



**OUTSOURCING OF LIBRARY SERVICES IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES:  
THE PROS AND CONS**

***TERCEIRIZAÇÃO DE SERVIÇOS BIBLIOTECÁRIOS EM BIBLIOTECAS  
UNIVERSITÁRIAS NIGERIANAS: OS PRÓS E CONTRAS***

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**ABSTRACT:** The economic recession witnessed globally in the late year 2000 affected almost every sectors of the economy. The library was not left out. In order to survive and to remain relevant in the system, following the reduction in the financial allocation of the libraries, libraries opted for a way out. This calls for the introduction of outsourcing in the library system. This study reviews some of the library services that are been outsourced in order to save cost and improve operational efficiency. It went further to investigate on the reasons why libraries outsourced their services thus allows the library to refocus upon its core businesses or services and re-engineering its business processes. The researcher went further to x-ray the shortfalls associated with outsourcing of library services.

**KEYWORDS:** Outsourcing, University library, Library services, Photocopying services, Binding Services, Cataloguing Services, Non-core functions, Economic recession.

**RESUMO:** A recessão econômica globalmente testemunhada no ano 2000 afetou quase todos os setores da economia. A biblioteca não foi uma exceção. Para sobreviver e permanecer no sistema, seguindo a redução de seus recursos financeiros, as bibliotecas optaram pela introdução da terceirização em seus sistemas. Este estudo revê alguns dos serviços bibliotecários que têm sido terceirizados para reduzir custos e melhorar a eficiência operacional. Buscou-se investigar as razões pelas quais as bibliotecas terceirizaram seus serviços permitindo assim um reposicionamento dos seus principais serviços e uma reconstrução de seus processos de negócio. O investigador intentou radiografar as deficiências associadas à terceirização de serviços bibliotecários.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Terceirização, Biblioteca Universitária, Serviços Bibliotecários, Serviços de fotocópia, Serviços de encadernação, Serviços de catalogação, Funções não essenciais, Recessão econômica.

## Introduction

Outsourcing is having an external agency perform a function or related functions instead of doing it with in-house agency employees. The term in reference to services was coined in 1989 when Eastman Kodak outsourced its information technology unit to three outside firms observed, Bryson (1999). Outsourcing can be applied to any service in the library especially noncore services. In the late 2000, the whole world witnessed recession in their economy which has some financial implications on the spending pattern of organizations. Organizations' financial allocation was affected drastically. In federal, state and local government which get their monthly allocation from the government purse were also affected. Libraries that exist in these establishments were badly hit by the recession especially the university libraries which get their allocations from the federal and the state vaults respectively. Their allocations were reduced to the bearest minimum. Hence information centers and libraries, irrespective of the sector they exist, are typically seen as not generating any revenue rather they are seen by their parent organizations as consumers of financial resources of the organisation, which is an extremely risky position for them to be in today. In order for libraries to survive within the limited resources available to them, they employed various strategies in order to cut costs and still provide the necessary services to their increasing clientele. These costs, coupled with static budgets make the burden on library services tremendous. These libraries then opted for outsourcing of some of their services. Attempts to save money and improve operational efficiency have led to the first example of "outsourcing" a public library to a private vendor says Rubin (1998). This was observed in 1997, when library Systems and services, inc., located in Maryland, took over the operations of the Riverside Country Public Library System in California **(J.K, 1997)**

According to Ugah (2010), outsourcing is a controversial issue with redundancy implications for library staff. It is a frequently misused and misunderstood term and some disagreement can be traced to different definitions observed, Appleby (2000). Bryson (1999), used "outsourcing" to mean contracting out of services to a third party to manage on the organization's behalf. In some instances, it involves the transfer of ownership and responsibility for assets from the organization to the vendor. Outsourcing describes how services are obtained although the term outsourcing and its practice have been more prevalent in business; it has recently become a persistent and controversial topic among librarians as a result of the financial reduction to University libraries that get their financial

subvention from the federal, state and private organizations respectively. In order to improve on the quality of service delivery by the university libraries coupled with the effect of the economic recession, university libraries in Nigeria opted for outsourcing of some of their non-core functions. It is on this premise that this study looks at outsourcing of library services in Nigeria University libraries in order to reveal the pros (reasons for) and cons (reasons against) associated with the introduction of outsourcing in library services.

