

Barriers in Collection Sharing among Libraries of Pakistan: University Library Managers' Viewpoint

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Abstract

University libraries in Pakistan are a privileged type of libraries with comparatively sound collections and good staff strength. They spend a large portion of their funds on developing in-house collections in isolation. In spite of the prevailing information and communication technology (ICT), there is hardly any practice of sharing collections in a formal manner. Using a survey method, this study explores the barriers to collection sharing among the well established chartered university libraries situated in the major cities of Pakistan. The survey followed a qualitative design based on an interview technique of data collection. Twenty chief/head librarians from five major cities of Pakistan were interviewed. These in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted at the librarians' workplaces during 2003 to 2004. The data analysis of the present study revealed that various technical, procedural, psychological, and behavioral barriers in achieving planned and meaningful collection-sharing (CS) programs still prevail. It suggests analyzing the possibilities, opportunities, and challenges of CS in the emerging paradigm. The findings and suggestions may be of value to developing countries with similar situations.

Keywords: Resource Sharing and University Libraries; Library Cooperation in Pakistan; University Librarianship in Pakistan; Collection Sharing in Pakistan

Introduction

The need to share other libraries' collections is as old as libraries themselves. It is said that the Alexandria library shared its collection with the Pergamum library in 200 B.C. There is much literature on the emerging patterns and issues of sharing collections with other libraries on the local, regional, and international levels. Resource sharing (RS) is a commonly used umbrella term covering different forms, including interlibrary loan, document delivery, consortia/remote circulation, access services, courier services, and other shared library services. For the purpose of this study, the term *collection sharing* (CS) has been used instead of resource sharing since most of the discussions in this study revolve around sharing collections.

While libraries in leading countries such as the USA, Britain, Canada, and Australia have found new models and ways of sharing collections and have

developed consortia, libraries in developing countries such as Pakistan are still far behind in planning even primitive kinds of such arrangements, e.g., inter-library loan (ILL). A few serious efforts have been made towards library cooperation by some libraries and organizations but in vain. According to Haider (2003), "awareness of resource sharing in Pakistan in its present day form is a phenomenon of the 1980s." He identified the causes for the failure of certain resource sharing projects as "absence of proper planning, lack of competent human resources, non-availability of standards, non-existence of bibliographic apparatus and absence of leadership" (p. 55). There is a serious need to probe this phenomenon given the presence of the emerging digital paradigm.

Literature Review

A huge body of literature on the subject of resource sharing is available; its need, issues, and various forms have been discussed in almost every text on the subject of collection development and in professional journals. Since the 1990s, extended access to electronic databases through computer networks at the global level has added much to discussion, planning, and practice in the realm of RS. For example, *Library Trends* (1997) discussed the issue in the presence of swiftly developing digital resources and communication technologies, and Shreeves (1997) mentioned that the digital environment would offer new opportunities and challenges for cooperative activities making information resources available to clients. In the presence of print media and with the expansion of electronic network information, it is important to focus on areas of cooperation.

The literature establishes that it is difficult to devise successful CS programs as common practice. Evans and Saponaro (2005) mentioned that

based on the volume of material, a newcomer to the field might think that libraries have been successfully engaged in such activities for a long time. However, just [the] opposite is the case. . . . What has changed in the last few years is a rapid growth of consortia that purchase electronic resources (p. 339).

Nevertheless, Nitecki and Renfro (2004) found that the direct borrowing model is the biggest breakthrough in RS:

This model allows faculty and students to perform a single search in a union catalog, to know immediately what is available on the shelf, to request items online, and to have a fairly reliable guarantee that books will be ready for pick up within a specific number of days. . . . This model reduces staff involvement for a reader to obtain a needed book (p. 132).

The situation evolving in less developed countries is not very encouraging. For example, a study by Majid, Eisenschitz, and Anwar (1999) found that RS was basically limited to interlibrary lending and document delivery activities in the agricultural libraries in Malaysia. Only limited RS activity was observed among participating libraries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' region. Nevertheless, according to Kaul (1999), the Delhi Library Network

(DELNET) is a growing resource sharing service in the Delhi region, offering a range of products and services to facilitate the exchange of information among 86 member libraries.

