Academic Library Partnership as Strategic Tool for Proactive Library Services in Nigeria

Promise C. Awa
Federal Polytechnic, Ukana
Akwa Ibom State
Awapromise@Gmail.Com

Amogu Uma Kalu, Cln
Abia State Polytechnic, Aba
Abia State
Maxwellamogu@Yahoo.Com

Abstract
This study examines strategic partnership among academic libraries in Nigeria. It discusses the rationale for resource sharing and networking particularly in this present Technological Age. It also discusses practical steps and structures necessary for resource sharing, areas of cooperation, funding, justification for resource sharing and practical examples of partnership among academic libraries. The study revealed that the prospect for strategic partnership among academic libraries in Nigeria is high. The paper equally looked at factors affecting effective partnership among academic libraries in Nigeria, which include inadequate funding; a dearth of skilled librarians, power outages, absence of web accessible online public access catalogues (OPACs), uneven development of libraries, and slow progress of library automation, and inactive cooperation among libraries. The paper recommends that libraries should seek for workable partnership efforts, Partnering libraries should examine the partnership mission in the light of individual and institutional values before venturing into it among others.

Keywords: Strategic, Partnership, Library services, Academic library, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria has a number of universities. At present there are about one hundred and thirteen (113) public and private universities in Nigeria (Lawal, 2007 and 4 International Colleges and Universities, 2016). Also there are a number of polytechnics and colleges of education all with academic libraries attached to them. An academic library is an integral part of a college, university or other tertiary institutions, and administered to meet the information and research needs of its students, faculty and staff (Reitz, 2004). Wikipedia (2013) describes academic library as a library that is attached to a higher educational institution, which serves two complementary purposes, namely, to support the schools curriculum and to support the research of university faculty and students. According to Agwu (2004), the term "academic library" is used to describe all libraries in post-secondary institutions such as colleges of education, polytechnics and universities. Oduagwu (2006) describes academic libraries as libraries in institutions of higher learning, which are devoted to the academic activities of their parent institutions. Academic libraries are libraries attached to tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnic institutions, colleges of education, colleges of agriculture, colleges of technology and also research institutes (Akporhonor, 2005)

Academic libraries provide information services to the academic community. It is an

information centre, which helps in the realization of the objectives of an academic institution. Indeed, an academic library supports teaching, learning and research of the host institution, thereby fostering intellectual development of both staff and students. Ugwuanyi (2009) notes that academic library has a crucial role to play in the development of any community. This is achieved through implementing ideas, opening up minds, recognition of knowledge, releasing the yoke of imagination, creating the opportunity for man to think critically and independently and reinforcing the dynamism of progress.

Academic libraries by their functions ensure the development of intellectual consciousness and potentials of members of the academia on one hand and the larger society on the other hand. According to Kawatra (2000), academic libraries occupy a very important place in the complex matrix of information generation, organization and dissemination for development. Little wonder academic libraries are described as the "heart of the institution" or the "hub of the educational wheel" (Kumar, 2005).

The function and objectives of academic libraries in information provision, organization and dissemination depends to a large extent on the resources held by the library. In their work on resource sharing among public libraries in Nigeria in the Digital Age, Akanmidu & Aboh (2014) argue that the exponential growth of information in recent time has surpassed and super cedes the ability of individuals and individual institutions. Morden (2003) agree that providing services and better access to information resources vis-à-vis efficient information service delivery can be achieved through strategic partnership in library services.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2006) defines partnership as a relationship between two people, organizations etc or the state of having this relationship. It also defines strategic as a part of a plan that is meant to achieve a particular purpose or to gain an advantage. To this end, libraries must partner and lean on the old adage that "No man is an entire island upon himself" to facilitate various co-operative efforts aimed at optimizing services delivery, which may involve resources sharing, various forms of library co-operations or collaboration. These forms of partnership become imperative as no library no matter its level of stock can provide all the information needed by its users alone. The paper is done in three segments namely rationale for strategic partnership among academic libraries in Nigeria, possible areas of strategic partnership, threats to strategic partnership, conclusion and recommendations.

