



Sustainable consortium building among university libraries in Nigeria: Adoption of new strategies

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KEYWORDS

Consortium building;
University libraries;
Nigeria

Abstract This paper makes a case for sustainable consortium building among University libraries in Nigeria. It examines critical issues involved in consortium building, identifies inherent problems and charts the way forward in dealing with identified problems. It further posits that if carefully planned and executed, consortium building could help Nigerian University libraries improve and sustain services to users.

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Introduction

Libraries are centres for repository of knowledge where social, political, economic and cultural aspirations of society are gathered and are freely disseminated to users for advancement of society (Bosah, 2008). One of the most prominent types of library today is the university library. University libraries all over the world are established to provide literature support to the teaching, learning and research activities of their parent institutions. They carry out their responsibility through the acquisition, organization, dissemination and preservation of information resources. These information resources are accessed by users through a variety of services.

Development of university libraries in Nigeria cannot be separated from the evolution and growth of universities in the country. The history of university library development in Nigeria dates back to pre-independence time when the University of Ibadan and its library were established in 1948. As pointed out by Aguolu (1996), since independence

in 1960, there has been an unrelenting upsurge in the establishment of educational institutions at all levels, especially university education. University libraries, being integral academic parts of the universities, generally emerged simultaneously with their parent institutions. At independence in 1960, the Federal Government of Nigeria decided to establish a university in each of the geo-political region existing at that time. This brought about the establishment of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife, and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. These universities all established libraries to meet the needs of their students and staff. Over the years, universities and by extension university libraries have increased. Federal and state governments have opened more universities, while private individuals and organizations are now licenced to operate universities. Presently, there are 104 universities (and by extension university libraries) in Nigeria (National Universities Commission, 2010).

University Libraries especially in government-owned universities are suffering from low budgetary allocation for education. An analysis of the federal government allocation to the education sector in the last nine years reveals that between 2000 and 2008, the government's allocation

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to education was an average of 9% (Mordi, 2008). Punch (2008) reported that out of the N738 billion the federal government allocated to the sector between 1999 and 2007, the federal ministry of education spent about N473 billion on salaries and wages, leaving a meagre N265 billion for the development of infrastructure in these universities over a period of eight years. With low funding, universities are not able to provide adequate funds to operate libraries with first class services. As a result, there are no adequate facilities and information resources, so students use the libraries mainly for study space. Few faculty members use the libraries' resources regularly and most seem unaware of new developments and resources within the library. The library staff is struggling to provide access to electronic resources while coping with unreliable power, on and off access to the Internet and low bandwidth. Many view the library as weak and unable to support teaching and research (MacArthur Foundation, 2005).

This means that university libraries are faced with challenges in trying to fit into the emergent information society. The above challenges may be met in part by developing strategies for survival and growth. Of course, funding is also an important factor.

Nwalo (2008) posits that the extent to which the libraries can provide services in meeting the information needs of their numerous users depends on a number of factors including:

- Funding
- Staffing
- Quality, depth and recency of the collection
- General support and goodwill of the management of the parent body
- Environmental factors
- Consortium building.

These factors make the difference between the effective university library and the ineffective one. Inadequate funding, limited knowledge and number of staff, inadequate collection as well as the evolution of information and communication technology (ICT) have made consortium building a critical success factor in the effectiveness and sustainability of university library services.

This paper takes a critical look at the role of consortium building in promoting effective and sustainable services in university libraries.

Objectives of the study

University libraries are important to the success of the teaching, learning and research processes of their users. Consequently, the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the services of these libraries has implications on the teaching, learning and research processes of users. Therefore, all factors needed for the effectiveness and sustainability of services of the libraries must be identified and put into use. One such factor has been identified as consortium building.

This study is built around the following objectives:

- To identify necessary facilities and resources needed for consortium building to help university libraries thrive

- To examine the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in a library consortium
- To identify problems encountered in the course of consortium building among university libraries in Nigeria
- To recommend appropriate measures that will enhance consortium building among university libraries.

Review of literature

Consortium building, also known as alliance, association, cooperation, collaboration, resource sharing, confederation and networking refers to a formal arrangement by a group of organizations (in this instance, libraries) with common interests in order to pool their material and human resources together to meet the needs of their users much more than they could have done were they to depend on individual efforts (Nwalo, 2008). According to Okerson (2004), a library consortium is any local, regional or national cooperative association of libraries that provides for the systematic and effective coordination of the resources of schools, public, academic and special libraries and information centres for improving services to the clientele of such libraries.

The underlying assumption of any library cooperation is that by working together through consortia arrangements, members can achieve more than could be achieved individually. According to Rowley (1993), the central objectives of library consortia are to:

- Reveal the contents of a large number of libraries or a large number of publications, especially through accessibility of catalogue databases using OPAC interfaces
- Make the resources shown in these catalogue databases available to individual libraries and users when and where they need them
- Share the expense and work involved in creating catalogue databases through the exchange of records and associated activities.

Rowley (1993) further posits the functions that may be carried out through consortia include:

- Distribution and publication of electronic journals and other electronic documents
- End-user access to other databases, such as those available on the online hosts and CD-ROM
- Value added services such as electronic mail, directory services and file transfer
- Exchange of bibliographic records.

Simpson (1990) asserts that there are essentially three reasons why libraries participate in library consortia. First, a consortium can improve the quality of services that a library provides its clientele. Consortia offer a number of effective resource sharing services to libraries, ranging from shared cataloguing systems to online searching of information retrieval databases, document delivery, preservation, microfilming and collective collection development.

The second reason relates to the altruistic nature of the library profession. Sharing is good and working together

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