

## KNOWLEDGE SHARING AMONG ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS IN NIGERIA: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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### Abstract

It has often been said that knowledge is a distinct commodity and its true value can only be achieved when it is shared among people. Knowledge has become a competitive factor that provides an essential cause for both individual and organizational success. Librarians need to enhance knowledge sharing through their profession to gain and maintain their veritable positions as knowledge carriers and knowledge workers. This is because the current industrial and knowledge society is steadily being advanced by science and technologies, creating an entire different world of knowledge. This world is also influencing individuals, organizations, nations and societies. User's expectations are greatly influenced by these changes. They expect to be served better when they visit libraries and they are ever ready to check on other Information Service Providers (ISPs) when their information needs are not satisfied. Therefore, for librarians to perform better and deliver exceptional services in the current knowledge society, they need to gain new knowledge through knowledge sharing. This has also become needful to enable them face competitions, perform better in their services and conquer ignorance. This paper therefore reviews opinions and views of different authors on knowledge sharing among librarians in Nigeria. It gives a conceptual clarification and insight about knowledge, knowledge sharing, and its benefits among academic librarians, barriers to knowledge sharing among academic librarians and made some recommendations.

**Keywords:** Librarians, Knowledge, Knowledge Sharing

### Introduction

The current environment in which librarians work is constantly changing as result of globalization and advancement in information and communication technologies. This new environment is filled with plethora of trends and concepts such as innovations, reengineering, remapping, artificial intelligence, big data, algorithm, block-chain technology, Internet of things, virtual and augmented reality, drones, virtual learning, e-services, digital media labs, cloud computing, solar powered systems, new ICT techniques, e-services,

digitalized/virtual libraries and many more. These concepts and trends by their practical applications in libraries, have also introduced new information behaviours and provisioning models, new digital collections, revised and integrate new knowledge patterns of services delivery, broadening the scope of librarianship with new roles conferred on librarians.

The impacts of new technologies on library operation has become quite huge and felt by librarians in every aspect of their job. Computing, Communication, and mass storage technologies have generally leveraged traditional library operations such as knowledge selection, acquisition, organization, preservation and dissemination. Krubu and Osanu (2010) asserts that these continuous development reshapes the way libraries access, retrieves, store, manipulate and disseminate information to users. They also offer libraries opportunities to offer value-added information services and access to a wide variety of digital-based information resources to their patrons.

The emergence of this knowledge economy had given rise to business environment that is characterized by uncertainty, instability, and changes that creates various challenges and opportunities. Increase in globalization, rapid technological changes and the growing need of qualified employees and improved performance. The affairs of the world are currently run by those who have information and knowledge. Knowledge is currently considered to be an asset for individuals, organizations, nations and the society at large. It has become power that pushes individuals to cutting edge with competitive power. It is so because knowledge as a derivative of information has become legal tender, it is sourced, bought, acquired, created, organized, managed and exchanged to maintain a world of knowledge order (Ugwuogu, Ugocha & Ibeme, 2019). There is currently a trend in organizations in the search for greater competitiveness, and this is related to the integration of

a series of values, processes and behaviours developed through the use of the knowledge available and within their reach (Di Vaio, Assunta, Rohail Hassan, and Rosa Palladino, 2020). This is directly influencing organizational development and its respective ability to innovate (Ganguly, Asim, & Debdeep, 2019). Greater search for competitions in the current knowledge society is also pushing individual and organizations for more quest for knowledge that could place them at cutting edge. Corroborating this view, Bratianu, (2010) stressed that knowledge plays a key role in giving meaning to the world we live through the process of knowing which contributes to the construction of our conceptual system. This opinion based piece, therefore reviews literatures on knowledge sharing among librarians especially in Nigeria.

### **What is knowledge?**

Every field of life without knowledge is dead. Different authors with diverge views have revealed what the term 'knowledge' is all about. For instance, Zamir & Kim (2022), knowledge is a resource or asset that allows individuals and organizations to enhance learning and decision-making through knowledge management. Coker and Macaulay (2019) view knowledge as an embodiment of learned behaviour built upon careful observation of phenomenon, factual information, stored data and or skills acquired through practice and education. Gaziano (2017) revealed that it is information gained and remembered through the process of learning. Knowledge is an expressive tool to make salient epistemic claims within a social space that is subject to human inquiry (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018; Vega-Encabo, 2016). Knowledge is a multi-dimensional concept consisting of data, information, skills, and experiences that may be used in making firm decisions. Hence, previous knowledge enhances

the formation of developed and advanced knowledge (Nejatian, Nejati, Zarei & Soltani, 2013).

