Collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries: A Diagnosis

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ABSTRACT: *This paper sought to show the potential of collaboration of university libraries in ameliorating the common problems and challenges facing the Nigerian Academic Library System on the basis of the current status of collaboration in Nigerian university libraries. The paper addressed the following questions: what is the status of collaboration of Nigerian University libraries? How can University Libraries achieve meaningful collaboration? And what possible benefits can University libraries in Nigeria attain from effective collaboration? The paper clarified three forms of collaboration within the University Library system to address the indiscriminate use of the term 'Librarian collaboration' to pass for library collaboration. Based on literature reviewed, the current level of collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries is below expectation and is to a great extent responsible for poor quality teaching, learning and research bedeviling the Nigerian tertiary education system. University Library leadership and the Committee of University librarian in Nigerian Universities (CULNU) were identified as prime movers whose efforts could improve the level of collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries. The paper revealed that possible areas for collaboration include: resource sharing, inter-library loan, cooperative acquisition, cooperative cataloguing, cooperative referencing, staff development, library exchange and librarian and library user networks. The paper further noted that the key benefits of collaboration are significant reduction in operational costs, increased human cooperation and exposure of Librarians to global library practices. The paper identified factors that pose as either a threat or a challenge to the implementation of effective collaboration in Nigerian university libraries. They include: Inadequate funding, leadership issues, lack of structured library development policies, proliferation of informal collaboration, high competition in library profession and resistance to change. The paper therefore recommended that committee of University Librarian in Nigerian Universities and the Nigerian Library Association should make and implement a policy for all University Library Leadership to develop and implement documented and structured develop plans and policies p to provide strategic direction for University libraries.*

KEYWORDS: librarian, universities, collaboration, libraries, consortium

1.0 INTRODUCTION

University Libraries are pivotal institutions that drive knowledge acquisition, transmission and storage in higher institutions of learning. They collaborate with faculties and research centers to create knowledge hubs that are designed to meet the information needs of students, researchers and faculty members (Nwegbu, Echezoma, & Obijiofor, 2011). The optimal service delivery of these institutions has been observed to be significantly hampered by inadequate resources; these resources include library materials, facilities, equipment and personnel. Inadequate funding is the fundamental issue highlighted by scholars for the inadequacies of University Libraries to meet their obligations. Another fundamental issue stressed by scholars is the challenge of use of library practices that are outdated and do not support the globalization trends of education and knowledge centers. We mean to say that Librarian skills and development is the next big issue impeding efficient service delivery by University Libraries in relation to their specific mandates.

In the more advanced countries of the world, Collaboration among University Libraries has been identified and greatly acknowledged as a strategic means to dealing with issues of lack of resources, standardization of Library practices and the development of the 21st century Librarian. The challenges highlighted above are not peculiar to Universities in any region and thus it uniquely provide opportunities for collaboration as University Libraries in Nigeria are facing common problems and similar pressures from university management, faculty and patrons (Olaniyi & Olaojo, 2017). The fact remains that these challenges are far too large and complex to be successfully dealt with by a University Library in record time to meet their obligations. Thus, in the 21st century, collaboration among university libraries is no longer an option but a necessity as partnership across university libraries can help meet client needs and meet institutional objectives efficiently and innovatively as well (Atkinson, 2019). Thus this paper seeks to create awareness on the status on collaboration among University Libraries in Nigeria and showcase why collaboration among university Libraries in Nigeria should be utilized for resolving challenges facing the Nigerian University library system. Specifically, the paper addresses the following questions: what is the status of collaboration of Nigerian University libraries? How can University Libraries achieve meaningful collaboration? And what possible benefits can University libraries in Nigeria attain from effective collaboration?

University library Collaboration: A differentiation and Clarification

Collaboration is a mutually beneficial and clear-cut relationship entered into by at least two associations to accomplish shared objectives (Atkinson, 2018). The relationship includes a commitment to mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards. There are three forms of collaboration within the University Library system. First, collaboration among academic librarians in the university system, more particularly, collaborations among librarians in a specific university and collaboration by librarians from

different university libraries. Secondly, collaborations between the university library and faculty and/or special study and research centres in a university. Thirdly, collaborations between different university libraries in their institutional capacity to solve common problems and boost service delivery in their respective areas of service.

