

Enhancing Access to Electronic Resources through Collaborations and E-Document Delivery: Experiences of University Libraries in Kenya

Judy S. Kasalu

Margaret Thatcher Library, Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya.
kasalu2012@gmail.com

Joseph B. Ojiambo

DVC, Academic and Students' Affairs Division, University of Kabianga, Kericho, Kenya.
ojiambojb@yahoo.com



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Abstract:

The advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) has been both a curse and blessing to many university libraries in Africa. ICTs have created a heightened demand for efficiency in library service delivery. This has forced university libraries to realign services to the needs and expectations of users needs. ICTs have also opened opportunities for university libraries to cooperate for resource sharing and access to remote information resources. ICTs have created an increased demand for more funding for university libraries, escalation of prices of information resources and reduced patronage of libraries by users. Unfortunately, universities in Africa have not been able to adequately meet the increased demand for more funding for libraries. This forces these libraries to seek collaborations with other institutions locally and internationally for resource sharing and document delivery in order to meet the increased demand by users for effective service delivery. Resource sharing activities such as document delivery and consortial arrangements for acquisition and sharing of e-resources have become popular practices in recent years. This paper shares experiences of university libraries in Kenya in information resource sharing. The paper looks at the resource sharing initiatives as well as opportunities and challenges experienced by these libraries. The paper discusses how these resource sharing initiatives in Kenya help enhance access to e-resources.. Although attempts have been made to encourage university libraries in Kenya to engage in electronic resource sharing, a lot needs to be done. Support is needed from the government and parent institutions to enhance electronic resource sharing and document delivery activities.

Keywords: Resource Sharing; library Collaborations; Electronic document delivery; University libraries in Kenya; Library consortia

Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been both a blessing and a curse for university libraries especially in Africa where support for libraries has been minimal. ICTs have created a heightened demand for quality services by various stakeholders. This is forcing university libraries to realign their services to the needs and expectations of users. The pressure for quality services coupled with minimal budgetary allocation has left most of these libraries struggling to catch up. ICTs have also created an escalation of prices of information resources and reduced patronage of libraries. This has in turn created a need for more funding of university libraries. However, the ICT revolution has created increased possibilities for collaboration for resource sharing and document delivery. Collaborations play important role in collection development particularly in Africa where resources and support for libraries is limited. Additionally, it would be impossible for any library, however great, to acquire all the materials that it requires especially in the current information environment, hence need for resource sharing. Some university libraries in Kenya have developed collaborations with other libraries from within and outside Kenya for resource sharing activities and electronic delivery of information materials. These collaborations have created an opportunity to provide enhanced access to electronic resources to library users. Resource sharing refers to an attempt by libraries to share information materials and services cooperatively so as to provide one another with resources that might otherwise not be available to an individual library (Walden, 1999). It encompasses concepts such as library cooperation, library networking, library linkages, library collaboration, library consortia, and interlibrary loan. Resource sharing is basically aimed at promoting free flow of information among libraries and the users of information.

Universities and university libraries in Kenya: an overview

Kenya's higher education is composed of both public and private universities. Currently there are fifty two universities which are either chartered, have letters of interim authority, or registered to offer university education (CUE, 2015). Out of these, twenty two are public universities and thirty are private universities. Majority of these universities are located within Nairobi with the rest scattered in different parts of the country. University education in Kenya is regulated by Commission for University Education (CUE); a body mandated by the Kenyan government to regulate the establishment of and ensure quality of higher education. It is a requirement by this Commission that any university in Kenya must have a quality university library that is run by qualified staff. The Commission has set rules and standards for establishment of university libraries in Kenya. One of the requirements is that university libraries must engage in collaborations and resource sharing activities (CUE, 2015) for enhancement of resources and services to library users. Additionally, CUE requires that budget allocation for library collection development activities be 10% of the universities operational budget (CUE, 2015). However, many universities do not adhere to this with some allocating less than 2%. Rosenberg, (1997) and Kavulya, (2006) observe that financial support for libraries by parent institutions in Kenya has been very minimal which has affected collection development practices in these libraries. This has hampered collection development activities in university libraries in Kenya.

Resource sharing activities in university libraries in Kenya

The need to share information in Kenya has been immense just like any other African country due to limited resources and inadequate support by parent institutions. In Kenya, support for university libraries has been very minimal until recent intervention by Commission CUE. This minimal support has to a great extent affected collection development activities including resource sharing. Moreover, the desire to share information resources has been fuelled by a

deluge of information as a result of emergence and adoption of ICTs. This has changed the information needs and expectations of users requiring university libraries to change the way they handle and offer information services. The amount of information generated has become so enormous such that no single library can think of collecting all of it individually. Wanyoike (2004) observes that the increase in value and demand for information has continued to exert pressure on university libraries to offer more effective services to the users. Consequently, the collection development activities in university libraries have changed with many now gradually shifting from the need to accumulate and own information to providing access to information. Computer networks have made it easier to share information resources and with a click of a button, it is possible to share and access information available locally and internationally.