Knowledge as a concept results from a progression of data and information to knowledge. Data is unprocessed information, information is data analysed while knowledge is the application of information. The basic component of knowledge is data, which may be figures, numbers, facts, events, transactions, opinions, and others that have been recorded. Knowledge in the current environment is equated with development. The World Bank has used metaphor “knowledge is development”. In other words, lack of knowledge is largely responsible for underdevelopment. If knowledge can be equated with development, then the wider the knowledge gap, the broader the development gap (Onuoha, 2015). It is then reasonable to understand various types of knowledge.

### **Types of Knowledge**

Knowledge is of different types. Authors such as Qandah, Ramiz, Taghrid Saleh Suifan, Ra’ed Masa’deh, & Bader Yousef Obeidat. (2020) and Aljuwaiber (2016) asserts that there are two types of knowledge which are explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is a type of knowledge that is formalized and codified. It is a kind of knowledge that is documented and easily communicated, shared and transferred in their codified form. It is usually disseminated through documents, electronic works and manuals (Ugwuogu, Ugocha & Ibeme, 2019). Explicit knowledge is characterized by external appearances and can be expressed in the form of books, the web, and documents. This type of knowledge is easy to store and circulate, using technology. Explicit knowledge can be transferred in figures, words as well as can be conveyed or transferred easily between individuals.

On the other hand, tacit knowledge is the type of knowledge that is hidden and often times, based on experience and difficult to express through technology. According to Ajie (2019), tacit knowledge resides in the minds and behaviour of individuals, the internal intuition and common-sense. Skills, intelligence, and experiences in a person is known as tacit knowledge (Razmerita, Kirchner & Nielsen, 2016). Panahi, Watson & Partridge (2013) reiterated that this kind of knowledge could only be attained via personal experience at the workplace. However, the greater the tacit knowledge element, the harder it will be to transfer or to share.

Explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge could be differentiated. Al-Husseini, Elbeltagi, & Dosa, (2015) reveals that tacit knowledge is difficult to communicate, unlike explicit knowledge which is much easier to communicate due to its nature. As mentioned earlier, explicit knowledge is easy to share or to transfer, but tacit knowledge is difficult to share. But one common thing about both is that they can be transferred through socialization, internalization, communications and various activities with different levels such as intra or inter organization, individual and technology (Juhariand & Izhar, 2018).

Arguably, Dombrowski, Rotenberg, & Bick (2013) on their own, posited that Knowledge as an integrative concept has three basic categories which include skill, experiential and knowledge claim. The categorizations are interconnected with each other but seemingly with different unique features (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018). Nevertheless, they encompasses both the individual and organizational level which are fundamental to knowledge manifestation in different ways through continuous interaction with the environment that support in developing conscious cognition via direct interface with the environment which consist in reflection. However, it is rooted in the sensory system which

when processed is open to abstract considerations (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018). The experiential knowledge according to them, is personally acquired knowledge through direct interface with the environment obtained via the sensory system and processed by the brain (Dombrowski, Rotenberg & Bick, 2013; Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018).

Individual perspectives of viewing things around their vicinity tends to influence their interpretations of phenomenon around them such that it creates a powerful interaction between their emotional, spiritual and rational knowledge, considering the fact that their entire body system and the mind are actively involved in the participative process (Bratianu, 2015). Knowledge claims are what we know that exist in our cognition without the use of conscious rational process that enable individuals to learn from each other as well build shared knowledge (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2015; Dombrowski, et al., 2013). The skill knowledge is a procedural kind of knowledge that is action oriented and well-structured by performing a task unconsciously in a repeated manner with a given procedure that enable individuals to recognize a pattern as well build mental model via experience.

There is currently a trend in organizations in the search for greater competitiveness, and this is related to the integration of a series of values, processes and behaviours developed through the use of the knowledge available and within their reach (Di Vaio, Rohail & Rosa, 2020). Ritala, Olander, Michailova, Husted, (2015), highlighted that successful knowledge sharing can expand the competitive advantages and can increase organizational efficiency. Many newly established organizations seek knowledge to gained from experienced individuals in order to succeed (Meri, Hasan., Safie, 2017). Knowledge is directly influencing organizational development and its respective ability to innovate (Ganguly, Asim & Debdeep, 2019). Knowledge among employees requires continuous development and

acquisition/complementation of new information corresponding to their daily functions (Gope et al. 2018).

