

Consortium Development and Resource Sharing, the WRLC Model: Creating Synergies for Success for Nigerian Libraries

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to discuss the rising global trend of networking, resource sharing and consortium building by various types of libraries around the world all aimed at making more information and learning resources available to information seekers irrespective of their geographical location .

Design/Methodology/Approach: An exploratory approach through extensive review of related Literatures was adopted for this study. Conceptual framework was developed to understand the concept of consortium building. The historical development of library consortium worldwide and in Nigeria was traced. Next was the discussion on the Washington Research Library Consortium which this paper presents as a model for Nigeria. It also outlines conditions for developing a functional library consortium in Nigeria.

Findings: This paper found out that efforts have been made in the past to establish several library consortia in Nigeria. These efforts were spearheaded by international development organizations and government agencies. None of these earlier consortia is fully functional and most of them have since died a natural death due to systemic failure and other factors.

Practical Implication: The information and research needs of information seekers in Nigeria are hardly ever met by any one library. This is due to the fact no individual library can claim to be self-sufficient in providing all types and formats of information materials. This leads to information seekers and researchers not having access to wide range of needed literature and also to travelling long distances in search of needed information materials. This impacts on their economic resources as well as exposes them to unnecessary risks on the road. This dearth of information materials and the difficulty in obtaining them ultimately results in low quality research outputs. Development of functional library consortia by various types of libraries across Nigeria will empower information seekers by providing them access to needed information resources which may not be in their own library thereby eliminating the distance between information seeker and his information materials.

Originality/Value: It is recommended that Nigerian libraries should build functional consortia modeled after WRLC and other functional consortia around the world.

Keywords: library consortium, networking, resource sharing, Washington Research Library Consortium (WRLC).

Paper type: Conceptual

Introduction

The size of the 21st century library is no longer determined by the dimension of its building neither is the size of its collection determined by the sheer volumes of its print collections. Information explosion and multidisciplinary researches in the global information landscape keeps creating enormous amount of information every minute and the complexity of the demands of information users has made it a near impossible task for any single library to successfully undertake this task. This situation

has brought about the need for libraries to come together by way of forming consortium so as to share resources in order to meet the increasing users' demands in a more satisfying way. A consortium is a group of people, countries, companies, etc. who are working together on a particular project" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2010)

Libraries world over are facing severe budgetary cuts. Okeagu & Okeagu, (2008) observe that university libraries have realized that no matter how they are well funded, it is difficult to

acquire all the information resources needed by their users.

Being insignificant income generating institutions, they are being compelled to justify their expenditures in order to continue to enjoy budgetary allocations. This has brought about the need for libraries with similar interests to come together to form common bonds and share resources. Edem, (2010) in Anasi & Ali, (2011) states that ‘the global Information explosion, the cut in budgetary allocations, the rising costs and complexities of information resources as well as the imperative to provide the user community with optimal access to needed information make resource sharing initiative indispensable.’ Resource sharing may involve sharing of print materials in form of inter library loans, sharing of ICT facilities, sharing of bibliographic and authority records. Recently, interlibrary loans have transcended the sharing of print materials to the current trend of sharing electronic resources among libraries.

Library Consortium

Reitz, (2005) defines consortium as ‘an association of independent libraries and/or library systems established by formal agreement, usually for the purpose of resource sharing. Membership may be restricted to a specific geographic region, type of library (public, academic, special) or subject specialization. One of the leading examples in the United States is OhioLINK, which includes Ohio’s college and university libraries and the Ohio State Library.’ similarly, Akintunde, (2006) cited in Edewor&Omosor (2008) defines library consortium as a group of libraries coming together to find a common solution for their common problems in order to advance the practice of librarianship and information science.

Why were library consortia formed and why was it necessary for libraries to come together? Speirs, (2006) observes that various consortia arose in response to the increasing calls for the establishment of interlibrary loan program. She further notes that some of these involved many small libraries which wanted to increase their base of available resources without increasing their budgets and that many of them also evolved as a response to government sponsored initiatives.

Libraries in a consortium work together for the mutual benefit of their users, including centralized processing, cooperative cataloging,

international exchange of bibliographic information, union catalogs, resource sharing, and sharing of storage facilities.

There are different types of library consortia. The reason for these differences can be attributed to the different types of libraries, each of which is tailored towards providing specialized services to a specialized user community. Advances in ICT and its numerous possibilities have laid the framework for library consortia to flourish. With such facilities available, it is now possible to have local, regional, national as well as international consortia.

