



Sharing library resources in technology-enhanced and technology-starved times: A Case of Selected Southern African Library Consortiums

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Abstract:

Library resource sharing has become the cornerstone of survival and international cooperation. At a time when institutional insularity has given way to convergence, libraries have exploited the advantages proffered by digital technologies to enhance cooperation and collaboration to meet the ever-increasing dynamic and diverse information needs of users. Library resource sharing has become the new currency for leveraging library services beyond time and space. In the face of underfunding, libraries in Southern Africa have thrived through cooperation and collaboration to provide greater access to resources. The study examines the architectural framework of resource sharing among academic libraries in selected Southern African countries. By analyzing the digital divide from a qualitative perspective, the study identifies strategies for enhancing resource sharing between academic libraries and National

Research and Education Networks (NRENs) as well as commercial Internet Service Providers (ISPs). The proliferation of NRENs has come at an opportune time when most academic libraries in Southern Africa are involved in resource sharing using digital technologies. The study seeks to recommend a strategy for wider access to library services to promote diversity of collections and inclusivity.

Keywords: Resource sharing; Digital divide; Southern Africa; Access to information ;
Library consortium

Introduction and background to the study

The hasty development in digital technologies has extended resource sharing and networking services among libraries as libraries can easily provide relevant services to their users irrespective of space and time (Diseiye, et.al.,2024). Academic libraries have over decades developed important forums for cooperation, for example, shared cataloguing, inter-library loan and document delivery, off-site shelving facilities, joint licensing of electronic content, and many similar activities (Neal, 2011). With the advent of electronic journals as sources of information for research and scholarship, university libraries are shifting their focus from collection development to connection building and collection management (Kumar, 2014; Machimbidza, & Mutula, 2020). Academic libraries no longer have a choice but to collaborate effectively. Libraries around the world have developed new strategies to cope with numerous challenges such as growing costs of library resources and underfunding (Chisita, 2017). A argumentative issue regarding ebook pricing causes supplementary tension in the connection amongst publishers and libraries (Nowakowsky, & Voy, 2023).

Publishers use ebook pricing to maintain their control over the market and revenue stream, which can be prohibitive for libraries. There is a rapid change in the academic library world. In the past, ebook lending worked comparable to print lending and libraries were sold uninterrupted eBooks with the one book/one user model, in which each ebook can only be loaned to one individual at a time (Sisto, 2022). In 2011, publishers changed their model, instead of selling eBooks, they were going to license them, and such resources were licensed for 26 loans maximum. (Pinfield, Cox, & Rutter, 2017) as well as financial cuts, accountability pressures, changes in the pedagogy, and growing client expectations (Hickman, 2017) in universities. Globally, library cooperation and collaboration has become the standard among academic libraries and Southern Africa is not an exception. Libraries are also expected to develop compact cooperation with fellow university libraries and other types of libraries to meet the required information needs of diverse users. Libraries form alliances in order to meet the demands of clients for faster and more reliable services through consortiums, networking, resource sharing, cooperation, and partnerships (Kumar, Sharma, & Lal, 2024). According to the authors library network involves a strategic engagement between two or more libraries partner to share resources in order to realize organizational objectives. Kumar, Sharma, & Lal, (2024) provides libraries with an opportunity to access to a bigger assortment of expertise and other resource and prevent duplication of efforts via the effective use of resources available.

Schneider, (2003) noted that an early comprehension and apprehension of library cooperation was that of libraries working together within a community, whether public,

academic or special. The aforementioned author highlighted that in the second half of the 20th century cross-library cooperation became prominent in the 1950s when librarians were considering how they could reach other libraries to benefit from cooperative initiatives. Resource sharing is the appropriate response to a wide range of challenges libraries face, including technological and budgetary challenges, (Che, Njiraine, & Ondieki, 2022). The aforementioned authors highlighted the dire need for libraries to adapt resource sharing so that they can continue to provide information that meets the needs of a wide variety of users. As part of a consortium, a variety of services may be offered, including cooperative collection development, education, training, preservation, centralized services, network alliances, library automation, system support, interlibrary lending, retro-conversion, consulting, and cooperative purchasing (Wylie, and Yeager, 1999; Hasan, 2024).