Efforts to share information in the past have not been successful in many university libraries in Kenya. Resource sharing activities have been minimal and only limited to Inter-Library Loan (ILL) ventures with most of these ILL ventures limited to libraries of the same type (Otike, 1983; Were, 2004). However, these ILL ventures have not been successful due to a number of reasons; lack of policies or obligations relating to resource sharing, insufficient information resources to share, limited budget allocation by parent institutions to engage in meaningful collection development activities, lack of appropriate technologies, networks, and lack of skilled staff. Otike (1983) attributes unsuccessful ILL ventures to duplication of information resources and services. He observes that each library aspired to collect as much information resources as possible in spite of limited budgetary allocation and desired to be as independent and self-sufficient as possible. Duplication of resources and services was also caused by low levels of library automation. This resulted in many librarians not knowing what their counterparts in other libraries owned. Automation was necessary because most information resources were in print format and their catalogues were not visible. However this is gradually changing and many university libraries are now automating and putting their catalogues on the web. Additionally, university libraries did not have a union catalogue; a situation that made information resources discovery very difficult. Other reasons given include lack of trust among libraries and the fact that ILL, in most cases, was done on ‘gentleman understanding’. Ng’ang’a, (1982 & 1984) indicates that there were no policies obligating a particular university library to share its resources with another and this caused lack of trust that the borrowing library may not return the material(s) borrowed. This caused many librarians to refrain from lending their information materials to other libraries. The Kenya government did not help either because there was no national policy to support information resource sharing activities in the country.

This situation has essentially remained the same even today because many university libraries do not engage in meaningful ILL activities. Most University libraries no longer engage in ILL activities and where it happens, it’s only by librarians who know each other. A study by Ocholla and Onyancha (2006) attributes this to limited networking among Kenyan universities; a situation that poses threat to current and future electronic information resource sharing initiatives. The study also found out that Kenyan universities have a selfish attitude as each one of them tries to gain a competitive advantage with regard to increasing enrolment of new student (Ocholla and Onyancha, 2006). In support, Kavulya (2003) observes that resource sharing among universities in Kenya is limited. He further argues that there is a tendency by Kenyan universities to strive towards self-sufficiency rather than sharing with each other. This situation affects existing resource sharing efforts in Kenya.

Collaborations for electronic resource sharing and document delivery

University libraries in Kenya began using computers to enhance their service delivery in 1990s (Rotich & Munge, 2007). And as use of computers and related technologies spread over the years, the library users began accessing and managing information on their own thus alienating librarians from their role as information gate-keepers. Consequently, university libraries in Kenya have been under pressure to embrace ICTs for service delivery and resource sharing for information resources not available in home libraries. The new information environment has seen the collection development practices slowly changing from “just-in-case” to “just-in-time” thus making access to information resources outside the home library more critical than ever before (Shorley, 2008). In this environment, resource sharing has taken a new turn for good with libraries now finding it easier and necessary to form collaborations for acquisition and access to electronic resources. Bailey-Hainer, et.al. (2014) assert that:

“Resource sharing has become a dynamic and increasingly strategic area of service that reflects a constantly changing information landscape and commitment libraries are making to empower their communities to discover and access information efficiently and effectively”

In Kenya, a number of collaborative efforts have been made with intentions of fuelling information resource sharing activities among university libraries. Most of these initiatives started and flourished between 1990s and early 2000 (Rotich and Munge, 2007). These include: Electronic Supply of Academic Publications (eSAP); Kenya National Education Network (KENET); Database of African Theses and Dissertation (DATAD); African Virtual Library-Kenya (AVL-K); Program for Enhancement of Research Information (PERI); Kenya Libraries and Information Services Consortium (KLISC); CABI-RUFORUM - Collaboration; Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) - Moi University Collaboration; and Consortium of CARTA Libraries (CCL). These initiatives have helped set the stage for information resource sharing and enhancing access to local and international electronic information resources among university libraries in Kenya.

