

Collaborative Library Policies: Fostering Partnership and Resource Sharing in Academic Libraries of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The spread of knowledge sources available in various formats and financial constraints has made it difficult for libraries to satisfy their users' needs. The basic aim of the study is to examine the potential, challenges, and implementation approaches of partnership and resource sharing in Pakistani academic libraries. A systematic search of academic databases was conducted using relevant keywords, focusing on scholarly articles, books, and reports. The selected literature was analyzed. The findings of the study states that there is strong relationship between collaborative library policies and their strategies, as well as the effectiveness of resource sharing in improving academic libraries and addressing students' information needs. Collaborative library policies can enhance resource sharing among academic libraries in Pakistan, allowing institutions to pool resources and expertise. This approach enables libraries to offer expanded services, improve access to collections, and optimize operations.

Keywords: Collaborative Library Policies, Library Partnership, Resource Sharing, Library Cooperation, Information Sharing, Library Services, Digital Libraries.

INTRODUCTION

Resource sharing is a vital concept in library science, often referred to as library networking. This involves interconnecting libraries to facilitate effective information and resource exchange, addressing challenges

like escalating costs, bibliographic management, and storage issues stemming from rapid information growth. By optimizing resources, resource sharing has become crucial for libraries worldwide, particularly in developing countries. Academic libraries can benefit from consortium building to subscribe to resources and meet patron needs. Governments should allocate funds for necessary technologies. Starting with interlibrary loans for high-demand, scarce print resources is recommended. Effective policies are also needed to ensure smooth resource sharing in academic libraries (Olubiyo, P. O., & Olubiyo, L. M., 2022).

In today's rapidly evolving academic landscape, libraries serve as the backbone of research and knowledge dissemination. At the heart of this mission lies Information Resource Sharing (IRS), a system that allows libraries to pool their resources, giving students, and researchers' access to a far wider range of materials than any single institution could provide alone. By sharing books, journals, and digital databases, IRS not only maximizes cost-efficiency but also ensures that knowledge is distributed more equitably (Usman, M., 2025) The problems of information explosion, ever changing users' needs, shrinking library budgets and currency devaluations can be overcome, to some extent, through resource sharing. Library professionals need to explore options to extend users' access to information sources by forming partnerships with other local libraries having similar collections. These collaborative arrangements enable patrons to access resources otherwise out of their reach. This requires each participating institution to contribute in the network of their extended libraries' family and do not operate in isolation. It is widely acknowledged that no library, no matter how large and well-funded it is, can be self-sufficient in meeting its users' demands. Hence, libraries in Pakistan need to develop cooperative plans to meet the challenges posed by rapid growth and diversity of knowledge sources, increased users' demands and expectations, decreased budgets, hiking prices of books, journals and databases are the major reasons for cooperation amongst libraries (Sharif, A., 2006)

Sharing of knowledge is very important for its dissemination as “it is said that knowledge is a power, yet this is of little value if it is not shared” (Noonan, 2008: 51). Collaboration can be defined in different ways. It can be defined as the process in which individuals or organizations cooperate with one another in matters that can be solved more efficiently by collective efforts as compared to individual efforts. Collaboration can also be considered as a “working practice whereby individuals work together to a common purpose to achieve business benefit” (Global Community of Information Professionals, 2014). Collaboration is a viable connection that can be forged by sharing work practices, skills, and resources with the help of different collaborative tools such as emailing groups, social networking sites and online meetings, etc. Collaboration among two or more organizations may be an avenue through which cooperative training activities may be organized by sharing funds, exchanging experts (trainers) working in those organizations, and making available physical facilities for the participants of training workshops (Ullah, A., 2016).

The main objectives of information resource sharing include, but are not limited to; increase availability of resources, extend the accessibility of resources, diminish cost and promote the utilization of resources (Posner, 2017). Additionally, the study by Looney (2020) on library marketing established that for the library to remain relevant and deliver content which library members find useful, it is vital to adopt a good information resources sharing techniques that would at least help to address the information needs of library patrons. Although information resource sharing has been advantageous in various libraries it is unclear whether library stakeholders in Tanzania are well informed about the forms, benefits and the extent libraries rely on information resources sharing (Mubofu, C., & Chaula, S., 2020).

Today, Libraries are confronted with the unprecedented challenge of showing relevance to society the way they offer their services. Today's users have more opportunities to access information. The rapid development of the Internet has greatly changed the entire information phenomenon. To ensure relevance, libraries need to adapt to the needs of their target market. Libraries need to understand that they have earned

a presence for their clients. This is a good proof that a library that understands the idea of the market is closest to the customer (Das & Sahu, 2012; Shah, N. U., & Idrees, H., 2021).