Contextual background of library consortia in Zimbabwe and South Africa

Library consortia has gained ground in Zimbabwe and South Africa, with the latter having a national appeal, while the former focuses primarily on academic institutions as implied by its name. South Africa's library consortium has developed to a national level, while that of Zimbabwe is still confined to academic and special research libraries. The level of development in Zimbabwe and South Africa has been shaped by exogenous factors including colonialism and imperialism. South Africa was colonized by the Dutch when Vasco daGama in (1652) and later the British in 1795 and 1806, while Zimbabwe was colonized by the British through the British South African Police (BSAP) in 1890. This explains the differences in the development of education and libraries in both countries. Overall, libraries in both countries have their roots in the colonization process which resulted in the development of a colonial library to provide for the educational, informational, recreational and cultural needs of the colonisers (Mudimbe, 1988a; Mudimbe, 1991b; Mudimbé, 1993c). While the focus of the article is not on colonisation, it should be understood that the colonial history gives the discourse a contextual background necessary to unpack the key motifs of the article.

In South Africa, the consortium for nationwide access was formed in 1999 by representatives of several regional academic library associations, all of which were at that time subcommittees of regional academic consortiums. It was established by the Coalition of South African Library Consortia (COSALC) (Meijer, 2019). Through its structures, the South African Site Licensing Initiative (SASLI) was created to address the urgent need to enhance access to online scholarly information (Halland, 2019). In November 2006 at the Annual General Meeting of COSALC a unanimous decision was reached to rename the organization as the South African National Library and Information Consortium (SANLiC) (Halland, 2019). As an organization, SASLI's role was to identify needs, negotiate prices and terms and conditions of licenses with publishers, coordinate access to and training of electronic information, and handle any other issues (Halland, 2019).

It is essential for successful library consortia to be able to enhance inter-consortia cooperation via national platforms. For example, in South Africa, the South African National Library and Information Consortium (SANLiC) regulates and rationalizes operations to prevent duplication (Thomas, and Fourie, 2006). It is essential to establish a consortium with a national focus at the operational and strategic levels to rationalize funding, license e-resources, train in e-resource management, learn

negotiation skills and licensing principles, and leverage a better alternative to negotiable agreements (BATNA) when negotiating with publishers for e-content licensing (Halland, 2019). As part of SANLiC, experienced professionals serve on the consortium's committees and share their expertise with newcomers to the world of online resources, such as (Chisita, 2017).

SANLiC is involved in negotiating collective licenses with publishers and aggregators for scholarly reading and publishing services for the benefit of member institutions (SANLiC, 2024). The consortium also promotes Open Access to enhance science as a global good that is accessible to all. In its commitment to promoting open access to South African research outputs, SANLiC has increased access to scholarly information, lowered library subscription costs, and identified alternative delivery forums for scholarship (SANLiC). The participation of libraries and other member institutions benefit from the bargaining power of the consortium. Frier, (2013) highlighted membership of SANLiC buttressed the relationships that Information Services already had with a database vendors. SANLiC membership research and academic institutions, even though other types of libraries including public libraries can benefit the collective purchasing power of the consortium to access electronic resources (SANLiC, 2024). By lowering subscription costs for member libraries, SANLiC is enabling them to expand their collections (Strydom, et.al, 2022).

Zimbabwe has two library consortiums; the Zimbabwe University Library Consortium (ZULC) and the College and Research Libraries Consortium (CARLC). The Zimbabwe University Libraries Consortium (ZULC) was formed in 2001 in response to the worldwide movement for electronic journals consortiums (Machimbidza, & Mutula, 2020). Out of the two library consortia, ZULC is the most vibrant and well developed with proper systems of governance, resources and web presence, while CARLC has not been so effective in positioning itself in the realm of cooperation and collaboration (Chisita, 2017). In the minutes of ZULC's first working group, dated 27 February 2002, it was noted that the library consortium was launched against a backdrop of declining economic standards, including low budgets and rising living costs (ZULC Minutes, 2002). In February 2000, university libraries congregated to deliberate on ways for cooperating as a single group, which is the origin of ZULC. As a result of this discussion, the Open Society Institute of Southern Africa (OSISA) received the funding proposal for the creation of university library consortia (Chisita, 2017). By establishing special consortia arrangements, Bhukuvhani, Chiparausha, and Zuvalingenga (2012) found that academic libraries in Zimbabwe had reasonable access to electronic resources following the successful launch of ZULC. Through cooperation and collaboration, ZULC managed the payments for e-resources collectively on behalf of members through the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications' Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (INASP-PERI) (Ojedokun & Lumande, 2009).