### **Librarians and Knowledge**

The changing technological environment and innovations have altered traditional operations in university libraries. University libraries is traditionally, a place to read books, magazines, newspapers, either electronically or print form, complete assignments, conduct research, or relax and read for leisure. The primary objective of every university library is to meet the information need(s) of library users and to help the university system to achieve its educational goals via librarians. Librarians are those with awarded institutional certificates such as BLS, Bsc, BA, PGDLIS, MLS, PhD etc with theoretical and practical knowledge of information science and knowledge management. As the society gets intense with the growth of knowledge as a result of globalization and advancement in information and communication technologies, more knowledge are being generated in the society. It has practically become impossible for individuals, organizations, nations and society to be self-reliant or sufficient with their knowledge capacities in the current knowledge environment. It then becomes needful that librarians proactively utilize opportunities created by these developments to bridge their knowledge gaps via knowledge sharing.

### **Knowledge sharing: A conceptual clarification**

Several authors have defined knowledge sharing differently. According to Swift and Virick (2013), knowledge sharing involves the delivery of task-related information, or feedback regarding a procedure and can involve communication about a particular task, direct or indirect exchange of tangible items. Khalil & Shea (2012) defined knowledge sharing as “the exchange of different types of knowledge between individuals, groups, units, and

organisations. Knowledge sharing is a type of social exchange behavior, which can help make knowledge more understandable and easier for individuals to use (Shehab, Eladwiah, & Salina, 2018). Dalhatu Usman Mairiga (2022) established that knowledge sharing denotes the exchange of knowledge between at least two parties in a reciprocal process allowing reshaping and sense-making of the knowledge in a new context. Kang & Lee (2017) asserts that it is an engagement in mutual discussion and exchange of ideas improve one's capability to make sense of things.

Ali Abdullah (2015) described it as the process of transferring and exchanging ideas, values, and sensory perceptions from one person to another in the institution. Janus, (2016) opines that knowledge sharing is the process of interchanging knowledge, skills, information, expertise, experience, intelligence and understanding menace in organizations. Knowledge sharing refers to the process of making knowledge available to others by exchanging it among organizational members for them to collaborate on organizational tasks, solve problems or implement ideas (Flinchbaugh and Chadwick, 2016). Salma Mahmoud Muhammad Al-Balawi (2019) added that it is the process of acquiring skills, experiences, competencies and knowledge through the exchange and dissemination of ideas, information, and inventions between individuals. It is a process of giving, offering, and requesting any process of searching for knowledge in several directions that individuals may have, or in books and publications, or in databases, networks, or blogs (Mubaraki Safa, 2019). Knowledge sharing is a process through which organisations, professional individuals, communities, nations or societies shares information or knowledge either in written words (books documents, project materials), visuals (images, graphics, graphic, videos, blueprints, designs or user interfaces), processes (procedures, approaches, frame works, methodologies



techniques, models, proven practices, checklists), learning, workshops or training to strengthen professional ties.

Knowledge could be shared via conferences, workshops, capacity building, brainstorming, one-on-one discussions, job rotation, coaching, mentoring, storytelling adhoc meetings, focus group discussions, questionnaire or survey, learning by observation or training and development sessions within and outside organizations.

### **Benefits of Knowledge Sharing amongst Librarians**

A number of studies have revealed that knowledge sharing is beneficial to every organization including libraries. Knowledge sharing is regarded as a strategic method for gaining competitive advantages. Ritala, Olander, Michailova, Husted (2015), highlighted that successful knowledge sharing can expand the competitive advantages and can increase organizational efficiency. Many newly established organizations seek knowledge to be gained from experienced individuals in order to succeed (Meri, Hasan, Safie, 2017).

A study conducted by Islam (2013), established that the capability of sharing knowledge enhances research work significantly; individuals are stimulated to share knowledge to enhance learning and teaching activities. Carmeli, Gelbard, and Reiter-Palmon, (2014), shares the same view that knowledge sharing leads to effective learning and creativity. In the words of Mayekiso (2013) knowledge sharing benefits in academic libraries include 'better informed staff which in turn leads to better service delivery. Okonedo and Popoola (2012) asserts that knowledge sharing helps librarians to share knowledge about new trend in librarianship and by sharing knowledge, they use experience gained in finding solution to their problems on the job. When employees engage in knowledge sharing, they elaborate and externalize their knowledge (Ahmad and Widén, 2018). Ali and Dominic

(2016) have shown that knowledge sharing is indeed essential for organizations. It can especially help minimize training costs because when knowledge sharing is adopted, employees learn from each other and correspondingly improve their knowledge and skills. Acquiring knowledge, keeping knowledge, using knowledge, and sharing knowledge are essential accomplishments to be achieved in organizations and among individuals that adopt an open environment and promote a positive learning system.

