Indian Academic library consortia (IALC): A proposal for electronic resource sharing

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Abstract:
Library & Information system networking in India have come into existence more than two decade ago. For so many years the term "Interlibrary loan or Exchange" has been in focus in the parlance of library management. This scenario has extended from its limited basis to become fully grown Consortia of various kinds. Since India is a developing country, we constantly work towards improving our infrastructure and technology to meet the demands of our scientists and researchers by taking the lead from the developed countries. By utilizing the support of the regional & national level networking, libraries in India should cooperatively establish library consortia for offering and sharing electronic resources. Many libraries, especially research libraries in India, have their own network existing within their own locations. These networks can be expanded to enhance the access to the information resources through collaborative partnerships, in the form of Consortia. Since this Consortia idea is still at a nascent stage in Indian libraries, it is essential to have some ideal Consortia models for our libraries to adhere to for optimum utilization of their resources and services. Today Consortium's purpose is shifted from mere sharing of resources to sharing of expertise between libraries and also to explore the need for libraries to make the most effective use of their funds collectively. This is an essential future aspect to be considered seriously in libraries of India. Attempts have been made here to illuminate the idea of forming a national level consortium of Indian academic libraries (IALC) and delineate its benefits.

International background:

Library cooperation is no new phenomenon in India, but consortia are still in nascent stage and significantly growing during recent years. Due to the impetus toward technological innovation, there has been renewed interest in Consortia development in all library sectors. A library consortium is a group of libraries that agree to pull their resources by allowing the users to each institution some type of access to the resources of all the other institutions, either through interlibrary loan or borrowing privileges. Electronic resources accessed through WWW are becoming one major source of information, and sharing these kinds of information resources gradually becomes another important goal for establishing library consortia. Electronic libraries like netLibrary are the latest ventures which has signed agreements with many leading libraries for creating electronic versions of the books. Libraries like OhioLINK, PALINET, University of Colorado Library system and several other consortiums are accessing this NetLibrary.

In Thailand, for instance, there are two existing networks (THAILINET, a network of online catalogues of academic libraries in the Bangkok region, and PULINET, the grouping of provincial academic libraries) have now joined forces to form ThaiLIS, which is the backbone of a national resource-sharing system. The China Academic Library and Information System (CALIS) lunched in the first half of 2000 is a nation-wide academic library consortium which links services across the provinces and cities in China. Washington Research Library Consortium(WRLC) cooperatively developing collections of member libraries, and assuring expeditious access to, and delivery of materials held in those collections. Consortium of Academic Libraries of Catalonia (CBUC*) is* a consortium of the state-funded universities and the State Library of Catalonia (Spain) acting as a channel for co-operation. The Digital Library of Catalonia has been sharing the electronic resources among all the member libraries of the consortium. The Gauteng and Environs Library Consortium (GAELIC) is the largest academic library consortium in South Africa, striving to achieve greater efficiency in the area of document delivery, with the objective of providing information rapidly, cost-effectively, and in accordance with users' needs and expectations. The Regional University and Science Library Advanced Network (RUSLANet) in North-West of Russia is creating common information space of libraries and integrating to worldwide library information space. International coalition of Library consortia (ICOLC) comprising of library consortia in the United States, Canada, The United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, Israel , Australia and many other countries. The Coalition represents over 5000 member libraries worldwide, serves primarily higher education institutions by facilitating discussions among its members on issues of common interest.

Resource sharing in India:

In India there are few efforts to provide and share electronic resources through networking. The National Information System for Science & Technology (NISSAT), Dept of Scientific & Industrial research (DSIR) took up initiatives for the design and development of library networks in India in the year 1985 in order to share the resources available in the libraries, located in various parts of the country. At present there are few networks working on national label namely INFLIBNET, ERNET, DELNET etc. besides each metro city in India have their own Metropolitan City network. INFLIBNET - the catalyst in promoting resource sharing among university libraries, has taken a new initiative recently by launching an innovative service called Electronic Document Delivery Service. This service was launched in the month of July 2000, by six university libraries, which are identified to serve as Document Delivery Center National level subject specific libraries such as National Science Library, National Medical Library, etc. at Delhi maintaining computerized databases and acting as information provider of specific subject area. The National Library stands out as the largest library which acts as the depository as well as the repository of all material published in India received under D.B Act. In the year 1979, astronomy librarians established the FORSA (Forum for Resource Sharing in Astronomy) a regional forum to have an extended information exchange facility, not only within the astronomy libraries, but also with physics, mathematics and computer science libraries. Mostly Indian libraries are using library software to create and maintain in-house databases are designed in SQL, MS – Access, Oracle (or any other RDBMS, as backend) and using web based modules(front end) through which end users can access resources via a communication network. DELNET- Developing library network, Indian Institute of Technology (IITs), Indian Institute of Science ,CSIR library, INFLIBNET-Information & library network, National Aerospace research library etc. are the Indian web libraries using distributed information system and client can access these via Internet or communication network.