Statement of the problem

Library consortia are critical institutions because they support libraries through mobilizing resources to support teaching, learning and research. South and Zimbabwe have established library consortia to support wider access to information to promote teaching, learning and research. While South Africa has established a national library consortium that facilitates and negotiates cost effective access to, Zimbabwe's library consortia is still confined to the academic and research institutions.

Furthermore South Africa's SANLIC is more focused on facilitating and negotiating licenses for accessing scholarly content by academic and research libraries even though other types of libraries are accommodated, including, public libraries. However, while both countries have made significant progress in developing library consortia architecture there still are challenges regarding wider access to such services considering the digital divide and resource scarcity for libraries that are not resource endowed. Such libraries will remain behind the other resource endowed libraries that have taken advantage of the opportunities provided by membership to a consortium. There exists a gap between academic libraries that are fairly funded and resourced in terms of digital infrastructure and those libraries including public, community and school libraries that have not yet taken a leap forward regarding digital transformation in both countries. This scenario exacerbates the gap between the two groups of institutions and hence the need for a nationwide consortium to facilitate nation-wide access to information. A national library consortium will help to strengthen cooperation among different types of libraries. It will also create opportunities for resource sharing about collection development, training, storage and expertise. Academic libraries are ahead because they already have established consortia but these could work together in order to build an all-inclusive consortium for mutual benefit.

Research Objectives

The following objectives will guide the study:

- 1) Examine the state of library cooperation and collaboration in selected libraries in South Africa and Zimbabwe ;
- 2) How can library consortia get better deals from publishers?
- 3) Analyse the challenges and opportunities for library cooperation in South Africa and Zimbabwe; and
- 4) Recommend a library consortium model for library cooperation.

Research Methodology

The study will employ a qualitative approach based on a narrative review. Greenhalgh, Thorne, & Malterud, (2018) argued that narrative reviews should be regarded as scholarly summaries sideways with clarification and assessment. According to the authors, narrative reviews can be underpinned by variety of methodologies and that people should not view them as unsystematic because of its deviation from the principles and procedures of the standard methodology of systematic since they can be undertaken in a methodical way, contingent to purpose, method and context. Greenhalgh, Thorne, & Malterud, (2018) argued that the narrative review should not be viewed as a poor cousin of the systematic review but a unique and hypothetically harmonizing form of intellectualism. Sukhera, (2022) contended that most procedures of narrative reviews resonate with subjectivist and interpretivist research paradigms. Such paradigms stress that reality is subjective and ever in state of constant flux (Sukhera, 2022). The researchers chose narrative review as a methodology because it permitted the researchers to describe what is acknowledged regarding the phenomenon concerning shareability of library resources in technology-enhanced and technology-starved in the context of selected library consortia in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Narrative reviews are useful for discovering topics that are under-researched as well as for new intuitions or

ways of discerning regarding acute energetically researched fields (Sukhera , 2022). Narrative reviews do not aim to be systematic syntheses that answer a specific, highly focused question; instead, they offer carefully thought out and rigorous interpretations of a body of knowledge. Such reviews will not provide an exhaustive, comprehensive review of the literature; however, they are useful for a fertile and expressive summary of a topic(Sukhera , 2022, Snyder, 2019).