### **Literature review**

Outsourcing of some library services has not been a new thing. Libraries have outsourced some non-professional tasks for many years now. Cataloging has been outsourced since the Library of Congress began issuing printed catalog cards. Many libraries have purchased shelf-ready books from vendors. Leased or rental books represent outsourced collection development where a profile creates a changing collection of shelf-ready books. Some new libraries have begun with "opening day" shelf-ready collections put together according to standard lists by vendors.

Lund (1997), used "outsourcing" to mean that someone who is not on the university payroll manages the whole or part of a university library function, employing their own staff and assets. Outsourcing describes how services are obtained. Although the term and its practice have been more prevalent in business, library outsourcing has recently become a persistent and controversial topic among librarians. Some of the activities that have traditionally been performed by libraries are now being outsourced to other organizations for example, automated acquisitions have also permitted vendors to supply some materials already processed and catalogued, and even re-bound to specification observed, (RUBIN, 1998). He went further to reveal that vendor acquisition and selection processes have become so sophisticated that in some instances major collection development responsibilities are shifted to vendors. Whatever the definition, outsourcing has become a standard practice in both the corporate and the not-for-profit worlds. A 1995 survey indicates 40% of Fortune 500 Companies outsourced some department or service (LANCASTER, 1995).

Outsourcing may also offer expertise that is not available in-house, and library management can concentrate more resources on activities tied directly to the mission of

the library. Outsourcing may improve services that have become unproductive observed (APPLEBY, 2000); Ebbinghouse, (2002). There are processes involved in outsourcing of library service. Bryson (1997), listed the processes to include; determining the right objectives and strategy; determining what to outsource; assessing the benefits; determining the risks; selection of the vendor; negotiating the contract; structuring the relationship; and managing the risks.

## **Library services outsourced**

- **Cataloguing Services**

In the early part of the 20th century, the Library of Congress began mass-producing catalog cards and providing them to other libraries, in the process becoming perhaps the first vendor of cataloging services, observed Robert et al., (2000). Over the years, libraries have contracted out not only cataloging services, but other functions as well, including the development of automated systems and the acquisition of materials. These practices were not generally labeled as outsourcing when first adopted, and they are common practice today. Libraries that still use card catalogue can engage the services of vendors as a temporary measure to deal with the production of cataloguing materials like the date due books and the like. This will enable the few librarians to concentrate on the core processing of the backlogs of books yet to be processed. Libraries that still operate card catalogue can employ the services of good printers for the production of cards, book pockets, date return slips, borrowers tickets and other card related works and save library the cost and effort of doing them in house.

Dunkle (1996), in her article, "Outsourcing the Catalog department: A Mediation Inspired by the business and Library Literature," notes a variety of businesses effectively use outsourcing to become more effective and reduce costs. While not a good idea to totally outsource cataloging functions, Dunkle suggests cataloging by vendors may provide greater accuracy and consistency of cataloging records.

- **Photocopying**

Most libraries have photocopying services. When the machines break down, library staff must solve the problem. Money generated from this service may be diverted to other activities instead of replenishing the photocopying paper, servicing, and maintaining the photocopier, and buying toner, said Ugah (2010). Libraries should outsource this service or a business partnership should be engaged and allocated space within the library or its vicinity, to photocopy library materials at a reasonable cost to the user. This service when rendered at a reasonable cost will reduce the risk of losing the materials on high demand that are very few in copies.

- **Indexing and abstracting services**

Greater numbers of libraries do not have the resources to provide indexes and abstracts for their collections of periodical literature and similar material. At the same time, it takes time and money to train indexers and abstractors; hence libraries tend to resolve to outsourcing indexing and abstracting services in the libraries in order to save cost.

- **Collection development services**

Libraries outsourced their collection development by contracting vendors with the services of building their collection. Libraries leased or rental books represent outsourced collection development where a profile creates a changing collection of shelf-ready books. Some new libraries have begun with "opening day" shelf-ready collections put together according to standard lists by vendors.

