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Exploring the Benefits of Library Consortium: The Information Resource Sharing.

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EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF LIBRARY CONSORTIUM: The Information Resource Sharing.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the cardinal benefits of library consortium which is the resource sharing. Resource sharing aims at maximizing collection and services of libraries and information centres at minimum cost. Various sources of information (primary and secondary literature) were perused to view the essentiality of resource sharing in carrying out effective and efficient library and information services to users. The paper also highlighted the requirements needed for successful resource sharing practices among libraries. The significance/benefits of resource sharing as it relates to economic, developmental, academic/research as well as social life of librarians and library personnel were clearly stated. An ideal library networking model for resource sharing as well as examples such as DELNET, INFLIBNET, GILLDDNET and NULIB were presented. Various challenges militating against effective resource sharing were highlighted. The study concluded that resource sharing is inevitable and absolutely a necessary tool for enhancing an all time effective and efficient library and information services.

The study proffered recommendations as remedies to factors militating against effective resource sharing in libraries.

Keywords: Consortium, Information, Resource, Sharing, Importance, Libraries.

INTRODUCTION

Library consortium is an official or formal arrangement by libraries with sole aim of achieving enhanced access to human and material resources of the participating libraries for optimum user satisfaction. A consortium is said to be a cooperative arrangement among groups or institutions" or "an association or society (Encyclopedia Britannica (2010). Moreover, Ratna (2014) defined library consortium as an association or group of libraries who come together to achieve the common goal of optimum users satisfaction with the participation in a common activity and sharing the resources. Library consortium is triggered by ever-increasing cost of information resources and the inability of libraries to meet up with the challenging demands for information by library users. It is therefore a cooperative venture aimed at connecting libraries to share human and information resources.

The need to share, transfer and receive information resources is not a new concept in the field of librarianship. It has been in existence since the 17th century. Prior to emergence of digital world, librarians have been engaged in different kinds of resource sharing between different kinds of library to meet their users' expectation at different times. Barretto and Dessai (2021) while citing Nagy (2020) poses that "the primitive form of resource sharing involved inter library loan which can be traced back to Alexandria and Pergamum library. This concept has seen a radical change over the period, especially after the technological revolution. The advents of ICT (information and communication technologies) in Libraries have transformed the meaning of resource sharing that was once limited only to Inter Library Loan". What led to the sharing of resources between libraries is an answer to the question of adequacy or sufficiency of the resources in libraries and information centres. In librarianship, there has never been a time a library was said to have possessed adequate information resources to meet the needs of all its patrons. That is to say that no library, no matter its size of collection or building cannot alone satisfy the varied information needs of its client. This brings about the need for libraries to cooperate, form consortia and share their resources.

The terms 'Resource' means something(material or personnel) that one uses to achieve an objective while the word 'Sharing' means giving or allotting a portion of something to someone. Thus, resource sharing denotes the acts of giving out or allotting a portion of material, personnel or something to someone or some people in order to achieve the set or desired objectives.

Resource sharing in librarianship is therefore defined as the process or activities involved in sharing, transferring and or receiving (exchange) of information resources between libraries and information centres. According to Mbofu and Chaula (2020), The concept of resource sharing refers to mutual agreement between libraries to share their resources for providing better services to their clients. Such resources may include: document collection, staff members, technical facilities and mechanical support among participating libraries. This occurs through official co-operation or formation of consortium by the prospective participating libraries. Bangoni, Chizwara & Moyo (2018) asserts that the main purpose for such arrangements is to achieve what the members of a group cannot achieve individually. Resource sharing is a very essential tool for libraries especially in this era of exponential growth of information being produced and the dwindling economy where libraries find it difficult to discharge their official mandates occasioned by high rate of procuring physical resources and subscription to electronic databases to achieve their visions and missions. In order words, resource sharing has come to aid or overcome enormous cost of procuring information resources by libraries and information centres. Resource sharing is therefore essential and worldwide acceptable as a means of optimizing resources in libraries and information centres. It is a method for demonstrating wise management of resources in libraries, the place of resource sharing in libraries cannot be overstressed.

