Our Sister Library Cooperation: Inspiring Cross Cultural Capability for Librarians and Enhancing Universal Access to Information and Knowledge

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Abstract:

This international study examined the perceptions of team members of a newly formed sister library initiative, between the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta in Nigeria and Oregon State University in the United States, and found that members had positive perceptions towards the relationship. They were enthusiastic about learning more about each other's culture as a way of facilitating cross cultural capabilities in information handling in diverse cultures and communities. Networking was also identified as a medium of improving global access to knowledge among the librarians. Although members on both sides of the relationship were greatly concerned about the technology gap between the libraries, the study revealed that they looked forward to helping each other in any way possible.

Keywords: Sister Library, Cross Cultural Capability, Access, Information, Knowledge

Introduction

Libraries from time immemorial have played a unifying role among humanity providing access to information for people of diverse cultures and races. Inasmuch as these libraries strive to satisfy their users' needs they are always being curtailed as no library is self-sufficient in resources acquisition. Library cooperation is therefore seen as an important element in facilitating global access to information and effective library service delivery. Library cooperation could mean different things to different libraries such as library consortium, exchange of resources, networking of professionals, interlibrary loan, or even collaboration on a specific project. Whatever it connotes, cooperation among libraries is not a

new phenomenon in the history of libraries. According to Kumar Jha (2001) this can be traced down to 200 B.C. when Alexandria Library shared its resources with Pergamon Library. According to Kraus, also cited by Kumar Jha (2001), there existed library cooperation among the monastery libraries in the 13th century. As simple as this may sound, it can be difficult to establish partnership or cooperation among libraries. This is because needs and expectations of libraries differ widely and it may be very tough to reach a common agreement for further development or even sustain such a relationship. It is therefore, very important that any two libraries going into partnership or collaboration must have a concrete agreement and mutual understanding between them to drive the cooperation.

Although library cooperation has been in existence since ancient times, most often this has been between libraries of the same region, country, or nation. Regardless of this, the libraries of the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, (FUNAAB) Nigeria and Oregon State University, Corvallis, (OSU) Oregon, in the United States of America decided to foster a friendly relationship effective from 28th of September 2015 despite their different locations, region, and orientation. It is believed that through this sister library relationship it will be possible to:

1. raise awareness of issues and needs facing libraries internationally;
2. inspire cross cultural competence of librarians and professional networking;
3. share information, resources, and expertise between the libraries;
4. track trends in librarianship to improve library services to our users; and
5. share techniques and technologies to help solve problems

The memorandum of understanding was signed by the management of the two universities and agreement was made in the following areas of cooperation:

1. exchange of library staff;
2. joint research activities;
3. participation in virtual seminars and academic meetings;
4. exchange of library materials and other information.

Sequel to the above, a sister library team was formed in each of the libraries to work out the modality of our relationship and forge a solid cooperation, hence; like Henry Ford cited by Murray (2004) the two libraries are saying 'coming together is our beginning, keeping together will be our progress while working together will lead us to success'.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are listed thus;
1. to assess the perception of librarians about the sister library relationship between the two libraries
2. to examine how the sister library relationship will enhance the cross cultural capabilities of librarians
3. to determine the benefits the two libraries stand to gain from the sister library relationship
4. to ascertain how these benefits will enhance universal access to information and knowledge among librarians
5. to find out whether the sister library relationship will enhance library services at the two libraries.

Literature Review

The literature review for this study is divided into three main sections and it revolves around three key themes; library cooperation, cultural capabilities, and universal access to information and knowledge.

Cooperation among Libraries

The term cooperation can be defined as a relationship which is built on trust and mutual understanding between two or more parties while the aim of any cooperation activity is to achieve what the members cannot achieve individually. Cooperation is also a social activity which is as old as human civilization (Kumar Jha 2001) hence, the most important factor in any successful cooperation is human relationship. In essence, the human element must first of all agree to form a relationship and be willing to work together. Many reasons have been given for cooperation among libraries, one of the sparks for library cooperation may be the information explosion which is being witnessed all around the world (Ossai, 2010, Omotoso, and Igiamoh 2012; Adam and Usman, 2013). Borek (2006) as cited by Rezaul Islam (2012) however, observed that libraries often come together for selfish but positive reasons to leverage shrinking budgets, to learn from each other, to build better tools together, and most importantly to serve their users better by taking advantage of one another's collection. Rezaul Islam (2012) summarized in another way and stated that the main objective of cooperation among libraries is to maximize the availability of, and access to information and services at a minimum cost.