Statement of the problem:

Academic libraries in Pakistan face challenges in meeting the diverse information needs of their users with their local collections alone. To address this, resource sharing through collaborative efforts with other libraries is essential, allowing access to a broader range of materials. While global university libraries have adopted resource sharing to enhance services (Beryl, 2013), preliminary investigations suggest that many academic libraries in Pakistan lack the necessary infrastructure and strategies to effectively engage in resource sharing and collaborative practices (Shah, N. U., et al, 2025).

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study is to investigate the resource sharing practices and management of collections in academic libraries across Pakistan. This aims to accomplish these goals by analyzing published literature to;

1. To identify existing collaborative initiatives and partnerships among academic libraries.
2. To assess the types of resources being shared among libraries (e.g., collections, staff expertise, technology).
3. To examine the benefits and challenges of resource sharing and collaboration in academic libraries.

Research Questions:

1. What is the current state of collaboration among academic libraries in Pakistan?
2. How does different types of resource sharing impact library services and operations?
3. What are the key benefits and challenges of resource sharing and collaboration in academic libraries?

LITERATURE REVIEW

No single library can boast of being self-sufficient in terms of providing the information resources that will meet the information needs of its clientele satisfactorily. This makes a good case for resource sharing among libraries. Resource sharing entails all arrangements entered into by willing cooperating libraries to share their information resources together in order to serve their patrons better (Chisita & Fombad, 2019). The main purpose of resource sharing is to increase the use of library resources through making it easily available to library users for the satisfaction of their information needs (Cuhader, Cimen & Turan, 2019). Resource sharing saves cost and time to both librarians and library users. The libraries that are involved in resource sharing are saved the expenses of repurchasing materials that are already available in other libraries (Ugodu, H. N., et al., 2024).

Resource sharing involves libraries agreeing to mutually share resources like document collections, staff, technical facilities, and support to enhance client services (Bangoni, Chizwara, & Moyo, 2018). Academic libraries serve as key information hubs, gathering diverse resources to support academic achievement

(Mubofu & Malekani, 2019). To meet growing educational needs, libraries should collaborate to provide relevant information through various resource-sharing models (Mubofu, 2019). However, many libraries struggle to acquire resources that meet user needs (Chen, 2013), highlighting the importance of interlibrary cooperation to satisfy patron demands. This arrangement enables libraries to leverage each other's resources and services (Mubofu, C., & Chaula, S., 2020).

The mission and goals of any library revolves around meeting the informational, educational, or recreational needs of its clientele. How do information professionals know the needs of their users or potential users and satisfy them? The answer to this question is one of the major keys to successful collection development and management policies and procedures. (Khan, G., & Bhatti, R., 2021).

As academic libraries continue to face acquisition budget challenges, collaborative collection development (CCD) offers greater opportunities to fulfill the core role of library collecting and collection management, namely, to provide enhanced access to the widest variety of relevant resources in the most cost-responsible manner possible. Libraries have successfully implemented CCD projects of various types, and as a result, have achieved these needed cost savings. (Levenson, H. N., & Hess, A. N., 2020). The authors conducted survey research to investigate current CCD activities and librarians' perceptions of its benefits, drawbacks, elements contributing to successful CCD programs, and possible obstacles to success. Library collections consist of a variety of material formats and librarians have applied CCD models to maintain needed access to these resources, shifting from ownership to access, all in support of building collective collections. The survey results found that, although challenges can exist, application of CCD activities have realized substantial benefits, financial and otherwise, for academic libraries overall. (Levenson, H. N., & Hess, A. N., 2020).

Resource Sharing in Electronic Environment:

A study conducted by Imo (2017) expressed that electronic information resource sharing has been identified as the critical factor for effective functioning of libraries in this present ICT dispensation. Resource sharing in libraries has undergone a significant transformation, evolving from its primitive form of interlibrary loans, which dates back to ancient libraries like Alexandria and Pergamum (Nagy, 2020). The advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has revolutionized this concept, expanding it beyond traditional interlibrary loans. Digital documents, new scholarly communication methods, and Web 2.0 tools like wikis, blogs, and cloud computing have reshaped how libraries access and share information. (Barreto, H. M., & Dessai, P. S., 2021).

ICTs have eliminated geographical barriers, enabling faster and more efficient resource sharing. As the volume of information grows, libraries face the challenge of delivering the right information to users promptly. The resource sharing model is built around this goal, aiming to support the academic and research needs of faculty and students by providing timely and accurate information. Given that no library can possibly hold all knowledge, resource sharing is essential for meeting user needs. Various library networks, such as OCLC, JANET, ERNET, DELNET, and INFLIBNET, facilitate this process, though their success rates vary (Barreto, H. M., & Dessai, P. S., 2021).

