

Knowledge Sharing Techniques in Academic Libraries in Africa: A Perspective from the University of Namibia

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Abstract: Knowledge sharing practices in academic libraries is increasingly recognised as a tool for competitive advantage and has become a buzz word for enhancing service delivery in academic libraries in Africa. African scholars are increasing conducting research to establish knowledge sharing strategies in libraries. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions reiterates the value of knowledge sharing techniques in academic libraries. Notwithstanding, knowledge sharing practices are still ad hoc and informal, and academic librarians are still grappling with integrating the different knowledge sharing techniques. This article investigates the perceptions of knowledge sharing among university of Namibia library staff to establish the techniques of knowledge sharing. The overall findings reveal that library staff are aware of the various knowledge sharing techniques in academic libraries but are yet to adopt and integrate these techniques. The findings further revealed a preference to technological-based knowledge sharing techniques over human-based or interpersonal knowledge sharing techniques. This article resonates with the findings of most academic libraries in Africa and therefore adds to the body of knowledge on knowledge sharing in academic libraries from an African perspective. Unlike most studies on knowledge sharing that seeks to establish strategies, this article focuses on establishing perceptions of librarians and the different ways by which techniques for knowledge sharing may be enhanced.

Keywords: Knowledge Sharing, Academic Libraries, Namibia, Knowledge Perceptions, Knowledge Sharing Techniques, Africa

1. Introduction

Academic libraries, like most organisations are striving to foster knowledge sharing to stimulate productivity, encourage innovation, and remain competitive in the higher education landscape. The organisational growth and the job performance of academic librarians is contingent upon the extent of their knowledge sharing activities (Ajegbomogun and Diyaolu, 2018:6; Olatokun and Njideaka, 2020:297). The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA 2015) reiterates the value of knowledge sharing techniques in academic libraries. Researchers have perceived knowledge sharing as a cornerstone to the success of academic libraries as it enables library staff to exchange knowledge, skills, and experience. The plethora of studies on knowledge sharing practices in academic libraries in Africa reveals that academic libraries are conscious of the value of knowledge sharing in enhancing the services of libraries although knowledge sharing is still practiced at an ad hoc basis (Izu and Fombad 2024; Bumbie-Chi 2020; Muchaonyerwa and Mutula 2017; Tahleho 2016; Lekay 2012; Abdur- Rafiu and Opesade 2015:14; Kabiru 2016:31; Antwi, Ankrah and Frimpong 2020:34; Olatokun and Njideaka 2020:306; Bumbie-Chi 2020:316; Ilonga 2019:171; Muchaonyerwa and Mutula, 2017:11). Notwithstanding there remains a dearth of research on integrating tools and techniques for knowledge sharing in academic libraries in Africa. Also, studies have revealed that library staff are fully cognizant of the concept of knowledge sharing and its benefits and its potentials in increasing productivity and service delivery notwithstanding the lack of a holistic approach to organising knowledge within these libraries (Izu and Fombad 2024; Bumbie-Chi 2020; Muchaonyerwa and Mutula 2017).

Academic library staff perceive knowledge sharing as happening in an uncoordinated, and informal manner, primarily through one-to-one conversation among library staff (Bumbie-Chi 2020). Henttonen et al (2016) noted that Individual -level knowledge sharing affects individual work performance. A knowledge-friendly organisational culture will enhance the organisational performance of an organisation (Liu et al 2021).

Namibia which is the focus of this study is one of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The University of Namibia is one of the four universities in the country with twelve campuses. Each of these campuses has its own library that serves a diverse community. The university of Namibia sixth strategic plan seeks at building and exchanging knowledge through collaboration. Studies on knowledge sharing in Namibia have primarily focused on corporate, public, and ministerial libraries and there has been little focus on academic libraries. Knowledge sharing occurs at the University in an ad hoc manner. Against this backdrop, this article investigates knowledge sharing perceptions among library staff at the University of Namibia, with a view of suggesting techniques enhance knowledge sharing.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Perceptions of Knowledge Sharing In Academic Libraries

