Trends in Libraries, Information Science and Technology:
A Journal of Nigeria Library Association Enugu State Chapter *Vol. 5, No 1, June 2025 (87-93)*

Determinants and Practices of Knowledge Sharing among Librarians of University Libraries in Nigeria

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Abstract

Knowledge is widely recognised as the driving force behind organisational growth and innovation in the twenty-first century. This paper examines the concept and practice of knowledge sharing among librarians in university libraries, focusing on its role in improving professional competence, research productivity, and service delivery. The study reviews relevant literature to explore the various modes of knowledge sharing socialisation, externalisation, internalisation, and combination and analyses how information and communication technology (ICT) supports these processes within academic libraries. Despite the increasing adoption of ICT for administrative and technical operations, evidence suggests that its utilisation for structured knowledge sharing among librarians remains limited. This gap has constrained the potential of libraries to function as effective knowledge-based institutions. The paper therefore aims to assess the current state of knowledge sharing among librarians, identify the barriers and determinants influencing these practices, and propose strategies for fostering a sustainable, ICT-driven knowledge-sharing culture in university libraries. The review reveals that while librarians in Nigeria and other African countries often share knowledge informally through discussions, workshops, and seminars, such practices are rarely institutionalised. The paper concluded by recommending deliberate policy support, capacity-building initiatives, and investment in ICT infrastructure to enhance collaboration, strengthen knowledge exchange, and reposition university libraries as dynamic centres of scholarly communication and innovation.

Keywords

Knowledge Sharing; University Libraries; Librarians; Information and Communication Technology (ICT); Scholarly Communication; Nigeria

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Introduction

Knowledge drives the activities of individuals and organisations in the 21st century, leading to the emergence of knowledge economies. To that extent, knowledge is considered essential for the growth, development, survival, and actualisation of competitive advantage of all sectors of human endeavour. Tella (2016) submits that knowledge is a critical and strategic resource that leads to new ideas and spurs innovation, improves employees' performance, and supports innovations in organisations. This makes the strategic acquisition, storage, sharing, and utilisation of knowledge imperative.

Knowledge sharing is considered as both a fundamental and most crucial activity of knowledge management. Knowledge is information that changes something or somebody, either by becoming grounds for action or by making an individual or an institution capable of different or more effective actions. Knowledge sharing involves the action in which individuals diffuse relevant ideas, facts and information to others, either in organisations or institutions. Knowledge sharing can be done through formal, informal, unsystematic and non-daily routines. In the online environment, for instance, findings have shown that participation in discussion forums encourages intellectual support, which is the sharing of knowledge and ideas among participants as well as improvements in learning performance and deepening of knowledge

(Tella, 2016). The ultimate goal of sharing employees' knowledge is its transformational assets and resources for productivity.

Furthermore, sharing activities have to be voluntary and cannot be forced. Nonaka (2017) identifies four modes of knowledge sharing: socialisation, externalisation, internalisation and combination. Socialization is the interaction between two or more individuals for mutual understanding and benefits. Since tacit knowledge is intangible, through interaction, it can be understood and can create new tacit knowledge. Examples of socialisation knowledge are knowledge acquired through chat rooms, tea rooms, professional discussion groups, round tables, brainstorming, thinking sessions and finding solutions to problems. Externalization takes many forms, including performing actions based on this knowledge, explaining it in a lecture or codifying it in an intelligent knowledge system. Internalization is the conversion of explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge. Internalization may occur during learning by doing activities in which concrete, articulated concepts emerge in interactive trial-and-error processes, reading books, or trying to understand the codified knowledge in a knowledge base. Combination, on the other hand, ties together different bodies of explicit knowledge held by individuals through processes such as meetings, telephone conversations, and the exchange of documents (Okonedo & Popoola, 2019).

