



The Center of Excellence for Academic Services in Jordanian Public Universities: Achievements and Ambitions

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Abstract

In 2000, the Jordanian Government launched a project to improve education in public universities. The libraries were the core target to provide better services for researchers. A consortium was established for this purpose. Now we have one library system for ten universities, one administration, a union catalog, and consortia subscriptions for online e-resources. So, we are not only saving a substantial amount of money annually, we are also providing ample resources and quality services. We consider the Center a story of success that we would like other institutions to have, reaching a consortium of consortia in the Arab world. The presentation sheds light on the Center's achievements and ambitions. The researcher collected the data for this paper from publishers of databases and also from the archives of the Center of Excellence.

“The idea that libraries should, in some way, find means of work cooperatively is a deeply rooted concept in librarianship.” (J. W. Kraus: Prologue to Library Cooperation)

1. Introduction

The libraries in the 21st century are confronted with issues involving constantly increasing information overload, changing patterns of resource management, new and growing technologies, specialized needs and expectations of users which are threatening the very existence of the usual functioning of libraries around the world and have pushed them to the crossroads (NACLIN 2011). In the 1990s, serial prices started rising at about 10% per annum. In 1995, serials prices increased 10.8%, 9.9% in 1996, and 10.3% in 1997, eventually reaching 10.4% in 1998. Library budgets were struggling to keep up the subscription, and every time the price of a journal increased, a few more libraries cancelled their subscriptions. This led publishers to increase prices further, which triggered another round of cancellations. It was a vicious cycle that many felt threatened to destroy the 350-year-old scholarly publishing system (Cham, 2011).

Although no particular date can be cited as the beginning point of library consortium, the concept as a consortium as being an association or partnership has long been a tenet of librarianship (Kopp, 1998). However, it is said that cooperation between libraries was initiated in the 1880's (Horton, 2015). The idea of cooperation in the United States started early in the 19th Century. Bostick (2001) reports the American Library Association formed the Cooperation Committee. The library of Congress began a cooperative cataloging program in the early 1900's by distributing cataloging information and cards to participating libraries nationwide. De-la-Fuente, et al. (2012) points out that academic libraries are dramatically changing towards an innovative age of information services as a result of the development of open an ever-increasing access to different electronic

resources and more liberal educational systems. It is also agreed among librarians and politicians that part of library resources management should not only focus on maximum utilization of the library budget, but on the extension of this budget to exceed institution boundaries, at least within each region. According to the US Code of Federal Regulations, Section 54.500, a library consortium “is any local, regional, or national cooperative association of libraries that provides for the systematic and effective coordination of the resources of school, public, academic, and special libraries and information centers, for improving services to the clientele of such libraries.” Therefore, library cooperation can be described as a fundamental aspect of the human society. On the same line of the importance of combined efforts to develop library cooperation, Shilpa, et al. (2013) argues that

Library associations play an important role in development of libraries. It provides a forum to the professionals to share their experiences and to suggest new measures for development at national level. Associations can also play a vital role in conducting trainings and short courses for the library information training through conducting seminars, workshops and conferences.

There are many advocates for creating library associations and consortia in the world who keep emphasizing the idea of cooperation in library resources. For example, Brooks (2002), supporting the idea of savings for the sake of enriching library resources for the benefit of the researchers at institutions, asserts that

Depending upon the stability and longevity of an individual consortium and the databases chosen by that consortium, libraries may seek to address other needs with the funding previously used for ‘similar’ resources. Although allocating funds in this manner may seem appropriate, the existing resources must be scrutinized to determine their degree of necessity as well as the quality information lost in making such a decision.

Libraries have myriad reasons for forming a consortium. While some libraries do so to save money by sharing resources, others are more interested in building joint collections of resources, especially articles, theses, books, etc. Having in mind that an individual library is never adequate alone, we can assert this kind of collaboration leads to richer resources, which in turn boost research in their academic institutions. For we know that such resources make the essential tools for researchers to be able to come up with significant research of publishable quality. Significant published research adds to the ranking of the institutions of the researchers on the universities scales worldwide.

