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An overview of the current state of interlibrary loans in South Africa Jenny Raubenheimer John Stephen van Niekerk

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# An overview of the current state of interlibrary loans in South Africa

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#### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to review interlending development in South Africa and current trends in interlending. **Design/methodology/approach** – Literature study and survey.

**Findings** – Interlending is still an essential service in South Africa. Interlending systems must be used effectively to ensure rapid delivery of requested interlibrary loans. There is a significant use of WorldShare ILL, but there is a scope for substantial development.

**Research limitations/implications** — This is not a comprehensive study but focusses on current interlending activities at some of the larger South African academic and special libraries and the use of Online Computer Library Centre systems.

Practical implications – The paper provides some historical information and the extent of current interlending and systems used.

Social implications — The paper gives an indication of the value of interlending in South Africa and its contribution to information provision. Originality/value — The paper provides a snapshot of interlending in South Africa and areas for development.

Keywords South Africa, Interlibrary loan, Document delivery, Resource sharing

Paper type Research paper

# Introduction – the interlending landscape in South Africa

As background to interlending in South Africa, the sectors in which it mainly occurs are first outlined, followed by the development of interlending over many years. The results of a snapshot survey are then discussed to give an indication of current trends.

As in most countries, interlending in South Africa is dominated by the tertiary education sector and research-orientated institutions that have the need of more specialised information. The Council on Higher Education, an independent statutory body, categorises universities as follows:

- 11 traditional universities;
- 6 comprehensive universities;
- 6 universities of technology; and
- 2 universities to be created.

According to the Council on Higher Education definitions, the traditional universities offer a "broad range" of programmes, whereas comprehensive universities offer the "full spectrum" of programmes at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels. Universities of technology are more

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Interlending & Document Supply 43/2 (2015) 76–83 © Emerald Group Publishing Limited [ISSN 0264-1615] [DOI 10.1108/ILDS-02-2015-0005] "vocationally and/or professionally orientated", mainly at the undergraduate level (Council on Higher Education, 2013).

Academic programmes on a post-graduate level and research activity are concentrated in the traditional and comprehensive universities but not exclusively so.

There has been a steady expansion in the university sector in recent years, as evidenced by the most recent audited figures from the Council on Higher Education for 2006-2011:

- an increase in the total number of student enrolments from 741,380 to 938,200;
- an increase in the number of graduates from 124,615 to 160,624;
- of the enrolments, the number of post-graduates increased from 111,237 to 148,035;
- post-graduate qualifications increased from 30,966 to 43,066 (includes honours, master's and doctoral); and
- instruction and research staff increased from 43,323 to 49,983.

#### (Council on Higher Education, 2013)

The national Department of Higher Education and Training (2013) in its annual report highlights the greater increase in post-graduates compared to undergraduates as critical for the country's future in knowledge-intensive professions.

The authors would like to express their gratitude to Ros Hattingh, Managing Director of Sabinet, for the distribution of the questionnaire via the Sabinet Listserve and making available South African interlending statistics and to Tony Melvyn from OCLC for making available the statistics on the use of WorldShare ILL by South African Libraries.

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To this tertiary sector can be added research organisations, such as the Human Sciences Research Council, as institutions that are most likely to have the need of substantial interlending. It is in this area that interlending must find its main market to remain a significant information service in an era of rapidly expanding electronic resources.

### **Interlending development in South Africa**

Interlending in South Africa has mirrored developments elsewhere and has long been a key library function. The twentieth century saw interlibrary loans (ILLs) become a standard service worldwide, and networks and document supply centres were established to facilitate the process. Major developments were the replacement of paper and manual processes by computer systems and the advent of the Internet and electronic information resources to augment physical collections (Goldner and Birch, 2012).

There was some interlending in South Africa in the 1950s and earlier (Lor, 1990), but the more widespread use of journal indexes and photocopying machines, from the 1960s onward, facilitated the supply of articles (Kinnucan, 1993). Publications became more readily available in the 1970s and 1980s through the development of networks and supply centres such as the British Library Document Supply Centre established in 1962 (Goldner and Birch, 2012). The introduction of the fax machine greatly enhanced delivery.

The State Library of South Africa moved from card and microfiche catalogues to online databases in the 1980s, joint catalogues were included in the South African Bibliographic and Information Network (Sabinet) and an ILL module was launched by Sabinet in 1993 (Raubenheimer, 1998). ILLs increased as holdings information became available on the network and clients became more aware of material through online public access catalogues (OPAC) and bibliographic databases (Raubenheimer and van Niekerk, 2002). The supply of ILLs received another boost in the 1990s with the introduction of the Ariel electronic document delivery system (Raubenheimer, 1996).

The advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994 with key policies emphasising education, equity and open access encouraged cooperation and resource-sharing and the formation of library consortia in which interlending was prominent. In Southern Africa, Sabinet continued to play an important role as a network for interlending, and the web-based request system to enhance the management of ILLs was introduced in 2000 with Online Computer Library Centre (OCLC) WorldCat Resource Sharing and WorldShare ILL following (Sabinet, 2014a).

#### **Prospects for interlending**

Clients need effective access to information resources in their preferred format, and interlending is one of a variety of services that support this need. The libraries that engage in interlending and the systems and networks that are used must have the capacity to render an effective service that meets client expectations; otherwise, the service will decline. Developments in technology and improvements in access to information resources have led to increased expectations by

clients with key factors being turnaround time and alternative delivery mechanisms (Goldner and Birch, 2012).

Kochan and Leon (2013) in a discussion of a best practice framework for ILLs conclude that there will be a continual need for the service in the foreseeable future, but how this is done will evolve, and it is necessary to be on the lookout for ways of improving the service. Technology is the key in this regard, and with rapid technological change, it is necessary to select tools that will save time and improve efficiency.

Interlending can still grow, despite ever-increasing information access. This has happened in the US research libraries with effective bibliographic records and holdings and ILL networks with delivery systems comparable to the commercial market. Clients searching themselves at their convenience are important. There has also been a continual growth over many years of OCLC WorldCat records and holdings and related ILL transactions (Mak, 2012). The OCLC Annual Report 2013-2014, for example, highlights the development of the new WorldShare Management Services system, including the ease of ILLs. The report notes the University of Delaware as being the 200th library to go live on the system – an indication of the continued relevance of interlending (OCLC, 2014a).

### Methodology

It was decided to obtain original and current insights into the needs of South African libraries with regard to ILLs and trends pertaining to the filling of requests rather than just using available documents on ILL practices. The methodology employed encompassed a literature study and an empirical investigation as follows:

#### Literature study

From the literature study, it was possible to identify significant developments that have also affected South African interlending, namely, the expansion of the higher education sector (Council on Higher Education, 2013; Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013); the evolution of technology and systems for interlending (Kochan and Leon, 2013), culminating in the OCLC WorldShare ILL platform (OCLC, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d); increased expectations by clients for rapid delivery of services (Goldner and Birch, 2012); and electronic information resources that augment physical collections (Goldner and Birch, 2012).

#### **Empirical research**

The focus of the empirical study was to gain an insight into the current South African perspective towards client needs for ILLs and the libraries' response in this regard using available systems. Against this background, it was decided to focus on the following:

- the volume of ILL traffic;
- · online ILL systems used by libraries;
- · client needs;
- the impact of electronic resources on ILL; and
- the extent to which OCLC WorldCat Resource Sharing and WorldShare ILL are being used.

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Information on the current needs of South African ILL clients were captured through a survey conducted in February 2014. The survey included 12 quantitative and 3 qualitative questions. The questionnaire (Appendix) was placed on the Sabinet Listserve with the request that it be completed by all heads of ILL departments in South Africa with a view to determining the current needs of clients and the response of the libraries.

#### Responses

The distribution list of the Sabinet Listserve contains many subscribers, including several from the same library, in cases where the institution has a decentralised ILL service for faculties. Therefore, it was not possible to calculate a response in terms of percentage of respondents against the total number of available participants. The response to the survey was rather analysed in terms of library categories and the number of libraries per library category which responded. There were three significant resource-sharing categories: The National Library of South Africa, academic libraries (19 of 26 libraries responded) and 17 special libraries. This was a high enough response to be regarded as significant. A total of 42 responses were received.

#### Volume of ILL traffic

The survey revealed that with regard to the question on the need for books and journal articles, 56 per cent indicated that they request less than 500 books per annum from other libraries, 27 per cent of the libraries request 500-1,999 books, 17 per cent request more than 2,000 books, 47 per cent request less than 500 articles, 36 per cent request 500-1,999 articles and 17 per cent request more than 2,000 articles. Thus, a significant number of respondents process high volumes of ILLs in South African terms. However, statistics supplied by Sabinet for interlending transactions on its Request system indicate a substantial decline in recent years – from 91,420 in 2006 to 38,751 in 2014 (Sabinet, 2014b).

