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Information Resource Sharing in Academic Libraries: Tanzanian Context

Christian Mubofu

The Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy, Library and Publication Department,
mubofu.christian@gmail.com

Salatiel Chaula

The Open University of Tanzania, chaulasalatiel@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

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. The main purpose for such arrangements is to achieve what the members of a group cannot achieve individually (Bangoni, Chizwara, & Moyo, 2018). According to Yao and Zhu (2015) an academic library is an important hub of information exchange, gathering different kinds of information and academic resources. They do so by providing a variety of information resources to the users due to the fact that a well-stocked library system is vital to student's academic achievement (Mubofu & Malekani, 2019). In order for the academic libraries to meet the growing needs of quality education, concerted efforts should be made towards the provision of the right information to the right library users by acquiring library information resources by various forms of library resource sharing (Mubofu, 2019). But the challenges facing most libraries is their inability to acquire information resources appropriate in addressing users' information needs (Chen, 2013). This is because no library, despite its size, can meet the varied information needs of its patrons, and hence, the need to cooperate with other libraries in order to satisfy users' information needs is important. Under this information resource sharing arrangement, it implies that one library uses the resources and services of other libraries and vice versa in addressing the information needs of their patrons.

The main objectives of information resource sharing include, but are not limited to; increase availability of resources, extend the accessibility of resources, diminish cost and promote the utilization of resources (Posner, 2017). Additionally, the study by Looney (2020) on library marketing established that for the library to remain relevant and deliver content which library members find useful, it is vital to adopt a good information resources sharing techniques that would at least help to address the information needs of library patrons. Although information resource sharing has been advantageous in various libraries it is unclear whether library stakeholders in Tanzania are well informed about the forms, benefits and the extent libraries rely on information resources sharing.

Despite the importance attached to library resource sharing in the academic world, issues related to the status of resource sharing among academic libraries in Tanzania have not received adequate

attention they deserve in terms of enhancing research. In recent years there has been no research which was carried out to in Tanzanian context to assess the status of library resource sharing among academic libraries. The few available studies by Kiondo (2003), Lwoga, Sife, Busagala and Chilimo (2003) were very useful, informative and shed light on efforts made on library resource sharing in the country. However, the studies were carried out many years ago and too inclusive. This study investigates the forms of information resources sharing, benefits embedded in resource sharing and disclose the extent to which academic libraries rely on information resources sharing for effective information services provision.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in Dar es Salaam covering four academic institutions namely; the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), the Open University of Tanzania (OUT), Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS), and Tumaini University Dar es Salaam College (TUDARCO). The Universities were chosen because apart from being among the oldest and biggest academic institutions in Tanzania, they are all members of the Consortium of Tanzania Universities and Research Libraries (COTUL) and are involved in resource sharing endeavours coordinated by COTUL. The target population was 126 people constituting of library directors and library staff from the four academic libraries operating in the universities under study.

The sample size for this study was 66 respondents, comprising four (4) library directors and sixty two (62) library staff. These were purposely and simple randomly selected respectively from a target population. These respondents were selected because they were information rich cases and knowledgeable people involved in resource sharing and hence expected to provide valid data for the study. Data was obtained through structured and unstructured questionnaires which were administered to key respondents with both closed and open ended questions that were complimented by interviews. Data collection instruments used in this study were questionnaires and interviews.

Data processing and analysis involved the organization, verification, compilation, coding, and summarization of primary data. This process was aided by the SPSS statistical package version 20

for quantitative data, while qualitative data collected through open-ended questions and interview were coded and arranged according to their themes as they emerged to form discussion

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Resource Sharing Practiced among Academic Libraries

This was intended to bring to light the existing forms of resource sharing, which are commonly practiced among these libraries. Respondents were asked to mention the type of forms of resource sharing practiced at their libraries. Findings in figure 1 show that 33 (82.5%) of the respondents said their libraries were involved in resource sharing in the form of a consortium, followed by 26 (65%) who said their libraries are engaged in networking.