Library cooperation is basically the exchange of library resources. However, we should also consider the financial support needed to obtain the resources that libraries can otherwise acquire through cooperation. As a result, library cooperation is always closely associated with the level of the financial support to individual libraries. We perfectly know that Library budgets almost always fall short from allowing them to be self-sufficient. The other reason relates to the ample amount of ever increasing resources which are needed by researchers and learners. Storage capacity, which is always limited, requires libraries to utilize the storage capacities of other libraries. Sometimes, a certain very expensive resource which is in a certain area of specialization that is not a major one in a certain institution, but a patron in this institution needs this resource, his library can borrow it from another library instead of acquitting it. This kind of cooperation gives the impression and the comfort that each member of a consortium considers all the libraries of the other members are its. With such a cooperation and assumption, libraries increase the return value of their resources. Therefore, the library budget of every member of a consortium contributes to benefit all members. Moreover, the idea of monopoly of library resources is reduced to minimum, if not eliminated altogether.

Some authorities in the field of research take the issue even further by developing a kind of global cooperation across continent boundaries for richer research. Vincent-Lancrin, (2006) argues that one particular increasing feature is the increase in international research collaborations, which can be evidenced by the increase in the numbers of internationally co-

authored publications. He maintains that these international collaborations are happening not only within OECD countries but also include emerging and developing countries.

2. Advantages of Consortia

The advantages of consortia can be manifested in two categories: one that relates to obtaining the system and its hardware and administration; the second relates to the savings as a result of consortia subscriptions to databases. This is a breakdown of these categories:

- a. Libraries can cooperatively own integrated library systems which they cannot individually. For example, the cost of ILS of the Jordanian libraries consortium (hardware and software) was about US\$ 1.6 million. No one library can even think about having this system by itself.
- b. The ILS has one administrative location and staff instead of as many as there are libraries. This reduces the running cost of libraries.
- c. Cataloging processes are reduced because a resource is cataloged only once in the consortium.
- d. The cost-benefits are enormous. – Libraries world over have reported gains ranging from 70-90%.
- e. Access to a greater number of journal titles and a stronger negotiating position through the purchase of a greater volume of content.
- f. Indian consortia are a step ahead in their negotiation skills and have been able to secure gains up 96%.
- g. Smaller institutions (historically unable to afford many journals), can have access to wide range of journals
- h. Researcher and author also get benefit as consortia made it possible to expend greater potential readership.

3. Method of Research:

3.1 Data Collection:

The researcher contacted publishers of databases to which member universities subscribe to obtain statistics about individual institutional prices, consortia prices, number of full text resources, and number of downloads for the years 2011-2015. The researcher also referred to the COE meeting minutes and archives for information about the COE services to the consortium.

3.2 Data Analysis:

The researcher used Microsoft Excel to calculate the figures obtained from publishers for each year. The results include the amount of savings (Total Individual price – total consortia price) and the cost per article.

4. The Center of Excellence for Jordanian Public University Library Services

The creation of the COE in Jordan took several stages as follows:

- a. In 2000, the Jordanian Government decided to improve the quality of education in Jordan in general, and higher education in particular. Therefore, it (through the Ministry of Planning) allocated about US\$ 2,000,000 for a pioneering project to develop and improve library services as a necessary step to improve education at public universities level.
- b. The Council of Higher Education formed a Steering Committee which consisted from the vice presidents of the public universities to lead the project.
- c. A Technical Committee was formed from the directors of the libraries at public universities and a representative of the Ministry of Planning. This committee started holding weekly meetings (every Thursday) at the Ministry of Planning in Amman.
- d. Since this kind of experience was completely novel to us in Jordan, there was a strong feeling that there was a need for an expert in this field to join the Technical Committee. Therefore, the Ministry of

Planning hired an experienced consultant in this field, who joined the technical committee.

- e. Under the supervision of the Steering Committee, the Technical Committee worked for more than a year to prepare the specifications of the required system (hardware and software) so as to reach a state-of-the-art Integrated Library System capable of running a consortium of the libraries of the public universities. The TC constantly reported the development of the project to the SC which regularly kept the Council of Higher Education posted of all activities.
- f. The specifications (mandatory, non-mandatory, and nice-to-have) were included in one document as required by the Ministry of Planning.
- g. The consultant suggested two ways of carrying out the project: One called for a separate independent system for each library; another called for a single system for all libraries. The major disadvantage of the first method was that such a system would be far beyond the financial capacity of any individual university. Also, there would be no union catalog for these libraries. The advantages of the second method were many, such as affordability, management, and a union catalog, among others that surfaced later (consortia subscriptions) etc.
- h. The Technical Committee found the second method applicable. This decision was encouraged by the presence of a ground fiber optic network owned by the public universities that was functional then connecting these universities. This meant that one server can provide service for all public universities wherever they are from one site.
- i. The consultant personally visited the libraries of the public universities to recommend one to host the system. In a special meeting to choose the host university, the Technical Committee debated the issue and eventually Yarmouk University accepted to host it in its newly erected and adequately equipped library for the proper operation of the servers and the library system.
- j. Yarmouk University has been providing the following to the COE:
 1. a number of its employees from the Computer Center and the Library Department to the administration of the project,