Knowledge sharing is the exchange of articulated or consensual facts, opinions, viewpoints, and scientific knowledge among individuals and groups that encourages knowledge flow, which, in the end, enables the dissemination of knowledge, enhance growth, productivity and success of any organisation. Successful knowledge sharing depends on the eagerness of staff members to share their experience with one another, which results in existing knowledge within the individual, division, or team of an organisation made available to others (Ram and Gupta, 2014:780; Ajegbomogun and Diyaolu, 2018:3). Researchers have established a relationship between knowledge management technologies on the culture and organisational performance. (Liu et.al 2023) Perceptions are opinions or points of view that shape how people act or react in specific situations (Bumbi-Chi, 2018:151). There is a general perception that although library staff at certain levels understand the concept of knowledge sharing, academic libraries have yet to implement policies and strategies to harness library staff expertise as well as formalise knowledge sharing in their library operations (Bumbie-Chi 2018:151; Muchaonyerwa and Mutula 2017; Tahleho 2016; Mayekiso 2013; Lekay 2012). There is also a perception that knowledge sharing in academic libraries is uncoordinated, with the main channel of knowledge sharing being informal communication. among co-workers during regular conversations. Also, there is a perception of a general lack of well-defined policies to achieve knowledge sharing activities (Bumbie-Chi 2018; Muchaonyerwa and Mutula 2017; Maponya 2004) Despite their optimism about knowledge sharing, library staff still prefer to share knowledge on a one-on-one approach (Bumbie-Chi 2018:173; Onifade, 2015:91).

2.2 Techniques of Knowledge Sharing in Academic Libraries

The techniques for knowledge sharing may be classified as human and technological centered. Human centered techniques facilitate the transfer of tacit-to-tacit knowledge. Examples of human centered techniques are meetings face-to-face sharing, mentoring, Community of Practice, storytelling conversations by water coolers and peer assist. Meetings occur when employees who share common ground and experiences gather in a loosely structured setting to discuss ideas and challenges across organizational levels and to present functional actions. Meetings foster collaborative knowledge sharing through informal and formal networks and provide opportunities for staff to validate their practical knowledge and enhance certain skills like verbal communication and logical reasoning (Aljuwaiber, 2019:235; Khoro; 2019:17). Face-to-face knowledge sharing allows for more extensive discussion whereby individuals offer and receive comments until, they arrive at a consensus. Even though there are other platforms that can be used to share knowledge, Face-to-face exchanges is desired because it facilitates knowledge transfer (Kommey and Fombad 2023). Mentorship happens when a skilled and superior employee with extensive knowledge and experience is required to share their knowledge and experience with less skilled co-workers to provide advice and moral support. A mentoring relationship focuses on guidance and learning between two people (Lefika and Mearns 2015:27). Mentors can help their mentees get more job opportunities and reciprocal networks, learn new skills and knowledge, advance in their careers, and do better work (Khoro, 2019:15). Community of Practice are group of individuals who share mutual goals and collaborate on a regular basis to advance their knowledge in a particular subject (Bratianu, 2018). It can also be viewed as a social interaction group formed to promote learning and innovation within an organisation through knowledge sharing.

On the other hand, the technological centered techniques focus on information communication technologies (ICTS), knowledge management systems and data bases to facilitate explicit to explicit and tacit to explicit knowledge sharing. Technologies such as the internet, intranet, electronic mail, social media, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Flickr, Instant messaging, Blog or Weblog, instant messaging, blogs, video conferencing, knowledge sharing systems, databases, data mining, portals and artificial intelligence technologies are widely acknowledged as a means of sharing or disseminating knowledge within an organisation. The electronic mail may be used to convey knowledge and promote awareness through reference services in academic library (Valumani, 2016). Social media sites such may be used to share knowledge and improve service delivery in libraries (Umaru and Omame, 2020:5-6). For example, blogs may be used to raise awareness about library news, the acquisition of new consignments, solicit user feedback about library services, provide virtual outreach programs through information (Boateng and Liu, 2014:125; Hilsop 2018:217). Instant messaging may also be employed to enhance the delivery of reference services because it allows library staff to respond to user inquiries immediately. Videoconferencing technologies are face-to-face interplay, which allows participants to vividly see and hear each other, and in turn engage in simultaneous discussions where questions and points are clarified using

demonstrations (Alkhalidi, Yusof and Aziz, 2013:410). Amongst the systems and databases that could be used to share knowledge are expert-locator systems, electronic document management systems, incident report databases, data mining, lesson-learned databases, and best practice databases. Expert-locator systems are knowledge repositories that aim to organize knowledge by identifying and finding professionals who are knowledgeable about a particular topic within an organization and makes such information available to other employees (Janus 2016:35). Expertise location activities encompasses mentoring program facilitation, knowledge gap identification, operational support, and continuing professional development designed to disseminate knowledge among library staff (Hameed Basheer). Electronic document management system is robust software that advocates the process of creating, searching, storing, and retrieving documents electronically. Data mining technology is used in academic libraries to obtain statistical evidence pertaining to user circulation, library collection statistics and other search patterns. Lessons-learned systems collect knowledge gleaned from previous experiences, with the goal of capturing and providing lessons that can benefit other employees (Wang and Wang, 2020:8). It also provides others with insights into how they dealt with similar events, as well as advice on how library staff should provide services. According to Taskin and Van Bunn (2015:164). Best practices databases describe successful efforts, which are usually the outcome of reshaping business operations and may be relevant to organisational processes (Taskin and Van Bunn, 2015:164). Artificial intelligent technologies such as Optical Character Recognition, Categorization and Discovery: algorithms offer opportunities in enhancing knowledge sharing and fostering collaboration. Challenges and opportunities abound in leveraging personal knowledge managed through Chat GPT (Nazeer et. al 2023)

3. Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach and a case study design. A census of the entire university of Namibia library staff consisting of 104 respondents was utilised to gather data using questionnaire and a total of seven library management were purposefully sampled to gather data through interviews. Seventy five out of 104 target respondents completed the survey. The survey data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software (Version 26) and Microsoft Excel 2019. The interview data was organised thematically in accordance with the set objectives.

4. Social Exchange Theory (SET)

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) of Homans (1958) is a theory that suggests that social relations can be better defined by the exchange of rewards and costs between both partners (Romani-Dias and Carneiro, 2019). Apart from material or content rewards, exchange awards include intangible benefits such as peer group support, trust, confidence, and recognition (Romani-Dias and Carneiro 2019:464). Knowledge sharing is a type of social exchange that allows people to share their knowledge with their co-workers and to expect a reciprocal exchange of knowledge (Wang, Xiang, Yang and Ma 2019:871). Trust is an important basis for measuring the relationship between benefits and costs. (Jinyang 2015:175). When applied to this article the social exchange theory (SET) provides insight into the motivation for sharing knowledge amongst library staff by using the four basic concepts that influence interpersonal exchange processes which are cost-benefit analysis, reciprocity, social penetration, and equity and inequity (Arsawan et al., 2020). This indicates that the cost-benefit analysis of knowledge sharing in university libraries is determined by the level of trustworthiness shared by library staff.

5. Findings

The article seeks to accomplish the following objectives:

To establish library staff perception on knowledge sharing at the university of Namibia library

To establish the knowledge sharing techniques among library staff at the University of Namibia

6. Perceptions of Library Staff on Knowledge Sharing

The findings on table 1 below revealed that respondents fully understood the importance of sharing among co-workers at the university of Namibia library in enhancing library services and in becoming more innovative and creative, and appreciated the need to share knowledge. The findings were further corroborated by the following qualitative responses.

Interviewee 1: *“In my view, knowledge sharing is crucial and should be practiced openly.”*

Interviewee 2 *“Sharing knowledge and expertise, in my opinion, would enable staff members to gain skills through participation in knowledge sharing activities, which could contribute to the better provision of innovative and creative library services to improve performance”.*

Interviewee 3: *“In my perception, knowledge sharing is the process by which knowledgeable individuals share their expertise with others, thereby bringing innovation and creativity to library operations”.*

It is clear from the qualitative and quantitative findings that library staff understood and valued knowledge sharing, whether tacit or explicit knowledge, as part of their dairy library operations in order to provide efficient services. They believe that sharing knowledge among co-workers has a beneficial effect on enhancing library services and making them more innovative and creative. This is consistent with much of the literature by Africa researchers that describes library staff positive perceptions of the value of knowledge sharing in among co-workers for improving knowledge flow and library service delivery (Izu and Fombad 2024; Akporabore, 2015:32; Muchaonyerwa 2015:125, Bumbi-Chi, 2018:151; Chipeta, 2018:119; Onifade, 2015:96).

Table 1: Perceptions of library staff on knowledge sharing

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I believe knowledge sharing is a process in which knowledgeable individuals share their knowledge with their co-workers.	74 (98.7%)	1(1.3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Sharing knowledge can help library services to be more innovative and creative.	51(68%)	20(26.7%)	4(5.3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
I am cognizant of the benefits derived from sharing knowledge with myco-workers.	65(86.7%)	9(12%)	1(1.3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
I can use the experience of others to solve a problem at work if I share my knowledge.	60(80%)	10(13.3%)	2(2.7%)	3(4%)	0(0%)
I feel that sharing knowledge will enhance my library skills.	(46.7%)	33(44%)	7(9.3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
I believe that 'knowledge is power,' I refuse to share it with others.	0(0%)	0(0%)	1(1.3%)	21(28%)	53(70.7%)
I believe it is important for co- workers to share. their knowledge?	58(77.3%)	14(18.7%)	3(4%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

7. Knowledge Sharing Techniques Among Library Staff at the University of Namibia

The second objective examined the various techniques utilized by the university library staff to impart knowledge. The findings in table 2 below reveal meetings and face-to-face techniques as the two human centred techniques of knowledge sharing. It is worth noting that library staff were aware of various knowledge sharing techniques such as discussion forums, monitoring and brainstorming, organisational culture, coaching, and job shadowing, monitoring, brainstorming, organisational culture, and job shadowing. The open-ended question identified “presentations” “Informal discussions amongst colleagues” “Departmental WhatsApp groups” “Emails and Zoom “as techniques.