Collaborations among librarians is usually in the form of mentorship and research development. Usually this collaboration is brought about by leveraging on interpersonal relations facilitated by professional activities such as conferences and workshops. However, it is possible that existing collaboration between University Libraries to be the catalyst for collaborations among University Librarians (Atkinson, 2018). When this happens, the development of University Libraries become holistic and supports the objectives of their immediate academic environment or communities.

Collaborations between the University Library and Faculty is designed to meet the teaching and learning needs of the University. It usually involves improving access to library resources and providing special services to meet specific needs of faculty (Rachman, 2019). No matter how robust this collaborations may be, it is limited in services or resources that the faculty can utilize for academic work. This is simply because University Libraries can only offer services and resource they have or have access to. This brings us to the third form of collaboration.

Collaboration between University Libraries is more encompassing as it enables or facilitates the first two forms of collaboration already mentioned and discussed. It is designed to facilitate an exchange of services and resources to enable faculty and users in the universities gain greater access to resources and services required in their academic pursuits (Goulding & Walton, 2013). Thus, this collaboration occurs at a global level and supports the globalization of education, the library profession and access to educational materials, resources and services. The central aim is to facilitate teaching and learning at a level that universalizes education and succinctly captures the word 'university'. This is illustrated by the figure below.
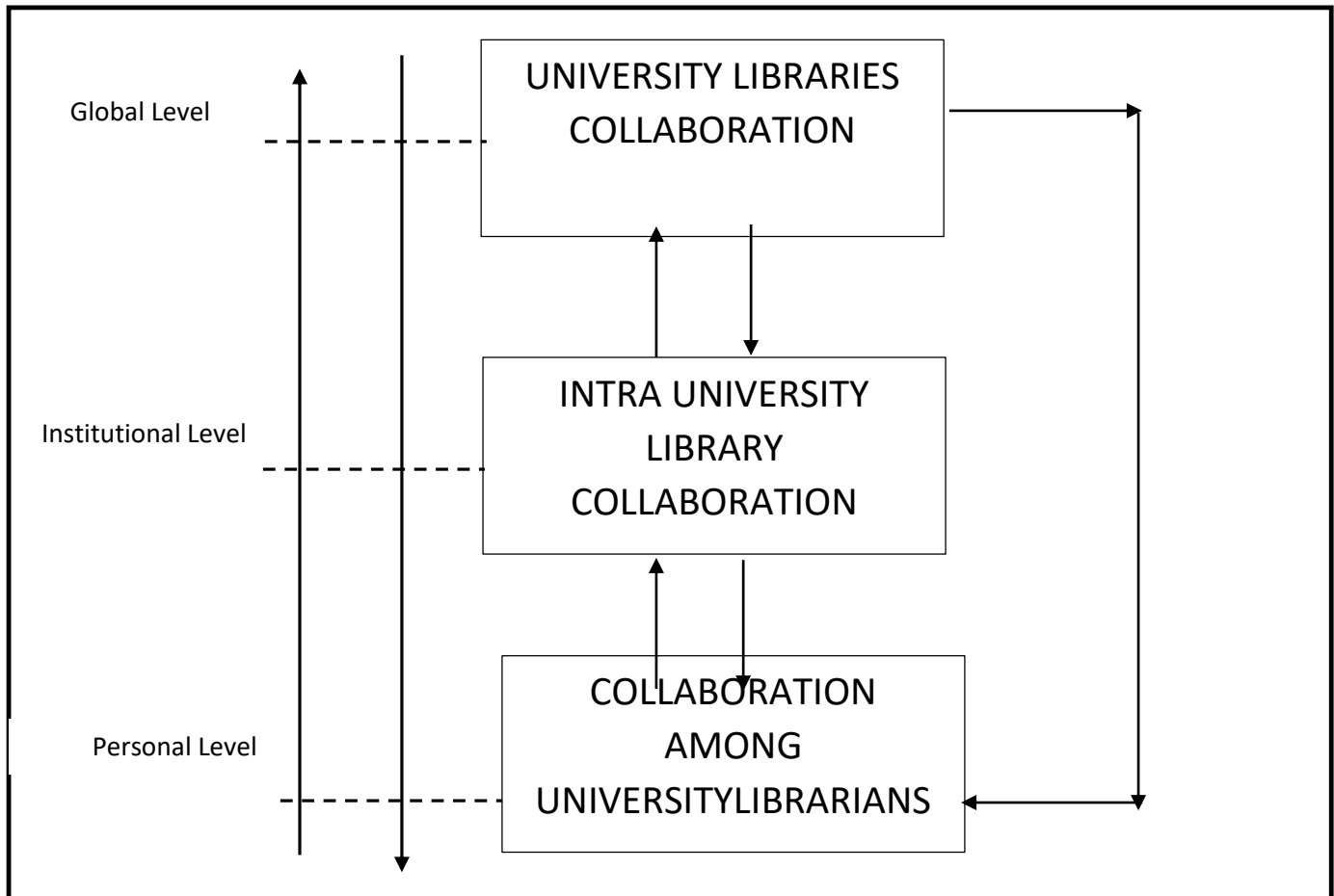
Figure 1: Hierarchical Presentation of Collaboration in the University Library System
Source: (adapted from Atkinson, 2018)