Rationale for Strategic Partnership among Academic Libraries

Today, the contemporary practice in academic library services in the 21st century is being propelled by information explosion, and the inclusion of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in all aspects of library services. Kumar (2009) notes that academic libraries are changing dramatically by adopting new means of technology in all activities of print to e-environment where a variety of manual method, are replaced by computerized system which provides opportunity for online accessibility. Libraries are now expected to provide to users a range of information and communication technologies necessary for retrieving information quickly from both immediate and remote databases, as well as creating a need for library cooperation and consortium initiatives (Okiy, 2005)

The present-day academic library services in the 21st century is focusing more on the area of digital, virtual or libraries without borders all of which have transformed academic libraries and led to transition and transformation in the academic library environment. The transition and the transformation are accompanied with sophistication in the changing pattern in the information needs of users which is growing rapidly, hence the need for strategic partnership with other academic libraries. Singh and Kaur (2009) observe that there is a paradigm shift from stand alone

libraries to library and information networks; from printed publications to digital documents; and from ownership to access.

Unfortunately, academic libraries in Nigeria are at a crossroad. This is because they are operating in an era of dwindling finances where resources (financial and materials) are not forthcoming. Nigerian academic libraries derive the greater part of their funds from the government (both Federal and State). Okiy (2005) notes that of all the different types of libraries in Nigeria, only university libraries have a clearly defined policy of funding, because they are allocated 10% of the recurrent annual budget of their parent institutions. However, it is regrettable that such monies are not forthcoming as most university administrators tend to flout that decision. And as such rely on strategic partnership with other academic libraries (Okiy, 2005; Yetunde, 2008)

Providing current awareness services to an ICT driven target academic community requires dynamic, innovative, timely and adequate communication technologies (Fatoki, 2005). However, most academic libraries in Nigeria are severely constrained by a number of factors that includes erratic Internet services, lack of hardware and software and in most instances the non-availability of the said ICTs in most academic libraries. Besides, there is difficulty in the importation of books and journals from abroad due to the high rise in foreign exchange. This has deterred many academic libraries from acquiring current and relevant titles that will support the academic programmes of their parent institutions. Thus the efforts of most academic libraries in providing modern information services are thwarted by the existence of the aforementioned problems whose genesis is that of inadequate funding. Also IT literacy among academic librarians in most libraries is still at the peripheral level. Nok (2006) observes that many staff of university libraries are not computer literate as such they find it difficult to cope with the requirements of the electronic age. In the bid to overcome the bottlenecks mentioned above, it becomes imperative that academic libraries develop strategic partnership with other libraries in needed areas to provide services that would satisfy the information needs of their teeming clientele.

Areas of Strategic Partnership among Academic Libraries

Strategic partnership arises because individual libraries realize that they can no longer be self sufficient in respect of their information resources, hence, they network. The underlying assumption of a strategic partnership is that all participating academic libraries share their resources. Eshijo (2011) states that resource sharing; library networking and library cooperation are used interchangeably in the Digital Age to mean strategic partnership, in terms of sharing of resources of a library with users of other libraries. It is the process whereby the resources of a group of network libraries are made available to the sum total of the persons entitled to use any of those libraries. Resource sharing is a wide phrase embracing library cooperation, library systems and networking. It is an omnibus expression to cover cooperation, coordination, inter-library loan services, cooperative acquisition, cooperative storage and processing.

A library can decide to go into strategic partnership arrangement in the provision of services. The aim is always to optimize service delivery. Some of the possible strategic partnership areas include:

Cooperative Acquisition: Under this strategic partnership arrangement, a particular library engaged in networking maybe assigned to acquire books for all the participating libraries, or each library in the scheme maybe given the responsibility to acquire books in a particular subject of interest to all the participating libraries, or the host computer acquire some necessary books

for all the participating libraries. This process will not only save money and manpower which are limited, but also save time.

Partnership in Cataloguing: This is an arrangement in which a library or library system agree to follow established cataloguing practices and work in automated systems or utilities that facilitate the creation of bibliographic and authority records in a form that can be shared with other libraries in the collaborative agreement. For example, in North America, cooperative cataloguing is facilitated by the uniform cataloguing practices established under Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules II (AACR2). OCLC is the bibliographic utility used for collaborative cataloguing in the United States.