Table 1: **Library networks of India**

Name	Objectives
INFLIBNET (Information & library networks) http://www.inflibnet.ac.in	It is involved in modernizing university libraries in India and connecting them as well as information centres in the country through a nation-wide high speed data network using the state-of-art technologies for the optimum utilization of information.
DELNET(Developing library network) established 1996 as Delhi Library Network ,name changed in Sept.2000(http://delnet.nic.in)	Prime objective is promoting *resource sharing* among the libraries through the development of a network of libraries. It aims to collect, store, and disseminate information besides offering computerized services to users, to coordinate efforts for suitable collection development and also to reduce unnecessary duplication wherever possible.
CALIBNET(Calcutta library network)	It aims to provide the individual libraries and their members with cost-effective solutions to their information problems. The primary objective of the Project is building access to library & information resources available in the eastern region of India
PUNENET (Pune library network)	The main objective of PuneNet is to connect the libraries and other resource centers in Pune. It maintains centralized databases of information resources available in the participating libraries.
MYLIBNET (Mysore library network)	It provides faster communication to all the libraries in Mysore city through E- mail. Creating awareness in the field of latest IT development & its application on libraries by conducting seminars/workshop/ training programs etc.
ADINET(Ahmadabad library network)1994	ADINET is promoting resource sharing and disseminating electronic information among member libraries by connecting them through network and creating a centralized Union catalogue of their holdings. It plans to coordinate efforts for suitable collection development and reduce unnecessary duplication wherever possible.
MANLIBNET(Management library network) 1998	It aims to achieve high standards in management and business librarianship and information services in India. Developing strong linkages among management and business libraries for resource sharing.

- **Electronic journal consortium:**

The move to form a consortium to share the cost of the access to e-journals is an essential task in the immediate future. In India the major academic libraries initiated consortium subscriptions to electronic journals, namely TIFR Mumbai has two consortium subscriptions viz. Math Science Net of American Mathematical society and LINK of Springer-Verlag which authorizes its sister organizations from Pune, Bangalore & Ooty access to electronic journals Similarly other organizations viz, IITs(Indian Institute of Technology) CSIR Laboratories have their consortium subscriptions within respective institute or negotiating for the same. FORSA had already attempted for the astronomy journals published by Kluwer Academic publishers within member libraries. Overall 545 titles are subscribed by five IIM(Institute of Management)libraries in India;

negotiations with publisher are initiated for discount on multiple subscriptions, which can be distributed among the participating libraries, which would strengthen the consortium activities.

The structure & function of Indian Academic library Consortia (IALC):
The library system in India are categorized into two major groups, viz. special library system and University library system, these are scattered throughout the country. The proposed IALC consortium of academic libraries will be a nation wide consortium, centered at New-Delhi funded by Govt. Of India .One of the original motive of this consortium is to increase the use of existing bibliographic resources in India. At the first stage IALC would focus on multidiscipline databases. However some single discipline databases are also important for the research of specific fields; thus in the next stage IALC would select both multi discipline & single discipline resources according to the requirements of the members. At the initial stage IALC will include of University and research libraries of national repute. However it will be open for participation to all libraries throughout India. IALC would combine together the purchasing power of all members and brings considerable leverage in licensing negotiation in order to obtain the best possible prices, services and rights from information providers. The organizational mode of IALC would be a combination of both centralized and localized management-that is a three tired structure viz. national, regional and local centers or member libraries (figure 1). To achieve maximum efficiency & smooth functioning, IALC would establish one national administrative center, four national information center, eight regional centers(responsible for promoting resource sharing in that particular region) in addition to this there will be national management center, regional management center to assist and advise in the concerned region.

- **Prerequisites**

 Strong resource sharing activities among libraries is the prerequisite for right mindset towards consortia activities.The following must be ensured before preparing the plan for linkages between Academic libraries:

1. Institutional commitment to accept the given measures.
2. Fund and support resource sharing solution.
3. Attitudinal changes in library staff to undertake additional responsibility in resource sharing environment.
4. Training of library staff to understand and appreciate the changed situation.