2. it has been paying their regular salaries and other university benefits,
 3. it pays for power consumption (offices, servers, server room air conditioners, heating and cooling systems, training labs, etc.).
 4. it provides a back-up power generator to keep the system running in case of power outage.
 5. About 500 square meters for the administrative offices of the COE.
 6. Services of its Financial Department, Procurement Department, Tender Department, Maintenance Department, Transportation Department, and the Legal Department to support the COE.
- k. The Steering Committee adopted the recommendation and passed it to the Council of Higher Education which approved it. The name Center of Excellence for Academic Library Services at Jordanian Public Universities was given to the project.
 - l. An establishment document was prepared to regulate the process of running the COE, point out the role of the host university, determine the annual fees of member universities, the salaries and allowances of employees, etc. It has been the only legal reference for the COE, though the Administrative Board has tried several times with the Ministry of Higher Education to upgrade this document to a Regulation approved by the Cabinet, but all efforts have been in vein, under the assumption that the document is good enough.
 - m. The document of the specifications of the required library system was forwarded to the National Center for Human Resources Development which revised it and prepared it for the tender.
 - n. Five competitors showed interest and filed their offers. After studying the offers with regard to specifications fulfillment, reasonable price, and time of installation, a decision was taken to adopt the Horizon Integrated Library System. The cost was about US\$ 1,600,000 paid by the Ministry of Planning from the allocated money for the project, as a library consortium for the first time in Jordan.
 - o. The technicians of Horizon started working on the installation of the hardware (the servers) and the software (the ILS).
 - p. The integration between the Registration Department and Human Resources Department and Horizon was accomplished.

- q. The stage of testing started immediately first by the migration of the catalog of Yarmouk University library from its Oracle-based system to Horizon. An item was checked out and returned on both systems, which was a horrendous job for the Circulation Division for four months.
- r. The results were compared and corrections were continuously carried out until the results on both systems were the consistent. Then the experience was carried out at the level of all universities, by the migration of all library catalogs into Horizon.
- s. The technicians worked out integration in other universities as well, and the testing was carried out at this level.
- t. A union catalog for the public universities was established for the first time. This required a process of integrating records to have only one record instead of multiple ones when there are repeated records, but the system shows which libraries hold it. This integration took much effort and time due to many factors, such as different spellings, mistakes in dates of publications, etc. Therefore, there was a need to refine records for proper integration. The union catalog now comprises about 1,440,000 records. An item is now cataloged only once by the library that acquires it first. When another library acquires the same item, it just tells Horizon that it has it, so as to appear in the union catalog, which has reduced the cost, time, and effort of such a process.

5. Accomplishments of the COE

Although the center is a new experience for cooperative and collaborative work in Jordan dealing with ten public institutions at different geographical areas, it has achieved many accomplishments. The following are the most important ones (information of this section comes from COE Guide 2015):

- a. Domesticating integrated and professional library technology and services in Jordan at consortium level.
- b. Effecting interlibrary loan among member libraries. The COE has an agreement with ARAMEX to deliver library items among

- libraries within 24 hours. Since the beginning of this service, the member universities have exchanged about 500 items. Though this figure is not big, it shows that the service is fulfilling the expected objective, and it is functionally adequate.
- c. Building a union catalog for the member libraries. This service makes interlibrary loan easier because patrons at all member universities can see the holdings of all libraries.
 - d. Coordinating an integrated negotiation system for subscribing for world academic databases. This process has resulted in substantial savings and an increase in needed information.
 - e. Holding over 30 training sessions for the employees of the member libraries on Horizon, most of which were provided by experts from Naseej, on circulation, acquisition, and cataloging. The COE also carried out a program to train trainers who can hold training sessions in their own libraries to reduce effort and domesticate technical knowledge in individual libraries instead of resorting to the COE itself.
 - f. Building an integrated system between libraries and the registration and human resources departments for immediate updates of patron information.
 - g. Building unified work techniques among member libraries. Now all technical jobs are carried out according to specific protocols set by the COE.
 - h. Adopting the Anglo-American, 2nd edition (AACR2) as the cataloging criteria in member libraries.
 - i. Adopting the subject headings of the Library of Congress (LCSH) in cataloging at all member libraries for resources in languages other than Arabic.
 - j. Reaching agreements between the COE and many institutions in the Arab world and foreign countries.
 - k. Joining the Arab Union Catalog in Saudi Arabia as an active member. The member libraries adopt the subject headings for all resources in the Arabic language.
 - l. Adopting the Arabic Union Catalog rules.

