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6-5-2014

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Chidinma Onwuchekwa Ogba

Ekiti State University, Ekiti State, Nigeria., chidinma.ogba@gmail.com

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Ogba, Chidinma Onwuchekwa, "The Practicality of Resource Sharing in Academic Law Libraries in South-western Nigeria" (2014). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 1120.

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The Practicality of Resource Sharing in Academic Law Libraries in South-western Nigeria

Ogba, Onwuchekwa Chidinma
chidinma.ogba@gmail.com
08032197361
Law Library, Ekiti State University.
Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Abstract

This study explores the practicability of resource sharing amongst Nigerian academic law libraries by looking at academic law libraries in south-west Nigeria. Judgemental sampling technique was used in selecting four law librarians while simple random technique was used in selecting four law faculties in south west, Nigeria. Phone and electronic mails were used for gathering data from these law librarians through the use of interview research method. Data was analysed by arranging responses into facets; thus like facets were grouped together and evidences representing issues in this study were selected and used as evidences of findings. Findings from this study showed that there is no practise of resource sharing in law libraries in south-west Nigeria. Though further findings showed that some Federal University Libraries which have equal digital strength were at the initialization stage of forming a consortium for sharing of e-resources; however law libraries were not included in the consortium; though it is assumed that they might be included later. Lack of innovation, lack of zeal, and lack of interest from the Council of Nigerian Legal Education(CNLE) on resource sharing were found as factors behind non-practicability of resource sharing in the law libraries studied. Findings also showed that the interest of the Council of Nigerian Legal Education(CNLE) on collaboration by law libraries would boost immediate results. Admittance, a long old culture in which students visit other libraries and use their resources was the only form of sharing found among law libraries; and there was no written or oral agreement to it. It was also found that there was no form of written or oral policy on resource sharing in the law libraries explored. It was concluded that further studies under resource sharing be done using interview (face to face) method in order to get in-depth data on reasons behind non-practicability of resource sharing . It was also concluded that further study on this topic be made in-order to find other reasons not shown in this research findings .

Keywords

1. Resource Sharing
2. Nigerian Law Libraries
3. Collaborative Services
4. Library and Information Services
5. Nigerian Council of Legal Education and Law Libraries

1.0. Introduction/Background to the Study

Resource sharing is ingrained in many libraries worldwide (PARMA University, 2004). It has been prevalent in the United States of America, Germany, Italy, Europe and Nigeria (PARMA University, 2004 and Abubakar, 2007). Its advancement is attached to activities which dictates its pace and relevance. For the purpose of this study, the historical background of resource sharing within and outside Nigeria is stated.

In the United States of America, resource sharing was initialised in 1880 as a cultural cooperation and activities among libraries in US (Alexander, cited in PARMA University, 2004). The cultural cooperation and subsequent activities focussed on distribution of bibliographic card catalogues and publication of LC subject heading. These activities were carried out in the Library of Congress. Gradually, mere cooperation in distribution of bibliographic card catalogues and publication of LC subject heading amalgamated into a consortium; this was in 1933 and later emerged as the currently known "resource sharing" in all its forms and interpretations; including both electronic and print based resource sharing. In 1990, this cooperation advanced and resources were shared through "Virtual Union Catalogue". While this was the background of resource sharing in the USA, in Germany, its background started in the context of law and was linked to Anglo-America(Alexander, cited in PARMA University, 2004).

The prevalent consortium in the US at the inception of resource sharing was beneficial. It facilitated a cooperation that resulted in sharing of the scarce expertise at that time; interlibrary loan of print resources, cooperation on resource sharing relating to limited subject areas, and cooperation geared at computerization of libraries in the United States.