It is important to note that while university library collaboration encapsulates all other forms of collaborations within the University Library system, the same cannot be said for either intra-university library collaborations and/or collaborations among University Librarians. Thus, the indiscriminate use of this terms in literature is an indication of conceptual misunderstanding, hence, this is why section of this paper was dedicated to differentiating them and providing additional clarification from a philosophical perspective. This explains why there is a dearth of publications on the current subject matter whereas there are several papers on Librarians collaboration in Nigeria. Somehow, in the Nigerian context, Librarians' collaboration has been inadequately conceptualized as university libraries collaboration. Hence, going forward in this paper, these concepts as discussed above will be used, however, with this clarification made, this paper will also attempt to holistically approach the subject matter.

2.0   Status of University Libraries Collaborations in Nigeria

An extensive review of literature to explore the extent of collaboration of university libraries in Nigeria and globally showed that University Library collaboration is significantly not utilized or talked about (Oni, Abu & Ekeniyere, 2018; Olaniyi & Olaojo, 2017; Dim, Ukwoma & Okafor, 2017). There is extensive evidence that support collaboration between librarians as well as between university libraries and their faculties, however, just very few can be cited for University Libraries collaborations. Many studies reviewed were qualitative in nature and succeeded in describing the perception of professional librarians towards university library collaboration without much attention on lessons or benefits or case studies of practical collaboration among Nigerian University libraries and also with their global counterparts (Dim, Ukwoma & Okafor, 2017; Yousef, 2010; Enakrire, Collence, & Tella, 2020).

The few examples of University Library collaboration are the brainchild of some initiatives such as the National Virtual Library project in 2011 funded by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education and the Nigerian University Libraries Consortium (NULC) (Nworie & Unegbu, 2014). The Nigerium University Libraries Consortium is a branch of the Committee of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities (CULNU). Its main focus is to promote and facilitate collaborations between Nigerian University Libraries and their global counterparts mostly in the areas of resource sharing and cooperative acquisitions. How well the NULC has been able to achieve or deliver on their mandate is another interesting research topic that will throw additional light on the status if university library collaborations in Nigeria ((Nworie & Unegbu, 2014; Dim, Ukwoma & Okafor, 2017).

It is worthy to note that the Nigerian Periodical Index of the CULNU which is aimed at providing access to current and retrospective information as well as facilitate research activities is a resource sharing project among Universities in the Nigerian University library Consortium (Nworie & Unegbu, 2014). There is yet to be available detailed information as to the collaborative arrangement, activities and success of the Nigerian University Library Consortium. For the moment, it seems to be a perfect plan on paper whose proceedings were cut short due to poor policy framework and ineffective leadership.