Literature abounds on various forms of cooperation existing among various libraries in different parts of the world. Kumar Jha (2001) stated that the first library cooperation activity in India was reported to be the catalog of manuscripts compiled by Whitney Stokes in 1868. In 1876 the American Library Association formed the committee on cooperation in indexing and cataloging College libraries (Millard, 2000). Murray (2004) also referred to the TriUniversity Group (TUG) library collaboration initiated in 1995 which has been widely emulated while Iroaganachi, Iwu, and Esse (2015) reported that library cooperation in Nigeria can be traced back to National Union of Catalogue which was conceived in 1963 by the National Library of Nigeria, although the cooperation did not stand the test of time due to lack of standards. Another cooperative initiative was also started by the National University Commission to examine the possibility of cooperative acquisition, but this also failed. Library cooperation can therefore be seen as a feature of the profession (librarianship). Nevertheless informal cooperation still exists among Nigerian libraries, but this is limited to interlibrary use by users of various tertiary institutions and research centers. Miambo (2002) cited by Adam and Usman (2013) concluded that "cooperation among libraries is a universal language spoken in different dialects".

The advent of Information Communication Technology has even made cooperation among libraries easier and more viable. While commenting on cooperation among libraries, Zhang as cited by Iroaganachi, *et al* (2015) indicated that libraries are entering the golden age of cooperation where there is technology to link libraries and make users aware of the collections of other libraries. However, Ke and Wen (2012) in his study of schools and public libraries in Taiwan highlighted diverse interest on the part of the cooperators as one of the difficulties encountered in library cooperation. RezualIslam (2012) also noted that one of the problems militating against effective cooperation among libraries in Bangladesh was lack of appropriate communication systems. However, the future of library cooperation is best

characterized as a movement from the sharing of "things" to the sharing of "people and expertise" (Manu Kumar and Mysore).

Cross Cultural Capability of Librarians

The concept of cross cultural capability is a relatively new area of study that began to evolve in the late 1990s and has grown at a very rapid rate (Kamorsi, 2006). A cursory look at the literature revealed that different terminologies have been used in this area to refer to the same concept. This is because the concept cuts across various disciplines. According to Killick cited by (Kamorsi, 2006) the list of these terms includes: cross cultural skills, cross cultural competence, cross cultural awareness, intercultural communication, just to mention a few. In librarianship the same concept has also been referred to as multiculturalism and cultural diversity; hence, in this study the term 'cross cultural capability' and 'cross cultural competence' will be used interchangeably.

Globalization has accelerated the need for cross cultural capability among librarians; for the frontline information professionals it is becoming very important to know how to make information available in different formats to meet the needs of diverse users despite their background and orientation without bias or prejudice. Mestre (2010) opined that our society is one of cultures, languages, abilities, preferences and backgrounds, and providing the optimal library experience to all constituencies is clearly one of the service goals of librarians. She therefore, suggested that all librarians need to possess at least the basic knowledge of what it means to be culturally competent. In the same vein, Dewey and Keally (2008, 634) stated that;

> "The twenty first century library must incorporate new methods of communication, collaboration, access to scholarship, and learning methodologies, recognizing that understanding and advancing diversity in the broadest sense is critical to an individual's success through their life …"

The above statement buttresses the fact that librarians need to enhance their cross cultural capability more than before. According to Kamorsi (2006) cross cultural capability is a term that deals with how people react to foreign culture, and how well they understand and accept their own culture. He stated further that cross cultural capabilities begin with understanding the belief, values, and behaviors of one's own culture. This understanding can then be applied to gain the knowledge of other cultures in an effort to behave appropriately.