In Nigeria, the history of resource sharing started in 1963 at the “National Library of Nigeria” (Abubakar, 2007). Its emergence was linked to the creation of “National Union Catalogue” for all the resources held in Nigerian libraries. This is likened to the history of resource sharing in the United States. Each of the 85 participating libraries sent a copy of their main entry catalogue cards to the National Library of Nigeria. Consecutively, another historical emergence on resource sharing covering serials/periodicals was also initiated (Abubakar, 2007). Thus serials/periodical resources became part of the National Union Catalogue. These were all in print format. The deposition of catalogue cards was the main form of resource sharing until 1977 when inter-library loan of books or resources were initiated (Abubakar, 2007). This initiation was pursuant to the recommendation by the “Interlibrary Lending Committee” (held at Ife) that a “Bibliographic Centre” be formed. Later in 1980, a move for a cooperative acquisition amongst libraries was initiated; however, this was not expensive as it stopped at the initialization stage. This shows that resource sharing is not alien to Nigeria and is assumed to be the order of the day ; but this is yet to be explored. However, there are issues within the Nigerian educational system which could have awoken collaborative sharing of resources among law libraries in Nigeria which include issues like inadequate funding of Nigerian Universities (Odunewe and Omagbemi,2008 and Komolafe-Opadeji,2011), lack of adequate human resources or expertise and the lack of quality resources(Ali and Owoeye,2010). This study is therefore explorative and has the aim of finding out the practicability of resource sharing in Nigerian law libraries with focus on 5 Universities in the south western part of Nigeria.

Dada (cited in Hussain, Ali and Owoeye, 2010) defines law libraries as “special hybrid of the art of librarianship”. In this definition, he included court libraries, commercial houses law libraries, ministry of justice and any organisation that bears the name “Law”. This definition would not be adopted as the definition of law libraries for this study as it would make this study derail from its focus since this study focuses on law libraries in academic institutions.

For the purpose of this study, a law library is defined as a special library within an academic environment; dedicated to providing legal resources and services to law lecturers , law students, and members of the legal profession.

Resource sharing was defined by Walden (cited in Hussain, Ali and Owoeye,2010) as “ a term used to describe organised attempts by libraries to share materials and services cooperatively so as to provide one another with resources that might otherwise not be available to an individual institution”. This would be adopted as the definition of resource sharing in this study. Therefore literatures would be reviewed under the following facets:

- a. The practicability of resource sharing.

- b. Platforms and opportunities available for resource sharing.
- c. The underlying factor behind lack of resource sharing amongst Nigerian law libraries.

2.1. The Practicability of Resource Sharing.

Plethora of literature have shown that librarians are aware of resource sharing and its attendant benefits but do not practise it (Abubakar,2007; Lawal, Bassey and Ani,2008; Ejadafiru,2010; Hussain, Ali and Owoeye,2010; Komolafe-Opadeji,2011 and Owolabi, Bamigboye, Agboola and Lawal,2011). In Owolabi, Bamigboye Agboola and Lawal(2011), admittance; which is permission given to law students from other institution to visit and use resources in another institution was ranked highest as a form of resource sharing. But this would not be accepted as proper resource sharing because it is not shown in the study that there was any formal agreement amongst the studied law libraries to mutually collaborate for resource gains. From observation, admittance is the practice among law libraries and non-law libraries, thus students from other institutions are allowed access to resources in other institutions if they could show proper identification. However, it is not known if there are any formal/written agreement towards this practice; neither has it been known if there are policies put in place in University law libraries supporting any form of resource sharing with other academic law libraries. Though in Lawal, Bassey and Ani(2008), it was found in a study of 27 law libraries in Nigeria that only 6 Universities have a policy on resource sharing. The names of the studied universities were however not explicitly mentioned; thus it is not known if the above findings relates to libraries in the south west.

In Owolabi, Bamigboye Agboola and Lawal(2011), book donation and gift were categorised as a form of resource sharing. However, this is a mere form of resource development and should not be seen as resource sharing practise as resource sharing is something that is mutual, relevant to solving needs and agreed on by parties involved; and not donations which might not be relevant for the law program in the University in which it was sent to. In Owolabi, Bamigboye, Agboola and Lawal(2011), exchange of publication was the most common form of resource sharing practiced, however, this study did not show the format of the publications exchanged. According to France (2005), resource sharing in Indian Universities was found to be in print format; though this is an old study, it is observed that it has relevance to Nigeria as it goes to show the need to find out the format of resources being shared.