THE NEED FOR RESOURCE SHARING IN LIBRARIES

As earlier stated, it has become practically impossible for any library to remain self reliant as a result of growing information demands of users and the depleting levels of financial resources; no library is capable of satisfying all the information needs of its varied users at any time. Libraries are faced with one challenge or the other, all in a bid to achieve their mandates of providing current, relevant, accessible, accurate and timely information resources and services to their clients. Since no library is financially buoyant at all times, it becomes a necessity for them to adopt the practice of resource sharing as the most effective and viable remedy through a well planned efforts and mutual agreements. A library may be strong in some areas and weaker in

others and vice-versa. Barretto and Dessai (2021) observed that resource sharing is built on the notion that every library cannot be self-sufficient in holding all the knowledge of the universe, however rich it may be. Through resource sharing, the library books and other materials are shared among the libraries through some written legislations or guidelines. Pradhan et al., (2016) viewed that schools and public libraries in developing countries do not have enough financial resources. Therefore, there is a need to share the library resources among them benefiting the users.

Venkatachalam (2011) outlined the following as the reasons or needs for libraries to come together to share resources with one another to enhance service delivery.

1. Knowledge Explosion: Research institutions, universities, industrial and commercial organizations and others academic institutions are responsible for knowledge generation. Inter-disciplinary, extra-disciplinary research and emergence of new disciplines have become more important and relevant. Professional activities in R&D also have increased considerably. Procuring all published literature by a library is too difficult, but on the other hand the users have been demanding access to all such available literature.

2. Increase in Library Users: Population explosion, influx of people from rural to urban, education, high priority on research and development have shown liberal use of libraries by all. Increase in user population demands growth in libraries and services, but there is a limit to such growth, as libraries cannot grow beyond a certain point. Due to the increase in users' demand for diversified information, the libraries are prompted to investigate ways and means for wider range of service and collections. Resource sharing offers practical solutions to these problems.

3. Library Services: Users in the libraries have become more and more information conscious than ever before, demanding effective quality library services. The CAS, SDI, information repackaging and consolidation would not be possible unless libraries share resources. Also the disciplinary interdependence calls for diverse collections of a variety of disciplines, which is not within the capacities and competence of a single library.

4. Acquisition Problems: Increase in publishing output necessitates large intake in libraries to update their collection. This needs a large space to house the collection. Obsolescence of

knowledge also calls for weeding of collection. Co-operative acquisition, storage, and services can eliminate the problems of space, balanced collection building, efficient services, etc.

5. Economic Resources: General Price Index everywhere indicates the rising trend. Prices of books and journals have zoomed over the years. This has tremendously affected the purchasing capacity of libraries. In spite of governmental and institutional finance, libraries are not in a position to buy all that is required for their user community. Regular budgetary cuts and introduction of new services and maintenance of staff also have affected the procurement of libraries.

6. Web Based Resource Sharing: Computer and telecommunication technology are playing a vital role in the design and operation of resource sharing systems network. A library network means as a group of libraries are inter-related through different areas. Now, resource sharing among libraries has been accepted as a necessity. These are required for working of large systems on national and international levels also.

Web based resource sharing includes the sharing of resources hosted on the net. It is very important for bibliographic control of the explosion of literature and knowledge. It also avoids duplication in purchase of costly documents. Library web resource sharing is a helpful way to develop the flow of information among the special information centers / libraries and other types of libraries.

REQUIREMENTS FOR RESOURCES SHARING IN LIBRARIES

Just like any other aspect of library operations and services where certain minimum requisites are expected to be put in place, resource sharing libraries and information centres deserves to meet some pre-operational conditions or requirements (both of human and materials) to be able attain the desired goals. Chatterjee, A. (n.d.) asserted that the process of resource sharing largely involves on two major factors. One is the availability of resources in library and the other is the sufficient numbers of library willing to join with resource sharing activities. The author went further to following as the basic requirements for effective resource sharing:

- There should be a communication link or system between the cooperative libraries.

- Most of all the libraries are willing to join with this resource sharing activities.
- Necessary technology and equipments should need to be available in the library.
- Standardized library software, hardware and database for sharing of library resources.
- Operating policies on the type of information and archives, which users can access.
- There should need an agreement, upon which the whole resource sharing activities may run.