Inclusion and exclusion criterion

Green, Johnson, , & Adams, (2001) stated that defining the inclusion/exclusion criteria for literature selection can be supportive in concentrating on the importance of the studies to the topic in a narrative review. The elimination criteria may be acknowledged according to the relevance of the exploration objective, whereas the inclusion criteria may express the essential issues of the review (Green, Johnson, , & Adams, 2001). Articles selected were published in English. Such articles were designated on condition that they focused on the crucial areas, namely, library consortia, cooperation and collaboration, digital divide, resource sharing ,and access to information. The relevancy of the articles was a determining factor for the inclusion criterion. The following category of articles were excluded:

- a) one times article in press;
- b) book reviews;
- c) erratum; and
- d) retracted works

Literature Review

Nesta, (2019) argued that ancient Alexandria and Athens libraries, for example, Hadrian's Library, were renowned more for being adversaries than friends during the age great libraries of antiquity. Kraus, (1975) highlighted that libraries should find means to work cooperatively to provide users with access to resources unavailable in nearby libraries via cooperative initiatives as a benefit of cooperation. The author further states that the origins of library cooperation is derived from ancient monastery libraries during the first half of the thirteenth century. Wolf and Bloss (2000) traced the history of library cooperation to the 19th. century as reflected by cooperation between American and European higher education libraries. The library at Alexandria in Egypt exchanged copies with the Athens library, but there is no substantiation of any sharing between Alexandria and its rival at Pergamum (Aman, 1989, 84).

Library cooperation in Europe began to gain momentum in the 17th century and this was an initiative of philosophers and writers who were also librarians, for example, Gotthold Ephraim Wolf and Bloss (2000:1) traced the foundation of cooperative collection development to the early 1800s as evidenced by international exchange programmes initiated by European universities and the cooperative collection development initiatives of the mid-20th century. Lessing (1729-1781) from the Herzog August *Bibliothek* in Wolfenbüttel began an exchange programme with other libraries and proposed a consortia acquisition scheme with the University of Göttingen. A union catalog was suggested by Goethe, who oversaw the libraries of Weimar and Jena, as part of his role as a government official in Weimar (Wormann, 1968, p. 340-341). Joint acquisition of library materials became a key issue on the agenda of ALA and this was essential in ensuring standardization of library systems and resources (Krajewski, and Krapp, 2011; Krajewski, 2023). Potter (1997) and

Pal, (2016) noted that the library cooperation has existed as evidenced by the production of shared catalogues during 16th century, the publication of analytic cards by American Library Association (ALA) as shared cataloguing programme in 1898, the sharing of resources via interlibrary lending code devised by ALA and the initiation of cooperative acquisition project by the Library of Congress in 1945. Cooperation among libraries is not new because it has been around since the 1880s at least (Johnson, 2018). Nesta (2019) noted that the formation of the ALA in (1876) marked a significant development characterized by heightened focus on cooperation among libraries. This period marked the development of the Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme (DDC) and hence the need for cooperation as highlighted below:

“It should be understood that such organization is not simply to create esprit de corps and to enjoy social intercourse with one another, but is a great labour-saving necessity; an economizer of time and money; a desideratum alike for library and librarian. Without such organization experience has sufficiently proved that Poole’s Index will remain uncompleted; that each cataloguer will work alone and unaided on his copy of each book without utilizing to any proper extent the like labors of his fellows ... Individuals have neither authority nor ability to carry forward the needed work. It must be done by the cooperation of those most interested – the libraries” (Library Journal, 1877, 178).

Laltlanmawi, & Verma,(n.d) argues that the development of library consortia is a very hopeful progress in this trajectory. Consortium of libraries is well known for sharing of resources all over the world. Information explosion, emergence of internet and particularly World Wide Web as a new medium of information storage make the concept more come into sight than earlier. Sahu (2006) affirms that the conventional model of scholarly communication, based on journal publication, has been unsuccessful in democratizing access to information accessible and usable especially for the developing world due to high subscription fees. On the same note, Kusekwa & Mushowani, (2013) argue that Africa, including Zimbabwe, has not been spared from the effects of high subscription fees for scholarly communication that are beyond the reach of many institutions

Atkinson, (2019) argued that the effective collaboration for academic libraries is no longer an option, but an obligation There is a rapid change taking place around academic libraries (Pinfield, Cox, & Rutter, 2017) and the university sector is facing financial cuts, pressures for accountability, changes in pedagogy, and growing expectations from students (Hickman, Citation,2017). Ridley (1995, 5) highlighted that collaboration should strengthen joint workmanship and stir member libraries to work toward common goals - “a sense of stewardship ... in which the care of the whole is considered, not just the individual institution. When an issue arises, the first question should be; what does this mean for the consortium? ... not, what does this mean for my library?” It can be challenging, complex, and time-consuming for academic libraries to collaborate, and staff often has to work outside their comfort zones to accomplish this (Atkinson, 2019). Yet, with trust, openness, commitment, resilience, and compromise, the benefits can be considerable for both library and university (Atkinson, 2019). Pal (2016) highlighted that India’s library cooperation and collaborative initiatives date back to the 2nd half of the twentieth century when the Indian National Scientific Documentation Center (INSDOC) (currently National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR)) was established in 1952. This initiative provides the foundation for the modern library consortia in contemporary