Table 2: Knowledge sharing techniques

Techniques for knowledge sharing	YES	NO
Meetings	75 (100%)	0(0%)
Face-to-face knowledge sharing	70(93.3%)	5(6.7%)
Job rotation	47(62.7%)	28(37.3%)
Discussion forum	27(36%)	48(64%)
Monitoring	22(29.3%)	53(70.7%)

Techniques for knowledge sharing	YES	NO
Brainstorming	22(29.3%)	53(70.7%)
Organisational culture	19 (25.3)	56(74.7)
Coaching system	16(21.3%)	59(78.7%)
Job shadowing	15(20%)	60(80%)
Community of Practices	7(9.3%)	68(90.7%)
Storytelling	6(8%)	69(92%)

The qualitative findings revealed an inclination towards the use of technology techniques as noted the following responses.

Interviewee 1: *“staff meetings, in-house training this hosting Zoom meetings and having a departmental WhatsApp group.*

Interviewee 2: *“The use of generic email or email list to all staff, meetings, phone communication, and presentations staff. Face-to-face knowledge sharing, departmental WhatsApp groups “*

Interviewee 3: *“Staff training, email lists, mentorship programs, job shadowing programs, ongoing planning, and job rotation programs, seminars, e-mail, library website,”*

Interviewee 4: *“discussion over the telephone, giving a presentation after attending a workshop, having informal discussions among colleagues, creating departmental or campus library WhatsApp groups, using an email list, and holding group meetings via Zoom”.*

Interviewee 1: *“I primarily use knowledge sharing platforms such as computers, electronic email facilities, websites, portals, forum, the internet, and the telephone, as well as departmental WhatsApp group, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, and Wiki to communicate with other colleagues and share information and knowledge”.*

Interviewee 2: *“Well, I personally use email, Zoom, University of Namibia forum Imo, YouTube, and online newsletter, as well as social media platforms such as Facebook, ResearchGate, Twitter, and WhatsApp.”*

Interviewee 3: *“I mostly use computer-based technology such as work electronic mail, Facebook, Twitter, the internet, and WhatsApp for the campus library or department”.*

Interviewee 4: *“I am personally aware of knowledge sharing technologies such as Facebook, WhatsApp, emails, Twitter, Skype, Instagram, Wiki, internet, blogs, telephones, and LinkedIn. However, I have had exposure to technologies such as the internet, email, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook. Additionally, departmental or campus WhatsApp groups are used to share insights and experiences among co-workers”.*

The qualitative findings further revealed the awareness of knowledge sharing systems by academic librarians although usage is still at its infancy.

Interviewee 1: *“I am personally conscious of systems such as Google cloud, Moodle content sharing/Learning Management System, expert-locator systems, LibGuide, electronic resource and institutional knowledge repository incident reports, library news portal, electronic document management systems, incident reports, just to mention a few. However, I have only used a few of these technological systems, including the institutional repository, LibGuide, electronic resources, and library news portal”.*

Interviewee 2: *“. We are not incredibly good at it, and some management teams have requested, for example, a shared folder to house all library institutional documents such as annual reports and statistical documents so that they can be easily found, but it is still in its infancy.*

Interviewee 3: *“There are numerous knowledge sharing systems available for use in any library or organisation, including expert-locator systems, electronic document management systems, incident reports, data mining, lesson-learned databases, and best practice databases, electronic resources, and the LibGuide system, However, we lack the majority of the ICT systems that we would like to have for the flow of knowledge, but I am aware of the basics for the time being: the institutional repository, the UNAM portal, library news, electronic resources, and the LibGuide system”.*

Knowledge sharing systems has been used in academic libraries, to support and facilitate the distribution of both explicit and tacit knowledge. This helps library staff be more effective at their jobs and improves the efficiency of the library operations (Akorabore, 2015:34; Bozzato, Eiter & Serafini, 2018:77). Technologies such as expert-locator systems, incident reports, and instant messaging, expertise locator system provide a platform for accumulating enormous amounts of technical expertise by harnessing existing knowledge, skills, and experience to enhance productivity and service delivery (Wang & Wang, 2020:7). Janus (2016:35) noted that expertise locator system assists in connecting library staff with knowledgeable professionals at the appropriate time. This implies that the library staff has systems in place that identify, locate, and connect library staff with right expertise on a certain subject and make such knowledge available to other co-workers in a reasonable amount of time.