As to evidence supporting the existence of collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries, Posigha, Godfrey and Seinmode (2015) carried out a survey which revealed that only two university among the universities in the northern and South Eastern region of Nigeria had functional Library consortia. Similarly, Isyaku & Ibrahim (2019) examined the resource sharing partnership between Abubakar Tafewa Balewa University (ATBU) and Muhamadu Wahi Library of Federal Polytechnic Bauchi. Their report indicated that despite the collaboration between the two university Libraries, service delivery is still significantly below expectation as both university Libraries lack material resources. Thus, based on available literature reviewed and a lack of additional evidence supporting collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries, we, therefore, posit that the level of collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries is significantly inadequate to

support research and teaching in a fast advancing global educational system and perhaps based on the core mandate of the Nigerian University Library Consortium, there is need for rejuvenation of the Nigerian University Library Consortium to address this present challenge.

The ideal scenario is to see partnership among University Libraries in specific geographical location to provide a vast array of library services together to the academic communities in a given state or region. Similarly, the forming of consortium and/or consortia among the Nigerian University Libraries in a geopolitical region has the potential to link academic communities and improve research, teaching and learning significantly. Also, collaboration between Nigerian universities Libraries and their global counterparts is so important to boost collaboration at the institutional level between Libraries and Faculties all geared towards improving the quality of research, teaching and learning in the Universities.

3.0 Digitization: A panacea for Nigerian University Libraries Collaboration

The 21st century Library is a library that utilizes digital technologies to deliver efficient, fast and reliable services to patrons. Efficient and effective collaboration in University Libraries requires digitization of library materials, resources and facilities. Digitization involves the transformation of the means of service delivery into electronic forms facilitated by ICT technologies (Udem, Okeke & Onwurah, 2015). It requires that access in the library as well as the acquisition of library resources, reference services, circulation services, current awareness services etc should be made easily available via ICT technologies.

The digitization of University Libraries has been pinpointed as the major reason for the high levels of collaboration observed among University Libraries in technologically advanced countries like United Kingdom, USA, Germany, China and South Africa (Mohammed, 2013). While inter-Library Loan programmes, Librarian exchanges and student exchange programmes are essential forms of collaboration among University libraries that requires physical exchange. All other forms do not need physical collaboration as such may make it cumbersome, expensive and in most cases retrogressive. Thus, digitization of Library and Library resources is key to achieving successful collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries.

While there are notable digitization projects in Nigerian University Libraries. Literature review shows that quite a lot of this digitization were only done on paper, few attained some level of digitization & automation and others attained acceptable levels of digitization (Oni, Abu & Ekeniyere, 2018). Those University Libraries with acceptable levels of digitization were unable to maintain their digital libraries mainly due to lack of funding, sponsorship and availability of digital-inclined librarians and technicians for maintenance purposes. Thus, what we have in Nigeria are University Libraries generally perceived and in some cases designated as automated or digital but provide virtually almost all their services in traditional form or using traditional means. The lack of digitization may be responsible for poor collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries. The identification of the fundamental importance of the digitization off University

Libraries in driving collaboration is the first step in addressing specific service related challenges (Oni, Momoh, & Odaro-Ekhaguebo, 2019). The focal question becomes what then they can do to attain digitization not forgetting that the development of University Libraries is significantly hampered by a lack of adequate funding from the government. The issue of funding could be addressed by leveraging on Library-industry relations as well as forming library cooperatives where resources can be together to carryout digitization projects in a specific but sustainable pattern.

4.0   Forms of University Library Collaboration

In this section of this paper, we conceptualize that there are three possible forms of University Libraries collaboration. However, it is important to note that the distinction between them are minute and thus with few structural arrangements University Libraries can smoothly move from one form to another in relation to their needs and circumstances.