- m. Attending some of the professional conferences, book fares, and electronic resources.
- n. Including Al-Hussein Cancer Center in all databases that relate to the needs of the center for free.
- o. Providing catalog search services for over 250,000 users in all member universities. The catalog is also open access on the internet for free.

6. Committees in the COE

The COE has the following technical committees:

- a. Committee for electronic resources subscriptions.
- b. Financial Committee.
- c. Interlibrary Loan Committee.
- d. Quality Assurance Committee.
- e. COE Regulation Committee.
- f. Unified Library Instructions Committee.
- g. Technical Committee.

7. Population Served by the COE:

The COE serves a large population in the ten public universities. It also makes it Union Catalog publically accessible via the internet for free. The following table summarizes the figures in these universities (figures are rounded):

| | CATEGORY | NUMBER |
|---|-------------------------|--------|
| 1 | FACULTY MEMEBERS | 7000 |
| 2 | EMPLOYEES | 12000 |
| 3 | BACHELOR STUDENTS | 256000 |
| 4 | HIGHER STUDIES STUDENTS | 30000 |
| | TOTAL | 280000 |

8. Training Sessions:

The COE has held several training sessions to library employees in different areas. The following is an account of the types of training sessions:

| | NAME OF SESSION | No. |
|----|--|-----|
| 1 | DIGITAL LIBRARIES | 2 |
| 2 | MARC WORKSHOPS | 4 |
| 3 | LIBRARY AUTHOMATED SYSTEM AND SECURITY | 2 |
| 4 | HORIZON INFO. SYTEM AND ADMINISTRATION AND REPORTS | 6 |
| 5 | PERIODICALS | 3 |
| 6 | COMMUNITY RESOURCES | 1 |
| 7 | CATALOGING/RDA | 14 |
| 8 | CIRCULATION/REPORTS | 3 |
| 9 | ACQUISITION | 3 |
| 10 | TRAIN THE TRAINERS | 5 |

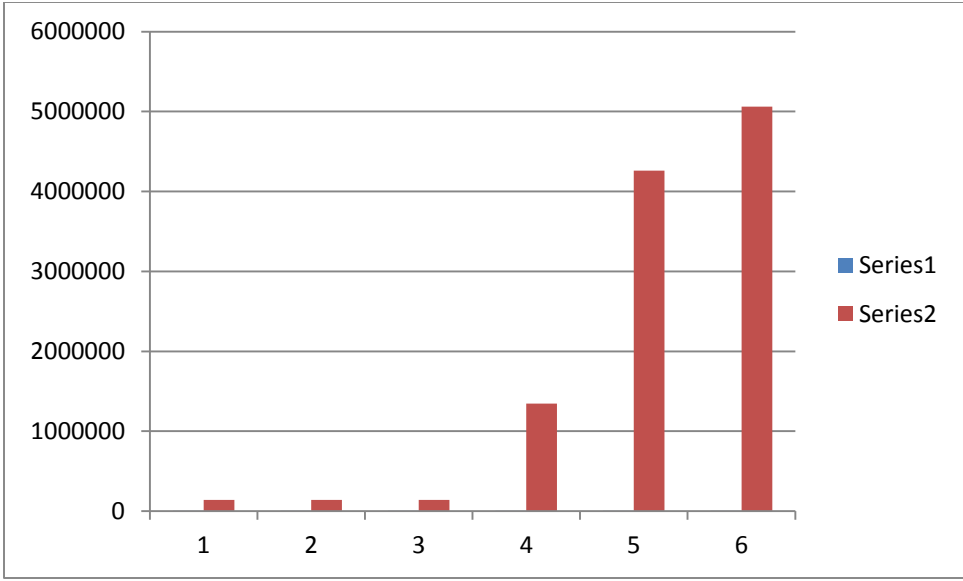
9. Direct Financial Contribution of the COE:

The direct contribution of the COE can be established when we hold a comparison between the individual prices of the databases it provides for member libraries and the consortia prices. (Names of publishers cannot be revealed for prices are confidential).

