

# Knowledge Sharing among Librarians in Federal University Libraries in Nigeria

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## Abstract

The paper examined knowledge sharing among librarians in federal universities in Nigeria. Eighteen (18) federal university libraries were selected and all 412 librarians in these libraries constituted the sample size. Out of 412 copies of questionnaire administered, 362 copies were found usable representing 87.9% response rate. The study reveals that librarians in federal university libraries in Nigeria had positive perception about knowledge sharing but averagely share knowledge. Majority of the respondents 140 (38.6%) shared knowledge through verbal discussion while 90 (24.9%) shared knowledge during staff meeting and the least respondents 10 (2.8%) shared knowledge through community of practice. There were no incentives given to those who share knowledge hence; the level of knowledge sharing was low among them. Recommendations are made to improve knowledge sharing among librarians in the university libraries.

**Keywords:** Knowledge sharing, Librarians, University, Libraries, Nigeria.

## 1. Introduction

University libraries are integral academic part of their universities therefore, they generally grow simultaneously with their parent bodies. Their functions are to support learning, teaching and research activities of their universities. However, Hines (2008) observed that those who use the libraries are changing and their expectations are also changing. Thus, university libraries have to provide high level services to meet the needs of their users. Consequently, the changing roles of university libraries demand that librarians working in these libraries must acquire new competencies and skills. They must be proficient to be able to satisfy their users' needs. Since it is not possible for an individual to have an all-round knowledge in a profession, it is therefore, necessary that librarians have to collaborate and share knowledge with one another. However, it is observed that librarians in federal university libraries in Nigeria are often reluctant to share their knowledge and when they disengage from service, they often leave with their knowledge. This study therefore, examined knowledge sharing among librarians in federal university libraries in Nigeria.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

1. find out the perception of librarians' on knowledge sharing in federal university libraries in Nigeria;
2. identify methods used in sharing knowledge among librarians in federal university libraries in Nigeria
3. find out if there are incentives for knowledge sharing among librarians in federal university libraries in Nigeria.
4. ascertain the extent of knowledge sharing among librarians in federal university libraries in Nigeria.

## 3. Literature Review

Nigeria is the most populous black nation in the world with approximately 140 million people (Eke, 2011). Politically, the country is administered under a federal system of government with three tiers of government; the federal, the state and the local government. Presently, there are 129 universities in Nigeria and these are categorized by their ownership. They are further grouped into five generations according to date of their establishment. The first generation universities were established with the birth of the University of Ibadan in 1962 which emerged from the University College Ibadan. The second generation universities were established between 1970 and 1985 and the third generation universities that focused on technology and agriculture were established in 1988. The fourth generation universities were established after 1988 while the fifth generation universities were established from 1999 till date. Most of the universities in the first three generation category are fully funded and owned by the federal government (Nwagwu and Agarin 2008). The state universities are owned by the state government while the private universities are established and run by private individuals and religious organisations.

Federal universities are regarded and known as public universities because they are funded by the federal government. Libraries attached to these universities have a clear defined policy of funding as they are allocated 10% of the recurrent annual budget of their parent institution (Abubakar, 2011). They are established to preserve the intellectual and scholarship resources in their universities so that they can fulfil their statutory functions. However, during the "oil boom era" in 1970s; the federal university libraries were well funded and

had enough resources needed to sustain the main academic disciplines in their universities but with the down turn in the nation's economy, they had to contend with many problems which had affected the quality of services been provided to their users (Aguolu, 1996; Lawal and Okwueze, 2007). Nevertheless, federal university libraries still have to provide quality service that will meet the needs of their users which are constantly changing due to technological advancement in learning. It is thus, essential for librarians in Nigerian federal universities to acquire new competencies and skills that would measure up with the new knowledge development. This requires that they have to collaborate and depend on one another's knowledge and skills to meet their users' needs. In line with this thinking, Dastgerdi (2009) posited that continuing education may not be available but it is important for professional librarians to network with one another to share knowledge and call for advice and help.