University libraries increasingly rely on technology for core operations such as administration, cataloguing, interlibrary loans, and international bibliographic projects. When effectively utilised, technology promotes the growth and development of libraries, facilitates cooperation, reduces duplication of efforts, and enhances service delivery (Fayose & Nwalo, 2021). Despite these advantages, evidence from Nigerian university libraries suggests that the use of technology for systematic knowledge sharing among librarians remains limited. Many libraries still depend on informal or face-to-face exchanges rather than structured, ICT-driven platforms that support collaboration and innovation. This situation highlights a significant gap in the integration of technology-enabled knowledge sharing practices within university libraries. Addressing this gap is crucial to improving librarians' professional competencies, research productivity, and service quality in the digital age.

Therefore, this paper aims to examine the current state of knowledge sharing among librarians in university libraries, identify the barriers and enabling factors influencing these practices, and recommend strategies for fostering an ICT-driven knowledge sharing culture within the academic library environment.

Concept of Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing is a process where individuals mutually exchange their (tacit and explicit) knowledge, leading to the creation of new knowledge jointly. This implies that the sharing process consists of bringing both knowledge and getting knowledge (Ardichvili & Wentling, 2021). How well an individual, an organisation, and an entire society can harness, access, share, and make use of available information and knowledge will ultimately decide their ability to generate economic growth and enhance the quality of life for all (Weiner, 2013). There is an increasing acceptance among scholars that knowledge sharing amongst individuals working in a system is a crucial factor and positive force in the success and survival of the system and the individuals involved.

Some African Universities have realised the need to use information technology to promote research and enhance excellence in libraries. The Cameroon interuniversity network is an example of the determination of the Cameroonian .higher education authorities to provide universities with modern infrastructure. In Kenya, the Kenya

Education Network (KENET) is an initiative to establish a high-speed, reliable and sustainable IP network for interconnectivity among educational institutions. The Malawi Academic and Research Network (MAREN) has been established to provide bandwidth to major academic sites. Senegal has the UCAD information technology network, which connects schools and faculties of the university. Nigeria has been involved in many projects to create a national research and education network.

NuNet, PolyNet, and TeachNet, among others, are all efforts to develop and use ICT to foster institutional collaboration among and between administrative and academic communities. Additionally, internet connectivity has become a requirement for higher education (Etim, 2021). Despite the relevance of these work areas to promote research and make the libraries the centre of academic scholarship, African university libraries have been portrayed negatively. Etim (2021) supported this assertion when she stated that the need to share and transfer information in Africa is not new. The issue is that in most African countries, adequate internet access presents a great challenge for university administration. Ogunshola (2014) noted that the proliferation of universities in Nigeria, despite the economic recession in the country since 1980, has aggravated the problem for universities and their libraries. On the whole, university libraries in many African countries are faced with a dearth of funding for books and journals, staffing difficulties and perhaps a loss of the perception of the library as the centre of academic life and scholarship. Lack of internet access has deprived African universities the latest information, web-based learning, opportunities to be part of international research teams, and the ability to connect campuses with video conferencing (Etim, 2021). Ardichvili and Wentling (2021) stated that despite all these impediments in the implementation of technology in Nigerian libraries, there are reasons to believe that prospects are brighter. Therefore, there is a need for knowledge sharing among librarians in university libraries if we must come out of these challenges. Managing knowledge has become an important subject facing libraries today, and it should be focused on the following: effective research and development of knowledge, creation of knowledge bases, exchange and sharing of knowledge between library staff/users, training of librarians, speeding up of processing of the implicit knowledge and realisation of its sharing (Alegbeleye, 2021).

Knowledge sharing helps librarians solve problems, learn new things and increase understanding. Librarians can learn from each other and benefit from new knowledge and development from one another. Librarians who can share knowledge are more productive and more likely to survive in their jobs than librarians who do not (Yang, 2014). Librarians, by way of sharing their knowledge, experience, thoughts and beliefs, mutually establish their common understanding. The most effective result of using knowledge sharing practices is to improve librarians' skills and knowledge, which in turn increases efficiency and productivity (Peariasamy, 2019). Those with limited knowledge benefit from the advantage of knowledge sharing in organisations. Knowledge sharing has helped each librarian learn from the experiences and practices of others and also increased librarians' efficiency in the library organisation. Knowledge sharing during collaborative learning makes all participants benefit in terms of positive learning outcomes and achieve more in cooperative interaction as compared to individualistic interaction. To achieve knowledge effectiveness, individual knowledge needs to be shared. Unless individual knowledge is shared with others, the knowledge is likely to have a limited impact on effectiveness. To ensure a good flow of information, librarians must share their knowledge. In the absence of this, there will be no free flow of knowledge, and this will lead to information hoarding (Yang, 2014).