Strategic Reference Service partnership: This is reference service provided by referring the user or the user's question(s) to library information personnel at another institution, according to a formally established system of protocols, rather than on an informal case-by-case basis. To assist libraries in establishing and evaluating collaborative reference service, the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) of the American Library Association has developed guidelines for partnership in Reference Service policy (Reitz, 2004).

Strategic Resource Sharing: This is a form of resource sharing activity that results from a partnership agreement among a group of libraries to share collections, data, facilities, personnel etc for the benefit of their users and to reduce the expense of collection development. In this partnership arrangement, the partnering libraries will first of all pool their resources together for the acquisition of the range of agreed resources and later share according to an agreed plan (Ali, Oweye & Anasi, 2010).

Partnership in Staff Development: Library establishments may enter into partnership in staff training and development, in which case, the concerned libraries pool their resources together and engage in a staff development. A good example is the staff training and development agreement entered by University libraries and the National Library of Ireland and some of the operational issues that guide the collaborative arrangement include committee with one representative from each participating library: an annual plan; one course per institution; organization; cost and evaluation (Fallon, 2004). This may also involve the interchange of professionals and sometimes non-professional staff under specific arrangements worked out by cooperating libraries. This is aimed at providing specific training or broadening the experience of the staff concerned.

Partnership with Users: The social media provides a platform to share work of librarians and engage network with users. The users should be given participatory role in library services. They should always give feedback to the librarians on what they want and how they want it. To increase the library appeal and value to users, the library should implement participatory services. User comments, tags, and rating feed user created content back to library websites. This will create more informative product for subsequent users. The users have favourite titles, authors, and genres. Giving them freedom to participate will enhance the library catalog. The librarian might not know all these things without the user. Libraries have to keep up with the changing needs of users. With the feedbacks from users, libraries will be able to update their services by improving on their services and discarding old ones. Users' collaboration also attempts to reach out to new users and better serve current ones through improved customer

driven offerings.

Justification for Strategic Partnership

Debagha (2012) states that the importance of partnership in libraries cannot be over emphasized. Indeed, it allows libraries and their users to access very wide variety of resource s as well as other services they could not have otherwise been provided or have access to. The need for sharing of resources stems from three underlying trends of a modern society: the growth of all form of literature, the increasing reliance on information to enable society, function effectively and the increasing availability of technology. Malumfashi (1986) has identified some variables at play that call librarians to resort to information networking for strategic partnership in libraries thus;

1. Proliferation in the literature output. The increase in the volume of printed materials has been occurring at a fantastic speed after the Second World War especially in science and technical literatures. This tremendous increase could be perhaps attributed to the scientific and technological breakthrough world wide. At such a fast rate of information, it is very difficult for any library, however resourceful it may be to acquire all types of materials and making it impossible for any library to be self sufficient

2. Steady increase in the cost of materials. Reading materials, especially books and journals in science and technology are too expensive for libraries to acquire. Nigeria is no exception to this ever increasing cost of published materials. Such partnerships will therefore reduce pressure on the limited resources of partnering libraries.

3. Limited financial resources. Libraries budget has been on a continuous decrease as a result of inflationary trends in publishing industries. In Nigeria, government do not increase library budget so as to meet up with increasing cost of materials because people and the government are yet to recognize the relevance of library to nation building.

4. The advancement in both hardware and software computers, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have made networking much easier and practicable than conventional methods of cooperation.

5. The need for increased bibliographical access both intellectual and physical to information resources in the universe of documentary resources, so that the resources of participating libraries will be made available to each other thereby increasing their chances of using a larger database of information resources.

6. Unfavourable foreign exchange situation of the currency of Nigeria also necessitates resources sharing, as libraries who may not be able source foreign exchange can resort to partnering with other libraries who are more favourably disposed.

In the view of Martey (2002), the need for strategic partnership in libraries can be categorized into individual users and staff, institutional library and at the national level. At the level of individual library, user and staff, it involves:

- Enhancement service through access to more information services available in consortia member libraries.
- Cheaper and more effective services.
- Document delivery services.
- Selective dissemination of information and current awareness services.
- Electronic conferences.
- Increased human cooperation.
- Skills development for opportunities available through cooperative arrangements.

