Inter-Library Loan Services among Academic Libraries: Reality or Mirage

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[1]Derrick Acheampong, [2]Rosemary Adu-Sarkodee, [3]Maxwell Akussah, [4*]Edward Asante

[1234]Koforidua Technical University Library, Ghana

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7366-8461

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to assess inter-library loan services among academic libraries. The study focused on the availability, utilization, challenges, and improvement strategies of inter-library loan services (ILLS) in academic libraries.

Methodology: The study adopted a quantitative method with a descriptive survey as the research design. The population comprised academic librarians and library staff from five technical university libraries (TULs) in Ghana. A questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument. A stratified random sample of academic librarians and library staff from the five TULs was selected, and questionnaires were distributed accordingly. In total, 56 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, of which 51 were retrieved, representing 91% of the valid sample size. The collected data were analyzed quantitatively using IBM SPSS version 26, with results presented in frequency and percentage tables. Descriptive statistics, specifically the mean and standard deviation, were also computed.

Findings: The results showed that although sufficient digital platforms exist to support ILLS and users are generally aware of them, improvements are still required in service efficiency, response times, and the integration of digital resources into ILLS. The main challenges identified were slow internet access, budgetary constraints, and administrative delays.

Contribution of study to Policy and Practice: The study concludes that ILLS should be given the necessary attention to make it a practical reality rather than a mirage. It provides insights into inter-library loan services in academic libraries globally and highlights the need for a policy framework to address the challenges of sharing information resources among academic institutions. Based on the findings, the study recommends centralized ILLS implementation, improvement of ICT infrastructure, and enhanced inter-institutional cooperation among academic libraries. Furthermore, it emphasizes that to maximize access and efficiency in inter-library lending services, a strong and sustainable library cooperation framework must be established.

Keywords: *Inter-library loan services, Academic libraries, Service accessibility, Digital platforms, Improvement strategies, ICT infrastructure.*

1.0 Introduction

Academic libraries cannot be exhaustive in their collections, nor can they exist as isolated entities. In this era of information explosion, coupled with users who have increasingly sophisticated information needs, libraries face significant challenges in meeting all demands. Academic libraries acknowledge that regardless of size, budgetary allocation, or collection strength, no library is entirely self-sufficient in satisfying the diverse information needs of its users. Moreover, users have become technologically savvy and expect access to a wide range of information resources within a relatively short time frame (Harrasi & Jabur, 2014).

Academic libraries must support diverse modes of teaching and learning, such as distance education and online learning, by making information accessible via the internet to both on-campus and off-campus patrons. However, dwindling library budgets across institutions, coupled with the rising cost of library resources and the increasing demand for information, have motivated individual libraries to explore cooperative strategies and resource sharing (Seal, 2016; Harrasi & Jabur, 2014).

In Ghana, resource sharing is largely conducted on an informal or personal basis. The formal inter-library loan system introduced in the 1990s, for instance, was severely plagued by challenges such as lack of trust, inadequate transportation, and other logistical constraints. Academic libraries play a crucial role in the digital age by providing access to resources that are not available locally. However, traditional inter-library loan services (ILLS) continue to face numerous challenges, including inefficiencies in processing requests, delays in resource supply, high operating costs, and difficulties in managing user data and transaction records (Eneojo & Okiki, 2019; Harrasi & Jabur, 2014).

Resource sharing refers to a mutual agreement between libraries to exchange resources. In this arrangement, each library provides its own materials to other participating libraries while also receiving resources in return. It is essentially the process through which the resources or networks of libraries are made accessible to all individuals entitled to use them. Traditionally, libraries have operated as standalone entities, building comprehensive yet often duplicate collections. However, in the global context, libraries now function within networks of shared resources (Eneojo & Okiki, 2019; Harrasi & Jabur, 2014).

Rapid technological advancements over the past two decades, particularly in information handling, delivery, and management, have resulted in a paradigm shift in the role of libraries. Academic libraries worldwide continue to face numerous challenges, including the acquisition of an ever-increasing number of resources, inadequate budgets, and evolving user needs and expectations. It is important to note that no academic library can hope to be entirely self-sufficient. Regardless of size, it is neither possible nor feasible for any academic library to be fully self-reliant in terms of collection development (Savatagi & Naik, 2024; Harrasi & Jabur, 2014).

Providing high-quality services has always been a central aim of academic and research libraries, and these institutions have traditionally responded to such challenges through collaboration. One of the most effective strategies developed by academic libraries to enhance

user services is broadening the availability of information through resource sharing. Resource sharing, which is a key aspect of inter-library cooperation, enables one library to access the resources of other libraries and vice versa (Savatagi & Naik, 2024; Harrasi & Jabur, 2014).

Inter-library loan (ILL) is essential to the vitality of academic libraries of all types and sizes, serving as a means to make a wider range of materials available to users. To ensure the provision of high-quality services, academic libraries have an obligation to obtain materials from other libraries to meet the needs of their clients and the broader university community (Savatagi & Naik, 2024; Harrasi & Jabur, 2014).