India. A number of library networks were established in India during the 1980s and 1990s for the purpose of collaboration and resource sharing, including the Calcutta Library Network (CALIBNET) (1986), the Developing Library Network (DELNET), (1988), the Madras Library Network (MALIBNET) (1993), and INFLIBNET (1991), among others (Lalitanmawii, & Verma, n.d). India has a vibrant network of library consortia with an emphasis on providing nationwide access to information. It is suggested by Singh and Rao (2008) that the development of library consortia in India were spurred by the following factors: the ability to share resources without sacrificing the individuality of each member, cooperative research and development that uses ICTs to enhance services and make them more cost effective, staff development, cost reduction, provision of interlibrary searches and ease of access to electronic resources.

Libraries should move beyond traditional systems to build new approaches to coordinated centers of content and service excellence, mass production operations in libraries, new technology, infrastructures, and new initiatives that can be integrated effectively across institutions (Neal, 2010). ICTs enable library consortia to shift from traditional to a modern mode of operation characterized by the use of integrated library management systems (ILMS) and inter-organizational information systems (IOS). SANLiC and ZULC members especially academic and research libraries have established institutional repositories (IRs) as part of strengthening the Open Access infrastructure (Chisita, & Chiparausha, 2019; (Borrego, Anglada, & Abadal, 2021; SANLiC, 2024). In the current age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) library consortia have an opportunity to apply data analytics to enhance informed decision-making regarding user's information needs or preferences, digitisation and preservation, provision of personalised information services and shared cloud storage .

Library consortia help to negotiate better deals with publishers at a time when the cost of subscriptions continues to escalate. Saini (2017) argues that libraries face a number of critical challenges related to journal subscription costs, budget constraints, changing dynamic user needs, internationalization of education, convergence of disciplines, and cooperation via consortiums. They can act as negotiating bodies to offer discounted subscriptions to consortiums of universities, institutions, and colleges through consortial approaches. Cooperation and collaboration among libraries serve as a significant resource for extenuating the effects of economic encounters on collection development (Chadwell, 2009). In spite of the greater bargaining power provided by these buying clubs, these arrangements are not always beneficial to all members. Consortial membership has the primary advantage of sharing license negotiation tasks (Murphy, 2019), but many e-resource licenses do not support cooperative collection usage: they may operate only on the basis of individual libraries, limit interlibrary lending, or restrict multiple simultaneous users (Machovec, 2020).

In Zimbabwe, ZULC, stands out as the most visible and vibrant library consortia providing for the information needs of academic institutions, research libraries and affiliates. The ZULC constitution gives the consortium the power to accommodate university libraries and Polytechnics as affiliate members. Differences in institutional size and capacity mean that the current model of cost and resource sharing needs to be rethought to benefit all beneficiaries (ZULC, 2016). In 2016, Mbasera argued that the current model for ZULC benefited the old and original members, and recommended a proportional cost-sharing model for subscriptions. ZULC is keen to

broaden its membership beyond the traditional university and college members to include NGOs, research institutions and government departments (Chikonzo, 2016). The consortium is fundamentally driven by the belief that access, as opposed to traditional unqualified ownership, is the most viable strategy to promote the ideals of the universities in Zimbabwe. There has been a paradigm shift since the beginning of the 21st century as academic libraries have transitioned from owning specific physical entities in local collections to providing access to many multi-format resources. Academic libraries in Southern Africa have risen towards distributed information resources and this has been enabled by the spread of ICTs. ZULC members benefit from negotiations with Eifl and for lower subscription and prices for e-resources (NUST, 2019). The report noted that irrespective of the constraints brought by Zimbabwe's currency reforms, which eroded the budget and reduced the Library buying power, the Library managed to subscribe to electronic resources through the facility provided by ZULC (NUST, 2019). According to the report the variety of resources accessed through ZULC includes e-books and e-journals. With increased membership to the consortia there has been a decrease in institutional contributions to the licensing fees, thus enabling members to have access to a wider range of e-resources.