Librarians as knowledge carriers need to open up in terms of sharing their knowledge in a world where change is inevitable. When librarians share their knowledge they in turn gain innovative ideas which were not previously there, think better, gain professional confidence and enthusiasm as knowledge workers. They also utilize such knowledge to strengthen bonds and connections among themselves and other professionals, manage libraries better as well as improve efficiently in their job performance to achieve library goals and expected values at work. Besides, professional survival in this fast-changing world of knowledge requires increase in capacities of learning, adaptation to knowledge systems and ability to face competitions. And this is exactly what knowledge sharing do for librarians.

### **Knowledge Sharing Barriers among librarians**

Despite the benefits of knowledge sharing, a lot of factors still pose as barriers to knowledge sharing amongst librarians. Shahid and Alamgir (2011) distinguished three types of barriers to knowledge sharing as organizational, individual and technological. However they looked at the role of ICT in curbing knowledge sharing barriers and reducing the other barriers. In the words of Rehman et al., (2010), organisational culture is a central and influential factor of knowledge sharing behaviour of individuals. They further assert that unsupportive organisational culture can be an influential driver of knowledge hoarding.

It is argued that if the organizations want to be successful in knowledge sharing, they need to pay attention to the knowledge sharing barriers (Athar & Evans, 2015; Chong, Yuen, & Gan, 2014; Dee & Leisyte, 2017). Also, Ramjeawon and Rowley (2017) found other organizational barriers to knowledge sharing like lack of policies and appropriate reward mechanisms, resources, data, funding and time for research, frequent leadership changes, lack of knowledge-sharing culture and research repositories and weak industry-academia linkages in universities. Ahmed (2018) noted that to stimulate knowledge sharing in organisations, employees need to be rewarded through prizes, salary increase, commission, bonuses, promotion, and educational opportunities (extrinsic rewards) or benefits such as enjoyment or satisfaction gained from undertaking an activity (intrinsic) (Sajeva, 2014). Meeting the psychological needs can promote intrinsic motivation, and this will enhance the results also reflect the intrinsic motivation to share knowledge to generate a positive impact. Chipeta (2018) study revealed that library staff in universities in Malawi was intrinsically motivated to share knowledge and they were not motivated by extrinsic rewards. Also, Tahleho (2016) found out that at the University of Lesotho, librarians were motivated to share knowledge through promotional rewards and recognition.

But Onifade (2015) contrarily explained that librarians in the Federal University libraries in Nigeria were not incentivised to share knowledge with others and consequently, their level of knowledge sharing was described as below average in their study. Jain (2012), established that knowledge sharing issues had not been institutionalized in the majority of university libraries. Libraries particularly those in Nigeria have not made knowledge sharing part their organizational culture. Organisational culture has a bearing on an individual's willingness to share knowledge. Since knowledge is stored in individual brains, when such librarians disengage from service in libraries or transferred from one section to another, they

often leave such duties with their acquired experiences or knowledge. Such knowledge is often buried in unread reports and filed away in cabinets or totally lost (Manus, 2016). Organizational culture is known to be an important aspect of the formation of a learning. Good relationship among workers and best organizational culture may also form their motivation to contribute their knowledge (Hung, Lai & Chang, 2011). Based on the above findings, Nejatian, Zarei, & Soltani (2013) advised that it is important that organisational structure is designed to be flexible enough to encourage creating and sharing knowledge across the organisation's boundaries. In the view of Rasula, Vuksic & Stemberger (2012), an organisation can achieve a competitive edge by creating and using knowledge and integrating the knowledge into business processes. Knowledge sharing in an organization is essential because, those employed in an organization may not possess all the occupational related knowledge that they need and they have to depend on others (Anand & Walsh, 2016).

Second barrier to knowledge sharing among librarians is individual factors. Individual factors such a negative attitude to knowledge sharing, lack of trust, fear of losing the power of knowledge, altruism, and reputation. In line with this, Ugocha & Igwe (2018) explained that an employee's attitudes and competencies may impede knowledge sharing. Some individuals may possess an attitude of indifference to sharing, due to personal insecurity, such as a fear of being seen as ignorant and therefore unfit for job advancement or new career opportunities.