1.2 Problem Statement

Academic libraries can no longer satisfy the needs of their clientele alone. Consequently, one of the most effective strategies developed by academic libraries to enhance user services is broadening the availability of information through resource sharing (Mingle et al., 2017; Mensah & Dadzie, 2022). Without inter-library cooperation, university libraries are unable to adequately meet the information needs of their users, making such cooperation essential for maintaining a robust and resource-rich library environment. Preliminary investigations and observations, however, indicated that university libraries rarely borrow materials to satisfy the needs of their clients. Several authors, including Savatagi and Naik (2024), Owusu-Ansah and Takyi (2017), and Dzandza and Alemna (2021), have confirmed this issue in their respective studies.

The researchers were therefore interested in analyzing the state of inter-library cooperation practices in university libraries. Accordingly, the purpose of the study was to assess the existence of inter-library loan services (ILLS) in technical university libraries by identifying gaps and proposing possible improvement measures.

1.3 Purpose of Study

The purpose of the current study was to assess whether inter-library loan services among academic libraries in Ghana is a reality or a mirage, with the aim of identifying gaps and proposing possible improvement measures. The study also aimed to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on inter-library loan services.

1.4 Objectives

The following objectives guides the study.

i.   To assess the availability and accessibility of inter-library loan services in academic libraries
ii. To examine the challenges affecting inter-library loan services in academic libraries
iii. To assess the strategies to improve inter-library loan services in academic libraries

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions mapped the study

i.   How available and accessible are the inter-library loan services in academic libraries?
ii. What are challenges affecting inter-library loan services in academic libraries?

iii.   What are the strategies to improve inter-library loan services academic libraries?

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study focused on inter-library loan services among academic libraries in Ghana, covering five (5) out of the ten (10) technical universities (TUs) in the country, with their libraries serving as the focal point of discussion. A systematic sampling technique was employed to select the five TUs that met the accreditation requirements of the Accreditation Board, now the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), based on criteria such as staffing, faculty strength, and student enrollment, availability of resourceful libraries, quality assurance policies, institutional and library websites, and academic facilities, among others. Four of the selected technical university libraries were included because they are not only members of the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Ghana (CARLIGH) but also in good standing with the Ghana Library Association (GLA). The selected institutions were Ho Technical University (HTUL), Koforidua Technical University (KTUL), Accra Technical University (ATUL), Kumasi Technical University (KsTUL), and Takoradi Technical University (TTUL). The study involved academic librarians and library staff because preliminary observations indicated that senior-ranked members are primarily responsible for inter-library cooperation and resource sharing, particularly in the Ghanaian context.

Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 The Resource Sharing Theory

Line (1979) in the late 1970s and early 1980s emphasized cooperation, inter-library lending, and networking as essential for efficiency and equitable access. The Resource Sharing Theory (RST) serves as the foundation for this study. The theory highlights the importance of collaboration among libraries to expand access to information resources beyond the capabilities of individual institutions.

Horava (2010) emphasized that cooperation is necessary to bridge gaps in collections, technology, and expertise, as no single library can acquire all the resources required by its patrons. The efficacy of inter-library loan services depends on reciprocal agreements, shared catalogues, and the cooperative use of technological platforms that facilitate resource exchange.

The Resource Sharing Theory (RST) provides a framework for investigating the availability and accessibility of inter-library loan services in academic libraries in the context of this study (Okorafor, 2019). This includes examining the obstacles to inter-library loans, such as inadequate staff capacity, lack of standardized policies, insufficient funding, and limited ICT infrastructure, all of which directly or indirectly affect the processes required for effective resource sharing (Reddy & Kumar, 2013).

Resource Sharing (RS) emphasizes the necessity of ongoing strategies to enhance cooperation, including staff training, the establishment of library consortia, the implementation of contemporary information technologies, and the standardization of inter-library lending

policies. Regardless of size or funding levels, these strategies not only improve service efficiency but also promote equity in access to academic resources among institutions (Singh & Kaur, 2014). Using this theoretical framework, the study critically assesses whether inter-library loan services in Ghana's academic libraries represent a reality, characterized by sustainable access and functional collaboration, or a mirage, constrained by inadequate implementation and systemic challenges (Singh & Kaur, 2014; Reddy & Kumar, 2013).

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

2.2.1 Availability and Accessibility of Inter-Library Loan Services in Academic Libraries

Studies on accessibility and availability have revealed that, although Ghanaian academic libraries understand the concept of inter-library loan services (ILLS), practical implementation is often limited or inconsistent (Mingle et al., 2017). For instance, while programmes such as the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Ghana (CARLIGH) have facilitated access to electronic resources, widespread accessibility remains constrained by the absence of a unified national union catalogue and standardized borrowing policies (CARLIGH, 2021; Mensah & Dadzie, 2022).