The successful operation of a library consortium clearly depends on the good working relationships among members and between members and the consortium.
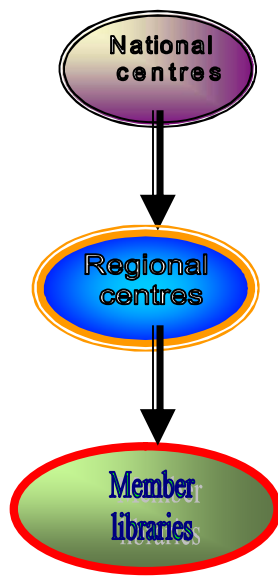
Figure 1: **I A L C - Proposed three-tired model**

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Table 2
Four national information centers

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Areas of specialization	Proposed location
Humanities ,Social sciences & Agriculture	INFLIBNET center, Ahmedabad
Engineering &Technology	IIT, Delhi
Science & Medicine	National Science library INSDOC New-Delhi
Defense & allied subject	DESIDOC , Delhi

Associated problems and Benefits:

Academic institutions in India and library users expect their libraries to acquire electronic resources while simultaneously maintaining or growing traditional print collections until the electronic resources are fully stable, it is also expected to maintain with no additional funding IALC has to contribute to the development of research & display the potentiality of serving their member libraries in many ways. The collaborative buying power, collective technical expertise, resource sharing, staff development, consolidation of services and collections, risk sharing, are the intangible benefits of consortia. Along with their strengths, consortia can develop negative characteristics that threaten to overwhelm the reasons for their existence. For member libraries, the dark side of consortia includes bureaucracy, loss of local control, expense, political intrigue, etc.

 IALC will realize several benefits:

1. Greater selectivity in collection developments
2. One comprehensive collection is better than several mediocre one
3. Intellectual & physical access will continue to improve via networking.
4. Different collection should have different specializations so as not to develop duplicate or competing comprehensive collections.
5. Consortia members will have a voice in determining the shape of consortia activities and priorities for the program, including the priorities of topics selected for grant applications.
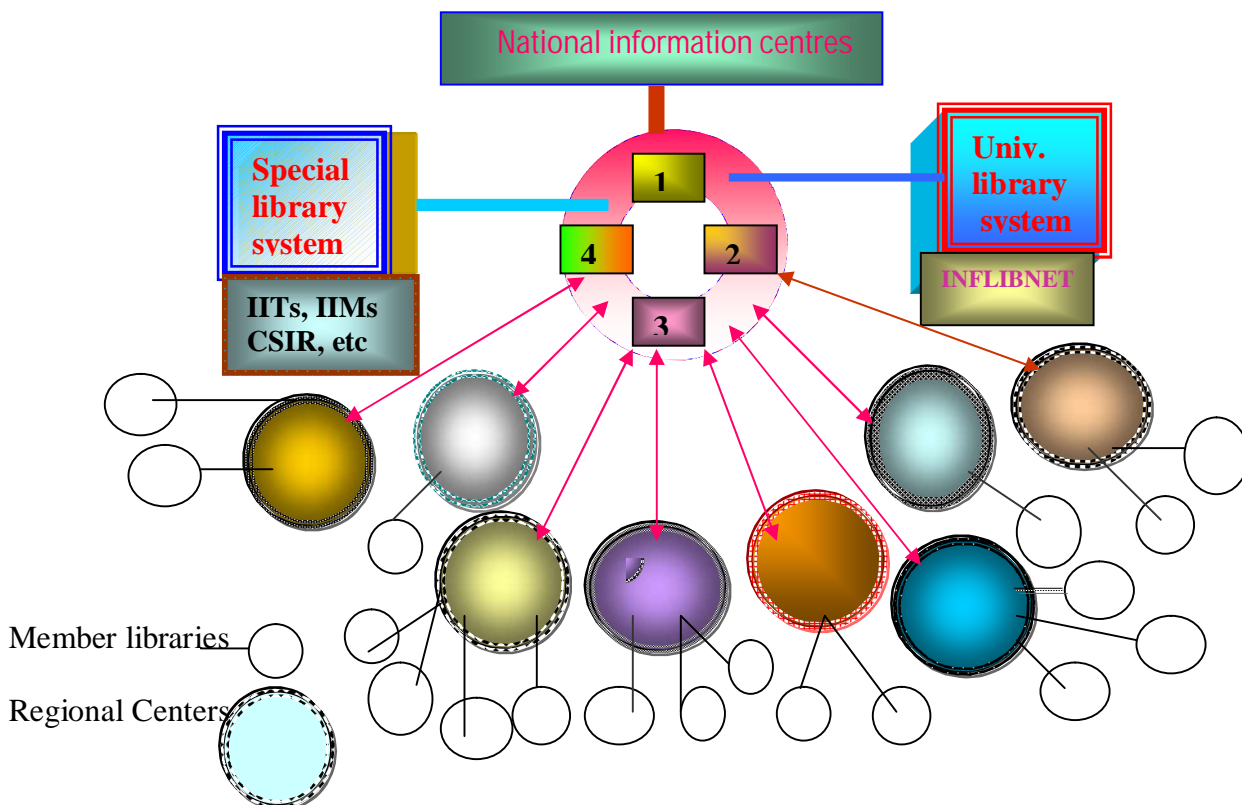
Until recently many consortia have not been very successful, the proposed IALC may face one or many of the following problems:

1. Inadequate planning, policies & procedures
2. Inadequacy of efficient stuff to manage program and relationships
3. Poor bibliographic control of participant holdings
4. Providing access can be a complex and difficult business
5. Copyright, permissions, fees and contractual agreements can create real barriers to sharing information
6. Lack of finance to support equitable cost sharing is a continuing problem

The Architecture of IALC:

Good communication and reporting structures are critically important in a consortium. Information from the consortium needs to be conveyed to individual institutions, and library managers need to ensure that it is passed on within their organizations. The proposed IALC model will be based, client-server relationship, which require close co-operation and the mutual acceptance of standards. 'Server libraries' will offer services to member libraries(client libraries) & take on the task of developing networked services in a specific subject domain (Social sciences, Medicine, Engineering, etc.) as a national information center. Client libraries, in contrast, do not develop full-scale services in areas covered by national server libraries; rather they act as an interface to these server libraries.

Figure: 2   Proposed IALC model

Mission and vision:

IALC's primary mission is to encourage and facilitate interlibrary communication, education and resource sharing within its diverse multi-type library membership ; to bring together national regional and local libraries or information centers for serving multiple resource sharing functions (e.g online searching, inter-library loan, document delivery, coordinated purchasing and cooperative cataloguing etc.) by digitizing resources and developing an information service network. The purpose of IALC is to fully utilize and develop the entire information resources in the country for promoting education, research, and lifelong learning among its clients, as a contribution to the development of research in India. Its vision is to create a virtual library by linking together University as well as special libraries via networks. It may be hoped that IALC will have accomplished the transition into a nation wide networking system of interdependent libraries with intensive international contacts & cooperation towards a distributed and dynamically developing digital library. In fulfillment of its mission, the following major objectives are to be agreed upon as the basis of cooperation between members in order to establish IALC as a workable and successful consortium:

- To support the information needs of clients through cooperation, resource sharing, and enhanced access to electronic information;
- To provide common software to facilitate resource sharing and provide state-of-the-art systems capabilities in member libraries;
- To formulate appropriate collection development and acquisitions policies among members, and to explore ways of saving costs;
- To utilize appropriate and up-to-date technology, and to keep abreast of new developments;
- To improve information literacy among clients, and to share training resources and expertise;
- To contribute towards the provision of information for the development of Indian subcontinent.

Concluding Remarks:

The primary purpose of IALC would be to control and reduce information costs, improve resource sharing, develop a networking information environment & share licensing issues with each other Although Current library networking activities for resource sharing and consortia concepts are growing in India but it is lacking of sound infrastructure & proper finance, unable to communicate or exchange data efficiently with users with in time & value added information . There is a need to put systematic effort to overcome this drawback. It is important to develop facilities like centralized cataloguing, developing protocol for transferring information from one library to another, enable the consortium to take a formal shape. There are insufficient awareness, especially on the academic side; the challenges of electronic information, economic & political dimension are the central problems in the construction of a national level information system. National library at Kolkata (http://nlindia.org/) could not provide sufficient leadership on cooperative work such as collective catalogues, interlibrary loan, and more recently, developing digital libraries. Following are the few observations can be summarized as follows:

1. Initiatives in the area of digital cooperation are coming mainly from the University and Research-institute libraries.

2. National library networking Projects (INFLIBNET) are unable develop sufficient backbone infrastructure for the formation of proper consortia, most likely because of financial problems lack of initiatives and especially the complexity and length of the decision-making processes needed to constitute a national consortia.
3. The Indian Digital library initiatives taken by DELNET & NISSAT should be properly funded by the Govt. of India
4. Some attention is turning towards university electronic publishing, though at the present stage it does not seem there are practical projects for cooperation in this area.
5. Although Govt. Of India has set up a separate ministry of Information technology, but still they are lacking an adequate national policy in the area of electronic information is probably the direct consequence of the problems.
6. The low initiative by libraries (compared with other countries) in developing content and in storing digital collections.

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