#### Online ILL systems used by libraries

All respondents (100 per cent) indicated that they subscribe to the online South African ILL system – Request. This system is made available by Sabinet, as indicated in the background information, which has been a valuable resource-sharing support since the previous century. Request also has an automated financial system which calculates ILL transactions between libraries and produces accounts annually.

Only 26 per cent of the respondents indicated that their users use a pre-request system to benefit from the fast online delivery of the request to libraries. Thus, there is a considerable scope for development of pre-requests. This function enables library clients to submit their request through an online self-service for materials not in their own library. Thus, the interlending process is speeded up, as the request can be certified instantaneously by the client's library and forwarded to a library holding the item. In South Africa using Sabinet's pre-request system, a client's personal details are emailed to Sabinet, which allocates a user ID and password. The client can then access the South African Catalogue (SACat) for holdings in South African libraries by clicking on a Sabinet link, search for relevant books and request an item on an online form. For material not available in South Africa,

international requests can be placed at OCLC WorldShare (Sabinet, 2014a).

#### Client needs

In response to the question "in days, how fast does your client expect you to deliver the requested item", 27 per cent indicated that their clients expect to receive the request in 1-2 days, 59 per cent in 3-7days and 14 per cent indicated that clients are prepared to wait for more than 7 days. Thus, there is an expectation of reasonably prompt delivery.

Of the respondents, 48 per cent indicated that there is a decline in the need for books; 52 per cent indicated that there is no decline and that ILL clients are still in need of books to be obtained from other libraries. However, 28 per cent of the respondents indicated that there is an increase in requests for journal articles, and 72 per cent indicated that there is a decline. Thus, there was a fairly even split regarding a decline in the need for books but an emphatic decline regarding journal requests.

Most interlending transactions in South Africa are done on the Request system from Sabinet, and statistics supplied by Sabinet in Tables I and II, for the years 2006-2014, show the decline, most sharply for copies:

Thus, a drastic reduction in article transactions of 70 per cent over the nine years.

A steady decrease but less pronounced than for articles: 41 per cent (Sabinet, 2014b).

The Sabinet figures suggest an even sharper decline than indicated by the respondents in the survey and a service under threat.

Comments by respondents on the decline in book requests mentioned the direct availability of e-books to clients, clients

Table I Transactions for copies (mainly articles)

Year	Transactions
2006	52,377
2007	45,155
2008	36,791
2009	32,608
2010	29,133
2011	23,385
2012	19,543
2013	17,404
2014	15,727

Table II Transactions for loans (mainly books)

Year	Transactions
2006	39,043
2007	40,934
2008	41,062
2009	35,535
2010	33,646
2011	30,534
2012	28,596
2013	26,719
2014	23,024

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buying e-books cheaply online, clients finding the postal delivery of books too slow and the unavailability of e-books for interlending. Regarding the decline in journal requests, there were numerous comments about the wide availability and increasing use of electronic resources.

Although ILL clients still need to find information contained in books from other libraries, it appears as though journal articles can be increasingly obtained through the vast number of databases that particularly the academic libraries subscribe to and also through open access.

The response to an open question on what systems were used for international requests indicated that the British Library and OCLC as well as Infotrieve were used.

The open-ended question on the preferred delivery needs of ILL clients shows a diverse response. Of the 11 responses received from academic (8) and special libraries (3), 10 indicated that they use e-mail to deliver the requested items as an attachment. In addition, two libraries deliver by courier; the Open Distance Learning Library delivers by post in addition to courier, and one special library has an in-house delivery system. Thus, the delivery is mostly electronic (articles), but there is still physical delivery by post or courier (books). Many years ago, The National Library established depots from which books can be collected to speed-up delivery. These are still actively used by South African libraries, particularly in the province of Gauteng, where a large number of academic libraries share resources on a daily basis.

#### Impact of electronic resources on ILL

A total of 19 academic libraries and 11 special libraries responded to the open-ended question on the impact of electronic resources on ILL by stating what they experienced as positive or negative. Two important themes emerged in the comments - a decline in interlending due to the availability of e-resources as an alternative and interlending being obstructed by the unavailability of licensed e-resources. Libraries also indicated that they feel positive about electronic systems speeding-up the delivery of requested material, which contributes to a rapid ILL service. There is much less dependence on postal and other forms of physical delivery, especially for articles, with libraries scanning print items and transmitting electronically. For many years, the fax machine and the Ariel system were used to speed-up the delivery of requested ILLs that could be copied in accordance with the South African Copyright Act 98 of 1978. This applied mostly to journal articles or short extracts from books and has largely been replaced by the Article Exchange procedure as part of the new OCLC WorldShare ILL system:

Article Exchange document-sharing site provides a single, secure location where lending libraries worldwide can place requested documents and library users can retrieve articles or book chapters obtained for them via interlibrary loan. This site adds convenience, security and enhanced copyright compliance to article sharing through interlibrary loan (OCLC, 2014b).

