each other in order to fulfill certain similar needs, usually resource sharing. Cooperation among libraries is not a new concept and practice. According to Sanni and Igbafe (2004), it is an imperative for resources sharing and networking among libraries for the provision of qualitative library services especially in developing country like Nigeria. Traditionally, library consortium means sharing collections in some ways but it could as well include sharing of services or of processes such as joint cataloguing of materials or staff and user training. Breeding (2013) averred that the key principle of resource sharing centers on enabling libraries to provide their patrons access to materials beyond their immediate local collection. Some involve reciprocal agreements where libraries make some or all of their collections available on request to patrons affiliated with cooperative partner institutions; others, where libraries or other organizations supply materials for a fee. In this regard, technology plays an essential role in support of resource sharing.

Libraries depend on various types of automation systems to manage their collections, and other layers of infrastructure are needed to enable broader exchange of resources among libraries and their patrons. In this age of information explosion, there is no library, no matter how big it may be, that has all it takes to satisfy all the needs of its users and this is due to various constraints. Okeagu and Okeagu (2008) submitted that African libraries have realized that no matter how they are well funded, it is still very difficult to acquire all the materials needed by their patrons. In view of this fact, partnership and co-operation at local, national and international levels have become inevitable for all libraries.

In similar vein Jerome et al (2016) observed that consortium of libraries is well known for sharing of resources all over the world. Information explosion, emergence of internet and particularly World Wide Web as medium of information storage and gateway makes the consortium of libraries more imperative than before. Library consortia imply the coming together of two or more libraries in a formal agreement to share their resources. Borek (2006) opined that library consortium is a vital practice in every library, especially academic libraries; that this is as a result of the fact that no library can be self-sufficient. Also, knowledge has continued to grow over the years due to exponential increase of researches conducted and their findings published for the purpose of educating people.

Obaro (2013) stated that the need for access to information to support academic activities in academic institutions is so high that a single library cannot afford it due to finance, manpower, and space constraints. As a result of this, libraries started organizing networks and consortia with the aim of resource sharing. Collaborative efforts among and between libraries have been documented as far back as the late 19th century. Islam (2014) observed that libraries, especially academic libraries, have gone long way to build consortia for the purpose of sharing existing physical resources, especially books and journals which are held by the members of
libraries that build consortia, Nwalo (2008) who cited Ike (1981), observed that there have always been some forms of co-operation formally practiced in Nigeria through inter-library lending, reference services and photo reproduction of materials. The origin of formal inter-library co-operation in Nigeria has been traced to the meeting of the Working Group on Inter Library Lending held in 1974 at the instance of the National Library of Nigeria (Issa & Oyeleke, 2000). Libraries thereafter started contributing catalogue cards for the National Union List of Serials. The meeting considered the inter-library lending practices that had existed in Nigeria as “only passive means of mobilizing resources for libraries”. The Kaduna conference looked beyond inter-library lending and recommended cooperative acquisition. An implementation committee co-ordinated by the National Library of Nigeria was set up for implementation of the co-operative acquisition. The country was divided into eight zones for the purpose of the programme. As with previous attempts, not much came out of this co-operative scheme. Ubogu et al (1992) lamented that apart from the series of meetings held by the Implementation Committee, most of the objectives set out still remained at the planning stage.

In the 1980s, the Committee of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities (CULNU) initiated yet another co-operative scheme on inter-library lending and cooperative acquisition. Because membership of the consortium and participation were not mandatory, many of the libraries did not participate. The National Universities’ Library Network (NUNET) envisaged by the scheme did not see the light of the day and so it was another failed attempt.

In the same vein, Aina (2001) observed that over the years, many of the university library cooperation have failed because of adoption of wrong strategies. He lamented that ownership of resources rather than access has been emphasized while the basis for resource sharing has not always been based on quantitative and scientific measures. Despite the failure of the past attempts at co-operation, there is still the compelling need for academic and research libraries to share their resources in the interest of their users.