Empirical Studies on Knowledge Sharing among Librarians in Nigeria

Ugwu, Eze and Idoko's (2012) study of the attitude of librarians towards knowledge sharing in the University of Nigeria libraries revealed a significant positive relationship between personality traits of self-esteem and self-efficacy and attitudes towards knowledge sharing among the librarians. The study recommended a reward system that will encourage librarians to share knowledge and collaborate with other colleagues as well as the inclusion of knowledge management in the curriculum of library and information science.

Similarly, Okonedo and Popoola (2019) investigated the effect of self-concept, knowledge sharing and utilisation on research productivity of librarians in public universities in South-West Nigeria. The study revealed that the level of publication of librarians is moderately high; there was a relative effect of self-concept and knowledge utilisation on the research productivity of the librarians. Furthermore, while knowledge sharing was not relatively significant in research productivity, the finding established that the joint effect of self-concept, knowledge sharing and knowledge utilisation on research productivity was significant. It was concluded that librarians who possessed high self-concept and made proper use of knowledge gained through knowledge sharing will have high research productivity. The study recommended that internal seminars and workshops should be organised every quarter of the year where it will be made compulsory for each librarian to present a quality paper. This will encourage knowledge sharing and will increase librarians' zeal to utilise knowledge and also have more research publications.

Similarly, Anasi, Akpan and Adedokun (2014) studied the extent of use of ICTs for knowledge sharing among librarians in South-west, Nigeria. The study found that librarians used ICT platforms for knowledge sharing. Challenges such as a lack of awareness of existing ICT-based knowledge sharing platforms, limited ICT skills, and an unhealthy technology environment weremajor hindrances to knowledge sharing among librarians. The study recommended maximum use of ICT platforms for knowledge sharing and collaborations for professional development, scholarly communication, and efficient service delivery. Aranda and Fernander (2020) examined knowledge sharing among librarians in university libraries located in the South-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The study revealed that the main subjects of knowledge sharing among librarians were in the areas of ICT and networking, database management, knowledge management and cataloguing; however, they were not satisfied with the extent of knowledge sharing among them.

A study on knowledge sharing among librarians in Federal Universities in Nigeria was conducted by Onifade (2015), using a questionnaire for data collection. Three hundred and sixty-two librarians responded to the survey. The study revealed that although there was low level knowledge sharing, exchanged mostly through verbal discussions, seminars discussions, seminars and workshops, they had a positive perception about knowledge sharing. Unfortunately, no attention was given to those who shared knowledge. The study recommended improved sharing of knowledge among librarians in the country. Awodoyin, Osisanwo, Adetoro and Adeyemo (2016) investigated the knowledge sharing behaviour of librarians in selected academic libraries in Nigeria. The findings revealed that librarians shared knowledge through face-to-face interaction, mobile phones, email and newsletters, which enhanced innovation, efficiency, effectiveness, and emotional relief. However, knowledge sharing was not yet adopted formally in the libraries. The study recommended that knowledge sharing should be a routine which library management should enforce in the studied institutions.

Tella (2016) developed and tested a statistical model that examined factors that determine the intention of information professionals in Nigeria to share knowledge with their colleagues. The result revealed correlations between the overall score for intending to share knowledge and other knowledge sharing intention factors among information professionals. Thus, citizenship behaviour had the highest correlation with knowledge-sharing intention, followed by creativity and innovation, and frequency of interaction.