Comments from respondents included that "It makes the work much faster and easier" and "Service is faster". There is also a wider range of e-resources available which can sometimes be used for filling requests where licenses allow. Libraries that experienced a negative impact of electronic resources on the ILL service indicated that this impact resulted in a decrease in the number of ILL requests. One library commented that "It may

lower the amount of requests but could also lead to more complex sourcing of requested documents from a wider source of e-resources [...]". This may be due to less need of the service with the greater access to content provided via licensed material or the many license agreements that publishers have with libraries, obstructing the filling of ILL requests. A number of comments addressed the license issue - "Supplying libraries don't supply e-resources to the requesting libraries because of licenses" and "E-journal site licenses restricting ILL usage is in my opinion shortsighted [...] whereas if there was more willingness to share, more researchers would make use of the resources". Some clients still need hard copies (print), as they do not have the infrastructure to receive electronic copies. In South Africa, the Copyright Act 98 of 1978 also applies to electronic publications, and licenses operate under the ambit of the Act with conditions and restrictions for specific publications in the licenses (South Africa, 1978).

# Extent to which OCLC WorldCat Resource Sharing and WorldShare ILL are being used

OCLC WorldCat Resource Sharing was replaced by WorldShare ILL in May 2014, which has greatly expanded ILL capabilities, as subscribing libraries become part of OCLC's global resource-sharing network. The network is made up of about 10,000 libraries, with the WorldCat database at its core, generating almost 9,000,000 ILL requests. This ILL service, supported by the WorldShare cloud-based platform, brings together functions previously on other systems and provides new functions to ensure a quicker and more effective ILL service (OCLC, 2014d). In the OCLC Annual Report 2013-2014, the Vera Bracken Library at Medicine Hat College reports that "[...] the appeal of the WorldShare Management System is evident in its seamless design, worldwide discovery of resources and ease of interlibrary loans for patrons" (OCLC, 2014a). OCLC underpins interlending in the USA, both domestically and internationally (Atkins, 2010), and is a way of facilitating interlending worldwide (Kluzek, 2014).

In South Africa, there was some use of OCLC WorldCat Resource Sharing, and there is now increasing use of OCLC WorldShare ILL. In January 2014, there were seven active users of WorldCat Resource Sharing, five active users of both WorldCat Resource Sharing and WorldShare ILL and nine active users of WorldShare ILL (OCLC, 2014c). The use of WorldShare ILL has been increasing since September 2013, and this increase can be expected to continue following the change over to WorldShare ILL in May 2014. The users were mainly university libraries together with the National Library and a large special library.

At the time of the survey, about six months after the launch of the OCLC WorldShare ILL system, 41 per cent of the South African libraries that responded indicated that they had subscribed to the system. Of the 22 libraries which indicated that they either use WorldShare ILL or WorldCat Resource Sharing, 48 per cent still used WorldCat Resource Sharing. Four small special libraries indicated specifically that they were using only WorldCat Resource Sharing and were satisfied.

Statistics supplied by OCLC because the survey indicate steady use of WorldShare in South Africa for the past six months of 2014 with a monthly peak of 26 active libraries,

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although there was a decline to 23 in November and 18 in December, almost certainly, for seasonal reasons, as this is the main summer holiday period with examinations ending and many institutions winding down and then closing for part of December. Nearly all the users were from universities with just the National Library and at most four special libraries using the service in any one month. Interlending borrowing counts on WorldShare also show growth from 429 in July 2014 to 485 in October, followed by the previously mentioned seasonal declines for November and December (OCLC, 2015). The scope for increasing the number of institutions using WorldShare may be limited, with just 23 state-supported universities currently in South Africa as well as a private university, but the low borrowing counts so far suggest a substantial potential for growth.