With regards to South Africa, SANLiC has been effective in depressing the cost of subscription access for member libraries consequential in the development of the collections of member institutions (Strydom, et.al, 2022). SANLiC has negotiated a number of Read and Publish Agreements on behalf of South African universities, enabling publication in gold open access journals. Such agreement enable libraries to benefit from read access to paywalled content while repurposing reading subscription spending to leverage open access publishing (SANLiC, 2024). As a result of transformative agreements, also known as 'offsetting', 'read and publish', or 'publish and read' agreements, scholarly journal licensing has shifted from cost containment to open access publishing (Borrego, Anglada, & Abadal, 2021). Such agreements also benefits authors to publish full and immediate open access without incurring Article Processing Costs(APC) (SANLiC, 204). In the same way, the Electronic Information For Libraries (EIFL) agreements with publishers also guarantee authors in Zimbabwe a reduced or waived Article Processing Charge (APC) when they publish in hybrid or open access journals(EIFL, 2024).

Discussions

Library consortia and resource sharing in South Africa and Zimbabwe has gained solid ground as evidenced by successes of SANLiC and ZULC (Frie , 2013; Chikonzo, 2016; Chisita, 2017; Strydom, et.al, 2022; Halland , 2019; Sisto, 2022;Nowakowsky, & Voy, 2023). Through cooperation library consortia in the two countries have transformed the library and information science landscape through innovative projects, including, cooperative collection development, continuous professional development, enhanced networking, library automation, system support, interlibrary lending, retro-conversion, consulting, and cooperative purchasing (Hasan,2024). These initiatives have helped to propel academic and research library to higher level regarding digital transformation (Halland, 2019). University libraries have shifted from collection development to collection building and collection management courtesy of digital technologies (Machimbidza,& Mutula, 2020). Collection development and collection building differs in the sense that the former

focuses on a single library, while the latter is a strategic process that emphasises collaboration among libraries.

Wylie, and Yeager, (1999) argued the groundwork for library cooperation started with Interlending services and the adoption of common standards for cataloguing library materials. The era of digital transformation spurred the need for retro-conversion of print by converting print catalogues to machine-readable formats. Wylie, and Yeager, (1999) highlighted that the use of common cataloguing standards enhance the interoperability among different libraries, enhances resource sharing, ensure accuracy regarding metadata and enhance discoverability of resources systems, the most common example of cooperation is probably interlibrary loans, which are available from virtually any public and most private libraries (Johnson, 2018). The challenges encountered by library consortia in Southern Africa include, rapid seismic technological changes in the information landscape, (Pinfield, Cox, & Rutter, 2017), fiscal constraint, the growing and dynamic and diverse needs of users, the need for transparency (Ridley, 1995; Chikonzo, 2016.; Atkinson, 2019), pressures for accountability (Chikonzo, 2016), changes in pedagogy, and growing expectations from students (Hickman, 2017).

The need for library consortia to move with technology regarding revolutionising operations and process have been emphasised by (Neal, 2010; Chisita, & Chiparausha, 2019; Borrego, Anglada, & Abadal, 2021; SANLiC, 2024). In the current age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) library consortia have an opportunity to apply data analytics to enhance informed decision-making regarding user's information needs or preferences, digitisation and preservation, provision of personalised information services and benefit from shared cloud storage integrated with AI.

Borrego, Anglada, & Abadal, (2021) highlighted the benefits of transformative agreements that accrue to academic libraries and institutions to benefit from open access without incurring Article Processing Costs courtesy of library consortia (APC) as stated in previous sections. This has enabled many academic institutions to leverage their research capacity through digital footprints in credible databases.

Conclusion

The success of library consortia in Zimbabwe and South Africa is testimony to the cooperation and collaboration initiatives among libraries under the aegis of ZULC and SANLiC. Through the aforementioned institutions are realizing the potential of diversity and inclusiveness through wider access to information and promoting local authorship and research.

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