Furthermore, the efficient operation of inter-library loan services (ILLS) in many institutions is constrained by infrastructure limitations, including outdated digital systems and unreliable internet connectivity (Owusu-Ansah & Takyi, 2017). These disparities are particularly evident when compared with international practices that utilize advanced digital platforms, such as OCLC's WorldShare ILLS, which enable seamless and near-instantaneous resource sharing (Owusu-Ansah & Takyi, 2017). Despite these challenges, ILLS remain essential for addressing resource shortages and facilitating scientific communication in academic libraries. Institutions in industrialized nations increasingly rely on modern technologies like OCLC's WorldShare ILLS to support efficient and timely resource sharing, reflecting the significant global evolution of inter-library loan services (Mensah & Dadzie, 2022).

However, due to infrastructural challenges such as inadequate internet access, outdated ICT facilities, and low digital literacy among library staff, the implementation of inter-library loan services (ILLS) in Ghana remains limited and inconsistent (Mensah & Dadzie, 2022). The absence of a central union catalogue and clearly defined procedures have hindered the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Ghana (CARLIGH) from establishing an efficient ILLS, despite its role in enhancing access to electronic resources (Dzandza & Alemna, 2021). These constraints make it more difficult for academic institutions to provide and access ILLS effectively (Dzandza & Alemna, 2021).

2.2.2 Challenges Affecting Inter-Library Loan Services in Academic Libraries

Several obstacles continue to impede the efficient operation of inter-library loan services (ILLS) in Ghana. Key challenges included unreliable logistics, limited institutional cooperation, insufficiently committed staff, and inadequate knowledge of ILLS protocols among both users and staff (Owusu-Ansah & Takyi, 2017). Resource distribution is further complicated by the shortcomings of the national postal system and the lack of courier infrastructure, as evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic when remote operations disrupted

informal ILLS (Dzandza & Alemna, 2021). Additionally, the underperformance of library services, particularly ILLS, can be attributed to the absence of strategic leadership and performance monitoring tools, such as the Balanced Scorecard (Owusu-Ansah & Takyi, 2017). Collectively, these factors create a fragmented system in which ILLS procedures are often implemented informally and inconsistently, reducing the overall effectiveness of the service (Owusu-Ansah & Takyi, 2017).

Inter-library loan services (ILLS) in Ghanaian academic libraries face a range of challenges. Key factors included inadequate ICT infrastructure, low levels of digital literacy among library staff, and inefficient postal and courier services, which result in delays in the delivery of resources (Mingle et al., 2017). Moreover, ILLS practices are often ad hoc and largely dependent on the goodwill of individual librarians rather than structured processes, due to the absence of institutional regulations, trained ILLS personnel, and documented protocols to guide operations (Mensah & Dadzie, 2022). These challenges are further compounded by organizational inertia and limited awareness of ILLS services among staff and students, frequently resulting in the underutilization of existing services (Mensah & Dadzie, 2022).

2.2.3 Strategies to Improve Inter-Library Loan Services in Academic Libraries

Despite these challenges, several strategies have been identified to enhance inter-library loan services (ILLS) in both domestic and international contexts. These strategies included establishing comprehensive policy frameworks that standardize ILLS practices across institutions, investing in ICT infrastructure to support digitized lending operations, and developing a national virtual union catalogue to improve resource discoverability (CARLIGH, 2021). Capacity building is also essential; training librarians in ILLS protocols and digital literacy ensures more effective service delivery (Owusu-Ansah & Takyi, 2017).

In addition, integrating low-cost communication applications such as Telegram or WhatsApp has been proposed as a practical interim solution to facilitate inter-library requests and communication, particularly in resource-constrained environments (Mingle et al., 2014). Various strategies have been suggested and partially implemented to address these challenges. For instance, CARLIGH workshops have highlighted growing recognition of the need for interoperable library systems and a national virtual union catalogue (CARLIGH, 2021). To support inter-library communication and resource sharing, institutions have begun experimenting with collaborative agreements and Web 2.0 platforms such as Telegram and WhatsApp (Mingle et al., 2017). Although these approaches remain unofficial, they provide feasible short-term solutions to improve inter-library cooperation. Formalizing and expanding ILLS further requires the implementation of national regulations, investment in staff training, and integration of ILLS functionalities into library management systems (CARLIGH, 2021). Such strategic initiatives, combined with adequate administrative support and infrastructure investment, have the potential to significantly enhance inter-library loan services in Ghanaian academic libraries (CARLIGH, 2021; Mingle et al., 2017).