The findings revealed that academic librarians were aware of social media platforms:

Interviewee 1: *"I. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Wiki, and WhatsApp are some of the social media platforms that I am familiar with. Other platforms, such as LinkedIn and ResearchGate, I specifically use them on a personal level to distribute research knowledge"*.

Interviewee 2: *"I am aware of common networking sites and platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. From the qualitative and quantitative findings, it is apparent that most of the techniques used but the library staff for sharing knowledge was technology based. Apparently, mobile phones, WhatsApp, email Zoom, Facebook and Twitter Video conferencing meetings, email, and phone conversations online training, presentations, where the most used technologies for knowledges sharing among co-workers"*

Social media technologies such as Facebook and Twitter were the most frequently used techniques for reciprocating knowledge among library staff and across campus libraries. The Google cloud, portals, electronic resources, and the LibGuide system were also used Technologies such as IMO, Skype, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, ResearchGate, YouTube, Imo, Tik-Tok, Wiki, and other interactive digital tools were the least used.

These findings are consistent that of researchers in academic libraries in Africa (Bumbi-Chi, 2020; Izu and Fombad 2024; Chipeta, 2018; Bumbi-Chi, 2018; Tahleho, 2016; and Onifade, 2015). It is apparent from the findings that the internet, Facebook, electronic email, WhatsApp, telephone video conferencing, Twitter, Instagram, Instant Messages, portal, Snapchat, university of Namibia forum, ResearchGate, YouTube, and Imo as methods used to share knowledge among the university of Namibia.

Notwithstanding the inclination towards ICT based techniques, and the importance perception about its usage, the findings revealed an underutilization of these tools for knowledge sharing. The underutilization stems from difficulties encountered when using these systems, poor network, and internet connection, lack of appropriate ICT infrastructures that support knowledge sharing, insufficient funding for university library operations to acquire modern technological systems, thus impeding knowledge sharing and service delivery. These challenges are consistent with studies on knowledge sharing in academic libraries in Africa whereby academic libraries are inundated with poor networks internet connectivity, a lack of modern infrastructure, and the absence of technological systems that support knowledge sharing across campus libraries. making it difficult for library employees to share knowledge and improve performance and service delivery.

8. Conclusion

The article investigated the perceptions on knowledge sharing among University of Namibia library staff and identified the different techniques used for knowledge sharing and suggest ways by which these techniques may be enhanced. Drawing from the findings, the study recommends library management to implement a policy that formalizes knowledge sharing techniques and creates awareness of the importance and value of knowledge sharing. The policy should incorporate the integration of modern technological infrastructure and artificial intelligence technologies that facilitates the flow of knowledge among library staff and across campus libraries. Both technological-based and human-based knowledge sharing techniques should be prioritized in the library operations. Systems, and technologies such as a best practices database, blogs, electronic document management, and lessons learned systems should be explored. The acquisition of artificial intelligence technologies for knowledge sharing is crucial because it has the potential of revolutionizing knowledge sharing in academic libraries. Progressively, library staff should be continuously trained on ICT-related topics to remain current in their field of expertise and to adapt to the changing world of technologies when reshaping and redesigning library operations. The library management should set aside adequate funds for the acquisition of appropriate technological infrastructure, the maintenance of adequate internet connectivity, and the frequent updating of the library website. Consequently, without proper and substantial technological infrastructure and tools, the success of knowledge sharing is bound to be unsuccessful.

Human centered approaches to knowledge sharing such as Community of Practice, Storytelling, rewards, and incentives, encouraging a leaning organization discussion forums, mentoring, brainstorming, organisational culture, coaching, and job shadowing should be encouraged. To this end, the elements of trust and reward as noted in social exchange theory are crucial in realizing the human centred approach to knowledge sharing. Successful knowledge sharing will not only enhance service delivery and trust among academic librarians but it will enhance quality education thus realizing the sustainable development goal that will actively contribute to inclusive, equitable, and quality education. These findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge sharing tools and techniques implemented in academic libraries in Africa and promotes a positive perception of knowledge sharing in academic libraries.

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