

Islamic Sharia Court (Law) Libraries in Nigeria: A Proposal for Networking

Ahmed Mohammed*

ABSTRACT

Emergence of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their subsequent integration in the field of Library and Information services offer opportunities to organizations in Nigeria especially to Sharia Court Law libraries. Today organizations can't prosper and deliver its services effectively and efficiently without embracing these technologies (ICTs). In this backdrop, the paper attempts to propose a networking model for Sharia Court libraries, to assist them in the provision of adequate services. It also relates the rationale for networking among libraries particularly in the present economic predicament of the country like rising cost and decreasing trend in budgetary allocation for libraries. Besides, structure for effective networking schemes is elaborated and problems, prospects and solutions outlined.

KEYWORDS

Law Libraries – Networking; Sharia Libraries; Library Networking – Nigeria

PAPER TYPE *Conceptual*

INTRODUCTION

No library is self sufficient, richly endowed and capable of providing all the information materials desired by its clientele and that reader in a particular library need to have access to resources from other library (**Rajashekar, 2000**). Besides, today in an era of great changes and technological advancement characterized by resources sharing and networking, it is impossible to achieve any meaningful and desired goal without proper coordination and cooperation. Accordingly, **Malumfashi (1996)** argues that in the field of librarianship, the concept of cooperation has taken the form of resources

* *Ph.D Scholar, Department of Library and Information Sciences, Bayero University, Kano P.M.B 3011, Kano-Nigeria. amkwaru4@yahoo.com*

sharing and networking. He observes that “no wonder therefore the libraries in the advanced countries have directed their attention in this venture in a bid to satisfy the information needs of their clientele”. **Rajashekar (2000)** views that “libraries have always been under tremendous pressure to share their resources. Inflation, almost static or dwindling library budgets, information explosion and escalating prices of publications have all contributed towards this situation. No library, however richly endowed in resources, is in a position to meet all the requirements of its users from its collections alone.” Although resource sharing has been in the scheme of libraries, in developing countries, it is often made with a considerable predicament. The point here to observe is that, unlike special libraries (including law libraries), the university libraries in Nigeria have appreciated the need to embark in cooperative venture, but whether this has been a success or a failure need a review.” **Oyeniya (1973)** reports that efforts to establish library cooperation scheme in Nigeria arose from the IFLA Conference (France, 1973). It led to National Library of Nigeria to set up inter library lending unit. Later, for establishing library cooperation programme in the country, a meeting of librarians was held at the *University of Ife* from 24th to 25th April, 1974. During the meeting, besides the issue of cooperation necessary agreement on operational guidelines, procedures, finance and other matter related to the adoption and implementation of the programme were discussed. However, this arrangement could not last long and did not yield positive results for many problems like lack of adequate funding of libraries and the scheme being focussed for all hues of libraries in the country. Other effort of library cooperation in the country having direct relation with university libraries being one reported by **Sanni and Igbafe (2004)** includes a group of libraries comprising of

Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Ibadan, Benin, Ilorin and the University of Nigeria Nsukka which joined together and began the publication of the union list of serials in Nigerian universities. No attempt however is reported about cooperation among other types of libraries. Thus the present attempt is to formulate a blue print for Cooperation and networking of Islamia Sharia Libraries.

NETWORK AND RATIONALE

Malumfashi (1986) relates that “technological innovations in the field of telecommunication and computer gave birth to the term networking”. **Doyle (1996)** calls Network as “a series of computers that are linked together so that they are able to share computing power or storage facilities.... in different parts of the country or even in different parts of the world”. **Winfield (1984)** terms network as “a collection of inter connected independent computers. The objective of networking is to deliver computing services to users and /or provide effective communication between users”. Similarly **Cosmos (1992)** view network as “a system of physically separate computers with telecommunication links allowing resources of each participating institution shared by each other”. In a more precise and plain terms **Adakole (1992)** consider networking as “interconnection of micro computers and peripheral devices (e.g. printer, hard disk), each remote from one other, exchanging data and sharing facilities as necessary to form the ...network”. Networking based on a small area network (SAN), local area network (LAN) or on wider area (WAN) emerge to facilitate access and share resources and services of each participating institute. However, a successful network according to **(Heathcote, 2000)** should ensure that the response time is adequate with hardware and software upgraded when necessary and user kept informed

of the changes. Besides the required software is uploaded and a system of regular backups is adhered to and network security is well maintained.

Several reasons are advanced by libraries (here law libraries) for embanking on networking. **Mohammed (2005)** outlines them mainly as:

- The tremendous increase in scientific literature in different field of endeavors coupled with ever increasing cost of reading materials and limited financial resources. There is also a need for an increased bibliographical access to both intellectual and physical information resources, so that the resources of the participating libraries will be made available to each other, thereby enabling their clientele to have access to information resources in different forms.
- The continuing decrease in purchasing power of a library budget in view of inflationary trends in publishing industries.
- Unfavorable foreign exchange situations of the currencies of the developing countries like Nigeria. (Evans, 2000). **Sanni and Igbafe (2004)** affirm that “the fact that Nigeria depend largely on foreign imprints for scholarship and research, coupled with dwindling acquisition call for networking among libraries for common exploitation of resources”
- Advance in both hardware and software and information and communication technologies (ICTs) have made networking much easier and practicable than conventional methods of cooperation.
- Networking in libraries, Malumfashi (**1996**) asserts is “basically a programme that seeks to balance the equation of demand and supply on one hand and the issue of self sufficiency on the other”.
- Sharing results in greater staff specialization and performance, i.e. a person can concentrate on one or two activities rather than many...