Furthermore, there is optimism due to emerging technologies. In their 2017 study, Mingle, Lamptey, and Hassan examined how Web 2.0 tools, such as blogs, wikis, and social media

platforms, could enhance academic library services in Ghana (Mingle et al., 2017). The authors found that while awareness of these tools was high, actual implementation remained low. By providing platforms for request management, raising awareness of available resources, and enabling real-time communication between institutions, these systems can support inter-library lending services (Mensah & Dadzie, 2022). For example, a dedicated Telegram channel or WhatsApp group could facilitate collaboration among libraries in a low-tech yet effective manner. However, many of these solutions remain experimental and largely informal in the absence of institutional support (Mingle et al., 2017; Mensah & Dadzie, 2022). Transitioning ILLS from ad hoc practices to a structured and fully functional national system requires sustained institutional commitment, policy reforms, and cooperative efforts among university libraries (Mensah & Dadzie, 2022; Owusu-Ansah & Takyi, 2017).

**Research Methodology**

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey approach within a quantitative research paradigm. A survey research design was employed because surveys are recognized as a cost-effective method for collecting large amounts of data from a substantial population. This design was considered appropriate for the study, as it facilitated the efficient distribution of questionnaires to participants (Saunders et al., 2016).

This study employed a descriptive survey design and a quantitative approach to assess the experiences of library users regarding inter-library loan services (ILLS) (Creswell, 2018). To ensure diverse representation, data were collected using a questionnaire administered to a stratified random sample of Technical University Libraries (TULs) in Ghana (Bryman, 2016). The survey comprised closed-ended questions using a five-point Likert scale to evaluate ILLS accessibility, availability, challenges, and strategies for improvement (Kumar, 2019). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated to analyze the data and identify significant trends (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.2 **Research Design Model**

To assess the experiences of academic librarians and library staff regarding inter-library loan services (ILLS), this study employed a descriptive research design within a quantitative framework (Creswell, 2018). To ensure fair representation across the selected Technical University Libraries (TULs), data were collected using a questionnaire administered to a stratified random sample of academic librarians and library staff (Bryman, 2016). Closed-ended questions on a five-point Likert scale were used to gather opinions on ILLS accessibility, availability, challenges, and strategies for improvement (Kumar, 2019). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, to identify significant trends and relationships (Saunders et al., 2019).

Figure 1: Diagram of the research design
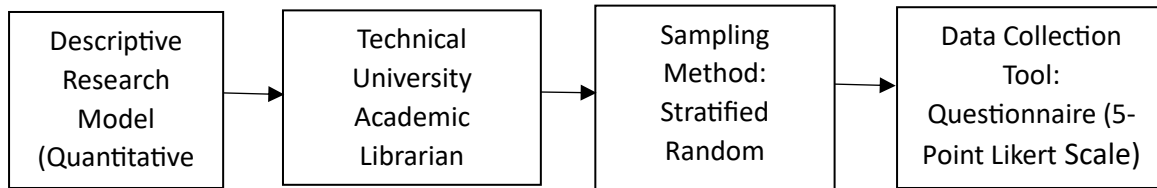
Source: Author's construct, 2025

3.4 Study Population

The population of the study was made up of academic librarians and library staff from five TULs in Ghana. Population refers to the complete set of group members a researcher is interested consulting for information (Romm & Ngulube, 2015; Saunders, et al, 2016). The technical university libraries were Ho technical university (HTUL), Koforidua technical university (KTUL), Accra technical university (ATUL), Kumasi technical university (KsTUL) and Takoradi Technical University (TTUL). The total population for the five TULs was 56.

Table 1: Population

Technical Universities	Per Institution	Sample Size
Koforidua Technical University (KTU)	14	12
Accra Technical University (ATU)	11	9
Ho Technical University (HTU)	16	14
Cape Coast Technical University (CCTU)	11	9
Takoradi Technical University (TTU)	13	12
Total	**65**	**56**

Source: Field Data, 2025

3.5 Sampling and Sample Size

Convenience sampling technique was adopted for the study. Sampling provides a valid alternative to a census when it would be impracticable to survey the entire population, or when budget constraints or time constraints prevent the researcher from surveying the entire target population for the study (Saunders et al, 2016). Using the Yamane's (1967) formula, the sample size was determined as follows:

$$\frac{N}{1+N\,(0.1)^2}$$

n is the sample size, N is the population size, e is the level of precision (0.1) and confidence level of 90%

The sample size for the five TULs are as follows:

Equation 1:

$$\frac{14}{1+0.01*14}$$

$$\frac{14}{1.14} = 12$$

Equation 2:

$$\frac{11}{1+0.01*11}$$

$$\frac{11}{1.11} = 9$$

Equation 3:

$$\frac{16}{1+0.01*16}$$

$$\frac{16}{1.16} = 14$$

Equation 4:

$$\frac{11}{1+0.01*11}$$

$$\frac{11}{1.11} = 9$$

Equation 5:

$$\frac{13}{1+0.01*13}$$

$$\frac{13}{1.13} = 12$$

Hence the sample size for the study was 56.