Overall (2009, p176) defines cultural competence for library and information professionals as:
> the ability to recognize the significance of culture in one's own life and in the lives of others; to come to know and respect diverse cultural backgrounds and characteristics through interaction with individuals from diverse linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic groups; and to fully integrate the culture of diverse groups into service work, and institutions in order to enhance the lives of both those being serviced by the library profession and those engaged in service

One of the diversity standards of the Association of College and Research libraries (2012) is 'cross-cultural knowledge and skills' and it is stated that;

> "Librarians and library staff shall have and continue to develop specialized knowledge and understanding about the history, traditions, values, and artistic expressions of colleagues, co-workers, and major constituencies served"

A cross cultural capable librarian therefore, needs to understand the breadth of cultural values of his community and those around him and be able to process this into appropriate responses for his diverse users. Corroborating this Mestre (2010) opined that cultural competence goes beyond diversity awareness "it denotes an individual's ability to effectively interact with and among others whose values, behaviours, and environments are different from one's own". The question now is how do we develop or enhance this capability among librarians? The sure way of achieving this, is through interaction and cooperation among the professionals. ACRL (2012) explained that "a cultural competent librarian shall work with a wide range of people who are culturally different and similar to themselves and establish avenues for learning about the cultures of these colleagues, co-workers, and constituents. Hence, it is increasingly becoming obvious that librarians need to become more cross culturally capable.

Universal Access to Information and Knowledge

The axiom "information is power" and "knowledge is wealth" show that these two intangible commodities are indispensable in any human society. These two fundamental commodities are even products of one another; Madukoma (2011) described information as the sum total of processed and unprocessed data which enhances knowledge. Knowledge on the other hand can be described as the utilization of information to accomplish a specific purpose. Ochogwu, (1999) emphasized the importance of information and stated that it is a basic resource, which is as fundamental as food and energy and its access is one of the fundamental human rights. Generally information has been accepted as a powerful resource which is equal to other natural resources (Abdulwahab and Umma 2009). In the same vein, knowledge has also been said to be the fourth factor of production. Drucker (1994) cited in Onifade (2014) referred to knowledge as the primary resources for individual and for the economy while land, labor, and capital are secondary. The fact that information and knowledge are important cannot be overemphasized; hence, Nzotta (1993) cited by Onifade (2010) claimed that no individual, organization, and community can succeed without using information. Corroborating this, Madukoma, (2011) opined that access to information is essential for the economic, social, and political wealth of a nation.

Nevertheless, access to information and knowledge is often seen as more of a privilege than a right in many nations of the world. One of the characteristics of information is that it is abundant, unlike the other economic resources which are scarce. Despite this, many barriers exist to hinder its accessibility such as education, technology, cost, and culture (Bridges and McElroy, 2015). As a result of this, many people are uninformed on crucial matters that affect their lives; in fact a lot of people are frustrated in their bid to get required information to solve problems. Bridges and McElroy (2015) observed that segmented access to information can be very dangerous and have severe consequences. In buttressing this, they referred to a New York Times editorial by Liberian health officers who claimed that the threat of Ebola had been identified as far back as 1982, but the research was locked up in expensive journal archives inaccessible to health practitioners in Liberia. The officers stated that;

> "had the virologist findings been linked to long-term effort to train
> Liberians to conduct research, to identify and stop epidemics and

deliver quality medical care, the outcome might have been different."

On this basis, Kahle and Ubois (2005) agreed that creation and dissemination of knowledge is important for building societies that grow and prosper.

Access to information has been greatly facilitated by the advent of Information Communication and Technology (ICT), but according to IFLA principle, access requires more than investment in technology infrastructure, it also requires a policy statement. Nevertheless, libraries must enable universal access to information and knowledge against all odds in order to fulfil the mandate of the profession; this can be achieved to some extend through networking among librarians both within and across national borders.

Methodology

This study employed the use of a self-designed online questionnaire and focus group discussion as the main instruments to collect data. In March of 2016 we began a two-phased research project exploring the expectations and opinions of our sister library team members. At the time of the research project, the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB) had 18 members on their sister library team, and Oregon State University had eight members on their team; these numbers do not include the two researchers, who serve as both members and coordinators of the sister library teams. The online survey was sent to 26 members of sister library teams but one mail bounced back.