At the level of institutional library

- It increases cooperation and sharing.
- Improved purchase of electronic information and library collection management.
- It reduces library subscription.
- It provides education and library services.
- It increases support for the library especially partners in development (donors) that prefer group rather than individual institutional levels.

At the National Level
- It increases growth of a national information society.
- It leads to improvement on technology development.
- It helps standardization of library services across the country.
- It ensures standardization of library training facilities.

Practical Examples of Partnerships among Academic Libraries

Examples of formal and informal partnerships exist among academic libraries in Nigeria and the world over. One of the Nigerian example is the partnership between Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University and Muhammadu Wali Libraries, Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi in the area of resource sharing (Adam and Usman, 2013). Gross and Riyaz (2004) conducted a study on the academic library partnership in the Indian Ocean region. The partnership involved the formation of a World Bank funded "Link Institution Arrangement". A partnership between Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Western Australia and the Maldives College of Higher Education (MCHE). The partnership extends to the libraries of both institutions and includes exchange visits, provision of advice, information and resource sharing over a period of two years.

Other practical partnerships among academic libraries include the Eastern Seaboard Association Libraries (esAL) initiated in 1997 and based in Kwazulu national province of South Africa. esAL is a partnership initially comprised of six, then eight academic libraries. Following some institutional changes, four member libraries emerged that serve a large number of campuses, students, faculty and staff (Ossai, 2010). Another is the South East Academic Library System (SEALS). The consortium is a sub-set of Eastern Cape Higher Education Association. It existed first as a project that began in 1996, but emerged as a formal consortium in 1998. SEALS is a partnership among four academic libraries whose scope of cooperation was initially limited to periodicals and CDROM products, but whose mission later expanded considerably namely to foster improvement in access to information, resources to support and enhance high standard of teaching, research and scholarship in member institutions by promoting resource sharing of human, material and information resources between academic libraries within the region (Ossai, 2010:80).

Threats and Challenges to Strategic Partnership in Academic Libraries in Nigeria

There is no doubt that information networking programmes have significant role to play in academic libraries in Nigeria, especially with regards to human, material and financial resources but despite the numerous benefits derivable from such partnerships, there are some inherent barriers to partnership. The challenges of partnership include:

Lack of Adequate Funds: This has been ranked as the greatest problem affecting resource sharing. This is because a networking arrangement of libraries is bound to fail if adequate funds are not made available. Debagha (2012) further states that most failed projects on the adoption of cooperative resource sharing activities are as a result of financial inadequacy or mismanagement.

Inconsistent Partnership Agreement: Fostering cooperation and partnership among libraries in Nigeria has failed because important steps are not taken in designing partnership agreement while the libraries lack faith in the proposals. Similarly, Blakes (2006) states that it is clear that resource sharing activities have a significant role in African countries especially in Nigeria. However, most libraries in Nigeria face many constraints in their efforts for sharing resources. The factors are corruption, mismanagement of resources, inflation, which has eaten deep and negligence of libraries and failed institutions.

Absence of National Information Infrastructure:

This unfortunate situation has drastically affected all aspects of library and information services in the country. The absence of effective national information infrastructure in the sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria; has affected negatively resource sharing among libraries.

Eshijo (2011)) has identified some most significant constraints as;

1. Lack of firm national policy of libraries, thus information service is seldom rated among many priorities. As a result, library budgets are correspondingly low, thus making it impossible for libraries to provide their dues under cooperative scheme due to gross underfunding and annual decreases in budgetary allocations.

2. Some libraries lack the data on present library situation and this constitute a serious obstacle to effective planning whether of library development in general or of resource sharing programme.

3. Another constraint is lack of basic infrastructure for rapid communication, e.g. poor state of electricity supply (PHCN), poor telecommunication (NITEL), poor postal services (NIPOST), poor internet connectivity are great threats to networking/resource sharing.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is axiomatic that no one organization or type of professional working alone has all the needed talents and resources,, hence, the need for partnership. Successful strategic partnership in academic libraries could be a positive step towards optimizing information services delivery in libraries, as it ensures better access to information resources, maximization of information resources and ensures faster provision of information and literature support to the users. Successful partnership however, requires that library leaders understands their organizations in order to ensure a positive response from staff to the necessary organizational change. Positive attitudes towards the partnership effort and the associated organizational change can best be generated by beginning with an inclusive exercise to articulate vision and mission and to establish goals. A successful partnership effort must benefit individual library users, staff, institution, library and the parent institution in the areas of increased cooperation and sharing enhances services through access, cheaper and more effective service. Based on the issues raised, the following recommendations are made:

1. Libraries should seek for workable partnership efforts, so that the benefits derivable will help them optimize information services delivery.
2. Partnership among libraries and related institutions should be strengthened by the leaders of the organizations through understanding.
3. Partnering parties should struggle and cope with changes through professional development so that they can adapt to their new roles.
4. Partnering libraries should examine the partnership mission in the light of individual and institutional values before venturing into it.
5. Libraries should develop alternative sources of funding than depending solely on their parent institutions.
.

References

Adam, A.I. and Usman, I. (2003). Resource sharing in academic library services in Bauchi. The case of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University and Muhammadu Wali Libraries, Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi. *Merit journal of Education and Review*, 1 (1), 1-5.

Agwu, G. O. (2004). *Library and information services in tertiary institutions.* Owerri: Barloz Publishers.

Akanmidu, J.O. and Aboh, S.O. (2014). Resource sharing among public libraries in Nigeria in the Digital Age. *Jewel Journal of Librarianship*, 7 (1), 31-39.

Akporhonor, B.A. (2005). Library funding in Nigeria: past, present and future. *The Bottom Line: Managing Library Finances, 18 (2), 63-70.*

Debagha, R. (2012). *Issues in library studies in Nigeria*. Benin: Martin Dee Publishers.

Eshijo, E. (2011). *Libraries and their challenges*. Lagos: Fortran Press Ltd.

Fallon, H. (2004). Collaborative staff training and development. Retrieved May 19, 2015 from http://iatul.org/doclibrary/public/workshopproceeding

Fatoki, O.C. (2005). Prospects of GSM technology for academic library services. *The Electronic Library, 23(3), 266-273.*4 Institutional Colleges & Universities (2016). A-Z list of Nigerian universities. Retrieved May 31, 2016 from www.4icu.org/ng/nigerianuniversities.htm

Gross, J and Riyaz, A. (2004). An academic library partnership in the Indian Ocean region. Library Review, 53 (4), 220-227. Retrieved May 31, 2016 from http://ro.ecu.edu.au/cgi/view content/ecuworks/6195

Hornby, A.S. (2006). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of current English*, 7th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kawatra, P. S. (2000). *Textbook of information science.* New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation.

Kumar, K. (2006). *Library manual.* New Delhi: Vikas Publishing.

Kumar, M. (2009). Academic libraries in electronic environment: paradigm shift. A paper presented at the International Conference on Academic Libraries (ICAL) held at the University of Delhi, India. P. 105.

Lawal, O.O. (2007). Standards for Library and Information Science Programmes in Nigerian Universities. A lead Paper presented at the conference of the National Association of Library and Information Science Educators (NALISE), Nigeria held at Imo State University, Owerri. P. 4.

Morden, S. (2003). Co-operation between public libraries and schools in Canada.Retrieved April 3, 2011 fro http://www.library.on.ca

Nok, G. (2006). The challenges of computerizing a university library in Nigeria: the case of Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. *Library Philosophy and Practice, 8(2)*, 1-15.

Oduagwu, E. A. (2006). *Libraries and information management in a globally networked society*. Owerri: Tony Ben Publishers.

Okiy, R.B. (2005). Funding Nigerian libraries in the 21st century: will funding from alternative sources suffice?. *The Bottom Line: Managing Library Finances*, 18(2), 71-77.

Ossai, N. B. (2010). Consortia building among libraries in Africa and the Nigerian experience. *Collaborative Librarianship,* 2 (2), 74-85. Retrieved May 31, 2016 from www.collaborativelibrarianship.org/index.php/jic/article/46/50

Reitz, J.M. (2004). *Dictionary for library and information science.* Westport: Libraries Unlimited.

Singh, J. and Kaur, T. (2009). Future of academic libraries in India: challenges and opportunities. A paper presented at the International Conference on Academic Libraries (ICAL) held at the University of Delhi, India. P. 52.

Yetunde, Z.A. (2008). A study of internally generated revenue (IGR) by University Libraries in Nigeria.