Individual prices can be given in the following table:

| | | | | | | |
|------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| YEAR | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
| INDV | 139300 | 139500 | 139700 | 1344900 | 4260100 | 5060300 |

Total price: **12,343,600**
(above twelve million US dollars)

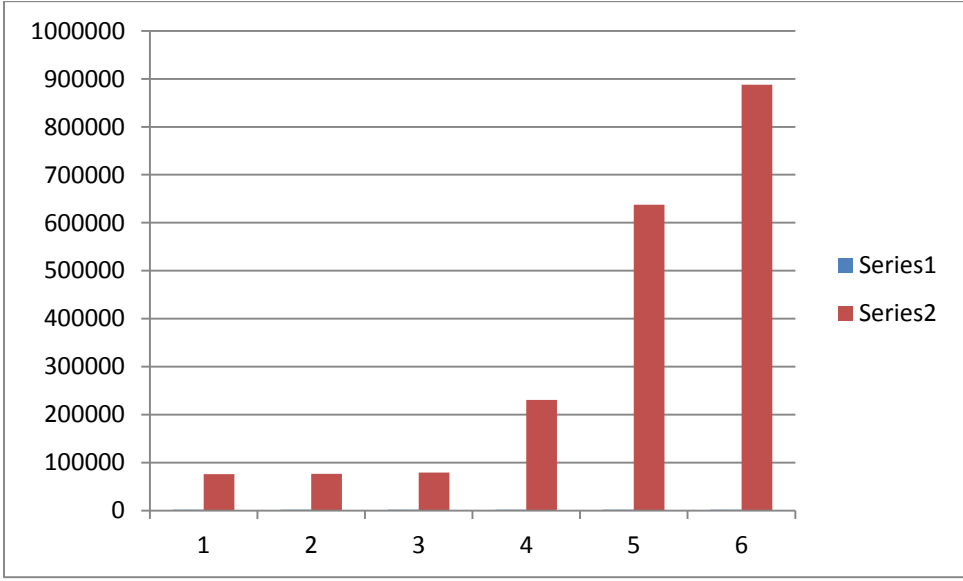


Consortia prices are shown in the following table:

| 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| 75900 | 76530 | 79020 | 230670 | 637670 | 887670 |

The total of consortia prices is: **1,987,460**
(About two million US dollars)

The following graph shows these figures:



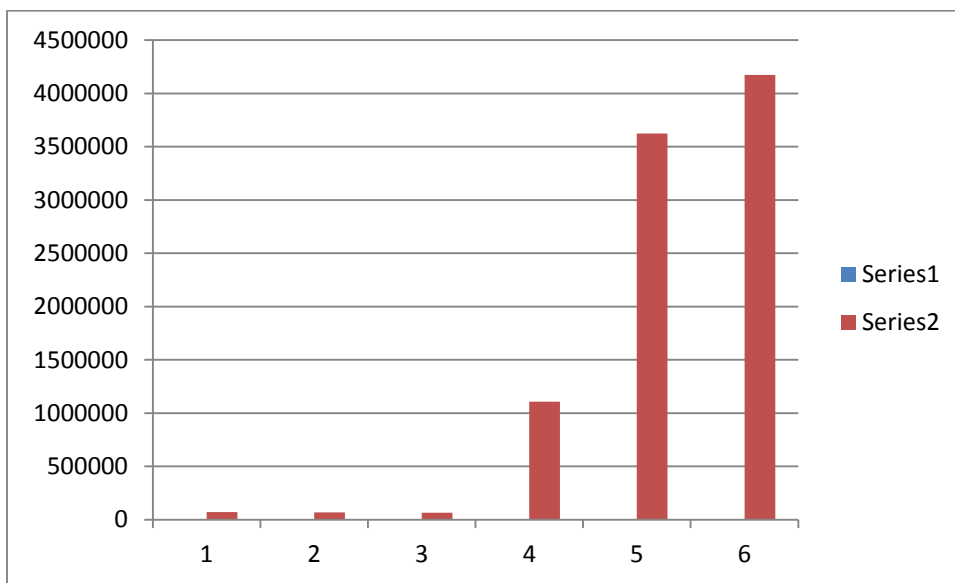
The COE has achieved the total savings shown in the following table:

| YEAR | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|---------|---------|
| SAVNG | 70880 | 67940 | 65430 | 1106930 | 3624730 | 4174530 |

The total figure is: **10,356,140**

(Over TEN million USD)

The following graph shows the savings over time.