Knowledge however, has been described by different authors as a distinct commodity whose true value can only be achieved when it is share among people. For instance, Teimouri, Emami and Hamidipour (2011) stated that knowledge is an intangible asset which tends not to depreciate in value when used, but rather it appreciates. Substantiating this, Abell and Oxbrow (2001) claimed that the productivity of knowledge depends on how people share their competence with those who can use it. Knowledge sharing between individual therefore, is the process by which knowledge held by an individual is converted into a form that can be understood, absorbed and used by other individual (Teimouri, et al 2011). According to Maponya (2004) knowledge sharing is based on the experiences gained internally and externally in an organisation. It is assumed that if knowledge is available to other members in an organisation, it would reduce duplication of efforts, serve as a basis for solving problem and enhance decision making. Anna and Puspitasari (2013) further stated that knowledge sharing is not like cutting a cake into some pieces and distributing them for people; but rather it is when individuals bring a cake and go back with a bigger one. Knowledge sharing therefore, is about team-work, that is working together to achieve the greatest result.

In this age of knowledge economy, Lee (2000) observed that the knowledge and experience of library staff are assets of any library and should be valued and shared. Townley (2000) on the other hand postulated that if the tacit knowledge about users held by a reference librarian could be share with systems personnel, a more effective library home page would be developed. One can then infer that libraries may be able to provide good and quality services for their clientele and communities, if librarians share knowledge with one another. However, Jantz (2001) observed that in many library settings there are no systematic approach to organising the knowledge of the enterprise and making it available to other staff in order to improve the operation of the library. As a result, each time librarians leave their job; they carry what they know with them. Whereas if knowledge is shared, it would ensures that important knowledge would still be available even when such staff has left.

Parirokh et al (2006) reported that knowledge sharing initiatives have not been formally embraced in many academic libraries. Corroborating this, Maponya (2004) observed that lots of knowledge sharing activities in academic libraries were largely uncoordinated; hence, sharing knowledge among librarians have always been on an informal basis and usually based on verbal conversations. However, Parirookh and Fattahi (2005) noted that sharing of knowledge among librarians can improve organisational learning in academic libraries. This also agrees with Quinn et al (1996) earlier claim that;

*as one shares knowledge with other units, not only do those units gain information; they share it with others and feedback questions, amplifications and modifications that add value for the original sender, creating exponential total growth.*

It can therefore, be argued that knowledge sharing activities of a group can create more opportunities for members to exchange ideas and engage in cooperative activities. Though it had been said that employees in almost every organisation often tend to hoard knowledge but if the right environment is created, it is possible for staff to share knowledge effectively (Husted and Michailova, 2002, Lelic, 2001). In other words it is necessary to introduce a culture and a set of behaviours in which people will share knowledge as part of their day-to-day activities (Lelic, 2001). Active knowledge sharing by employee therefore begins when other people voluntarily donate their knowledge and eagerly collect from others the knowledge needed, thus creating a knowledge sharing circle in the organisation (Liao, Fei and Chen 2006).

#### **4. Methodology**

Questionnaire was used as the major instrument to collect data for this study. Eighteen federal university libraries were selected through simple random sampling from the first three generation universities in Nigeria. Out of four hundred and twelve (412) copies of questionnaire administered to librarians in the selected university libraries 370 copies were filled and returned but only three hundred and sixty two (362) copies were found usable which represent 87.9% response rate. Data collected through the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1 Profile of the Respondents