Chua, Thinakaran, & Vasudevan, (2023) pointed out that trust deficiency is classified as individual barriers to knowledge sharing because individuals are not willing to share and transfer knowledge without trusting relationships. According to Ajer, (2019), the factors to create a strong trusting relationship between employees are common language, common

vision, discretion, and strong tie. Nakano, Muniz and Batista (2013) emphasized that individuals are important asset for organizations as far as knowledge resources are concerned. Personality will have an impact on knowledge sharing. Thus, some personality traits, such as extraversion and conscientiousness, instructor support, degree of competitions and technology support, were instrumental in determining knowledge sharing patterns (Zheng, 2017).

Employees may also fear a loss of superiority and knowledge ownership after sharing their own personal knowledge. Knowledge they say is power and most librarians regard their knowledge as their power. As Connelly (2012) rightly pointed out, organisations expect their employees to freely share their knowledge to gain sustainable competitive advantage. But the knowledge is, however, perceived by employees as the source of individual power which protects one's status in an organisation thus, sharing knowledge is perceived as a self-disarming process and losing ownership of knowledge weaken individual value and uniqueness in organizations (Yiu & Law, 2012).

Besides, most librarians are introvert personalities with great knowledge but majority of such personalities are not open to share their knowledge or seek other people's ideas and opinions. Such persons often times avoid socials which is not quite good for knowledge sharing practices. However, proactive librarians have believe that individuals are not bound by the existing environment, they can explore new ways to affect the external environment through active behaviour such as knowledge sharing. According to Yu, & Li, (2016), a survey of 199 employees and researcher shows that the proactive personality has the positive effect on the knowledge sharing. Zhang, Yoon, Cheolho, Rolland & Erik (2012), based on self-determination theory, investigated the effect of three basic psychological needs for

knowledge sharing factors, the results showed the ability and sense of belonging had a positive impact on knowledge sharing behaviour. Chong, Teh and Tan (2014) noted that personality traits, classroom and technological factors matter in knowledge sharing. Personal characteristics such as age, education and work experience that is likely to slow the relationship between knowledge promoter and process.

In addition to the previous discussions, technological barriers also stand as impediment to knowledge sharing among librarians. Although, there have been increasing evidence of research that shows that technology plays an important transformational role in knowledge sharing, and also technologies such as computers, internet, or social media platforms. Studies in Nigeria libraries have also shown that oftentimes, technologies are hardly used in serving users. Akpoiroro and Okon (2015) in a study on students' satisfaction with service delivery in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria, revealed that students satisfaction with library services were low due to inadequate information technology facilities. Anasi, Akpan and Adedokun (2014) on their own, studied the extent of using ICTs for knowledge sharing among librarians in South-west, Nigeria. The study found that librarians are using ICT platforms for knowledge sharing. But challenges such as lack of awareness of existing ICT-based knowledge sharing platforms, limited ICT skills, and unhealthy technology environment are major hindrances to knowledge sharing among the librarians. The study recommended maximum use of ICT platforms for knowledge sharing and collaborations for professional development, scholarly communication, and efficient service delivery. Akparobore (2013) also examined knowledge sharing among librarians in university libraries located in south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria. The study revealed that the main subjects of knowledge sharing among librarians are in the areas of ICT and

networking, database management, knowledge management and cataloguing; but however, not satisfied with the extent of knowledge sharing among them.

### **Recommendations**

To improve knowledge sharing among librarians in academic libraries in Nigeria, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. Knowledge sharing should be encouraged among librarians and policies that supports it should be put in place and adhered to in every academic libraries in Nigeria.
2. Librarians should always organize or attend thematic national or international professional seminars, conferences or workshops where both old and fresh professional knowledge could be shared among librarians.
3. Library administrators /managers should always from time to time invite resource persons with good knowledge in librarianship to share knowledge with both old and young librarians to improve their knowledge base.
4. Library administrators /managers should always give incentives or rewards as a way of motivating librarians who are willing to share their expertise or knowledge with others.
5. Since technologies have become one of the means through which knowledge is shared, Library administrators /managers therefore endeavour to train as well as make provisions of electronic facilities through which knowledge could be shared among librarians.

### **Conclusion**

Knowledge is a distinct commodity. It is the true meaning of life. Its values and benefits could only be gained, when it is shared to improve job performance in organizations

such as libraries. Knowledge sharing has also become an integral part of the current knowledge economy driven by globalization, advancement in science and technologies filled with plethora of new knowledge concepts, method, processes and trends. It is therefore reasonable for librarians to engage in knowledge sharing processes to sustain themselves as information professionals.

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