Furthermore, the result of regression analysis showed that ten independent variables (i.e. citizenship behaviour, peer reliable role performance, interaction frequency, trust, self-efficacy, creativity and innovation, organisation management policies, interest concern, sense of belonging, and organisational culture) jointly explained 76.5% variation in the knowledge sharing intention of the information professionals in Nigeria. The research findings have implications for policy formulation and decision-making in information and knowledge organisations, the public and private information sector players, professional associations, and information and knowledge training institutions, especially in Nigeria. It could be reliably inferred that management and information services to users of libraries in the 21st century require that librarians share their ideas and insights on best practices. There is a need for librarians to embark on knowledge sharing in contemporary and innovative methods which foster the delivery of services that attract and retain the confidence of information users. Within this domain, areas such as the delivery of information literacy programmes, digitisation processes and retrospective conversion of bibliographic records, web-based information services, and emerging issues in the education and training of librarians would be at the forefront due to their contemporary relevance.

Existing knowledge sharing practices among librarians in Nigeria on the best methods for the delivery of Information Literacy (IL) programmes need to be empirically explored. This owes to the probability that sharing knowledge on IL issues will enable librarians to utilise ideas, insights and experiences of colleagues for efficient and effective provision of result-driven IL instructions to the users. Exploring and reporting this aspect in the literature will most likely enable librarians in Nigeria to learn faster, develop creativity and improve their methods of inculcating IL competence in their diverse users. It has been averred that sharing knowledge on IL-related issues requires commitment, creativity and an interactive learning process among librarians for creating new knowledge on contemporary IL matters, whereas an unfavourable disposition towards sharing knowledge on IL issues among librarians can be detrimental to librarians' achieving set performance targets (Ugwu, Eze & Idoko, 2014). Besides IL programmes, other aspects of information sharing and knowledge management activities contingent on effective service delivery by librarians in Nigeria should also be explored and reported in order to bolster the literature base and scaffold understanding of the subject.

This literature review highlights that several studies indicate that librarians engage in knowledge sharing in various ways owing to a positive perception of its benefit. With the extent of reports indicating wide acceptance of knowledge sharing as strategic, essential, and beneficial for personal and group effectiveness among librarians in other regions of the world, there is no doubt that knowledge sharing should be similarly encouraged among librarians in Nigeria. The literature based on this subject for librarians in Nigeria needs to be expanded through more empirical studies. This owes to the fact that there are still other strategic areas that need to be explored in relation to the subject for librarians in Nigeria.

Thus it is therefore recommended that studies on knowledge sharing attitudes, pattern, and influencing factors among librarians in Nigeria should focus on the following specific areas: delivery of information literacy and programmes, creation and management of institutional repositories, creativity and innovations in serving users' information needs, digitization and digital preservation strategies, web-based information services, use of social media for innovative information services, managing diverse user information behaviour, contemporary education and training methods, effects of Open Access (OA) initiatives and movements, Open Educational Resources (OERs) and Mobile Online Open Courses (MOOCs) in services delivery of libraries and, e-publishing of scholarly communication. The synthesis of reviewed studies indicated persistent challenges in ICT adoption, organisational support, and formal structures for knowledge sharing among librarians

Recommendations

The following were recommended:

1. University library management should institutionalise knowledge sharing as an integral component of professional practice through policies that reward collaboration and innovation.
2. Regular seminars, workshops, and peer-learning sessions should be organised to enhance awareness and capacity for knowledge sharing among both new and experienced librarians.
3. ICT infrastructure and reliable internet access should be strengthened to support online platforms and communities of practice for librarians.
4. Library associations and training institutions should integrate knowledge management and sharing concepts into the curriculum of Library and Information Science programmes.
5. A supportive organisational culture that promotes openness, trust, and mutual learning should be fostered to encourage active knowledge sharing among librarians.

Conclusion

This study underscores that knowledge sharing is a vital process for enhancing librarians' professional competencies, fostering innovation, and improving library service delivery in university settings. Although many librarians engage in knowledge sharing through informal discussions, workshops, and professional gatherings, institutional structures and ICT support for systematic sharing remain weak. Proffering solutions to these gaps through capacity building, ICT enhancement, and the development of supportive organisational policies will strengthen the knowledge-sharing culture within Nigerian university libraries. Ultimately, embracing knowledge sharing as a strategic tool will position university libraries as centres of academic excellence and scholarly collaboration in the digital age.

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