SCOPE/COVERAGE OF RESOURCE SHARING IN LIBRARIES

Resource sharing in libraries covers a wide range of library and information services. Venkatachalam (2011) observed that the area of resource sharing is quite wide, which broadly include all of the materials, functions, and services. Materials and functions include reading materials of all types/formats, acquisition, cataloguing, storage and preservation. Services include all the techniques employed in libraries to establish link between the reader and reading material. ILL and book exchanges also fall into this. Kaur (2013) enumerated nine(9) areas of reach of resource sharing in libraries as follows:

Inter-library Loan Services: This service is to provide documents as well as information available to every reader whatever he needed and wherever it is available. If some document is not available in one library, an arrangement is made to procure this for the reader, from any other library of locality, region or country. The practice of inter-library loan is confined mainly in big cities because the document can be easily located, procured and returned.

Cooperative Acquisition: While purchasing the books and periodicals all the libraries has to go through purchasing channels and formalities in purchasing like selection, placing the orders, reminders to the suppliers, passing the bills, arranging the foreign currency for periodicals. The libraries of a same region or locality can team up to become a central agency for purchasing of books and periodicals for all the libraries of the region. This way multiple copies of the books can be purchased on behalf of other libraries and on these are distributed as per requirements of each library. Such a practice is beneficial to member libraries in saving the labour of member libraries, brings down the cost of acquisition and can have maximum discount and lot of time saving is also there.

Centralized /Co-operative Cataloguing: Libraries are always facing problems of funds and to reduce the cost and to save the time centralized and cooperative cataloguing the best scheme. Under centralized cataloguing, a central agency or single library does the cataloguing job while in co-operative cataloguing, two or more libraries share the work, Machine Readable Catalogue (MARC) is the best example of centralized cataloging. This improvement of quality and standard with uniformity and saving of time.

Co-operative Storage Programme: In every library there are thousands of books and non book materials which are seldom or little used and storage capacity in any library is limited. For this co-operative storage can be done.

Cooperative Reference and Information Services: The importance of reference and information services in any library can't be under-estimated. In research libraries such a service is essential. These days, when the means of telecommunication and computers are available everywhere, providing such a service through internet, telephone or fax, should be fully fruitful.

Sharing of Equipment: A reprographic facility is the best way as many costly and rare documents of libraries need to be conserved through microfilming or through scanning. There is no need to purchase equipment by all the libraries this can be done on co-operative basis. Main frame Computers are needed for automation in libraries. It is costly so every library cannot purchase. Co-operating libraries can use such a computer on a time-sharing basis.
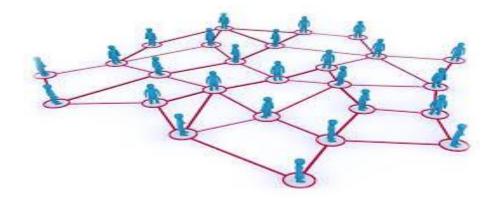
Exchange of Staff: There is shortage of expert manpower in the field of library software and operations. Library staff for such specialized jobs is not easily available. It is being felt by all the libraries that expertise of such personnel can be fully exploited by exchange of staff from one library to other. Such experts can train the staff members of other libraries.

Translation Services are necessitated: The published work in foreign languages can be translated in to the local or deism language. For this, research publications can got translated on co-operative basis. The services of translators can be sought by co-operating libraries by pooling resources.

Preparation of Bibliographies/ Databases: Nowadays every library is in process to computerized, so a computer databases on likeness with interest can be created. Libraries can prepare the bibliographies and exchange these among the co-operating libraries

LIBRARY NETWORKING FOR RESOURCE SHARING

Library networking is a system of interconnection of two or more libraries for the purpose and sole aim of benefitting from the resources and services of one another. It is meant to ensure that each and every library in the network contributes to increase the capacity and coverage of information and service contents of the network and to optimize the resources and services of the participating libraries at minimal cost. Hakansson (2015) asserted that the networking and resource sharing has always been an important prime factor in library services that helps to network a greater range of expertise resources available at one point.