Challenges and limitations in traditional resource sharing methods

Extending this sharing responsibility farther than the conventional library activities involves sharing library resources with the patrons of other libraries. However, some libraries let the fear of having their resources be stolen or misused influence their sharing responsibilities, thus, they run away from resource sharing (Speirs, M., 2006).

Some of the more common ways for academic libraries to share resources, like interlibrary loans (ILL) and real trades, have a lot of problems that make them less efficient and useful. One of the biggest problems is that handling real loans is very hard to organize. Coordinating the loan and borrowing of actual materials between many institutions takes a lot of work in the office, like taking care of requests, sending things, and keeping track of returns. This process can take a long time and be prone to delays, which can make it harder for students and teachers to get to materials on time. Traditional resource sharing is also limited by the need to stick to a budget. To keep large actual libraries and support interlibrary loan services, a lot of money needs to be spent. (Poundekar, M. D., et al., 2024).

Libraries, especially those in smaller towns or areas that are still growing, often have trouble with tight funds that make it hard for them to fully join resource sharing networks. More than that, the costs of sending real items can add up, putting even more pressure on finances. The waste of resources is another important problem. With the old ways of doing things, many institutions would have the same real copies of the same materials, which wasted room and money. With budget cuts and the need for libraries to get the most out of their money, this repetition is a big problem. Additionally, actual collections are limited by room, and it may not be possible to add to them to meet the needs of growing academic groups. Another big problem is that it can be hard to get around. Methods for sharing physical resources are naturally limited by limits set by institutions and places. It can be hard for students and teachers in different places to quickly get the materials they need, especially when those materials are rare or specialized and not widely available (Poundekar, M. D., et al., 2024).

METHODOLOGY

This paper used the literature-based qualitative research design to investigate the concept of collaborative library policies and resource-sharing practices in Pakistani academic libraries. The search of the main academic databases and other academic sources on the topic of research was carried out systematically to gather published literature on the topic. The search terms employed were collaborative library policies, library partnership, resource sharing, library cooperation, interlibrary loan, consortium, information sharing, library networks, academic partnerships, library services and digital libraries. To verify the relevance and credibility of the sources, only peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, and institutional reports were searched. The literature retrieved was carefully filtered and the only literature that was chosen to be analyzed is the literature that directly relates to collaboration, partnership models and resource sharing initiatives in academic libraries especially in the developing or similar context.

The content analysis of the literature selected was then done in-depth in identifying, classifying and interpreting significant themes regarding the potential benefits, challenges and implementation strategies of collaborative practices in Pakistan based academic libraries. The analysis was aimed at knowing how the partnerships and resource-sharing mechanisms can lead to improved library services, better access to information and efficient use of the resources. The synthesized results were methodically examined and explained to address the connection between the collaborative library policies and strategies to adopt them. The ability of these policies to meet the information needs of users, particularly students, and their contribution to the overall performance and quality of service delivery of the academic libraries were also given special attention.

DISCUSSION

It is constantly observed in the literature that no academic library alone is capable of supporting the growing and more specialized information demands of students and scholars. This fact is magnified in Pakistan, as

most university libraries are operating with limited budgets with the same breath they are experiencing an increase in subscription fees, as well as increased demands of digital and remote access. Research of collaboration in Pakistani university contexts has established that cooperation is already present- most often under traditional and low-cost forms like exchange of books and together professional activity since this can be facilitated without sophisticated infrastructure and complicated licensing deals (Shah, N. U., et al., (2025). Indicatively, a national survey of cooperation in university networks found that the most common type of cooperation practiced was exchange of books, and the more challenging collaboration (e.g., shared OPAC development, virtual reference and automation coordination) was relatively less widespread.

Benefits indicators: Accessibility and Quality of Service

The most common and consistently reported positive outcome of collaboration in the reviewed literature is increased access, especially to print collections and fundamental services. In the same survey of university-networks the respondents extensively related cooperation with the enhanced access to print resources as well as the high quality of services alongside the enhanced coordination of acquisitions.

These results are consistent with the wider international evidence that resource sharing is a fundamental service to the further extension of collection coverage and ongoing access in times of cost pressure (*in the form of cancellations*). As an example, research library resource sharing has been connected to the emerging focus on resource sharing and the instruments that can underpin it (Blessinger, K., 2025).

The digital access efforts at the national level are also a significant component of the resource sharing ecosystem in the context of Pakistan. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) Digital Library is a broadly placed tool as the means of delivering access to peer-reviewed academic materials on scale, a centralized access model that facilitates research and teaching in institutions (Baqi, Abdul, and Munir Ahmed., 2022).