A total of 16 libraries (14 academic libraries, 1 special library and the South African National Library) commented on the benefits of WorldShare ILL for staff and users. Almost all comments were positive with no problems experienced. Typical comments were that "Both systems work very well and so far we have not experienced any problems [...] easy to use and the reports are very user friendly" and "Our library uses those programmes and finds it effective and easy to use so far". Other comments mentioned that the system is advanced, as it is more flexible, less expensive and costs can be determined prior to the request being placed and that the users benefit from the system, as they can see holdings worldwide, receive larger files and have improved security.

#### **Conclusion**

The survey findings indicated that in South Africa, interlending is still an essential service because, although there is a decline in ILL traffic, there is still substantial interlending. Libraries have a need especially for books to be obtained from other libraries via the interlending service, and the ILL services should be delivered rapidly. License agreements tend to be viewed as an obstacle to the delivery of ILL services. This matter needs to be addressed to ensure that all library clients can benefit from the availability of library items in electronic format.

There are sophisticated interlending networks and systems, but they must be used effectively to ensure that library clients can benefit from a just-in-time delivery of requested information. In particular, the pre-request online system should be used by interlending clients, and libraries should, thus, include the use thereof as part of their training programmes. There is a significant use of WorldShare ILL, but there is scope for a considerable increased usage and further marketing and training is necessary. The large decline in ILLs in recent years suggests that these challenges need to be successfully dealt with if interlending is to have a future in South Africa, as an important part of the information services available to users.

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# Appendix. Survey: Inter-library loans - A South African perspective

## Figure A1

Sabl	<u>net</u>		
Inter-Library I	oans: a S	South African Perspective	
1. Your detai	ls:		
Full Name			
Email address		The state of the s	
Institution			
CLIENT NEEDS	AND EXPEC	CTATIONS	
		ny requests do om clients at your	
	Books	Journal Articles	
Less than 500	(P)		
500 - 999			
1000 - 1499			
1500 - 1999	[71]		
2000+			
3. How many	of these r	equests do you fill NATIONAL	LY per year?
Books			
Journal articles			
4. How many	requests	do you fill INTERNATIONALLY	per year?
Books	2251		
Journal articles			
5. In days, how fa item?	st does you	r client generally expect you to delive	r the requested
			(continued)

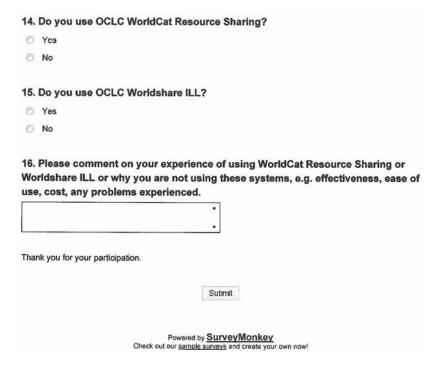
## Figure A1

6. Is there a decline in book requests via ILL?	
☼ No	
Possible reason for your answer	
7. Is there an increase in journal requests via ILL?	
e Yes	
O No	
Possible reason for your answer	
TECHNOLOGY	
8. Do you use an online system to request ILL's?	
○ Yes	
O No	
9. What online system do you use to request NATIONALLY?	
10. What online system do you use to request INTERNATIONALLY?	
11. Do your clients use an online Pre-request mechanism to submit re directly on the ILL system?	quests
O Yes	
O NO	
12. How do you deliver these requests?	
NEW DEVELOPMENTS: IMPACT ON ILL	
13. Please comment on any impact that you think access to electronic (e.g. e-books, e-journals & Open Educational Resources) may have on service?	
·	
WORLD SHARE / ILL	

(continued)

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#### Figure A1



#### About the authors

Jenny Raubenheimer is the Director of Information Resources Distribution of the Unisa Library, based at the University of South Africa (UNISA). She holds a master's degree in Information Science from the University of South Africa. Since the early 1990s, she has been actively involved in resource-sharing activities particularly in South Africa but also internationally. She has delivered papers on this topic at conferences worldwide and has published in this field of interest. In addition to her role at UNISA, she is currently serving in the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions Document Delivery and Resource Sharing section as a member of the Standing

Committee. Jenny Raubenheimer is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: raubej@unisa.ac.za

John Stephen van Niekerk retired as the Acting Director of the Medunsa Campus Library, University of Limpopo, in 2014, after more than 30 years in various posts at the Medunsa Library and holds a master's degree in Library and Information Science from the University of Pretoria. He has occasionally published and often contributed to the library profession in a treasurer role. Since retirement, he has continued on the Board of the South African Library and Information Trust that supports library development projects and research.