**Table 1 Demographic Characteristic of Respondents**

S/No	Variables	Sub-variables	Frequency	Percentage	
1.	<b>Age</b>	20-24yrs	9	2.5	
		25-30	41	11.3	
		31-35	91	25.1	
		36-40	60	16.6	
		41-45	39	10.8	
		46-50	63	17.4	
		51-55	30	8.3	
		56-60	21	5.8	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>100</b>	
2.	<b>Gender</b>	Male	159	43.9	
		Female	187	51.7	
		No indication	16	4.4	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>100</b>	
3	<b>Educational Background</b>	Degree			
		Qualification	Bachelor Degree (Lib. Sc.)	104	28.7
			Master Degree (Lib. Sc.)	176	48.6
			Master (other field)	40	11.0
			PhD	34	9.4
			No indication	8	2.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>100</b>		
	Subject Area	Library Science	176	48.6	
		Science	76	21	
		Arts	69	19.1	
		Social Sciences	29	8	
		Law	7	1.9	
		No indication	5	1.4	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>100</b>		
4.	<b>Work Experience</b>	1-5	124	34.3	
		6-10	74	20.4	
		11-15	50	13.8	
		16-20	46	12.7	
		21-25	24	6.6	
		25-30	15	4.1	
		31-35	22	6.1	
		<b>Total</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>100</b>	

The majority of the respondents are between the ages of 31-35 years, followed by those between ages 46–50 years, this indicates that the respondents are matured enough to know the implication of their actions. Out of the total respondents, 187(51.7%) were female while 159(43.9%) were male. The implication of this is that there are more female librarians in federal universities in Nigeria than their male counterpart. The largest proportion of the respondents 48.6% had master degree in Library Science; 28.7% had bachelor degree; 11% had master degree in other areas and 9.4% had doctorate degree, while 2.2% failed to indicate their qualification. The study further reveals that more than half of the respondents, 176 (48.6%) had subject background in librarianship, followed by those who had science background 76(21%). Others are as follows: Arts, 69(19.1%), Social Sciences, 29(8.0%), Law, 7(1.9%) while 5 respondents did not indicate their subject background. This shows that the respondents had adequate and diverse qualifications which if well harnessed will improve their knowledge creation and networking. On work experience, majority of the respondents 124(54.7%) had less than eleven years' experience working in libraries while 61(17%) had over 20 years' work experience. This implies that majority of the respondents are still very young and active in service.

## 5.2 Perception of Knowledge Sharing among Librarians in Nigerian Federal University Libraries?

**Table 2: Perception of Librarians in Nigerian Federal Universities of Knowledge Sharing**

S/NO	STATEMENTS	SD	D	A	SA	MEAN	STD.D
1	I think knowledge sharing is a process whereby knowledge possessed by an individual is shared with another individual.	39 (10.8)	58 (16.0)	78 (21.5)	186 (51.4)	3.13	1.06
2	I think knowledge sharing can bring innovation and creativity to library services	42 (22.6)	43 (11.9)	90 (24.9)	185 (51.1)	3.14	1.06
3	I am aware of the importance of sharing my knowledge with my colleagues	43 (11.9)	27 (7.5)	98 (27.1)	193 (53.3)	3.21	1.03
4	By sharing knowledge, I can use the experience of others in finding solutions to problems I encounter on the job.	25 (6.9)	54 (14.9)	147 (40.6)	134 (37.0)	3.07	.92
5	I feel knowledge sharing will enhance my skills in this library	36 (9.9)	57 (15.7)	97 (26.8)	169 (46.70)	3.09	1.05
	Total	Weighted average 3.13 (61.3%)					

**Key: SD= Strongly disagree, D= Disagree, A= Agree, SA= Strongly disagree**

The respondents were asked to state their perception and what they understand by the concept of knowledge sharing. The result shows that they understood the concept of knowledge sharing as they agreed that it is the process whereby knowledge possessed by an individual is shared with another individual (mean = 3.13). The result also shows that respondents are aware of the importance of sharing knowledge with one another (mean = 3.21) and that knowledge sharing can bring innovation and creativity to library services (mean = 3.14). The overall mean score of the scale is 3.13, rated as weighted average of 61.3% indicating that librarians in federal university libraries in Nigeria have a positive perception on knowledge sharing.