- **Binding and book repair**

Some libraries maintain a bindery and book repair unit. Some libraries have had problems with this unit become corrupt, using facilities, material, and time to engage in the private business of binding, enriching them to the detriment of the library while at the same time using the materials of the library at little or no gain. They at the long run collect salaries and allowances. Ugah (2010), suggested that outsourcing is a cure for this kind of corruption.

### **Reasons for outsourcing (Pros & Cons)**

Outsourcing is a viable consideration where the services can be provided more efficiently by an experienced third party says (Bryson 1999). The outsourcing of information and library services allows the library to refocus upon its core businesses or services and re-engineering its business processes.

Bryson (1999), went further to emphasize that if all the outsourcing process works well it stands to achieve the following:

- Save money since the vendor has economies of scale
- Allow resources to be shifted to core competencies
- Be more effective since vendors have economies of scale and more specialized experience
- Lessening of overheads associated with minor services

Supporting the above reasons Marcum (1998), saw outsourcing as a positive and strong cost cutting measure. He went further to say that outsourcing has been identified as a method of spinning off unnecessary work in order to focus the organization on its primary goals.

In another development, Baker (1998), saw rationale for outsourcing, in its “potential to reduce costs, increase customer satisfaction, and provide effective and efficient improvements.” He points out that “the success of the outsourcing project depends on how well the library plans and does its homework before entering into an agreement with a provider. A good contract and a good relationship with the vendor will help the library monitor performance, quality, and maintain control of the operation.”

Notwithstanding the above reasons, outsourcing may have the following shortfalls:

- Existing staff may lose their positions (outsourcing = downsizing)
- Vendors pay lower salaries, reduced fringe benefits and offer minimal job security so worker performance may be less efficient and effective (lower morale)
- Worker's loyalty is to the employer and not the library
- Poorly written contracts may not allow needed changes to be made
- Longer term contracts may become dysfunctional when conditions change rapidly



An obvious concern is that outsourcing will create a "hollowed out" information agency, one that can no longer do what needs to be done or respond quickly to changing conditions.

Outsourcing has been a frequent point of dispute for organized labour. If, for example, an employer has a labour contract with a union, and the outsourced work could be performed by union members, then the union will typically object to such a practice because it takes work away from the union's members. Management favours outsourcing, or subcontracting, often to nonunion providers, because these activities can often reduce costs. Outsourcing can also reduce the number of employees in a collective bargaining unit.

Michael Gorman is one of the most outspoken critics of outsourcing, especially outsourcing of cataloging and technical services. He states with some asperity that the outsourced catalog is "corruption of the bedrock of library competence" (Gorman 1995). More recently he wrote that library managers who decide to contract with outside vendors for cataloging, selection or acquisition services "are saying, in effect, that professional library skills and experience can be replaced by distant vendors who probably lack the former and certainly lack the latter." He opposes outsourcing because in his view it leads to an "inevitable debasement of service" and because it undermines "the very foundations of our profession" (GORMAN, 1998, 74).

Before outsourcing, libraries must know how much it costs to perform particular costs and how to measure success. This is absolutely essential. If this is not done well, outsourcing can be disastrous.

## **Conclusion**

Outsourcing library services is an interesting adventure in the library world which has achieved the opportunity of saving cost- saving and at the same time improved efficiency. Outsourcing may be a good career alternative to a traditional full-time job for librarians says Ugah (2010). It also has been a means of contracting out those support services which have been on the full time employment of the library thereby saving cost and improving efficiency. The libraries may not predict what the economy will have for the libraries in the nearest future, if not going to be worse than what was experienced in the



late 2000. The extent to which outsourcing will become an integral part of library processes is yet to be seen, but electronic technologies are bound to increase the percentage of this activity in the future observed Rubin (1998). This will directly affect the funding of the libraries and affect the services of these libraries if measures are not put in place in time. This suggested for quick and total outsourcing of some of the non-core services of the library and still remain relevant in the system where they exit.

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