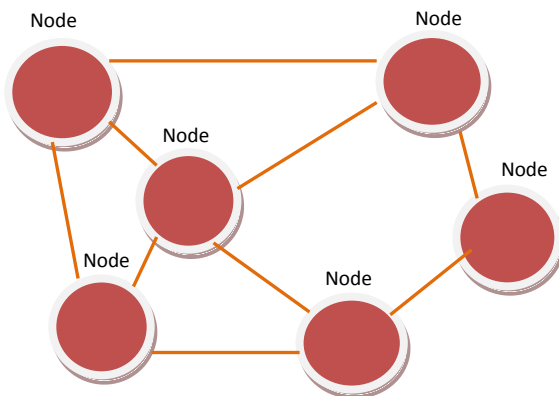
better performance can lead to better services and thus greater customer satisfaction.

PROPOSED NETWORK

Topology

One aspect of network architecture is its topology. Mesh networks is proposed for the Network as these are very reliable and in case of a fault in one channel, a different route can be operative. Besides, these are efficient- a lot of traffic on one path will slow down transmission, but other routes are found automatically on a faster path.

THE PROPOSED NETWORK STRUCTURE Mesh WIDER AREA NETWORKS (WAN)



It is assumed that in Mesh WAN service helps all participants to contribute to the common output. The model is flexible for accommodating more databases to facilitate more libraries to join the project. The sophisticated Mesh networks have the speed to cope with larger number of stations **(Heathcote, 2000)**

STRATEGY

Oladipo and Ikoro (1992) suggest the following steps for an effective network:

The first step is to determine the geographical location, limitations and disparity of the operations. Hence, the likely questions that may come up here are:

- i) Will the networking be national in its operation? Or
- ii) Will the country be zoned up?

In view of the fact that the number of Islamic Court law libraries has now grown tremendously over the last four decades, and the number of states where sharia legal system is practicing in the country, planning a national network at the inception of the programme will be advisable. This should be done by designating three (3) zones:

North Central Zone-Niger state sharia court of appeal

North West Zone-Kano state sharia court of Appeal and

North East Zone- Maiduguri Sharia Court of Appeal (**See Appendix**)

ACTIVITIES

Different activities of the each zone may include:

➤ **Administrative Powers**

With the progress and development of the Network other private sharia and conventional law libraries may wish to join the scheme registering with a zone nearest to them. For example, all libraries in the North West zone of the country could do so by registering with Kano sharia court of Appeal. The Abuja Federal sharia Court of appeal by virtue of its position being adequate in status as well as its central location at the capital city of the country (Abuja) can serve as the headquarters of the Network with responsibilities for formulation of Policy, Coordination, Monitoring, Staff training and Implementation of the network process.

➤ **Collection Development**

Each library in the zone needs to assign an area of Specialization to build collection. However, adequate care should be taken to avoid unnecessary duplication which in essence could negate the intended cost sharing and hence defeat the philosophy of the whole scheme. **Evans (2000)** observes that “collection development programme enable libraries to provide better services, a wider range of materials or both. Cooperative project also can reduce the duplication of materials that results from over tapping service communities and patron influence on collection development”

➤ **Union Catalogue**

Inter-library cooperative scheme can prove successful with a good union catalogue of the holdings of the member libraries. Therefore, union catalogue will not only facilitate inter-library lending, but will also reduce the duplication among member libraries. A standard bibliographical description (AACR2 for example) could be adopted in cataloguing the library materials to avoid disparity. With the launch of the network, the format and structure of the catalogue may either evolve or evaporate and network itself will by default take the care of functions of the proposed Union catalogue.

➤ **Finance**

Member libraries need to generate financial resources for meeting various expenses of the zones and the headquarters for taking various operations. Members who are not able meet their dues may not get the services of the project as **Oladipo and Ikoro (1992)** asserts “most cooperative activities overseas have survived because of the commitment of member libraries”. In case of libraries falling outside the scheme seek to get benefit from the resources of member libraries and their services, these can be charged on different terms and conditions.

➤ **Logistics**

Various ways of transporting materials from one library to another exist. **Ochai (1992)** gives many options ranging from “the use of DHL to transport services like Ekene Dili Chukwu distributors of network of a national newspaper or Nigerian union of road transport workers (NURTW)” or Nigerian Postal Services could be considered for transporting the materials where the need arises. Since **Rajashekar (2000)** observes that the best way to measure the success is through Speed and Cost of Networking. Therefore, networking procedures must occur with sufficient speed so that the client gets the desired material in hand well before the need has evaporated. Cost should be less or at least equal to the cost of purchasing the same material for the local collection.