The first phase of the project was designed to assess the perception of sister library team members of the newly established sister library partnership. In March of 2016 each team member was emailed an invitation to participate in an online survey; the email also provided an informed consent document and link to the survey. A reminder email was sent one week after the initial email. A total of 16 responses were received, eight from OSU team members and eight from FUNAAB team members. The online survey had 13 questions and each had a Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The thirteen questions were grouped into four sections. Section A related to the perception of the library staff about the sister library relationship, Section B investigated team members' opinions about how the sister library relationship may or may not increase their individual cross-cultural capabilities, Section C delved into the topic of information access, and Section D inquired about potential benefits for each library. The survey also had three open-ended questions:

1. If you have any concerns about this sister library relationship, what are they?
2. What do you hope to achieve, professionally or personally, as a result of participating in this sister library relationship?
3. Do you have anything else you would like to say?

The second phase of the project was designed to gather qualitative information. Approximately two months after the initial invitation to participate in the online survey, two separate emails were sent inviting all sister library team members to participate in a focus group. There was one focus group for each team; seven sister library team members participated in the OSU focus group and thirteen members participated in the FUNAAB focus group. The focus groups began by having participants to review silently a consent document and results from the online survey; results were broken out by institution. After participants finished reviewing the survey results, they were asked the following open-ended questions.

1. What stands out for you from the results of our sister library partner team?
2. What stands out for you from the results of our sister library team?
3. What concerns do you have?
4. Where should we go from here?
5. Do you have any final thoughts to share?
   The focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Results

The results of the survey revealed that out of the 25 members of the two sister library teams who received the online survey link only 16 members (8 members from OSU and 8 members from FUNAAB) responded; representing 64% response rate for the study.

One of the objectives of the study was to assess the perception of the sister library team members about the relationship between the two libraries. The following statements, in Table 1, were raised in order to assess perception.

Table 1: Perception of Librarians

Statements	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
I understand the potential benefits of a sister library relationship	12 (75%)	1 (6.25%)	3 (18.75%)
I am optimistic about our sister library relationship	13 (81.25%)	1 (6.25%)	2 (12.5%)
Our sister library is a welcome development	14 (87.5%)	1 (6.25%)	1 (6.25%)
Cumulative percentage (%)	81.25%	6.25%	12.5%

The results of the survey represented in Table 1 show that 75% of the respondents understood the potential benefits of the sister library relationship, 6.25% of the respondents did not. In the same vein 81.25% of the respondents were optimistic about the sister library relationship while 87.5% of the respondents agreed that the relationship is a welcome development. One can deduce from the above analysis that the majority of the respondents have a positive perception towards the relationship.

Another objective of the study was to examine how the relationship will enhance cross cultural capability among librarians of the two libraries. The results of this are reflected in Table 2

Table 2: Cross Cultural Capability

Statements	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
This relationship will increase my knowledge about libraries and librarians in other countries	15 (93.75%)	1 (6.25%)	-
This relationship has prompted me to think about libraries and librarians in other countries, more than before.	14 (87.5%)	1 (6.25%)	1 (6.25%)
This relationship has inspired me to learn more about Nigerian or US culture	12(75%)	2(12.5%)	2(12.5%)
Cumulative %	85.41%	8.3%	6.25%

Judging from the above results it was obvious that the majority of the respondents agreed that the relationship will enhance cross cultural capability through learning about one another's culture. A cumulative percentage of 85.41 % of respondents agreed with this while only 8.3% of the respondents disagreed.

The third objective was to examine the benefits the libraries stand to gain from the relationships. In order to know this, the respondents were asked to respond to the following statements in Table 3.