Library Networking Model (Source**:** Chavan & Kalbande, 2016**).**

There are various forms of resource sharing networks in libraries around the world. The followings are few examples of such networks: INFLIBNET, DELNET, GILLDDNET, NULIB, etc……….

INFLIBNET Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET) Centre is an Autonomous Inter-University Centre (IUC) of University Grants Commission (UGC) which is involved in creating infrastructure for networking of library and information resources sharing services in Academic and Research Institutions. INFLIBNET aims to modernize the university libraries in India by connecting these universities and other information centres throughout the country via a high speed data network mapping the entire nation and using the state-of-art tools and expertise for the finest utilisation of available information. INFLIBNET is pitched as a major participant in encouraging intellectual statement between the Indian academicians and researchers (Waghmode, 2014).

DELNET – Developing Library Network is an important active library network used for resource sharing in India. It connects 1674 libraries from all over India and seven other countries. The DELNET was conceived as Delhi Library Network in the year 1992 and initially it was for Library resource sharing only in the Delhi region, but later on it has grown across the local boundaries and is now a network mapping not only the entire country of India but also available globally. Hence the acronym DELNET has now been used to denote Developing Library Network. The primary goals of DELNET are to endorse resource sharing between the member libraries and provide interactive services to researchers, academicians and scholars to enhancement their research activity (Kaul, 2010).

GILLDDNET – Ghana Interlibrary Lending and Document Delivery Network. This was funded by the Danish International Development Agency(DANIDA) from 1998 to 2002. It was first formal system of cooperation in the country. It made Ghanaian librarians aware of technological innovation and gave them the capacity to exploit them for the benefit of providing information for their users. However, the implementation was not smooth and many of the initial problems remained unsolved (Alemna and Cobblah, 2004).

NULIB - The formation of the Nigerian University Libraries Consortium (NULIB) was triggered by two events: firstly, the commissioning by the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) of a study on the feasibility of establishing a consortium among university libraries in Nigeria(Bozimo, 2011 while citing Bozimo, 2004). The study according to Bozimo (2011) provided an insight into the attitude of Nigerian university librarians towards formal cooperative activities. Although they had previously accepted the logic of enhanced access to information through cooperative sharing of their libraries' relatively limited holdings of books and journal resources, only lip service was paid to the reality of implementing shared access through interlibrary loan.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RESOURCE SHARING IN LIBRARIES

Several benefits or importance can be attributed to the task of resource sharing in libraries. The followings are the benefits or importance of sharing resources amongst libraries and information centres:

i. **Economic importance of resource sharing:** the major economic importance of resource sharing in libraries is to reduce the all round cost and create positive impacts on library budget. This is to lessen the cost of procuring information resources individually by the participating libraries and to enhance more services to users. It also includes avoiding the duplication of information resources, their maintenance and cost of processing. It also ensures economy of space in libraries since there are numerous information resources available in e-databases. Resource sharing according to Prakash and Janardhana (2017) aids to overcome the limitations like enormous cost of purchase, bibliography handling, storage of material etc. as a result of the surprising growth in the produced information

ii. **Developmental benefits:** resource sharing makes each participating library develop interest in acquiring and building up specific collection of information resources. A participating library do not necessarily have to acquire all the resources individually but rather, rely on some other collections built up by other participating libraries in the network. Thus, each library in the network becomes a specialized collection builder or collection developer.

iii. **Academic/Research Importance of Resource Sharing:** resource sharing greatly enhances academic and research activities most especially in academic environment. Researchers rely heavily on available and accessible information resources to conduct research. The unlimited access to millions of relevant information resources made possible through resource sharing model has very high significant impacts on research which influences academic and research output. In this vein, researchers do not have to go outside their library or pay for accessing information resources of other libraries which their libraries do not possess. Sharing library resources also makes it possible to enhance academic performance of students who are the immediate users of academic libraries. The information resources not available in any individual participating library can be accessed through the links established by other libraries forming the consortium. Students are thereby presented with unlimited access to information sources by navigating between the libraries in the network. This makes it easier for them to carry out assignments, term papers, preparing technical reports as well as project/theses/dissertations. Thus, access to institutional repositories of

participating libraries exposes both students and academics to different formats and styles of reporting research findings.

iv. **Social Benefits of Resource Sharing:** sharing library resources makes it possible for librarians to interact or socialize and share knowledge and experiences both locally and internationally. It is a good opportunity for personal and professional development of librarians of the participating libraries. It also enhances the visibility of library and its personnel in the global arena especially in the present era of social media networking. Social media are very powerful tools for connecting people in remote locations and fastest tools for disseminating information.