➤ **Personnel**

Each participating library in the zone should send their staff (at least one) to serve as representative of their library and work for the success of the network, who will from time to time report back to his original library. He/she is expected to handle the training of his/her colleagues and share experiences to the members of their respective organization and upgrading their knowledge. This is very crucial especially when the staff gets transferred or resigns or superannuates.

SERVICES

The following services can be undertaken by sharia court law libraries.

➤ **Cooperative Acquisition**

A particular library engaged in networking may be assigned to acquire books for all the participating libraries, or each library in the project may be given the responsibility to acquire books on a particular subject of interest to all the participating libraries. (Example *fiqué collections* or

Islamic jurisprudence etc). This, will save time, finance and human resources which are always limited.

➤ **Interlibrary Loan**

This process will help materials borrowed out by libraries which could be either online transactions or by transporting the materials to another library with the assistance of courier or speed post etc.

➤ **Information Services**

Under resources sharing, member libraries can benefit from services such as a) *Current Awareness Services (CAS)* b) *Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI)*; c) *Indexing and Abstracting Services*; d) *Journal Content Alert*; and e) *E-mail correspondences and alerts* etc.

➤ **Technical Services**

This includes cooperative cataloguing which has to do with the process of centralization of all libraries holdings, with a view to reduce the cost of such activities to the individual libraries and above all for standardization of records and format to avoid disparity of the records.

➤ **Exchange programme**

The services of personnel having certain skills and experiences can be exchanged to another library for a specific period to enable them to get trained. This method can help in transferring the skills, level of knowledge and competence of the skilled staff to those who lack them.

PROBLEMS

Some problems envisaged are:

➤ Finance is the major problems of organizations in developing countries like Nigeria. Inadequate funding of libraries has direct effect on the budget; as a result, libraries may find it difficult to finance the initiative, due to meager provisions and annual decrease in budgetary

allocation by the Government, and low priorities accorded to libraries **(Mohammed, 2005; Sanni & Igbafe, 2004; & Tsafe2003)**.

➤ Non-cooperative attitude of the librarian may constitute a stumbling block in effective networking venture among libraries besides Poor state of communication infrastructure and electricity supply. The slow document delivery due to horrific roads and higher state of insecurity with higher cost of postal services particularly courier services make things more difficult.

CONCLUSION

Various aspects of Networking such as cooperative acquisition, interlibrary loan, and cooperative storage (portal) can be easily facilitated through many measures like good public relations by librarians to advocate their planners and financial masters (Management and Chief Executives), particularly to appreciate the importance of networking. Secondly, Library managers should strive hard to generate other sources of income to avoid total dependence on government resources only. They could organize national seminars, workshops, etc as it could help greatly to furnish other resources to enable the library to execute certain developmental projects and create awareness among stakeholders. Of course, Librarians should change their attitude towards ICTs and appreciate modern communication technologies by increasing their level of understanding and utilizing them positively to assist in the information delivery services. Government effort towards stabilization of power supply and communication infrastructures needs to be redoubled. Funding for libraries by the government is quite pathetic. Government should give education a top priority as through education a nation can be enlightened enabling to utilize and harness potentialities to move a country forward. It

is ultimately that efforts and the suggestions are put to test so that the dream for national computer-based networks of libraries is realized.

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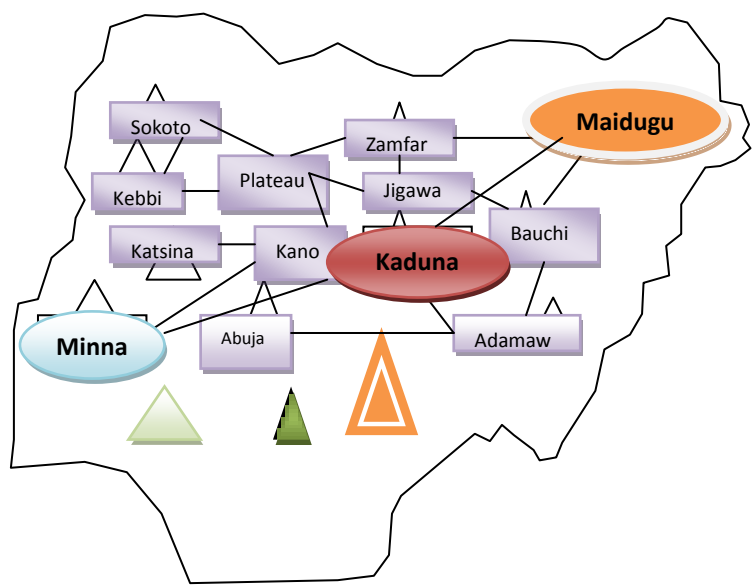
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**APPENDIX
PROPOSED NETWORK STRUCTURE FOR ISLAMIC SHARIA COURT
(LAW) LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA**



LEGEND

 Sub Hub

 Hub and zonal Head quarters

 Satellite link