Table 3: Benefits the Libraries Stand to Gain

Statements	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
This relationship will help to solve technological issues in my library	7 (43.75%)	6 (37.5)	3 (18.75%)
This relationship will enable my library to reduce costs	5 (31.25)	6 (37.5)	5 (31.25)
This relationship will result in no tangible benefit to my library	2 (12.5%)	13 (81.25%)	1 (6.25%)
Cumulative Percentage %	29.16	52.08	18.75%

43.75% of the respondents agreed that the relationship will help solve technological issues in their libraries; although this percentage was recorded from the Federal University of Agriculture (FUNAAB) side. Worthy of notice in this aspect is also the fact that a greater proportion of the respondents disagreed with the point that the relationship will not bring any tangible results to their libraries. This indicated that the respondents were optimistic about the gains or benefits that this sister library relationship will bring to them, no matter how small.

The issue of universal access to information and knowledge was dealt with in the fourth objective

Table 4: Universal Access to information

Statements	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
I will learn about information access issues in other countries as a result of participating in this relationship	15 (93.75%)	1 (6.25%)	-
This relationship will improve my knowledge about information resources in other countries	14 (87.5%)	1 (6.25%)	1 (6.25%)
Cumulative	90.625%	6.25%	6.25%

The results represented in Table 4 clearly show that the respondents saw the relationship as an avenue to access information from one another. This will, in no small way, enhance their access to global knowledge.

Table 5: Library Services

Statements	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
This relationship has inspired me to research library-related topics that are new to me	10 (62.5%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (25%)
This relationship will result in improvements to my library's services	10 (62.5%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (25%)
Cumulative	62.5%	12.5%	25%

The results represented in Table 5 indicate that more than half of the respondents, 62%, agreed that the sister library relationship has inspired them to research more on library-related topics, (it is hoped that this will eventually have impact on service delivery). It is also interesting to note that another 62% of the respondents agreed that the relationship will somehow improve library services in their universities.

Discussion

Our sister library relationship formally began in September of 2015. Almost seven months later we distributed the online survey to sister library team members and one month afterward we conducted a follow-up focus group in each library. Responses to the online surveys and focus groups were overwhelmingly positive and hopeful. However, the following findings were identified as areas that require additional attention, discussion, and work in order to further develop a successful sister library partnership:

Creation and Maintenance of One-On-One Relationships

In both the online surveys and focus groups discussion, sister library team members in the US and Nigeria expressed a desire for one-on-one connections between staff. Although some team members had been paired with partners several months before the focus groups, and sent emails about the pairings, it was revealed during the focus groups that there was some confusion about the pairings and two-way communication had not yet happened. Based on

the feedback, we will implement the following procedure for pairings, and suggest future sister library partnerships consider similar activities.

First, each sister library team member will be paired with another member. Because there are more members on the team in Nigeria, US members will either be paired with two Nigerian staff members, or a US staff member who is not on the sister library team will be paired with Nigerian staff. The two coordinators will work together to pair members and create a master list, along with email contact information, that will be sent to all participants. After one month the coordinators will check-in to see that participants are satisfied. If participants are not satisfied, the coordinators will work together to remedy the situation. Second, when pairings are announced, a list of ten "conversation starters" will be included with the email announcement. Conversation starters will help partners kick-off their new professional relationship.

Technology Challenges

In the online survey FUNAAB participants overwhelming agreed that, "This relationship will help solve technical issues in my library." In the follow-up focus group Nigerian staff members again expressed optimism about the ability of the partnership to help with technological issues, but also expressed some concern about "meeting up with the standards" of the OSU libraries. Similarly, in the OSU focus group, staff members talked about technical issues at FUNAAB, including concerns about intermittent internet access and routine power outages. Ultimately, OSU librarians know little about the technological issues at FUNAAB and within Nigeria, because access to information on this topic has been limited.

Technological issues are of great concern to librarians in FUNAAB because, without relevant information technology tools, the library cannot perform optimally. Several attempts have been made to get the library fully automated, starting in 1999 with the use of TINLIB software, but this attempt did not succeed and another attempt was later made with the use of GLASS software, but this also failed. In fact, it is on record that FUNAAB library was the first library in West Africa to subscribe to The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library (TEEAL). Presently, the library uses Koha integrated library software, but there are still some fundamental problems to be resolved. Another major issue concerning technology at FUNAAB is funding, which has greatly hindered the library in acquiring the relevant information and technology tools needed to provide services to its various users. These on-going issues and the fact that FUNAAB library is at the mercy of the Information Communication Technology and Resource Centre of the University (ICTREC) (the center is responsible for distributing access to the internet), have forced the library to look beyond University management for help in resolving these barriers.