Others, 2 (5%) of the respondents said their libraries are engaged in collective staff training, while 1 (2.5%) respondent mentioned Interlibrary lending services to users. Findings revealed that Interlibrary loan (ILL), which is one of the oldest methods of library information resources sharing, was mentioned by only one (2.5%) respondents. As summarized in figure 1

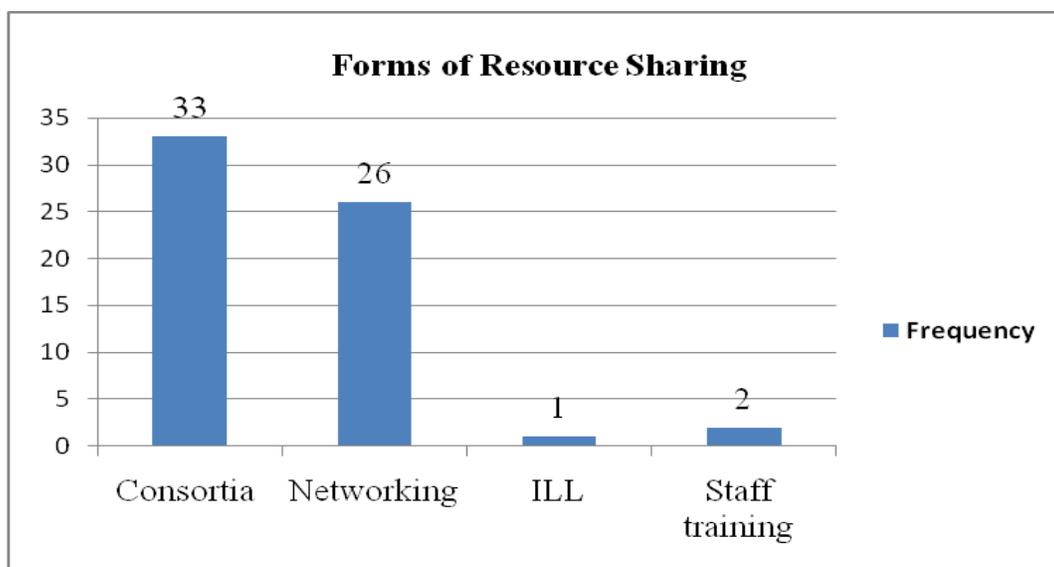


Figure 1: Forms of Resource Sharing

The study revealed that the minority 2.5% used inter library loans which is the form of library resources sharing amongst libraries in the African region with declining prominence. Due to the world economic shocks of the nineteen eighties, which transcended most developing countries

over the decades, government budget support to institutions of higher learning, inter alia, dwindled drastically, causing a viral effect on the academic health of universities, which for some time led to poor delivery of academic education outputs and services pertaining there to, including academic library/information services.

As a result of this, libraries lacked the financial capacity to acquire sufficient/adequate information resources to meet the information needs of their immediate internal academic communities in the first place, as well as for inter lending amongst local and external libraries. In essence academic institutions in Africa could not sustain the sharing of resources nationally, sub regionally or continentally, as used to be the case of the past. The advent of ICT and its application to library information processes and services, has revolutionized the ILL service, through innovative consortia programs, which to a large extent are supported by the ICT and through which information can be accessed easily among members.

In addition, the respondents who had used materials acquired through inter library loan were asked to indicate the method of delivery used to get the materials they borrowed. The results obtained indicate that 9 (10.8%) of the respondents said the documents were delivered in print form while 5 (6%) said the documents were delivered electronically. This is an indication that these libraries also used print-based even in this technology driven age to satisfy user needs. This remains true because not all the information is found in electronic format.

However, there is ample evidence to show that interlibrary loan service is still very much in use to date, among academic, research and public libraries in highly technologically developed countries where printed texts rare books and other publications which are highly demanded for academic, teaching, research and consultancy are loaned between libraries, within and between states (Bangoni, Chizwara & Moyo, 2018).

Benefits of Resource Sharing to Academic Libraries

Respondents were further asked to explain how their libraries benefit from being involved in resource sharing activities. This was intended to find out if the library's involvement in resource sharing had any good returns to the libraries in question. Findings in Table 1 show that the majority (82.5%) of respondents find resources sharing to increase the subscription power, 29 (72.5%)

respondents said it minimizes storage requirements for their libraries, and 25 (62.5%) said it helps their libraries to keep up with the pace of information generation. In addition to that, 20 (50%) respondents said it helps their libraries to acquire new resources not in stock. The results are as summarised in Table 1

Table 1: Benefits of Academic Libraries on Resource Sharing

Benefits	Frequency	Percent
Increased subscription power of the library	33	82.5
Minimizes storage space demands	29	72.5
Helps to keep up with publication pace	25	62.5
Brings materials not in stock at less cost	20	50

In relation to this, views of library directors who have managerial roles were sought to determine the benefits accrued by their libraries when engaging in library resource sharing practices. Their responses basically focused on the financial benefits of resource sharing to their libraries. For instance, one director praised their being part of the Consortium of Tanzania University and Research Libraries (COTUL) as follows:

The amount of electronic resources that our users are being offered with right now is the best manifestation of resource sharing. The costs of all those resources would be beyond our budget reach.