Some of such consortia are The Cape Libraries Automated Materials Sharing (CLAMS). This is a regional consortium of over 30 libraries on Cape Cod. An example of a national consortium is FinELib, The Finnish National Electronic Library. FinELib, is a consortium comprising Finnish universities, universities of applied sciences, public libraries and a number of research institutes and special libraries. Online Computer Library Center, OCLC (formerly Ohio College Library Center) is an example of an international consortium. OCLC aims to bring together all the libraries of the world by providing innovative services such as WorldCat which is a Global network of library content and services that allow institution be more connected, open and productive. Another innovative service is Connexion which is an integrated cataloging service. Others are OCLC-MARC Record Delivery, CatExpress, etc

Library Consortium in Nigeria

Bozimo, (1980) in Folorunsho&Folorunsho, (2010) observes that in Africa and Nigeria in particular, John Harris ignited the flame of library co-operation in 1955 by submitting a memorandum to the Nigerian government advocating for the establishment of a Library Advisory and Consultative Committee for Resource Sharing. He further observed that, in 1974 the National Library of Nigeria initiated a resource sharing and networking scheme which involved the machinery for the establishment of National Union List of Serials (NUSLOS) which eventually took off in 1977. The subsequent conference on cooperative acquisition held in Kaduna in 1980 resulted in the National Union Catalog (NUC) (Okeagu & Okeagu, 2008).

In 2004, the committee of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities (CULNU) formed the

Nigerian University Libraries Consortium (NULIC) to embrace all universities with the view to expanding it to include all academic and research libraries in Nigeria. Some of the objectives include:

- Promote resource sharing among member libraries
- Make the academic resources of each member library available to all the others
- Ensure that member institutions contribute meaningfully towards sustaining the consortium

The establishment of the National Virtual library Project in 2001 by the Federal Ministry of Education with the mission to provide an equitable, cooperative and cost effective manner, enhanced access to national and international Library and information resources as well as sharing locally available resources with libraries all over the world using digital technology added impetus to the importance of resource sharing. In this scheme, Nigerian Universities are to contribute their research information which would be placed online for sharing. Nigerian Universities Network (NUNET) is another initiative by the National Universities Commission to encourage Universities to network and share information for their academic and administrative functions. Other resource sharing projects are the Nigerian Periodical Index (NPI) of CULNU and the National Documentation and Library Center for Science and Technology (NADICEST)

Efforts have been made in the past to develop some forms of consortia in the African continent with each one achieving its own appreciable level of success. However, the same cannot be said of Nigeria. These failures were as a result of different factors. Etim, (2006) observes that libraries throughout the country, Africa's most populous, have tried to obtain access to the latest information, to improve the dissemination of information, and to provide high quality library services, but these efforts have failed because of several challenges some of which include lack of appropriate technology and trained manpower.

Washington Research Library Consortium (WRLC)

The Washington Research Library Consortium (WRLC) was established in 1987 by some of the major universities in the Washington D.C. area to share library collections and information technology in order to enhance the resources

available to their students and faculty. The Consortium is a collaborative partnership providing proactive and responsive, innovative, cost-effective access to shared information resources, services and expertise. Its vision is to be a catalyst creating synergies among the partner Universities to enable the success of learning and scholarship.

WRLC (2017) provides the following mission-critical services to its member Universities:

- Information technology supporting library operations and resource-sharing
- Access to online resources
- Technologies to support digital collections and share campus scholarship, and
- Offsite storage to free valuable space in campus libraries.

The libraries in the consortium include: American University, The Catholic American University, Gallaudet University, George Mason University, The George Washington University, George Town University, Mary Mount University, and The University of The District of Columbia. The consortium provides the following services to its member institutions:

- i. Coordinated Collections
- ii. Discovery and Access
- iii. Preservation and Digitization
- iv. Sharing Expertise

WRLC operates a shared offsite storage facility. The combined collections of The Washington Research Library Consortium total more than 12 million items, 2,803,869 volumes and 66,585 archival boxes are readily available to students and faculty using the Consortium Loan Services. This offsite storage facility was designed to free valuable space in the campus libraries for newer or more frequently-accessed materials. The storage facility provides high-density, environmentally-controlled, retrievable storage for books, audiovisual or microform media, and archival boxes. Individual items are sorted by size in order to store the maximum number of items in the minimum floor area. Students and faculty of WRLC libraries may submit online requests for items stored at the "WRLC Center" using the ALADIN library catalog's Request feature. Materials requested by 5 pm are delivered to the library the next business day. Individual journal articles are transmitted directly to the requester at a password-controlled website. A small reading room is available at

WRLC by appointment for onsite review of materials.(ACRL, 2017).