The review of literature published in Pakistan presents a very dismal state of CS among libraries. The index compiled by Z. Khurshid (1974), *Ten Years Work in Librarianship in Pakistan: 1963-1972*, mentioned seven works on cooperation. This indicates that library professionals showed some awareness of library cooperation during the late 1960s. Samdani and Mahmood's (1999) *An Index of 50 Years' Work in Pakistan: (1947-1997)* listed seven works under the heading resource sharing and five under cooperation for the Pakistani scenario.

Two significant doctoral studies have addressed this issue: Khan (1991) concluded that formal cooperation is almost nonexistent in Pakistan. Informal cooperation, however, exists in the form of inter-library loan through reprographic services, and Khalid (1997) found that cooperative and network systems in developing countries exist through personal contacts and on an ad-hoc basis. Khalid's study proposed a multi-staged model for the implementation of cooperation and networking in developing countries to cover local, regional, and national levels. It also concluded that the lack of standardization in services and in technical processing is a major obstacle in developing cooperative activities. More currently, Sharif (2006) proposed various possible models to initiate collection sharing among different types of libraries in Lahore, and Jaswal (2006) discussed opportunities for sharing resources using digital technology in Pakistan.

Theoretically, professionals have discussed the benefits of CS, but, as identified by Haider (2003), on the practical level there have been only a few significant but temporary attempts at cooperation among scientific and special libraries. In October 2004, the governor of the Punjab, who is also chancellor of all universities in the Punjab, constituted a Chancellor's Consultative Group (CCG) for finding ways and means to share resources of universities, including resources of their libraries. But after three years no further action has been taken by the universities in this regard. This may be due to vacant positions of chief-librarians in the majority of the university libraries of the Punjab (Ilyas, 2007).

Another significant activity in this regard was a five-day "National Workshop on Resource Sharing and Networking of Libraries and Documentation Centers" from April 11-15, 2005, in Islamabad with the collaboration of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. The Directorate of Scientific Information, National Agriculture and Research Council, Islamabad, organized this workshop, and it was attended by over 90 head librarians and documentalists from all over Pakistan.

The literature illustrates that awareness of mutual cooperation among librarians has existed. As Jaswal (2006) stated, the concept of resource sharing is not missing among libraries of Pakistan. An unwritten code of conduct exists among librarians of Pakistan to informally borrow and lend materials to each other in urgent circumstances, an activity which is keeping the resource-sharing tradition alive though at a limited level (p. 89). Nevertheless, there is hardly any formal program of CS in academic and public libraries. A recent master's study by Asjad (2007) reports the non-existence of both a union catalog of hundreds of thousands of books in 54 departmental libraries of Punjab University and formal sharing amongst these libraries residing on the same campus. This is the state of CS in the oldest and the largest university of Pakistan. Haider's view that "resource sharing . . . is an almost untouched aspect of librarianship in Pakistan" (2003, p. 58) still seems true in the present situation.

This literature review demonstrates that in spite of recognizing the need for CS, the recommendations presented in two doctoral studies, and an exclusive workshop on the subject, the situation has not changed much and barriers continue to exist. This paper analyzes the reasons behind this deficiency with an assumption that the findings will provide constructive information to the parties concerned.

Aims of the Study

Given the circumstances of CS discussed above, this study aims to:

- discover the prevailing status of collection sharing in the university libraries of Pakistan,
- find the reasons libraries are not participating in CS plans but continuing to work in isolation, and finally
- suggest possible ways of collection sharing.

Research Methodology

This study is based on a survey of well established chartered university libraries situated in major cities of Pakistan. The survey followed a qualitative design based on an interview technique of data collection. Twenty chief/head librarians from five major cities in Pakistan were interviewed and the list of libraries visited is at Appendix 1. These in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted at the librarians' workplaces.

In order to develop the interview-guide, a review of literature and consultation with peers were conducted. The interview technique was used to discover the thoughts of library leaders regarding issues of collection sharing. Interview tapes were then transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The content of the text was analyzed and categorized using a thematic approach. This was followed by reporting findings. The names of persons and universities have not been mentioned in order to avoid any controversy. Interviews were conducted during 2003 as part of a doctoral research plan of this author. First,

40 major universities of Pakistan were sent a self-completion questionnaire, and 30 responses were obtained after four reminders. Interviews were conducted with twenty librarians from sixteen of the responding university libraries (Ameen, 2005).