 Throughout the world computer technology has rapidly become central to library services. The most recent American Library Association's State of America's Libraries Report 2016 begins with the sentence, "Academic, school, and public libraries continue to face an uncertain economy as they shift resources and services to meet the needs of the 21st-century digital world." This statement applies equally as well to Nigerian libraries.

A next step in the conversation about technology between the sister libraries may be to have the librarians on the FUNAAB team write a short white-paper about their goals and desires related to technology. At this point in the relationship, while technology is a concern, the US sister library team remains relatively unaware of how they might best support the sister library staff. When the US library team better understands the topics that are of interest to

FUNAAB librarians, and the self-identified issues facing the Nimbe Adedipe Library, a plan of action can be co-developed between the sister libraries.

An equitable relationship In the online surveys, one US team member stated, "As an American, I worry that it's hard for us to move out of a paternalistic paradigm, so making sure that we are aware of those biases is important." This sentiment was repeated, expanded, and agreed upon by several participants in the US focus group, with one person saying, "…there is just such a long entrenched history with these issues, so there is being conscious of it, but then it's on both sides, that this is the way the structures have developed, so it's a difficult thing." Another librarian expressed concerns about not wanting to tell Nigerian librarians, "how to do things," or "this is the right way to do things," and concluded by saying, "…it's a shared experience and we are learning from each other."

It is not surprising to hear US librarians express trepidation about entering into a relationship with librarians in Africa. According to Suarin (2012), an international relations scholar, colonization hit its zenith in 1947, after the conclusion of WWII, and the "historical transition from imperial to international world order and from international to globalized world order is highly questionable," he goes on to note that there is a "long shadow of history" (p. 23-24).

Many people in the US are ashamed of the country's colonialist history and worry about continuing that narrative into the future. It is a "difficult thing" as one of the focus group members stated. It is possible that some libraries and librarians in the US may avoid developing sister library relationships with libraries in Africa for fear of continuing or repeating imperialist history. However, the two researchers believe that cross-cultural learning is one way to bridge understanding and offer counter-narratives to history and current reality. Embracing reflection and conversation about the fraught nature of this legacy, rather than avoiding it, is one way to enact many of our stated professional values, such as inclusion, equity, and access for all. Hudson (2012), a librarian in Guelph, Canada, writes about the "critical discourse of global justice in library and information science" and suggests a beginning step of "self-reflection in our interventions in global inequality" (p. 69). Hudson concludes his thought-provoking article by stating that, "[we] must start, in concrete terms, with a rigorous practice of asking ourselves difficult questions about what we understand and believe" (p. 83). He goes on to say that we cannot find the answers, until we ask the questions. For our sister library teams, and others, there is no easy path, but the first step for our librarians may be the "self-reflection" and "critical self-scrutiny" that Hudson (2012) suggests, followed by conversations within our libraries and across international borders.

Conclusion

Although the sister library relationship between FUNAAB library and OSU library is barely a year old, the study revealed that the stakeholders are committed to sustaining the relationship. Even though both libraries have their fears (the fear of meeting up with each other's expectations), they are ready to share their strengths to improve their weaknesses. They are ready to respect the fact that they are different people with one common goal 'creating universal access to information and knowledge'.

This relationship started with a "coming together" when the two coordinators met at the American Library Association Conference in 2015, and shortly thereafter established a formal sister library initiative. After approximately seven months the researchers conducted the online study and focus groups in order to assess library team members' perceptions and

identify early bumps-in-the-road: a way of "keeping together." The next step is to further our relationship by "working together" in an effort to improve services at two academic libraries in different countries to achieve greater efficiency, face new challenges in the profession globally, and enhance service delivery for our diverse users.

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