3.6 Data Collection Instrument

The questionnaire was the primary instrument used for data collection. The researchers developed the questionnaire based on the specific objectives of the study. The variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was structured into sections: Section A captured demographic information, while Sections B, C, and D and addressed the study objectives. A sample of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix A.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

The researchers distributed the questionnaires to participants in their respective libraries. For those who were unavailable during the distribution period, the questionnaires were sent by mail. Each respondent was assigned a unique identification tag to prevent duplication and multiple submissions. After one month, the researchers collected the completed questionnaires. The study distributed 56 questionnaires to the respondents, 51 were returned and considered valid for analysis, representing a 91% response rate.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

The researchers obtained permission from the Research and Quality Assurance Directorates of the selected universities to collect data from participants. The principles of confidentiality were strictly observed. No information provided during the data collection period was disclosed, and participation was entirely voluntary, with no respondent compelled to provide information against their will (Saunders et al., 2016).

3.9 Data Analysis

The researchers cleaned and organized the collected data to ensure alignment with the study objectives. Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 26 (Ngulube, 2023). Data from the survey questionnaires were categorized into themes to provide a comprehensive understanding of the results. The findings were presented using tables, including frequency distributions and descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations.

Findings

4.1 Demographic Information

On the whole the study distributed 56 copies of questionnaire, out of that 51 copies were retrieved representing 91% of the valid sample size. This was used for the analysis.

Table 2: Gender of Respondents (N=51)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	33	64.7
Male	18	35.3
Total	**51**	**100.0**

Table 2 presents the gender distribution of the respondents in the study. Out of a total of 51 participants, the following trends were observed; females constituted 64.7% (33 respondents) of the study population. Males accounted for 35.3% (18 respondents). This shows that male was less represented in the study compared to female. The survey had a higher female participation rate, with nearly two-thirds (64.7%) of respondents being women. Male respondents were significantly fewer, making up just over one-third (35.3%) of the study population. The gender distribution suggests that the study may have attracted more female participants, this indicates that women made up the majority of the respondents.

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Table 3: Age of Respondents (N=51)

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
36 - 45	19	37.3
46 – 54	17	33.3
26 – 35	15	29.4
Total	**51**	**100.0**

The data presented in Table 3 illustrate the age distribution of the sample population of 51 individuals. The age groups are categorized as 26–35 years, 36–45 years, and 46–54 years. Analysis of the frequency and percentage distribution shows that the 36–45 age group represents the largest proportion, accounting for 37.3% (19 individuals) of the sample, indicating that this age range is the most represented. The 46–54 age group follows, comprising 33.3% (17 individuals), suggesting that older participants are also well represented, though slightly fewer than the 36–45 category. The 26–35 age group constitutes the smallest portion, with 29.4% (15 individuals), indicating that younger participants are less frequent in the study compared to the older age groups.

Table 4: Ranks (N=51)

Position/ Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Junior Assistant Librarian	15	29.4
Assistant Librarian	14	27.5
Senior Assistant Librarian	9	18.7
Deputy Librarian	8	12.7
University Librarian	5	11.8
Total	**51**	**100.0**

Table 4 presents the professional roles of the respondents within library services. Junior Assistant Librarians constitute the largest group, with 15 respondents (29.4%), followed closely by Assistant Librarians, who account for 14 respondents (27.5%). Senior Assistant Librarians comprise 9 respondents (18.7%), while Deputy Librarians make up 8 respondents (12.7%). Head Librarians represent the smallest group, with 5 respondents (11.8%).

Table 5: Years of Experience in Library Services (N=51)

Years of Experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 year	12	23.5
1-5 years	12	23.5
6-10 years	8	15.7
More than 10 years	19	37.3
Total	**51**	**100.0**

Table 5 illustrates the years of experience of respondents in library services. Respondents with more than 10 years of experience represent the largest group, with 19 respondents (37.3%), indicating a substantial presence of seasoned professionals. Both newcomers with less than 1 year of experience and those with 1–5 years each account for 12 respondents (23.5%). Librarians with 6–10 years of experience comprise 8 respondents (15.7%). This distribution reflects a balance between experienced professionals and newer entrants, providing a diverse range of perspectives within the study.

4.2: RQ1: Availability and Accessibility of Inter-Library Loan Services

The first objective of the study was divided into two parts, with the first part focusing on the availability of inter-library loan services (ILLS). The sub-variables measured included the availability of sufficient digital platforms to facilitate ILLS, whether the library offers inter-library loan services, the adequacy of ILLS in meeting users' needs, user awareness of ILLS, the simplicity and efficiency of processing requests from other libraries, the effectiveness of collaboration networks among academic libraries, and the turnaround time for obtaining requested materials. A decision rule was devised for interpreting the results, using a scale of 1.0–2.0 as "less influential," 2.0–3.0 as "influential," and 3.0–4.0 as "most influential."