Findings, Interpretation, and Discussion

The data of the present study revealed that various barriers to achieving planned and meaningful CS programs still prevailed. It is apparent from responses to the self-completion questionnaire that out of thirty university libraries, only four (13 %) were engaged in a primitive level of interlibrary loan, while 26 (87%) libraries had no formal collection sharing programs.

The Barriers to the Creation of CS Programs

The main objective of this study was to analyze the underlying causes for the absence of a CS culture in the country. The strategy of conducting unstructured interviews proved beneficial in obtaining realistic and frank input. The interviewees very openly discussed the real causes, excuses, and barriers in this regard. The analysis of responses throws light on various reasons for and views regarding the status of CS and ILL programs in the university libraries of Pakistan. The barriers to initiating formal CS programs, as described by respondents, were extracted by a content-analysis of the verbatim transcripts from the interview recordings. Tables 1 and 2 present the barriers as mentioned by the interviewees along with the frequency of their occurrence in the interview text.

Table 1: Technical and Procedural Barriers

N= 20

<u>Responses</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
<p>University libraries do not have the basic infrastructure to initiate cooperative programs. To begin with, they do not have even union catalogs of departmental libraries on the same campus. All libraries have still not developed web OPACS; hence access to each other's catalogs is not available. We do not know about each other's collection strengths.</p>	10
<p>University libraries are engaged in developing their collections in isolation. Under these circumstances, librarians cannot proceed towards formal cooperation programs.</p>	2
<p>Librarians lack needed writing and communication skills for the documentation of such plans. No "how-to-do-it" training in this regard is available from educational institutions and professional associations. (Studies demonstrate that LIS professionals demonstrate poor communication skills, e.g., Ameen, 2007).</p>	4
<p>Cooperative plans should be developed among institutions at higher levels and in a formal manner rather than among librarians as personal favors to each other. Librarians take a risk in helping users and sometimes suffer for what may be regarded as irresponsible behavior.</p>	6
<p>Different university libraries' collections and infrastructures are not compatible with each other, which also creates barriers to CS. As a chief-librarian of an advanced engineering university in Karachi stated, "Sister libraries do not have compatible resources to offer in return; hence there is no motivation for mutual cooperation at the national level. However, we do share collections at the international level."</p>	2

Table 2: Psychological and Behavioral Barriers

N=20

<u>Responses</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
<p>Librarians feel they do not have any authority to develop formal cooperative plans. Therefore, it is the exclusive responsibility of university management to initiate such plans. Librarians should not be blamed in this regard.</p>	8
<p>There are problems of a possessive mindset on the part of both librarians and the administration. Faculty and higher authorities do not support the practice of lending materials to others without having much in return. Furthermore, they want to get their needs fulfilled locally and in a timely manner.</p>	5
<p>Librarians are afraid of losing materials during the sharing process. Interviewees mentioned that the higher administration of some universities consider book losses to be not a routine occurrence but the outcome of librarians' negligence. Consequently, librarians prefer to avoid taking part in such plans and having to deal with the consequences.</p>	8
<p>It was also mentioned by some librarians that they could not initiate a formal cooperative plan because it would add to their workload and they were already faced with a shortage of staff.</p>	3
<p>Behavior of librarians is not a barrier to cooperation. They are already cooperating, informally, by lending their collection to colleagues while personally taking the responsibility for any loss.</p>	7
<p>The careless attitude of users is also a barrier to collection sharing. An interviewee stated that "librarians face problems in getting back overdue books from the local faculty. How could they get them from outsiders?"</p>	6
<p>It was also mentioned that users in Pakistan are not information hungry enough to exert pressure on libraries for the initiation of such services. Information is not desperately needed in our academic culture due to less emphasis on research and the higher use of traditional teaching methods. (However, the situation is changing gradually in this regard since the Higher Education Commission's focus in 2004 on the promotion of research in higher education).</p>	3

Interpretation and Discussion

Anonymity has been maintained in this section due to the sensitivity of information. The quoted comments intend to highlight the basic issues in developing cooperative plans. The findings indicate that establishing formal cooperation among university libraries is a complicated matter. This researcher worked for eight years as a librarian of a departmental library in Punjab University and found that the faculty of the department lent a number of library books to their colleagues in other departments, but those books were never returned to the library. Hence, the irresponsible attitude of the faculty adds to the obstacles standing in the way of informal cooperative efforts on campus.

