

Consortia-Based Resource Sharing in Pakistan Academic Libraries: Opportunities, Barriers, and Future Directions

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ABSTRACT

Resource sharing based on consortia has become an important solution to academic libraries facing the increased costs of information, limited budgets and growing demand of electronic resources. Libraries can improve access to scholarly work by promoting collaborative arrangements so that they can reduce dependence on institutional collections and increase sharing. The urgency of such programs is heightened by the fact that digital scholarship is spreading, and individual institutions are facing financial demands. Pakistani academic libraries largely rely on collaborative and nation-wide consortia in order to gain fair access to scholarly data. These consortia are organized as organized groups that combine subscriptions, enter into licensing contracts and share electronic resources among the member institutions. Through them, they are an important process by which the scarcity of resources can be relieved, as well as serve as a way to maintain academic competitiveness. The current quantitative research paper critically analyzes the future outlook, challenges and future prospects of resource sharing in consortia in Pakistani academic libraries developed with the lens of professional librarians. The study used a survey research design where structured responses were obtained by conducting interviews on librarians working in both the public and private universities throughout the country. The data collection was structured in a way that was able to obtain subtle information on the perceived effectiveness, concrete value, and operational issues related to the participation in the consortia. The methodology used analytic procedures through descriptive statistics to question the perceptions of librarians on the effectiveness, advantages, and obstacles of the consortia-based resource sharing. Central tendency measures and variability measures were used to answer a question about the level of consensus and the differences of opinion among the respondents. The evidence of the empirical data shows that consortia programs significantly enhance access to electronic resources and offer valuable support to research work. However, there are still certain barriers especially financial setbacks due to institutional financial constraints, technology gaps as a result of inequalities in infrastructure and policy considerations that

impede the best collaboration between the stakeholders. The research ends by giving a series of practical suggestions that would strengthen the practice of consortia-based resource sharing in Pakistan. Additional financial investment, technology support, and policy changes that streamline the consortia systems' accountability and governance frameworks are the suggested interventions. This study offered useful information that can direct the creation of particular regulations and tactical plans focused on long-term library cooperation. Having defined both the facilitators and obstacles to the consortia engagement, the research provides a factual basis to the decision-makers to drive forward a collaborative strategy that ensures equitable access to scholarly information in the country.

Keywords: *Library consortia, resource sharing, academic libraries, Pakistan, quantitative study*

INTRODUCTION

The fast growth of academic information and the increasing price of academic publications have been a big challenge to the library systems across the globe. The libraries are being subjected to the growing demands of offering access to a wide range of high-quality information resources under tight financial constraints. This has in turn rendered the conventional methods of collection development ineffective to respond to the various and ever-increasing demands of academic societies. Resource sharing through consortia, in this case, has become a strategic solution and the libraries have been able to cooperate, share resources and negotiate together access to electronic information.

The higher education sector in Pakistan has grown significantly in the last 20 years, which has led to the increased demand of digital scholarly resources by the students, faculty members and researchers. Academic libraries, nonetheless have been facing the problem of tight budgets, lack of adequate technological infrastructure as well as subscriptions that are based on the foreign currency. Efforts organized by consortia, especially those that are supported by the country associations have been key in alleviating such predicaments by offering access to electronic journals, databases, and other digital materials on a shared basis.

Although the role of library consortia is becoming more and more topical, there is little empirical evidence that studies the effectiveness, opportunities, and challenges of library consortia in the Pakistani context. The available research work is mostly descriptive in nature, or conceptual, without providing strong quantitative data based on the perceptions and experiences of librarians. To fill this gap, therefore, this paper aims at undertaking an empirical research on consortia as a mode of resource sharing among Pakistani academic libraries using a quantitative research design.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The traditional definition of library consortia is collective agreements between libraries that are intended to achieve the shared goals, especially in the areas of resources procurement and services provision. The ability of consortia to reduce subscription bills, expand access to electronic repositories, and the collaboration of libraries has always been highlighted in international scholarship. Research studies conducted empirically in developing settings have shown that resource sharing facilitated by consortia has a beneficial effect on quality library services and customer satisfaction.

In the South Asian context, the studies show that national and regional consortial efforts provide libraries with significant advantages in academic libraries. Consortium membership enhances access to electronic resource and support scholarly research, according to comparative studies conducted in Bangladesh and India. However, there lingers the difficulty of financial sustainability and infrastructural preparedness. These findings are especially relevant to Pakistan where similar economic and technological environments dominate.

Within the Pakistani academic community, the existing academic discussion on the topic of library consortia is highly focused on the Digital Library project launched by the Higher Education Commission. Recent research findings argue that the HEC Digital Library has significantly increased the access to international scholarly materials as well as, coincidentally, research output in the universities. However, researchers have pointed to such problems as disparate institutional access, lack of training, and poor knowledge of existing resources. The lack of larger-scale quantitative research assessing the views of librarians highlights the urgency of the empirical research, an undertaking taken in the current research.