(1) **Library Partnership:** This is the strategic collaboration between University Libraries who are domiciled with a geographical region or location of proximity (Chigbu, Ezema, & Ali, 2010). Ideally, it is formed between two (2) or three (3) university Libraries like in the case Abubakar Tafewa Balewa University (ATBU) Library and Bauchi Polytechnic University Library. It is greatly utilized for resource sharing, staff development and fostering academic communication. It supports inter-library loan (ILL) since libraries are physically close to each other.

(2) **Library Cooperatives:** Library cooperative is a unique form of library partnership that usually involves more than three (3) University library in a given geographical location forming a partnership that is based on the cooperative model. The driving force behind Library cooperatives is the minimization of running and service costs (Rezaul Islam, 2013). The operations of each member Library is guided by a cooperative agreement. To the best of our knowledge, this mode of collaboration is yet to be formally exploited by Nigerian university libraries and this can be due to a lack of institutional maturity and low cooperation in the library profession. Usually, the members of a Library Cooperative select or appoints one of the libraries as its center of operations. A coordinating committee made up of representatives from the member libraries coordinates the efforts of the Library cooperative. The committee coordinates resources and activities on behalf of its members. Library cooperatives are different from library consortium due to geographical restrictions, they are more likely to enjoy support, sponsorship and grants from government, NGOs and industry due to their cooperative nature for the development of the member Libraries as contained in the Cooperative Agreement. Library cooperatives can successfully support digitization projects among member libraries to boost their collaborative activities.

(3) **Library Consortium**: This is an advanced level of collaboration among University Libraries. It was the innovation of digital networks that marked the birth of the digital age and led to the formulation of library consortium. Library consortium is a group of libraries

who come together to share their resources, exchange expertise in a cooperative sense and whose collaborative activities are achieved via the use of digital networks and other ICTs (Saini, 2017). It is not limited by geographical proximity as in the case of library partnership and/or library cooperative. The establishment of a library consortium must be promulgated on a written agreement which every intending member must accept and align to (Moghaddam & Talawar, 2009). The main aim for the establishment of library consortia is to improve access to library resources at minimum costs and at the best terms of licenses. With the collective strength of the resources of various institutions available to it, each library in the consortium is better positioned to resolve the problems of managing, organizing and archiving their electronic resources.

The dynamics of the various forms of University Library Collaboration discussed in this section is presented in the figure below.
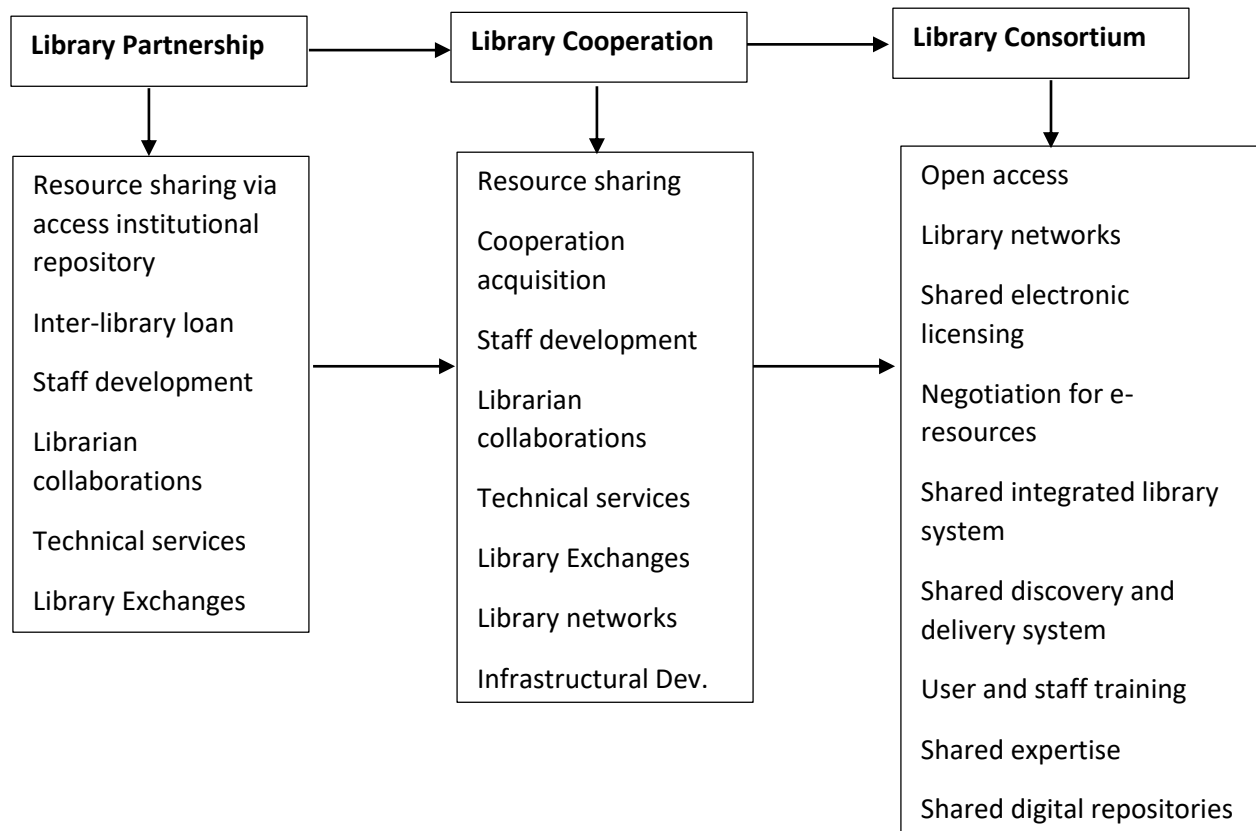