Resource Sharing and Collaborative Library Policies

This study highlights that collaborative library policies play a pivotal role in enhancing resource sharing among academic libraries in Pakistan. Collaborative efforts improve access to both digital and physical resources, optimize library budgets by reducing duplication, and foster a culture of shared growth (Ahmad, B., et al., 2024). However, effective implementation hinges on addressing challenges like coordination, policy alignment, and ensuring institutional buy-in. Overall, well-crafted collaborative policies can significantly boost resource sharing and strengthen academic libraries in Pakistan.

Collaborative library policies can enhance resource sharing among academic libraries in Pakistan, allowing institutions to pool resources and expertise. This approach enables libraries to offer expanded services, improve access to collections, and optimize operations. Shared cataloguing, joint collection development, and coordinated reference services are examples of collaborative applications. Studies highlight the impact of such policies on library functions. Collaborative efforts can alleviate workload pressures and improve user experiences by providing seamless access to resources. Libraries can offer 24/7 access to information and personalized recommendations through shared platforms, fostering a more user-friendly experience. Collaborative policies also support research planning and education across institutions. However, challenges like coordination, policy alignment, and awareness among LIS professionals in Pakistan need addressing.

Key challenges limiting effective collaboration in Academic Libraries

The analyzed literature identifies a number of common problems that slow down the transformation of informal collaboration to formal resource sharing.

Creating union catalogues is consistently found to be necessary and challenging, as well as interoperable discovery. The literature published on university libraries in Lahore city that though many libraries are automated, have access to the internet, and have awareness of standards, there are significant obstacles such as non-standardized software, absence of consistent policy, budgetary pressures and work pressures that negatively impact on the development of coordinated union-catalogue (Mairaj, M. I., & Mukaram, M., 2024).

It becomes easier to work together when responsibilities, eligibility, workflow, and cost-sharing are well promoted. However, information available in Pakistan indicates that the lack of a policy, or the lack of consistency, exacerbates the number of perceived barriers, especially when the cooperation is not officially encouraged and funded (Bibi, T., & Zakria., 2024). It is a structural problem, since, without a policy alignment, the cooperative work is still left in the hands of individuals, personal relationships, and thus, easily subjected to turnover of staffs and change in institutional priorities.

According to a research conducted in Pakistan on the use of digital libraries, it is emphasized how the lack of skills and professional training can diminish the usefulness of national digital access programs and both collaborative and independent initiatives. Lacking proper training of librarians in the area of licensing interpretation, interlending procedures, metadata processes, or online delivery of services, the process of resource sharing is delayed and less efficient.

Cloud-based platforms and workflow automation are also helping in enhancing the sharing of resources across boundaries. As an example, OCLC Interlibrary Loan is described as an automated and cloud-based model to simplify the process of borrowing/lending and connect with large resource sharing networks (Mairaj, M. I., & Mukaram, M., 2024).

Although the context of Pakistan is different, the implication applies: unless the workflow is modernized, ILL and document delivery might continue being labor-intensive, slow, and unreliable, and thus the user satisfaction box will remain small, limiting the scale.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicates that joint projects can play a positive role in enhancing the responsiveness of libraries to the requests of students, especially in expanding access to print and electronic resources, not limited to the local collections. The national level programs and informal collaboration between institutions have been significant in assisting in teaching, learning, and research. But the literature also emphasizes that the success of such collaborative work is disproportionate and is frequently constrained by the structural and operational issues. The barriers are the absence of standardized policies, the lack of technological infrastructure, the deficiency of professional training, and the absence of clear governance structures to facilitate the long-term collaboration. The study further demonstrates that while access to shared resources is crucial, access alone does not guarantee effective use. The success of collaborative library policies depends on efficient workflows, skilled library staff, user awareness, and supportive institutional leadership. Libraries that combine resource sharing with user education, staff capacity building, and service-oriented approaches are better positioned to meet the evolving expectations of academic users.

The collaborative library policies and resource-sharing practices have substantial potential to strengthen academic libraries in Pakistan, particularly in improving access, service quality, and user satisfaction. To fully realize these benefits, academic libraries and governing bodies should move toward more structured, policy-driven collaboration supported by standardized systems, professional development, and sustainable funding models. Future empirical research is recommended to assess user satisfaction, service efficiency, and the measurable academic impact of collaborative initiatives, thereby providing evidence-based guidance for strengthening library cooperation at institutional and national levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Library professionals in Pakistan should develop skills in collaborative technologies and resource sharing platforms to boost inter-library cooperation.
- Incorporate collaborative library policies and resource sharing strategies into LIS curriculum to prepare future librarians for joint initiatives.
- Devise a national policy for collaborative library services, focusing on resource sharing, and promote a positive attitude among librarians towards partnerships.
- Conduct workshops on collaborative tools and benefits of resource sharing for LIS professionals in Pakistan.
- Encourage pilot projects between libraries to test collaborative policies and improve resource sharing practices.

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