Table 6: Availability of Interlibrary Loan Services (N=51)

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
Users are aware of the inter-library loan services available.	3.50	1.40	1st
There are sufficient digital platforms for facilitating inter-library loans.	3.25	1.50	2nd
The turnaround time for obtaining the requested materials is satisfactory.	3.24	1.31	3rd
The inter-library loan service adequately meets users' needs.	3.18	1.40	4th
There is an effective collaboration network among academic libraries for inter-library loans.	3.10	1.31	5th
Our library offers inter-library loan services.	3.08	1.50	6th
The processing of requesting materials from other libraries is simple and efficient.	3.00	1.40	7th
Total	**22.35**	**9.82**	

Source: Field data, 2025. *M= Mean, SD = Std. Deviation*.

Table 6 was on the availability of inter-library loan services. Seven sub-variables were measured. Among the sub-variables measured, users are aware of the inter-library loan services available with an M of (3.50) and SD of (1.40) came first. This was followed by sufficient digital platforms for facilitating inter-library loans with an M of (3.2549) and SD of (1.50) at second position. Third was the turnaround time for obtaining the requested materials is satisfactory with an M of (3.24) and SD of (1.31) and at fourth place was the inter-library loan

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service adequately meets users' needs with an M of (3.20) and SD of (1.40). Again, there is an effective collaboration network among academic libraries for inter-library loans with an M of (3.10) and SD of (1.31) was at fifth position. At sixth place, was our library offers inter-library loan services with an M of (3.0) and SD of (1.50) and last position was the process of requesting materials from other libraries is simple and efficient with an M of (3.00) and SD of (1.40). The results revealed that, among the sub- variables measured, users are aware of the inter-library loan services available and sufficient digital platforms for facilitating inter-library loans were most influential.

4.2.1 Accessibility of Interlibrary Loan Services

The second part of the objective examined the accessibility of inter-library loan services (ILLS). Six sub-variables were measured, including restrictions on loan periods and book renewals, whether library users receive adequate assistance, the availability of an online platform, the ease and user-friendliness of processing inter-library loan requests, the response time for requests, and the inclusion of digital resources in ILLS. Table 7 presents a detailed structure of the data. The results were interpreted using a decision rule with a scale of 1.0–2.0 as "less influential," 2.0–3.0 as "influential," and 3.0–4.0 as "most influential."

Table 7: Accessibility of Interlibrary Loan Services (N=51)

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
Restrictions on loan periods and book renewals do not hinder access to inter-library loan services.	3.75	1.30	1st
Library users receive adequate assistance in accessing inter-library loan services	3.60	1.30	2nd
There is an online platform for managing inter-library loan requests.	3.52	1.40	3rd
The process of requesting materials through inter-library loan is easy and user-friendly.	3.50	1.35	4th
The response time for inter-library loan requests is satisfactory	3.40	1.31	5th
Digital resources are included in the inter-library loan service.	3.30	1.32	6th
Total	**21.07**	**7.98**	

Source: Field data, 2025. *M = Mean, SD = Std. Deviation*.

From Table 7, restrictions on loan periods and book renewals do not hinder access to inter-library loan services ranked highest with a M of (3.75) and a SD of (1.30). Library users receive adequate assistance in accessing inter-library loan services followed in second place with M of (3.60) and a SD (1.30). There is an online platform for managing inter-library loan requests ranked third, M of (3.53) and a SD of (1.40). In fourth place, the processing of requesting materials through inter-library loan is easy and user-friendly had a M of (3.50) and a SD (1.35), The response time for inter-library loan requests is satisfactory was ranked fifth M = 3.40, SD = 1.31 M of (3.40) and a SD (1.31). Lastly, digital resources are included in the inter-library loan service ranked the lowest with M of (3.30) and a SD of (1.32). The results revealed that,

among the sub- variables measured, restrictions on loan periods and book renewals do not hinder access to inter-library loan services and library users receive adequate assistance in accessing inter-library loan services were most influential.

4.3 RQ2: Challenges Affecting Inter-Library Loan Services

This objective examined the challenges affecting inter-library loan services (ILLS). Seven sub-variables were measured, namely: poor internet connectivity limiting access, limited financial resources hindering effectiveness, bureaucratic processes slowing down ILLS transactions, reluctance of libraries to share resources, absence of a standardized inter-library loan system, lack of awareness and training among staff, and inadequate ICT infrastructure. Table 8 presents a detailed result of the collected data. A decision rule was applied for interpreting the results, using a scale of 1.0–2.0 as "less influential," 2.0–3.0 as "influential," and 3.0–4.0 as "most influential."