Supply of Academic Publications (eSAP)

The discussion about eSAP project was started in 1997 in a conference of International Association of Universities. The project came into fruition in 2001 when International Association of University Presidents (IAUP) signed a memorandum of understanding with the participating East African Universities. The project is a joint effort of IAUP and International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU). It is aimed at setting up a sustainable electronic document delivery systems for scholarly publications between universities in the North and the South through the use of computer networks. In Kenya three universities participate in eSAP project: The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenyatta University; and University of Nairobi. The activities of the projects include:

- Managing and making available the academic journals possessed by the member universities
- Electronic delivery of articles from these journals to member institutions
- Publishing the output of academic staff in the member institutions
- Creating and maintaining databases for awareness of information resources available (Rotich and Munge, 2007)

Kenya National Education Network (KENET)

KENET was started as a U.S-funded organization but now it operates as a Non-Governmental Organization sustained by government subsidization and selling of ICTs-related services at low cost to member institutions. KENET support electronic resource sharing through providing network services to members at an affordable cost. Among the key objectives of

KENET are sharing teaching and learning resources and enabling collaboration in research and development of educational content. KENET operates as an education network and as an Internet Service Provider for most universities in Kenya connecting all categories of universities with internet (Thairu, 2004).

Database of African Theses and Dissertations (DATAD)

The idea of sharing research information among member institution was started in an Information Access and Connectivity meeting held in Nairobi in 1998 which came up with recommendation of carrying out a pilot project (carried out in 2000 to 2003) to index, abstract, and distribute theses and dissertation carried out in African universities. This pilot study gave rise to the DATAD project which is an affiliate of Association of African Universities (AAU). Among the key objectives of DATAD include: working together to build a database of theses and dissertations; providing visibility and accessibility of research done by African scholars within and outside the continent; providing access to the online databases and alternative data formats for dissemination; and promoting cooperation among member universities and networking of institutions. Among the eleven member universities only Kenyatta University in Kenya is a member (AAU, 2015).

African Virtual Library-Kenya (AVL-K)

AVL-K was launched in 1999 in a meeting of librarians and information technology specialists in Kenya with an aim of mobilising academic and public libraries around the country to form an online information sharing partnership. Objectives of AVL-K related with resource sharing include: assisting libraries to automate and put their holdings in MARC format to aid in establishing an online union catalogue; training in IT skills of personnel from member institutions; and promoting networking among the participating institutions for online information sharing (Wanyoike, 2004).

Program for Enhancement of Research Information (PERI)

PERI is a programme managed by International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) aimed at developing capacity building in research in developing countries, facilitating acquisition of local and international research information, and supporting problem solving of regional and local information access and dissemination challenges. The activities of PERI revolves around delivering information, strengthening national research publications, supporting country collaborations and networking, enhancing ICT skills, and research and development. Most of these activities serve to encourage collaboration for resource sharing activities among Kenyan institutions of higher learning (Rotich and Munge, 2007).

Kenya Libraries and Information Consortium (KLISC)

The idea of establishing a Kenyan library Consortium was discussed during a regional meeting of Inter-university Council for Eastern African (IUCEA) libraries in 1998. These discussions bore fruits when KLISC was mooted at a Kenya University Librarians Committee (KULC) meeting held in Nairobi in 2003. After discussion during this meeting and subsequent meeting of KULC, the consortium was finally inaugurated at a KULC seminar in June 2004. The consortium secretariat is hosted under the wings of University of Nairobi Jomo Kenyatta Library. However, plans are underway to make it an independent entity with its own headquarters in Nairobi. Membership to KLISC stands at more than 100 comprising of public and private universities, research institutions, major government tertiary colleges, national library, Kenya national archives, national museums and government ministries (KLISC, 2015).

The objectives of KLISC are to: develop cooperation and understanding among member libraries; to provide a forum for sharing information resources and experiences; to develop collective subscription to electronic resources to cope with the increasing cost of information resources; capacity building for librarians from member universities in information resource acquisition and information literacy skills for effective access of electronic resources; carrying out research studies, projects and programs; supporting the implementation of systems and techniques that facilitate increased cooperation among member libraries; and establishing networks for the development of content, creation of digital libraries and delivery of documents to university libraries (Rotich and Munge, 2007).

Among the activities of KLISC, collaboration for electronic resource acquisition and sharing stands out. Were (2004) observes that KLISC intention is to move libraries from hard copy collections to electronic collections and enhance access to electronic information resources for university libraries in Kenya. KLISC has done this successfully by enabling university libraries to collectively acquire e-resources through annual subscriptions. KLISC uses the institution type as a key factor for dividing e-resource subscriptions. Members pay for subscription differently according to their type (University and non-universities). For instance non-universities pay 10% of the total costs whereas universities pay 90% with public universities paying 80% and private universities paying 10% of the 90%. KLISC also enables electronic delivery of articles not available within the subscribed packages through the British Council document delivery services hence enabling university libraries to access information resources outside what is normally subscribed.