CHALLENGES OF RESOURCE SHARING IN LIBRARIES.

Despite the significances attached to resource sharing, libraries are faced with one challenge or the other while making efforts at ensuring effective sharing of resources among participating libraries.

- Paucity of fund: this is a very great hindrance to effective library and information services in developing countries. Proper funding is of paramount importance to libraries and even a necessity whenever two or more libraries come together to render services to one another so as to ensure that no library fails in its responsibility of providing specifically assigned information resources and services to all the libraries within the network.

- Lack of or inadequate ICT facilities (computers, printers, scanners, networking facilities) to handle effective resources sharing. This is a great setback to resource sharing especially with exponential growth of information produced daily and the need to deploy digital technologies to reach to varied clients in different locations of the participating libraries.

- Lack of skilled manpower: this is an avoidable hindrance if the participating libraries must achieve their goals of coming together to share the resources at their disposal. Every organization needs both human and material resources to thrive. Material or financial resources alone do not suffice to move any library to a successful destination therefore, cooperating libraries must possess highly skilled personnel in both traditional and modern library routines in order to attain effective and efficient resource sharing.

- Irregular subscription to e-databases: this occurs mostly due to the cost of subscription occasioned by changes from time to time and the dwindling budgetary allocation to libraries and information centres.
- Erratic power supply: this has always been a problem in libraries especially in developing countries for a very long time hence, the need for it to be properly addressed.
- Informal agreement or weak legislation for resource sharing among the libraries; this can lead to failure or collapse of parts if not a whole thing, if the libraries opting for resource sharing do not have a proper legislation or strong formal agreements guiding each library from acquisition through processing, dissemination, access and use by the patrons.

CONCLUSION

It is imperative to note that resource sharing in libraries and information centres especially in developing countries has absolutely become an indispensable tool in library and information services delivery especially when considering the height of daily information explosion, the global economic crises and the need to meet the increased information needs of library users. It is of higher significance if it is properly planned and geared towards achieving its goals. Resource sharing model is an information reservoir covering a wide range of scholarly works needed to satisfy the information thirst of academics, researchers and other community of library users. This is difficult for a standalone library to achieve. Successful resource sharing activities are attained through a formal agreements and legislative backups which spell out certain terms and conditions for effective acquisition, processing, dissemination and sharing of information resources amongst the member libraries. There is need for all member libraries to ensure that all requirements are met and rules and regulations are adhered to in order to ensure greater efficiency and a sustainable resource sharing model.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT RESOURCE SHARING IN LIBRARIES

- ✓ Proper funding of libraries must be given a higher priority by relevant authorities or institutions in charge of running the affairs of the libraries. Nothing works without adequate financial resources.

- ✓ The world has gone digital. Libraries must be equipped with latest ICT facilities especially the ones that are required to establish an effective networking for participating libraries.

- ✓ Library personnel or staff must be properly trained to meet the changing expectations of library users in both traditional and modern library world. Staff training and development should be given the needed attention to achieve the aims and objectives of resource sharing.

- ✓ Subscription to electronic databases by the participating libraries should be enhanced. This is to ensure an all time availability and accessibility to information resources by varied users of the libraries at any time.

- ✓ Each participating library must have an alternating power sources to ensure its visibility in the network and regular provision of information services to users in remote locations at all times.

- ✓ Prior to or at formation of resources sharing network by the prospective libraries, a strong legislation or formal agreement is required to achieve the desired results. This is a guiding document that clearly states the terms and conditions agreed to by all participating libraries. The leadership roles and terms, budgetary allocation, the processes of acquiring the information resources, manpower requirements of the member libraries, the security of information resources as well as time frame for the delivery of information resources to users are all expected to be clearly stated in this document. This will keep member libraries in proper direction to achieve the desired results.

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