Table 8: Challenges Affecting Inter-Library Loan Services (N=51)

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
Poor internet connectivity limits access to digital inter-library loan services.	3.70	1.30	1st
Limited financial resources hinder the effectiveness of inter-library loan services.	3.65	1.25	2nd
Bureaucratic processes slow down inter-library loan transactions.	3.61	1.33	3rd
Libraries are reluctant to share resources due to concerns over material loss.	3.61	1.15	3rd
The absence of a standardized inter-library loan policy affects efficiency.	3.51	1.43	4th
A lack of awareness and training among staff limits the effectiveness of inter-library loans.	3.50	1.30	5th
Inadequate ICT infrastructure affects the efficiency of inter-library loan transactions.	3.40	1.30	6th
Total	**24.98**	**7.89**	

Source: Field data, 2025. *M = Mean, SD = Std. Deviation.*

From the Table 8, poor internet connectivity limits access to digital inter-library loan services ranked highest with M of (3.70) and a SD of (1.30). Limited financial resources hinder the effectiveness of inter-library loan services followed in second place with M of (3.65) and a SD of (1.25). Bureaucratic processes slow down inter-library loan transactions ranked third with M of (3.61) and a SD of (1.33). In the same vein place, libraries are reluctant to share resources due to concerns over material loss had a M of (3.61) and a SD of (1.15) coming at third. The absence of a standardized inter-library loan policy affects efficiency was also ranked fourth with M of (3.51) and a SD of (1.43). A lack of awareness and training among staff limits the effectiveness of inter-library loans was ranked fifth with M of (3.50) and a SD of (1.30). Lastly, inadequate ICT infrastructure affects the efficiency of inter-library loan transactions ranked the sixth with M of (3.40) and a SD of (1.30). The results revealed that, among the sub- variables

measured, poor internet connectivity limits access to digital inter-library loan services and limited financial resources hinder the effectiveness of inter-library loan services were most influential.

4.4 RQ3: Strategies to Improve Inter-Library Loan Services

This objective examined strategies for improving inter-library loan services (ILLS). Six sub-variables were measured, including implementing a centralized inter-library loan system, reducing bureaucratic procedures to improve turnaround time, establishing formal agreements among academic libraries, digitizing library resources to strengthen inter-library lending, and enhancing ICT infrastructure to improve ILLS. Table 9 provides a detailed presentation of the data.

Table 9: Strategies To Improve Inter-Library Loan Services (N=51)

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
Implementing a centralized inter-library loan system would improve accessibility.	3.84	1.30	1st
Reducing bureaucratic procedures will improve the turnaround time of inter-library loan services.	3.80	1.23	2nd
Establishing formal agreements among academic libraries will promote better resource sharing.	3.65	1.40	3rd
Digitization of library resources will strengthen inter-library loan services.	3.53	1.25	4th
Enhancing ICT infrastructure will improve inter-library loan efficiency.	3.50	1.42	5th
Enhancing ICT infrastructure will improve inter-library will enhance efficiency.	3.41	1.33	6th
Total	**21.73**	**7.93**	

Source: Field data, 2025. *M = Mean, SD = Std. Deviation.*

From the Table 9, implementing a centralized inter-library loan system in improving accessibility ranked highest with a with M of (3.84) and a SD of (1.30). Reducing bureaucratic procedures improves the turnaround time of inter-library loan services followed in second place with (M = 3.80, SD = 1.23). Establishing formal agreements among academic libraries will promote better resource sharing ranked third (M = 3.65, SD = 1.40), In fourth place, digitization of library resources will strengthen inter-library loan services had a mean of 3.53 and a standard deviation of 1.25. Enhancing ICT infrastructure will improve inter-library loan efficiency was ranked fifth with M of (3.50) and a SD of (1.42). Lastly, increasing funding for inter-library loan services will enhance efficiency ranked the lowest with M of (3.50) and a SD of (1.33). The results revealed that, among the sub- variables measured, implementing a centralized inter-library loan system in improving accessibility and reducing bureaucratic procedures improves the turnaround time of inter-library loan services were most influential**.**

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Discussion of Findings

4.5 RQ1: Availability and accessibility of inter-library loan services

4.5.1 RQ1a: Availability of inter-library loan services

The results revealed that, among the sub-variables measured, user awareness of the availability of inter-library loan services and the presence of sufficient digital platforms to facilitate ILLS were the most influential. As noted by Savatagi and Naik (2024), sharing of library resources—an aspect of inter-library cooperation—means that one library can use the resources of other libraries and vice versa. The findings suggest that while the existence of ILLS within users' own libraries and the simplicity and efficiency of the request process are important, there is room for improvement. Based on the study's decision scale, user awareness emerged as the most influential factor. This aligns with the findings of Mensah and Dadzie (2022), who emphasized that providing platforms for request management, raising awareness of accessible resources, and enabling real-time communication between institutions can significantly enhance inter-library lending services.

4.5.2 RQ 1b: Accessibility of inter-library loan services

The results revealed that, among the sub-variables measured, user awareness of the availability of inter-library loan services and the presence of sufficient digital platforms for facilitating ILLS were the most influential. While overall accessibility was generally satisfactory, improvements are needed in response times and the inclusion of digital resources. Mingle et al. (2017) noted that although Ghanaian academic libraries understand the concept of ILLS, practical implementation is often sparse or uneven. According to the study's decision scale, restrictions on loan periods and book renewals did not significantly hinder access to inter-library loan services, falling within the 3.0–4.0 range and thus being most influential. In the interest of providing quality service, academic libraries are obligated to obtain materials from other libraries to meet the demands of clients or the university community, as supported by Savatagi and Naik (2024).