The literatures analysed has not shown any genuine practice of resource sharing among law libraries in Nigeria. This lack has often been linked to poor funding of Nigerian libraries and lack of platforms for effective practice. In Komolafe-Opadeji(2011), lack of adequate resources to purchase digital equipments was seen as a constraint, however academic libraries which have ICT(information

and Communication Technology) equipments were found not practising resource sharing (Abubakar, 2007). This then becomes a problem which is assumed to be ingrained in Nigerian library system as Ejedafiru's (2010) findings show that Nigerian libraries have been making efforts at resource sharing which efforts have not been yielding results. However, the efforts being made were not expatiated on; though his findings show that modern technologies needed for collaboration were lacking in some libraries studied. Findings further showed that librarians who are to manage collaborative sharing of resources lack ICT skills. However, a gap still exist as the University ICT personnel could be involved where there are no skills; while adequate training is provided collaboratively amongst the resource sharing groups. Thus, the above study provides excuses and not genuine reasons behind lack of implementation of resource sharing amongst the studied University libraries. This means that there is no conclusive reason behind the non-existence of resource sharing amongst libraries in Nigerian academic institutions. There is also not found in the literature, any study on resource sharing among law libraries as the literature reviewed focussed on resource sharing in Nigerian libraries. This becomes a big gap which this study would fill by exploring resource sharing among law libraries in Nigeria.

2.2. Platforms and Opportunities Available for Resource Sharing

Collection development policy on resource sharing is a major platform through which resource sharing could be enforced; however majority of libraries in Nigerian academic institutions do not have a policy on resource sharing (Lawal, Bassey and Ani (2008). According to Lawal, Bassey and Ani (2008), six Universities agreed to have polices on resource sharing. However, the method used in getting this data (structured questionnaire) is not totally verifiable as there is the possibility of misinterpretation of the meaning of policy on resource sharing. Furthermore, it is possible that the respondents have not seen any policy on resource sharing but provided positive answers based on assumption. Thus in this research, unstructured interview method would be employed in order to get verifiable data on resource sharing.

2.3. The Underlying Factor Behind Lack of Resource Sharing Among Nigerian Law Libraries.

Many of the studies reviewed show that the emergence of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) (John-Okeke, 2012), and lack of funding of University libraries are factors behind lack resource sharing in Nigerian law libraries (Komolafe-Opadeji, 2011 and John-Okeke, 2012). Adam and Usman's (2013) study carried out to ascertain the level of resource sharing among academic libraries in Bauchi; found that resource sharing was practised at a very low level. Reasons found for this were lack of information and communication technology (ICT) and ICT skills coupled with insufficient resources to share. If lack of finance, insufficient resources, lack of skills in ICT and lack of ICT equipments are reasons behind lack of collaboration, then they are already

platforms and motivating factors that should warrant resource sharing. Thus it is assumed that there is not yet any tangible reason behind lack of resource sharing in Nigerian libraries. This study would therefore focus on other areas, in order to find the reasons behind lack of resource sharing by looking at 5 law libraries randomly selected from law faculties in south western Nigeria.

1.2. Research Problems

Studies carried out in Nigeria have shown that poverty and lack of adequate funding of Nigerian Universities is pervasive (Komolafe-Opadeji, 2011). The grant or financial subsidy approved by the National Universities Commission for funding of University libraries has been a meagre sum of 10% of Universities income. This quota is hardly spent on library services but are many times shifted to more pressing needs of the University (Komolafe-Opadeji, 2011). Thus there's no steady financial allocation for libraries in Nigeria.

The law library, an arm of the University library has no specific allocation assigned to it as it is included to be a faculty library under the University library. Thus resources and information needs of law libraries are observed to be provided only towards accreditation by the Council of Nigerian Legal Education(NCLE). This means that immediate needs are not attended to at the right time. This becomes a need which could have bolstered collaboration of resources among law libraries in Nigeria. It then becomes a problem to know if Nigerian law librarians are providing services through collaborative resource sharing amongst law libraries in Nigeria.

1.3. Aims and Objectives of Research

The aim of this study takes its root from the research problem which has shown that Nigerian Libraries are not adequately funded and thus is assumed to gather strength through collaborative services. Thus the need to explore on the practicality of resource sharing among some libraries in south western Nigeria. This aim would be materialised through the below objectives.

1.4. Objectives of the Research

The objectives of this research is as seen below:

- a. To determine if resource sharing is practised among law libraries in Nigeria.
- b. To find out if there are platforms and opportunities available for resource sharing in Nigerian law libraries.
- c. To investigate the factors behind lack of resource sharing among Nigerian law libraries.