A study conducted by Ikem and Nwalo (2002) revealed that university libraries in Nigeria were highly desirous of forming a consortium in order to meet the challenges of providing effective library services to their clientele. Areas of resource sharing desired by the libraries included exchange of personnel, inter-library lending and joint financing of mutually beneficial projects especially pertaining to accessibility to electronic resources. The challenges of resource sharing by Nigerian university libraries identified in the study included vast distances separating the libraries, gross under-funding and lack of proper planning.

Problems of library consortium

Obviously, just as in every facet of human endeavors and every activity, on a very basic level, all issues of incapability may be traced to issues of funding. According to the Mortenson Center Report (2005) on library development in Nigeria, Irregularities in budget planning make it difficult for a library to secure consistent funding and to realize effective development. Specifically, funding deficiencies have led to challenges in several areas that affect consortia building. For this reason, Helmer (1999) express that the benefits of the consortia can be threatened by several issues that result to the failure of consortia. Here are the problems of Library consortium building:

1. **Unreliability of electrical infrastructure:** From the outset, the dwindling of Nigeria economy is as a result of sporadic power supply; therefore library as an institution has been affected, libraries need a reliable electrical power supply in order to provide access to electronic resources.

As Mortenson Center Report s (2005)
regarded reliable power as a precondition for the proper functioning of modern library services. Having unreliable power supply grid is a problem that has plagued Nigeria and other of African countries for a long time, but if the government at all levels cannot rectify this problem, consortium will therefore becomes a dream.

2. **Inadequate ICT infrastructure:**
Creating an adequate ICT infrastructure continues to be a major challenge facing libraries in Nigeria where even a reliable electrical grid remains a question. Computers loaded with appropriate software, connected to routers, and a high speed or fiber-optic data transmission backbone, along with skilled technical support, are often lacking at the institutional level (Ossai, 2010). As the need for consortia becomes stronger and as more electronic resources are made available to individual libraries through consortia agreements, users alike will rely more heavily on these resources and on the internet that supports them. Without a capable local ICT infrastructure, a library cannot fully be part of a functioning consortium.

3. **Sporadic and inadequate access to the internet:**
Having a reliable power source and a robust local computing network does not necessarily mean adequate internet access. Libraries providing electronic resources also need sufficient bandwidth to reach beyond the borders of its campus or community. Unfortunately, this remains a problem in Nigeria and in other regions of Africa. While there have been some consortia efforts to improve and expand bandwidth, this perhaps still remains the weakest link in the fuller development of consortia and to actualize the potential advantages of resources available through recent open access initiatives.

4. **Lack of staff training:**
Many library staff have not had adequate training in construction, maintenance and development of information and communication technologies. In fact, the greatest need for professional expertise and technical know-how likely lies in areas such as LAN (Local Area Network) management, network design, back-up systems, assuring data integrity and network security, and managing operating system software.

5. **Lack of electronic access:**
Since libraries all over the world increasingly have been better able to share resources electronically, many libraries deal with budget constraints by strategically embracing “access” rather than “ownership” of resources. While libraries in other continents depend on full-text electronic access to journals and other resources, scholarly materials are still largely available only in print in most libraries in African. This dependence on print tends to limit the appeal and ability to form library consortia in Africa, especially Nigeria.

**Prospects of Library Consortium**
Library consortia enable libraries to enjoy the benefits of wider access to electronic resources at affordable cost and at the best terms of licenses and with the collective strength of resources of various institutions available to it. It assists libraries to resolve the problems of managing, organizing and archiving the electronic resource. Bedi and Sharma, (2008) noted that, the most important prospects of library consortium will be to enhance ability to serve academic environment by giving better library services to the patrons. Some of the prospects of library consortium are highlighted as follows:

1. **Sharing existing resources or collections through virtual union catalogue and sharing Collections and collaborating on collection development;** each library will be able to contribute unique titles to the consortium – avoid duplication.

2. **Sharing electronic resources including the creation of digital collections among consortium**
members need not to be just in terms of licensing products.