Figure 2: Collaboration in the Library System
Source: Adapted from Dey & Singh (2019)

5.0   Areas of Collaboration in University Libraries

It is important to note that irrespective of the area of collaboration among University Libraries, the aim is to optimize service delivery in line with the objectives of the University. Here, specific areas of collaboration among University Libraries are highlighted and briefly discussed.

(1) **Resource Sharing**: This is the mutual sharing of library resources such collections, repositories, staff, functions, methods and services (Prakash & Janardhana, 2017). The goal is to improve access and maximize the availability of materials and services at minimum expenses. This sort of collaboration facilitate or support specialized collection development.

(2) **Inter-Library Loan**: This is a special case of resource sharing that allows patrons of collaborating Libraries to physically or digitally loan or read books etc from counterpart Libraries at no additional cost.

(3) **Cooperative Acquisition:** There are mainly two ways in which cooperative acquisition takes place. It takes place more efficiently in Library cooperative and Consortia and is guided by the Cooperative Agreement. Firstly, it involves the assignment of the acquisition of special collections to each member of the Library cooperative thus all collections becomes available to the participating libraries and their patrons (Millson-Martula, Pathak & Pfeiffer, 2005). Also, it involves the pulling of resources to acquire licenses or collections as a group often at very low rate due to the economies of scale involved. Both forms of cooperative acquisition are designed to increase availability of library resources such as print, electronic books, periodicals, reference lists etc.

(4) **Cooperative Cataloguing**: This is an area of collaboration by library cooperatives where based on the cooperative agreement binding the members, they are to adopt a specific cataloguing practice to facilitate the creation of bibliographic and author records in the form that can be easily shared among them (John-Okeke, 2011). It also aids users to use any of the library in the cooperative without stress or difficulties.

(5) **Cooperative Referencing**: This collaboration allows patrons to be referred to collaborating libraries for any specific service requested for but not available at the originating library. This allows libraries to leverage on the library resources, methods, services and expertise of collaborating libraries to improve their service delivery (Berry & Shrode, 2004). However, it is important to note that this collaboration must be guided by a formally established system of protocols, if not, it cannot then be referred to as cooperative referencing. This can take place in library partnership, cooperative and/or consortium.