Research Objectives

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To identify the level of awareness among academic librarians regarding consortia-based resource sharing in Pakistan.
2. Identify the major opportunities of consortia-based resource sharing in Pakistani academic libraries.
3. Find the key barriers faced by academic libraries in implementing consortia-based resource sharing.
4. To Evaluate librarians' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of consortia initiatives in supporting academic and research activities.
5. Suggest future directions for improving consortia-based resource sharing in Pakistan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate resource sharing among the consortia in Pakistani academic libraries, the study used a quantitative research design and a survey approach. Data on librarians that work in the university's public and private sectors was gathered using a questionnaire based on the appropriate literature. The tool covered five dimensions related to awareness, opportunity, barriers, and future improvement plans regarding library consortia. It was based on a five-point Likert scale. The convenience sampling was used to sample 120 participants. The reliability of the instrument was measured through Cronbach alpha that gave a coefficient of 0.87 thus showing high internal consistency. The data collected was processed using descriptive statistical methods, which included frequency distribution, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Data collected from academic librarians analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. The results presented in the form of tables to provide a clear understanding of respondents' perceptions.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents (N = 120)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	72	60%
	Female	48	40%
Sector	Public Universities	78	65%
	Private Universities	42	35%
Experience	Less than 5 years	34	28.3%
	5–10 years	46	38.3%
	More than 10 years	40	33.4%

The demographic data shows that the respondents were representatives of the public and private sector universities with different professional experience. The presence of both sectors in the sample makes the sample more representative and allows making a balanced representation of the practices of consortia in different institutional contexts. The difference in the professional experience implies that the responses provide the view of both early-career and senior librarians to the question, thus, making insights into the operational and strategic aspects of resource sharing. The older librarians are also more likely to see the thing of changes in consortia practices overtime as the less experienced professionals will be better able to represent the current realities of operation. This heterogeneity, in turn, makes the findings valid and allows the research findings to be generalized across academic libraries of the Pakistan sector.

Table 2: Perceived Opportunities of Consortia-Based Resource Sharing

Statement	Mean	SD
Enhances access to electronic resources	4.32	0.61
Reduces subscription costs	4.25	0.68
Supports research and teaching activities	4.41	0.57
Encourages professional collaboration	4.18	0.72

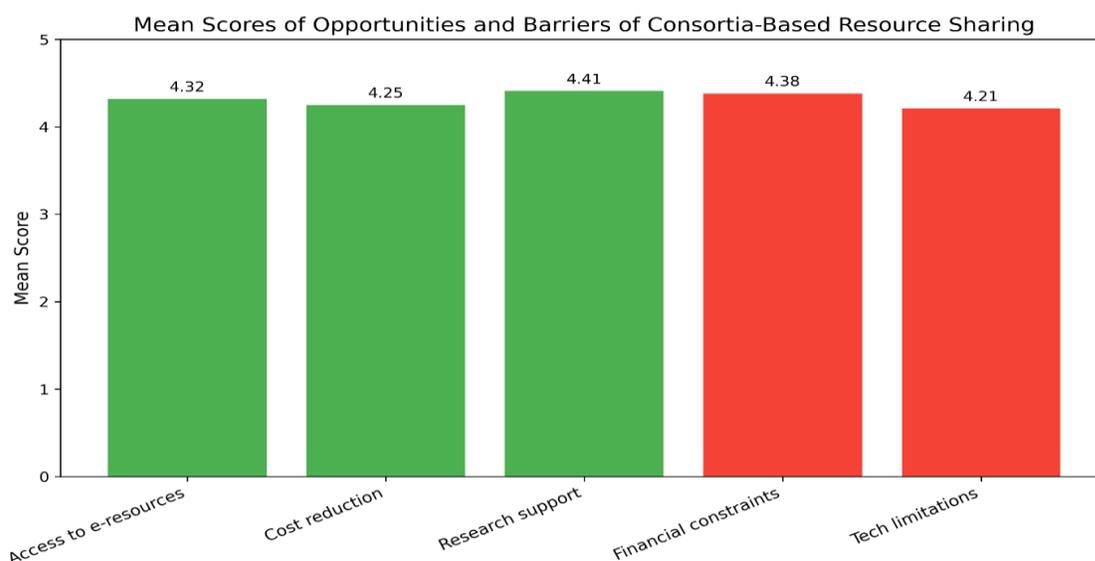
The average scores highlight strong consensus amongst academic librarians that there are tremendous advantages to resource sharing using a consortia especially with regard to improving access to electronic resources and supporting academic research. The high means values in all statements, which are related to opportunities, indicate a generally positive view of participating in consortia by librarians. The enhanced accessibility to electronic resources is one of the main advantages that can be deemed as critically important to the fulfillment of the information demand of the users through the help of shared digital collections. Understandings of cost-cutting also refer to a significant benefit, which reflects the financial demands that individual libraries face. Furthermore, the addition of consortia to the teaching and research activities strengthens their influence on the quality of academics. Although professional collaboration shows slightly lower mean, it remains a salient outcome, which suggests that consortia stimulate the sharing of knowledge and joint problem-solving among librarians.