From the director's response it is evident that apart from being beneficial to users, resource sharing activities at the selected libraries were also found valuable to the libraries themselves. Supporting this argument, Muthu (2013) and Geronimo and Aragon (2013) studies noted that libraries have a lot to benefit from resource sharing. Among the benefits included were that libraries offered an affordable resources acquisition and equipment. This could be impossible to achieve if independent resources sharing allowed libraries to ensure that their users have access to the most current.

Academic Libraries' Reliance on Resource Sharing

Respondents were asked to show the extent to which libraries relied on resource sharing to meet their users' needs. This was done to establish the role played by resource sharing in meeting the

needs of academic library users in Tanzania. To obtain the extent of academic libraries reliance on resources sharing each library involved in the study a cross-tabulation of the library and respondent worked for was performed. Findings showed that 19 (52.8%) of the respondents said that they felt their library reliance on resource sharing as medium while 9 (25%) said they found the reliance to be heavy, 6 (16.7%) said it was light, and 2 (5.6%) said the reliance was very heavy.

In terms of individual libraries, the results show that only Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Science (MUHAS) had a significant percentage (44.4% for heavy and 11.1% very heavy) of respondents who found the reliance on resource sharing to be heavy as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Academic Libraries' Reliance on Resource Sharing

Extent of Reliance	Library							
	MUHAS		TUDARCO		UDSM		OUT	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Light	1	11.1	3	42.3	1	7.1	1	16.7
Medium	3	33.3	2	28.5	10	71.4	4	66.6
Heavy	4	44.4	1	14.3	3	21.4	1	16.7
Very heavy	1	11.1	1	14.3	0	0	0	0

These findings seem to imply that resources available through sharing activities are not playing an important role in the provision of information services in these libraries. This is contrary to the results in earlier sections which have revealed that apart from some of them being used frequently, they are used for important purposes which contribute to the success of the universities these libraries support. As revealed by Mwantimwa, Elia, and Ndenje-Sichalwe (2017) if e-resources such as e-journals made available through COTUL were not available, many academic activities would be negatively affected.

These results are in disagreement with the widely known fact that with increase in speed of information generation and continued drop in library budgets, resource sharing is increasingly becoming something libraries need to engage in if they are to provide their users with quality information services (Muthu 2013). This is an indication that library and universities management and Library staff in some of the selected libraries are probably unaware of the importance of the

role played by resource sharing in their libraries, a state that can be attributed to the fact that not all of them are directly involved.

However, the findings from the interviewed library directors revealed that library information resource sharing is more needed now than before as more of them echoed that:

“Libraries are facing financial constraints thus, having an excellent way of sharing information resources would help our libraries to allocate the limited fund to other important issues like payment for internet services and ensuring that it is reliable”

CONCLUSION

The study therefore, concludes that the highly used forms of information resource sharing in academic libraries in Tanzania are consortia and networking while the least cited used forms of resources sharing are interlibrary loan and staff training. Considering the fact that the libraries that were involved in this study have been found to have limited resources sharing activities which primarily is consortium membership, it is not such a surprise that their users still feel that the available resources are not enough.

These results are therefore a strong indicator of the need for academic libraries to diversify their forms of resource sharing initiatives such as document delivery, sharing of bibliographic information, union catalogue to enhance their capacity to serve their clients. The study also concludes that the benefits of resource sharing in academic libraries include increased subscription power of individual libraries, minimizes demand for storage spaces, helps to keep up with publication pace and brings materials not in stock at a lower cost. Furthermore, the study concludes that the extent of academic libraries under study reliance on information sharing is medium probably due to lack of appropriate infrastructure that supports information resource sharing practices in academic libraries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings it is recommended that academic libraries in Tanzania should continue subscribing information resources through the Consortium of Tanzania Universities and Research Libraries and enhance their usage by ensuring total addressal of patrons information needs. The

study suggests that the least cited forms of resources sharing like Inter library loan should be given more priority especially for rare information resources that have high demand but their supply is low and exist in print format. The study further recommends that academic libraries should formulate effective teams that will ensure library resource information sharing is properly conducted in academic libraries by employing the right forms of information resources sharing for the right library customer in the right time to address the patrons' information needs on time.

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