(6) **Staff Development**: This collaboration involves the pooling of resources together by collaborating libraries to train their staff at lower costs. Libraries in a cooperative can significantly negotiate lower tuition of fees for professional development trainings, courses and workshops for their staff. The operational procedure that guide this arrangement is usually designed and implemented by a staff development committee made up of at least one representative from each of the collaborating libraries.

(7) **Library Exchanges**: This is a special form of collaboration in staff development that allows official exchange of librarians within the collaborating Universities usually aimed at providing specific training or broadening experience of staff. More advanced forms allow the transfer of students for specific periods or semesters within the collaborating Universities and this occurs more suitably in Library Consortium.

(8) **Librarian & Library User Networks:** This is the creation of a librarian/user network using social media or any other digital platform designed to promote interactions amongst Librarians and/or Users of the collaborating Universities. Effective use of this platform will galvanize cooperation between Librarians and cooperation between Librarians and users (Ugwuanyi, Nwafor & Onoh, 2013). This can also become a current awareness service platform and a feedback platform to improve service delivery jointly in the Collaborating University Libraries. Hence, competition is reduced and high levels of cooperation is achieved for the benefit of Libraries and their users.

6.0   Benefits of Collaboration among University Libraries

Basically, all forms and areas of collaboration are designed to attain a general improvement in library service delivery, however, the following point enumerated below are some specific benefits collaborating university libraries can gain for cooperation and association.

(1) Significant reduction in operational costs
(2) Increased ability to provide cheaper and more efficient services
(3) Increased human cooperation
(4) Significant reduction in negative competition
(5) Exposure of Librarians to global library practices
(6) Increased ability to attract support from foreign donor agencies and industry
(7) Standardization of library practice
(8) Improved library patronship
(9) Supports digitization of library resources and facilities
(10)   Avoid duplication of efforts

7.0   Threats or Challenges to Collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries

This paper has shown that the level of formal collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries is significantly below expectation when the potential of such association is put into context of the state of library service delivery in Nigeria. Hence, this section highlights the issues that are responsible for the low level of collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries.

(1) **Inadequate Funding**: Inadequate funding has been described by several researchers as the bane of the development of Nigerian University Libraries. There are usually no clear cut internal and/or external funding policies for University Libraries and when these policies are available, their implementation is grossly poor owing to corrupt practices. Without

adequate funding, Nigerian University Libraries will continue to remain poorly digitalized and/or automated for service delivery (Okwu, & Opurum, 2021). Thus, inadequate funding is a major threat to collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries as it is directly responsible for the digitization issue currently faced by University Libraries in Nigeria.

(2) **Leadership Issues:** A core challenge facing University Libraries across Nigeria is Leadership. A core responsibility of the university Leadership and the University Library leadership is seeking and attaining innovative ways of accessing funds for libraries to acquire necessary facilities and resources to boost service delivery (Ashiq, Rehman, & Batool, 2018). As experienced professional librarians and as members of the committee of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities (CULNU), they are expected to be the prime movers of formal collaborative agreements among University Libraries that they preside over, however, we posit that generally, University Librarians have been significantly affected by bureaucracy and politics that they have been unable to provide structured and strategic leadership that fosters collaboration as a panacea for library development and the attainment of University goals (Okiy, 2006). We posit that University Librarians are expected to champion collaborative efforts among Nigerian University Libraries, thus, it is only right that they are the next most significant threat to collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries.

(3) **Lack of Structured Library Development Policies**: Due to budget cuts in University Libraries of advanced countries, collaborations were leveraged on by these libraries to meet the milestones in their development plans as guided by their well structure and documented development policies. The availability of well documented library development plans and development policies serves as a metric for performance evaluation and as a control mechanism that spurs leadership to continually see for innovative ways of developing library systems despite the conventional challenges facing university libraries (Aslam, 2019). Thus, the absence of documented library development plans and development policies affects the continuity of library leadership and often results in uncoordinated or informal collaborations that often disappear bringing short or immediate relief. Lack of performance evaluation based on development plans is responsible for a lack of urgency to explore collaborative models as solution to the problem of inadequate funding bedeviling Nigerian University Libraries.