4.6 RQ2: Challenges affecting inter-library loan services

The results indicate that addressing internet connectivity issues, increasing financial support, and streamlining bureaucratic procedures could significantly enhance the efficiency of inter-library loan services (ILLS). Among the challenges, internet connectivity and financial constraints were identified as the most influential due to their direct impact on digital platforms and overall service availability. Eneojo and Okiki (2019) and Harrasi and Jabur (2014) noted that traditional ILLS systems face numerous challenges, including inefficiencies in processing requests, delays in resource supply, high operating costs, and difficulties in managing user data and transaction records. While ICT infrastructure remains important, it appears to be a lesser concern relative to other factors. According to the study's decision scale, poor internet connectivity, which limits access to digital ILLS, falls within the 3.0–4.0 range, making it the most influential factor. The efficient operation of ILLS in many institutions is further hampered by infrastructure constraints, such as outdated digital systems and unreliable internet, as supported by Owusu-Ansah and Takyi (2017).

4.7 RQ3: Strategies to improve inter-library loan services

The results indicate that the most effective strategies for improving inter-library loan services (ILLS) involve implementing centralized systems, reducing bureaucratic delays, and fostering inter-institutional agreements. Investments in digitization and ICT infrastructure are also critical for optimizing service efficiency. Among these strategies, establishing a centralized system and reducing bureaucratic procedures were identified as the most influential, as they directly enhance user awareness and overall service efficiency. While funding remains important, it appears to be a lesser priority compared to structural and operational reforms. More broadly, establishing comprehensive policy frameworks that standardize ILLS practices across institutions, investing in ICT infrastructure to facilitate digitized lending operations, and constructing a national virtual union catalogue can significantly improve resource discoverability (CARLIGH, 2021). According to the study's decision scale, implementing a centralized inter-library loan system was the most influential strategy for improving accessibility. Supporting this, Mingle, Lamptey, and Hassan (2017) investigated the use of Web 2.0 tools—such as blogs, wikis, and social media platforms—to enhance academic library services in Ghana, highlighting the potential of digital platforms to strengthen inter-library cooperation.

4.8 Implications of the Study

The study's conclusions underscore the critical importance of infrastructure, institutional cooperation, and staff knowledge for the effectiveness of inter-library loan services (ILLS) in academic institutions. Enhancing promotional efforts and simplifying access mechanisms can significantly increase the use of ILLS, as evidenced by the strong influence of user awareness and the availability of digital platforms. Furthermore, the identification of financial constraints and poor internet connectivity as major obstacles highlights systemic challenges that extend beyond library operations, necessitating broader institutional and governmental interventions. The findings also reveal that, although users have some access and are generally informed, bottlenecks persist in key areas such as response times, book renewals, and digital resource inclusion. Addressing these issues can improve the efficiency of resource sharing and foster a more collaborative learning environment. Overall, the study has important implications for library managers, policymakers, and academic institutions seeking to maximize access to academic resources through inter-library cooperation and modernization initiatives.

5.0 Conclusion

This study examined the availability, accessibility, challenges, and strategies for improving inter-library loan services (ILLS) in educational institutions. The findings indicate that, although users have moderate awareness of the existence and functioning of ILLS, there remain opportunities for improvement in institutional support, digital access, and service efficiency. The effective delivery of these services is hindered by challenges such as slow internet connectivity, limited financial resources, and cumbersome administrative procedures. While ICT infrastructure requires ongoing maintenance to support technological advancements, it was not identified as the most urgent concern. Implementing a centralized system, streamlining

bureaucratic processes, and fostering inter-institutional collaboration were identified as the most effective strategies. These approaches can significantly enhance the efficiency and accessibility of inter-library loans when supported by targeted funding and policy reforms, ultimately promoting academic productivity and equitable access to information across institutions. Overall, it is essential that academic libraries in Ghana address the persistent challenges of ILLS to transform it from a conceptual ideal into a practical and sustainable service.
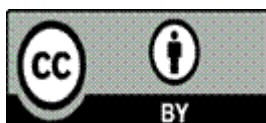
6.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed to improve inter-library loan services (ILLS) among academic libraries:

Academic library management should increase user awareness by conducting regular orientation programmes and sensitization campaigns to ensure that staff and students are informed about the availability of ILLS. Library management should invest in ICT infrastructure and reliable internet connectivity to facilitate efficient ILLS operations. Academic libraries should reinforce the adoption of a central union catalogue accessible to universities nationally and internationally. Management should ensure that ILLS services are responsive and user-friendly to enhance service delivery. ILLS should be expanded to include digital resources, such as e-books and journal articles, to meet evolving user needs. Academic libraries should strengthen inter-institutional cooperation through formal agreements, partnerships, and collaborative initiatives.

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