2.0. Research Methodology

Descriptive research design was used in gathering data from four law librarians in law faculties, South-western Nigeria. Judgemental sampling technique was used in selecting four law librarians who have been called to Nigerian bar and are managing law libraries in law faculties, south-western Nigeria. Simple random technique was used in making the selection of four law libraries which were studied. Phone and electronic mails were used for gathering data from these law librarians through the use of interview research method. Data was analysed by arranging responses into themes and grouping them under facets which reflected the objectives of the study. Unstructured questions were used because it was explorative and thus the respondents dictated the interview mode. However, questions asked did not derail from the objectives of this study.

3.0. The Analysis of Data and Discussion of Findings

The data were analysed by transcribing the shorthand form of writing which was used in writing down responses of respondents and arranging them into like themes. These themes were then arranged under facets which formed heading for the discussion of the findings. Thus the findings would be discussed under the facets as shown in figure 1 below.

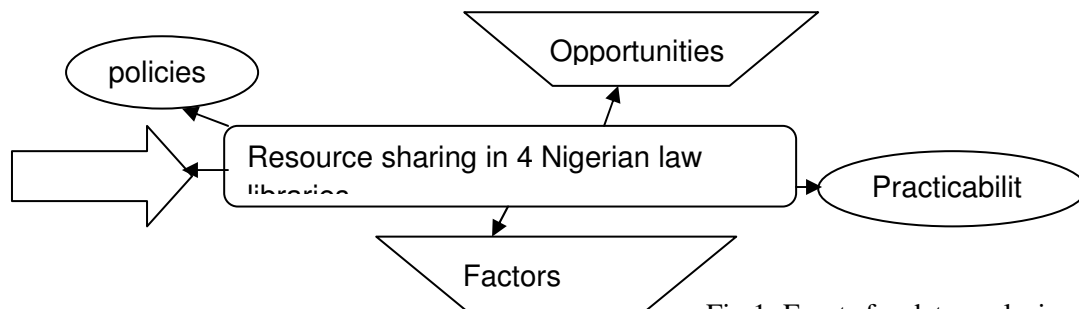


Fig.1: Facets for data analysis

3.1. The Practicability of Resource Sharing

The findings showed that resource sharing is not practised in full-scale. it was found to be at the stage of initialization. This finding was only related to some University libraries as there was no form of practise in law libraries . For example:

“It has been subject of discussion in institute of advanced legal studies...6
University libraries –OAU,UNILAG,UNI JOS,U.I and ...I can’t remember the
other 2 schools are planning a consortium on resource sharing... with respect to
law libraries, I don’t know if anything has been set in motion...”

However, this respondent believed that the implementation of resource sharing in the above mentioned Universities would definitely affect law libraries. For example:

“...Since it is University library, it would affect law libraries ...[only for Federal Universities] ...”

This is a mere assumption by the respondent above as collaboration among university libraries might not include law libraries if law libraries were not included at the initialization stage. This coincides with the literature reviewed as no study focussed on resource sharing among law libraries in Nigeria and no study also reported any form of resource sharing among law libraries in Nigeria.

While this is the case in some libraries, other libraries do not practise resource sharing and have not taken any step towards its initialization. For instance:

“No...has not crossed our mind...”

"No we don't. No particular reason"

"No, we don't request from any university, if you're interested in using our law library, we give assistance...where a sister university comes to request , the person ought to be allowed, we give every assistance that the person needs, so there's no standing rule, or law... I help on individual basis... if somebody is introduced by the Dean etc, we know what to do ..."

The evidence above do not correspond with findings in literature reviewed as findings in John-okeke(2012) and Komolafe-Opadeji(2011) showed that lack of information and communication technology and lack of funding were behind non-collaboration in relation to resources amongst law libraries in Nigeria. The findings from this study has shown that laxity, lack of innovation and lack of change are the factors behind lack of resource sharing among law libraries in Nigeria. In the evidence to findings below, one of the respondents said that resource sharing is practised in form of interlibrary loan; however he did not mention any specific law library his institution practises interlibrary loan with. For instance:

“yes...we carry out interlibrary loan with any library...”