3 Sharing of staff skills and expertise to strengthen library leadership—a consortium provides opportunities for staff members to develop new skills and interact with a varsity of people who would not have had the opportunity to meet otherwise.

4 Library consortia enable participating libraries to share risk. Sharing risk implies that members of a consortium can undertake projects that are larger than one institution can safely take on its own.

5 The cooperation enables the consortia libraries to borrow books, periodicals, articles, and scientific journals, which are not available locally (Islam, 2014).

6 The members of consortia will have access to latest scientific publications which has reaches none public, universities have dwindling access to books, journals and periodicals, this is having crippling effect on the future of national science and technology readiness, therefore a library consortia model offers only realistic possibility to reverse the situation.

7 Library consortium enable libraries to share vast amount of electronic books, courseware and multi-media contents that are already available open access. A university library consortium with ICT facilities can make them instantly accessible to the students, faculty and researchers.

Library consortia are commonly formed to negotiate joint purchases (e.g. of equipment, software, books, library materials and licensed electronic databases and resources) and to share.

How to make library consortium effective and efficient

Forming a library consortium has been an age-long practice among libraries. It involves teaming up to diversify the risks associated with the project as well as means to enhance expertise, knowledge base and resources. Library consortium is an operation typically formed to achieve an objective by a group of people. By forming a consortium among libraries, it becomes possible to purchase information in stabilized and reasonable prices, if these following are adhered to:

i. Trustworthiness among libraries: Academic libraries in Nigeria cannot remain isolated and independent. They have to depart from their traditional notions of librarianship, developed and nurtured in an era of institutional pride and autonomy. Therefore each library is looking for new and better ways to serve new and existing populations using technology. Times are changing and the academic library is evolving along with the needs and expectations of its users. Then there is need for partnership and collaboration. In order for this to be possible, libraries in the consortium must be trustworthy.

ii. There should be proper planning: Planning is cardinal point is life and living and for library consortium to be more effective and efficient planning must take place not just a suggestions but implementations to make it suitable because “if you fail to plan you will plan to fail “it becomes necessary to plan for library consortium.

iii. There should be formal agreements on consortium arrangements: Initial meetings are very important as it is the first step to building of a long-term relationships and trust. The agenda of the initial meeting should be the action plan for setting up and library consortium. Focus on the thought behind forming a library consortium, the expectation from the group of libraries, consortium models and other general discussions. It is important to give all the members a chance to voice their opinion on the consortium.

iv. There should be a strong central coordinating body: For example, the National Universities Commission, the National Board for Technical Education, the National Library of Nigeria or federal ministry of information, education or science and technology.
v. There should be capacity building: Personnel of libraries in the consortium should be made to undergo staff training and retraining especially on ICT skills. This is the age of ICT and internet global world and each must follow the trend to acquired basic knowledge to be able to operate staff in this categories must learn adaptation.

vi. The consortium should emphasize joint electronic licensing.

vii. There must be adequate funding of the libraries by their parent bodies: Belonging to a consortium means that part of library budget will be committed to the project to ensure that resources and services are provided, ICT infrastructure provided, maintained and sustained, etc. Lack of initial funds of university libraries may be a barrier to starting university library consortium.

viii. There must be periodic evaluation of the consortium by the co-coordinating body. This will permit corrective measures to be taken early enough to prevent breakdown in the arrangement.

ix. All academic and research libraries in Nigeria should be encouraged to automate their operations. Any library that fails to computerize cannot benefit adequately from the resources available electronically.

If these measures are taken, it will encourage effectiveness of consortium among academic libraries.

Conclusion
Library consortium has been an age-long library cooperation practice. It involves libraries teaming up to diversify the risks associated with the project as well as means to expand expertise, knowledge base and resources. In order to ensure success of the exercise, libraries should adopt concrete measures to improve the situation since there are many problems capable of thwarting the building and operations of consortia. Academic libraries in Nigeria should employ the ingredients which can make library consortia possible. These are trustworthiness among libraries, proper planning, formal agreements, joint electronic licensing of resources, provision of uninterrupted power supply and automation of library operations.

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