The analysis of qualitative data presents the stagnant and gloomy picture of CS. A vast majority of respondents (87%) have no formal plans even for ILL. The analysis of answers reveals that librarians do realize the importance of formal cooperation. However, due to varied technical, procedural, and behavioral obstacles, they have been unsuccessful in creating the infrastructure needed for formal CS. The most critical barrier has been the absence of automated lists of holdings, union catalogs, and Web OPACs together with a lack of initiative.

In addition, librarians are still possessive of their library collections. They are serving as custodians of collections, and in case of loss they are held accountable to the faculty and the audit department. The following comments by a senior respondent are quite illustrative of such barriers and fears:

We can go to the extent of sending photocopy or fax. No one would lend his or her library's books. One should help, I strongly believe, but to the extent that you and [the] collection should not suffer.

Another respondent stated, "Librarians are still very possessive about collections. They were taught [in old days] that they were the custodians of knowledge. Hence, they have become *custodians only*." Thus, planning for formal cooperation among universities appears to be an intricate affair. There is no sharing of collections between the central library and the independent departmental libraries. Moreover, library users' irresponsible behavior is also a barrier in formal and informal CS.

Nevertheless, during the 1990s efforts were made for collection sharing between the university and research libraries, but these efforts could never be materialized due to the above mentioned obstacles. To plan for ILL, RS, or CS happens to be a complex task due to various psychological, technical, and procedural barriers.

Recommendations

Although, it appears from the above discussion that CS is not an easy task, implementation of the following suggestions may bring some improvement in this regard:

- government authorities, librarians, and library administrations need to think seriously about the opportunities and challenges related to CS. Librarians need to take the initiative in this regard. They should make analyses of the possibilities, opportunities, and challenges of CS by coming out of isolation and exploring possible partners through an environmental analysis at the local, national, and international levels.
- The use of information and communication technologies is rising slowly. Librarians need to develop Web OPACS as a priority matter. Professional electronic groups have also emerged during the last few years and should be used to explore potential partners and to discuss safe possibilities of sharing.
- Workshops, guidelines, and special lecture sessions may motivate and facilitate professionals in planning CS programs. They need to learn about online resources available for their guidance, which may motivate them to take some initiative. Librarians need to realize that to initiate, to explore, to plan, and to convince higher authorities is their job. They cannot, however, put themselves in jeopardy by engaging in informal sharing as a personal courtesy.
- The Pakistan Library Association should delineate procedures, rules, and protocol for resource sharing at the local and national levels. University authorities and librarians should at least develop strategies for sharing collections among its departmental libraries and other university libraries in the same city.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that there are strong technical, procedural, and psychological barriers in developing formal CS. Despite pleading the concept in literature and discussions, librarians find it difficult to implement it in practical terms. With the emerging digital paradigm, however, facilities exist to bring positive results in this regard. There remains a dire need to motive, train, and devise a protocol for CS at the local and national levels. With librarians' initiative, surely the situation can change.

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APPENDIX 1

List of University Libraries Visited for Interview

- 1 Aga Khan University, Karachi.
- 2 Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad.
- 3 Government College University, Lahore.
- 4 Hamdard University, Karachi.
- 5 International Islamic University, Islamabad.
- 6 University of Karachi, Karachi.
- 7 Lahore University of Management Sciences, Lahore.
- 8 National College of Arts, Lahore.
- 9 NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi.
- 10 NWFP Agriculture University, Peshawar.
- 11 Peshawar University, Peshawar.
- 12 Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad.
- 13 University of Engineering and Technology, Lahore.
- 14 University of the Punjab, Lahore.
- 15 University of Sindh, Jamshoro.
- 16 Ziauddin Medical University, Karachi.