(4) **Proliferation of Informal Collaboration:** High levels of casual collaborative activities between university Libraries and University Librarians which is driven by leveraged inter-personal relationship is becoming a distraction and an impediment to the potential benefits of collaborations at the global and institutional levels as described in figure 1. University Library System gains more from the global level of collaboration than either institutional or personal. Informal collaboration at best can provide benefits at the institutional level. It is important to note that informal collaboration occur on a 'case by case' basis and does not transcend to a systematic approach until it becomes formalized via partnership, cooperative or consortium agreements.

(5) **High Competition in Library Profession:** As a result of the drastic changes within the library and information system, the library profession is quite competitive. Professional librarians are required to perform within expectation despite ever changing roles and challenges (Smith, 2009). It is however important to note that the challenges of globalization requires the 21st century libraries and librarians to deliver fast-paced and efficient services. Collaboration is a key strategy to meeting the needs of users in this digital age.

(6) **Resistance to Change**: Significant differences in the organizational culture and working practices of collaborating University Libraries can fundamentally bring about a resistance to change. Collaboration often require organizational, cultural and attitudinal/social changes which both staff and library leadership may not desire and thus will often resist the changes the collaboration may bring by opposing it or not supporting it when implemented (Nov & Ye, 2009). Poor support of librarians for collaborative agreement between University Libraries can hamper the success of the agreement at all levels of collaboration. Achieving the necessary change can take time as Librarians may resist change as a result of apprehension owing to a feel of perceived loss of professional and/or institutional identity. They may feel uncomfortable working outside their normal professional boundaries and comfort zones. Some may resist change due to lack of confidence and incompetencies in fitting with the integration of collaborative model in Library services (Darmawan & Azizah, 2019). At the institutional level, differences in library practices, goals, priorities and tools may form an impediment to making the necessary change for collaboration. The fear of change can come from the perceived difficulties that may be associated with maintaining the balance between protecting the policies and priorities of collaborating university libraries while leveraging on the opportunities that comes from shared approaches. Resistance to change may be responsible for the increasing number of informal collaboration, breakdown and non-implementation of cooperative agreement in Nigerian University Libraries.

8.0   CONCLUSION

This paper sought to show the potential of collaboration of university libraries in ameliorating the common problems and challenges facing the Nigerian academic Library System. From a general standpoint, the level of similarities in the challenges faced by Nigerian university libraries provides a unique opportunity to leverage on collaboration in resolving them. The potential benefits available from collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries stress the need why collaboration should no longer be an option but if possible become mandatory. With the fast moving trends of globalization and digitalization, Nigerian University Libraries can no longer function as completely independent entities if they are to remain relevant and ensure that they meet the information needs of their immediate academic communities. The current level of collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries is below expectation and is to a great extent responsible for poor quality teaching, learning and research bedeviling the Nigerian tertiary education system.

University Library leadership and the Committee of University librarian in Nigerian Universities (CULNU) were identified as prime movers whose efforts could improve the level of collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries and thus the paper suggested for further studies to be carried out on the Nigerian University Library consortium (a brainchild of Committee of University librarian in Nigerian Universities (CULNU)) activities over time to unravel reasons for their minimal impact.

9.0   Recommendations

Based on the threats to collaboration in Nigerian University Libraries, the following recommendations were made.

(1) University Library Leadership should establish and maintain good public relations with industries and Education- based NGOs.
(2) University Library Leadership should explore innovative funding initiatives like charging for additional services, monetizing some specific services.
(3) The National University Commission and the Federal Ministry of Education should provide funding initiative for collaboration in Nigerian Universities.
(4) The committee of University Librarian in Nigerian Universities and the Nigerian Library Association should carry out a series of conferences or workshops on collaboration to raise the level of awareness and plant the desire for collaboration in the University library system to reduce resistance to change.
(5) The committee of University Librarian in Nigerian Universities and the Nigerian Library Association should make and implement a policy for all University Library Leadership to develop and implement documented and structured develop plans and policies p to provide strategic direction for University libraries.

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