The findings about becomes evidence of doubt as it is impracticable to carry out interlibrary loan with all libraries without a written document on modes of operations and limitations; except if the law librarian is unaware of activities within the law library in which he heads. This becomes a gap which would be studied in further research. However, the respondents generally agreed that “admittance”, a situation where law students visit law libraries and use their resources is practised as a form of resource sharing; though with no written agreement. For example:

“...we do allow students to come to our own libraries...”

When the respondents were inquired on the policy behind resource sharing, they said that there was no written policy on resource sharing in their law libraries. For instance:

"No policy"

"I wanted to write one, I did not write it because I was very busy. Acquisition policy is what we have."

The above evidences of findings show that there is no form of resource sharing in the law libraries studied. It also shows that there is no form of written policy on resource sharing. This collaborates with findings in the literature review. In Adam and Usman(2013), resource sharing was found to be practised at a very low level while in Owolabi, Bamigboye and Agboola(2011), admittance; a situation where law students visit other libraries and use their resources is the only form of resource sharing done without any written agreement. This seems to be an ingrained culture in academic libraries.

3.2. Opportunities for Resource sharing

The respondents when inquired on the opportunities available for resource sharing agreed that information technology is a platform for resource sharing amongst law libraries in Nigeria. For example:

Yes...mainly e-resources...”

This electronic platform has already been taken advantage of by some Universities who were found in this study to have formed alliance with an aim to collaborating in resource sharing amongst themselves; an agreement to share digital resources through giving free access to virtual libraries of consortium members. for example:

“It has been subject of discussion in institute of advanced legal studies...6
University libraries –OAU,UNILAG,UNI JOS,U.I and ...I can’t remember the
other 2 schools are planning a consortium on resource sharing... with respect to
law libraries, I don’t know if anything has been set in motion...”

This finding has overtaken the earlier finding in Adam and Usman(2013) in which it was found that ICT has not been embraced. Though his research was focused on northern Universities, however it has reiterated the findings of Ejedafiru(2010) in which it was found that digitalization is the backbone of resource sharing. The findings above has also shown that though information and communication technology is the backbone of resource sharing, it is not the solution as innovation, zeal and the needs

for change is an underlying reason as would be found in the below evidences from some of the respondents. for example:

“No...has not crossed our mind...”

"No we don't. No particular reason"

3.3. Factors Behind Resource Sharing

Findings from this study show that where the Council of Nigerian Legal Education (CNLE) makes resource sharing a requirement for law libraries to be accredited, law libraries would start a collaboration on resources. For instance:

“if it was imposed, the founder would play along
...but if you tell him that [about resource sharing]
he would tell you there’s nothing he can’t get...”

It was also found that a mutual feeling of equal strength bolsters the interest to collaborate with the agreement to share resources. It was found in this study that federal Universities that came together to initialize a consortium have good automated libraries and functional virtual libraries with gateways. For example:

“O.A.U library is online ...”

3.4. Policy on Resource Sharing

The findings from this study show that there is no written policy on resource sharing. However, one of the respondents said the policy was still in process. For example:

“...there’s a policy but it is still in process...”

The above finding has corroborated the findings of Lawal, Bassey and Ani(2008) which showed that out of 27 Universities surveyed, only six agreed that there was a policy on resource sharing.

4.0. Conclusion

This study which embarked on exploring the practicability of resource sharing in four Universities in the south-western part of Nigeria, has shown that there is no resource sharing practised in the studied law libraries. It was also found that the underlying factors which were not found in earlier studies are laxity and lack of zeal among law libraries. Equal technology strength and the presence of CNLE(Council of Nigerian Legal Education) were found as positive factors that could encourage resource sharing among law libraries in Nigeria. However, where strength and not weakness is the basis for resource sharing, then the fate of weaker libraries is yet unknown. It then

means that law libraries must strive to be strong in order to be marketable, acceptable and be seen as relevant to other libraries. It also means that the CNLE (Council of Nigerian Legal Education) has to get interested in making Nigerian libraries collaborate with one another. This would provide the initiative, zeal, interest and platform needed for collaborative tendencies.

More research needs to be carried out along the line of this study and it is recommended that interview(face to face) be used as the method for in depth data gathering.

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