Table 3: Perceived Barriers to Consortia-Based Resource Sharing

Statement	Mean	SD
Insufficient financial resources	4.38	0.59
Inadequate technological infrastructure	4.21	0.66
Lack of clear policies and governance	4.17	0.71
Limited professional training	4.09	0.74

The results show that the financial and technological constraints were seen as the most salient barriers to the effective implementation of consortia-based resource sharing. The high averageness of the low level of financial means can be regarded as due to the long-term limitations in the budgets of academic libraries in Pakistan, especially when it comes to the preservation of access to the expensive electronic sources. The technological limitation, which includes an inferior infrastructure and lack of connectivity, also contributes to the suboptimal use of common resources. The lack of clear policies and governance arrangements is an indication of lack of strategic planning and coordination both at institutional and national levels. Also, the lack of professional training was noted as one of the obstacles and the need to implement capacity-building efforts on a continuous basis. Taken together, these results add to the importance of the idea that despite the significant advantages of consortia, systematic issues need to be resolved to achieve their effectiveness and sustainability.

Figure 1: Mean Scores of Opportunities and Barriers of Consortia-Based Resource Sharing



A colored graphic (see Figure 1) that outlines the overall research findings is provided, which provides a comparative example of the facilitators and impediments in the reports of academic librarians. The figure summarizes all the salient findings of all the data tables to show that although opportunities are highly endorsed, such as amplified access to electronic resources and minimization of costs, challenges like financial and technological barriers remain serious challenges. This number thus acts as a domain coordinating visualisation of the whole quantitative research, a concise summary of the main tendencies identified in the sample.

Figure 1: Mean Scores of Opportunities and Barriers of Consortia-Based Resource Sharing

Figure 1 is a graphical representation of a comparison of mean scores of opportunities and barriers to resource sharing based on consortia according to the perception of academic librarians. The bar diagram, which was drawn in contrasting colors to make it easier to understand, illustrates higher means of opportunity-related variables, such as, access to electronic resources, support of research and teaching, and cost reduction. On the other hand, mean scores of barrier related variables including financial constraints and technological limitations are also greater indicating its prominence. The use of a coloured graphical representation makes it simpler to have a visual understanding of the relative scale of the perceived opportunities and challenges and thus to support the quantitative findings provided in the tables.

DISCUSSION

The current research results are in agreement with the prior international and national research that supports the fact that consortia-related resource sharing plays a central role in strengthening the services of academic libraries. The thesis of the necessity of collaborative strategies to ensure sustainable development of libraries in Pakistan is supported by positive librarian perceptions on improved access and cost-effectiveness.

At the same time, the mentioned barriers indicate the urgency of resolving systemic obstacles related to financing, infrastructure, and government. The sustainability of consortia programmes in the long-term may still be threatened without specific policy intervention and capacity-building efforts.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Key Findings of the Study

According to the study results, resource sharing through the consortia has become an important factor in strengthening the services provided by the academic libraries in Pakistan. The volume of academic librarians showed a strong level of awareness about library consortia and recognized their central role in the provision of access to electronic resource. The research also found that the librarians saw consortia initiatives as effective ways of reducing spending in subscriptions and of supporting research and teaching activities. Increased access to international academic databases has emerged as one of the most significant benefits of consortium membership.

The results also highlight the fact that academic libraries still have a lot of obstacles to overcome in order to effectively implement resource sharing related to consortia. Financial limitations were found to be the biggest obstacle, followed by infrastructure deficiencies and technological limitations. Coordination and long-term planning have been compromised by unclear policies and governance structures, which has been identified as a major problem. Additionally, professional training opportunities were found to be a barrier to librarians' ability to fully utilize the consortia's resources. When combined, these findings show that while consortium initiatives do offer substantial advantages, systemic issues hinder their overall efficacy.

CONCLUSION

Based on the quantitative research, the study concludes that consortia-based resource sharing is a vital approach for improving access to scholarly information in Pakistani academic libraries. Librarians' observations clearly indicate that consortia initiatives contribute positively to resource availability, cost efficiency, and academic support services. However, the resolution of financial, technological, and policy-related barriers reduces the full potential of these collaborative efforts.

The study give emphasis to the need for sustained institutional commitment and strategic planning to ensure the long-term success of library consortia in Pakistan. Addressing funding instability, investing in technological infrastructure, and strengthening governance mechanisms are vital steps toward enhancing the effectiveness of consortia-based resource sharing. Generally, the findings provide empirical evidence that can support policymakers, library administrators, and higher education authorities in developing more robust and sustainable consortia models for academic libraries.

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