KLISC activities are highly supported by International Network for Availability of Scientific Publication (INASP). INASP support involves negotiating with international publishers to secure licenses on behalf of KLISC for free or significantly discounted online access to electronic journal and electronic books (INASP, 2015). Through this support university libraries in Kenya are now able to access more than thirty e-journals and e-book databases. INASP also hosts and supports dissemination of research through Journal Online project in Africa (JOL); a project that has enabled KLISC members to freely access journal articles published in Africa and by Africans. Requested articles from JOL are delivered e-document delivery.

CABI-RUFORUM Collaboration

Regional Universities Forum (RUFORUM) for capacity building in Agriculture is a consortium of 32 universities in Eastern, Central and Southern African established in 2004. It is registered in Uganda as Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). RUFORUM offers a privileged access to CAB abstracts, database and compendia since September 2013 to its members including six universities in Kenya. CABI is an international NGO that seeks to provide information to solve problems in agriculture and the environment. CABI offers a wealth of print and online publishing products, books, online databases, abstract journals and compendia in support of scholars, academics and patrons with their continuing research and knowledge development (RUFORUM, 2014). Through this CABI-RUFORUM collaboration university libraries can access and share e-resources amongst themselves.

Moi University - IUPUI Collaboration

The relationship between Moi University and IUPUI began in 1989 when Indiana University School of Medicine began collaborating with Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital creating an Academic Mode for Proving Access to Healthcare (AMPATH). Later the collaboration was scaled up after realizing that providing medical treatment was not enough. Later the IUPUI library joined in the collaboration with Moi University Margaret Thatcher library to share

information resources and offer electronic document delivery services to Moi University. This project has been successfully carried out with IUPUI library sharing its electronic and print information resources with Moi University library to date through electronic document delivery services. Other university libraries in Kenya have also taken advantage of university-wide partnerships and linkages to forge partnerships for information resource sharing and electronic document delivery. A good example is St. Paul's University library - Kenya that collaborates with University of Pittsburgh Library in U.S.A for resource sharing and e-document delivery. The aim of such collaborations is to help these libraries enhance access by electronically availing information resources that are not available at home.

Consortium of CARTA Libraries (CCL)

CARTA stands for Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa. CCL is an arm of CARTA and an inter-regional network of 11 member institutions in Africa including Kenya; 9 universities and 2 research institutions. It was formed in 2012 during a CARTA workshop in Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania. CCL aims compiling, digitizing and uploading into a central server all research information available in member institutions for purpose of sharing amongst member institutions. CCL intends to create an e-library of academic research including theses and dissertations of members (Obasola, 2015).

Challenges

- Poor information and communication infrastructure especially in rural areas impedes information resources sharing
- There is slow uptake of modern ICTs by universities in Kenya which has slowed down resource sharing activities
- Copyright issues presents one of the greatest challenges for electronic resources sharing in Kenya
- Delay in payment of e-resources by university thus prompting publishers to disconnect some universities from access frustrates efforts of KLISC
- Unwillingness by some libraries to share their information resources impedes resource sharing activities
- Poor funding and support for libraries hinders the progress of resource sharing activities
- Poor Resource discovery in some libraries due to lack of central catalogue and low levels of automation
- A lot of duplication of e-resources due to the fact that subscription of is done collectively through KLISC
- Lack of technological know-how among librarians to engage in meaningful electronic resources sharing activities
- Lethargic attitude towards information resource sharing and document delivery by many libraries in Kenya.
- Delays in acquiring new e-resources because consortial members have to hold consultations before decisions are made.

Opportunities

- Collaboration for information resource sharing saves resources and avoid duplication of efforts as well as facilitating reciprocal exchange of local publications
- Available university-wide partnerships and linkages provides an opportunity for university libraries to forge collaborations for information resource sharing

- There is availability of affordable technology (e.g free/open source software, cloud computing) that can help in information resource sharing in university libraries
- Resource sharing helps parent institutions experience reduced costs of sustaining library services
- Collaborations increases support for libraries especially with donors that prefer to support group activities for instance willingness by international organizations (e.g INASP) to help negotiate for subsidization of subscription of electronic resources
- Forging collaboration with other IT staff can provide university libraries the much needed skilled personal for application of ICTs in resource sharing activities

Conclusion

Even though there have been many efforts that have been initiated to fuel information resource sharing activities in the country, these initiatives have not born much fruit in improving information resources sharing activities among university libraries in Kenya. Concerted efforts are therefore required by the stakeholders in supporting and embracing information resourcing sharing especially in this era of ICTs for quality service delivery. Positively embracing these initiatives and developing meaningful collaborations can go a long way in improving information resource sharing and document delivery services in Kenya. There is willingness by international organizations/universities to share information resources with universities in developing countries thus improving library collections and value of information resources available to both staff and students.

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