Conditions for Functional Consortium

Existing consortia have some time-tested principles which propel their wheels of success. A few of them are listed below.

ICT infrastructure: for a consortium to function properly, it has to be built on a sound ICT foundation. According to American University (2011), the requisite ICT infrastructures needed are:

- a. Appropriate internet bandwidth for each member library. This will guarantee fast and reliable connection to the internet.
- b. Adequate servers for website and other resource hosting.
- c. The right hardware and software need to be properly installed.
- d. ICT support and maintenance has to be readily and easily available for smooth running of any consortium.

Human capital: Every functional consortium, no matter how technologically endowed, needs a trained human capital to function. This brings to light the need for libraries to equip its staff with the latest ICT skills. These ICT skills need to be updated periodically and regularly as they can easily become outdated. Akintunde (2006) reaffirms this when he stated that technology easily becomes obsolete hence the need for routine ICT training to keep up with innovation.

Work flow analysis study: Libraries in a consortium need to adopt a similar workflow by carrying out a comprehensive workflow analysis. This is to ensure a seamless pattern of operations. Edewor & Omosor (2008) made a similar assertion when they stated that every viable library consortium formation is built on well-articulated broad base guidelines, depending on participating libraries situation. Libraries in a consortium should also use similar equipment such as software so as to achieve a synchronized data flow and exchange. A vivid example is the WRLC where most of the participating libraries are using ALADIN integrated library system.

Benefits of Resource Sharing in a Consortium:

1. Resource sharing: Information resources of the participating libraries are pooled together for common usage thereby increasing the

resources available to the users in each participating library.

2. Reciprocal Borrowing: This represents one of the longest continuous cooperative arrangements among libraries in the United States. Today the WRLC reciprocal borrowing program includes:

- Direct borrowing: Students and faculty may borrow in person at any member library
- Consortium Loan Service (CLS): Students and faculty may place an online request for a book or article held by another member library.

3. Consortial Licenses: This allows libraries in a consortium to negotiate for better deals from electronic resources vendors. WRLC members participate in a consortial licensing and technical support program which provides access to more than 200 databases through ALADIN. WRLC provides:

- A database licensing specialist to evaluate products and negotiate licenses for online information resources.
- Patron authentication system and proxy servers for each university to allow validated access from off-campus Internet service providers and on-campus access to personalized services

4. Cooperative Collection Development: Another benefit of a consortium is cooperative collection development, which aims to increase the scope of information resources available locally to faculty and students of participating institutions. Some examples of WRLC cooperative collection development initiatives include:

- Shared funding of retrospective conversion, which added 500,000 records to the online catalog.
- A "protected titles" policy governing retention of core journal titles in various disciplines.
- A 2-year joint conspectus analysis of the library collections.
- Planning toward specialized collecting responsibility (Home page: WRLC, 2017)

Conclusion

The world's progressive nations are being propelled by aggressive researches and unfettered access to relevant information. Any nation that neglects this segment in its striving for growth cannot be said to be serious in achieving its objectives. Nigerian government needs to pay more attention to the availability of relevant information if it is to attain its various set goals, visions and agendas.

For the dream of a functional library consortium to be realized in Nigeria, the major stakeholders in the provision of relevant information for national growth should live up to their expectation in order to realize these objectives. They can do this by replicating what other countries with functional consortia have done. If a nationwide consortium will be too cumbersome considering the requirements and the peculiar challenges facing the Nigerian educational system, then we should experiment with regional consortia or even state consortia such as the WRLC as they are easier to maintain.

The Nigerian library association should set the ball rolling by making sure that all the professional technical details for the smooth take off of a functional consortium are put in place. Such details include:

- Standards for bibliographic and holdings metadata such as (RDA).
- Standards for serials data as well as guidelines for cataloging serials in multiple Formats
- Guidelines for cataloging electronic resources.
- Guidelines for use of Dublin Core data elements for describing internet resources.

NLA and LRCN should also liaise with the National Universities commission to mandate Nigerian library schools to upgrade their curriculum to conform to the current trends in librarianship such as upgrading their teaching of cataloging rules from the outdated Anglo American Cataloging Rules (AACR2) to Resource Description and Access (RDA).

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