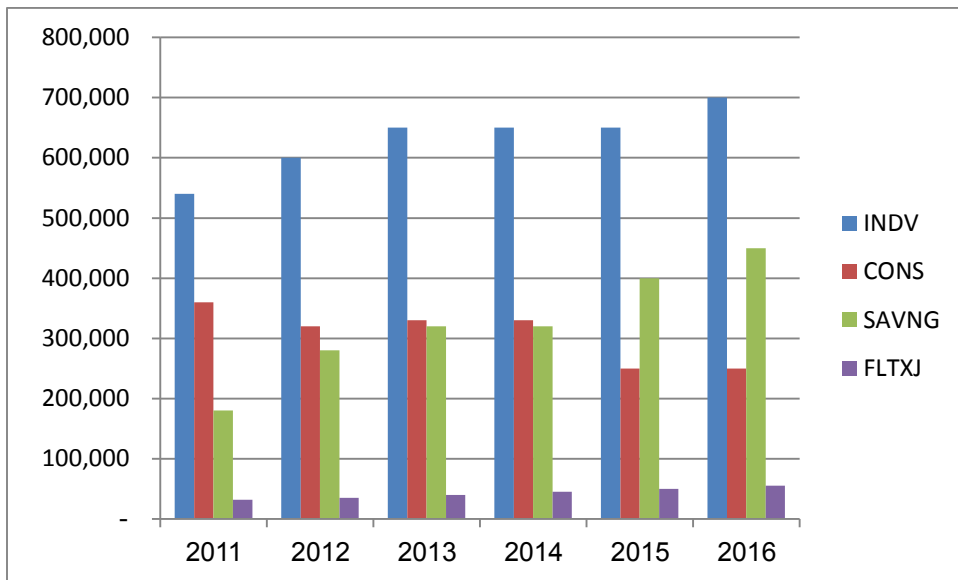


10. Indirect COE Contribution:

The major contribution of the COE is in the coordination of the consortia subscriptions to databases. These are too numerous to be accounted for individually in a paper of this size. Therefore, the researcher decided to choose one database as an example of the contribution of the COE in this area. The following table shows this between 2011 and 2016:

| | INDV | CONS | SAVNG | FLTXJ | DWNLD |
|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------|-----------|
| 2011 | 540,000 | 360,000 | 180,000 | 32,000 | 307,876 |
| 2012 | 600,000 | 320,000 | 280,000 | 35,000 | 274,244 |
| 2013 | 650,000 | 330,000 | 320,000 | 40,000 | 243,455 |
| 2014 | 650,000 | 330,000 | 320,000 | 45,000 | 825,575 |
| 2015 | 650,000 | 250,000 | 400,000 | 50,000 | 218,309 |
| 2016 | 700,000 | 250,000 | 450,000 | 55,000 | |
| Total | 3,790,000 | 1,840,000 | 1,950,000 | | 1,869,459 |

COST PER ARTICLE IS: **1.04 (ONE DOLLAR) (2011-2015)**
(Note: Cost per article does not include 2016)



11. Conclusion:

The researcher can come up with the following conclusions:

1. The Jordanian experience provides an empirical evidence of the importance of the cooperative and collaborative efforts to build an effective consortium of the libraries of ten public universities.
2. The experience provides an evidence for securing advanced services to the research community in the public universities.
3. The experience indicates the substantial size of savings which is important to a country like Jordan where financial resources are extremely limited.
4. The experience shows the feasibility of consortia subscriptions to electronic databases. This also shows the importance and effect of negotiations with publishers as a consortium to get much material with the lowest prices.
5. The experience shows that it is time to move from theory to practice. We have seen many conferences on library services with much theory, but very little about practical projects.
6. Though the Jordanian consortium is limited to only ten public universities, it provides irrefutable evidence that this experience can be implemented somewhere else. Moreover, it can be the first brick in building a pan-Arab consortium to even better services, especially when combined with the Arabic Union Catalog in Saudi Arabia.
7. The consortium has domesticated world library knowledge and technology in Jordan. So, the research and educational communities are now enjoying world level services, no less than those provided in Western countries.
8. The consortium has caused the development and improvement in the teaching of Library and Information Science at Jordanian universities to cope with the new knowledge and technology brought into the libraries of public universities.

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