## 5.3 Methods Used in Sharing Knowledge among Librarians in Federal Universities in Nigeria?

**Table 3: Methods of Knowledge Sharing among Librarians**

S/NO	Methods of Knowledge sharing	Frequency	%
1	Verbal discussion	140	38.6
2	Seminar/Workshops	85	23.5
3	Staff meeting	90	24.9
4	Community of practise	10	2.8
5	Mentoring	37	10.2
6	Story telling	0	0
	Total	362	100

The largest percentage of the respondents 140 (38.6%) indicated that they shared knowledge through verbal discussions; this mean face to face interaction. This confirmed Cross and Baird (2000) assertion that people are five times more likely to turn to friends and colleagues for answers to their problems. 90 (24.9%) respondents pointed out that they shared knowledge during staff meetings while 85(23.5) indicated that they shared knowledge in seminars and workshops. Mentoring was used by 37(10.1%) of the respondents to share knowledge. However, the least used method was the community of practice as it was only used by 10 (2.8%) respondents while story telling was not used at all.

#### 5.4 Incentives for Sharing Knowledge among Librarians in Federal Universities in Nigeria

Table 4: Incentives for Knowledge Sharing among Librarians

S/N	STATEMENT	SD	D	A	SA	MEAN	STD. D
1	This library usually commends those who share their knowledge with a letter of commendation.	97 (26.8)	102 (28.2)	111 (30.7)	50 (13.8)	2.30	1.03
2	This library usually recognises those who share their knowledge with annual award	123 (34.0)	142 (39.2)	46 (12.7)	49 (13.5)	2.05	1.02
3	I share knowledge in my library because my colleagues appreciate it	69 (19.1)	41 (11.3)	165 (45.6)	85 (23.5)	2.72	1.38
4	I do not share knowledge because it is difficult to convince colleagues to share knowledge	40 (11.3)	194 (53.6)	34 (9.4)	92 (25.4)	2.48	1.01
5	This library usually sponsors those who share their knowledge to professional conferences and workshops	77 (21.3)	168 (46.4)	95 (26.2)	20 (5.5)	2.15	1.18
<b>Weighted Average</b>		<b>2.50 (35.9%)</b>					

**Key:** SD= Strongly disagree, D= Disagree, A= Agree, SA= Strongly disagree

The use of incentives to motivate employee in order to share knowledge had been discussed so much in literature that it cannot be left out in a study such as this. However, the result of the study shows that there are no incentives given for knowledge sharing in federal university libraries in Nigeria. The respondents disagreed with all the statements in the likert scale and the mean score of the scale is 2.50 rated as weighted average of 35.9% which is very low. This implies that the library managers do not considered the use of incentives as a way of motivating their staffs for knowledge sharing.

#### 5.5 The Extent of Knowledge Sharing among Librarians in Nigerian Federal Universities Libraries.

Table 4: Extent of Knowledge Sharing by Federal University Librarians

S/N	STATEMENT	NAA	S	A	MTA	VHL	MEAN	STD. D
A	I share knowledge about Library users with colleagues	170 (47.0)	20 (5.5)	139 (38.4)	29 (8.0)	2 (.6)	2.08	1.11
B	I share knowledge about readers services with colleagues	14 (3.9)	105 (29.0)	156 (43.1)	77 (21.3)	2 (.6)	3.00	.91
C	I share knowledge about reference services with colleagues	161 (44.5)	3 (.8)	168 (46.4)	28 (7.7)	0 (0.0)	2.16	1.10
D	I share knowledge about serials usage with colleagues	87 (24.0)	170 (47.0)	88 (24.3)	15 (4.1)	0 (0.0)	2.07	.81
E	I share knowledge on library automation with colleagues	161 (44.5)	98 (27.1)	18 (5.0)	81 (22.4)	2 (.6)	2.06	1.21
F	I share knowledge about classification and cataloguing of library materials with colleagues	101 (27.9)	152 (42.0)	86 (23.8)	17 (4.7)	4 (1.1)	2.08	.91
G	I share knowledge about librarianship with my colleagues	33 (9.1)	240 (66.3)	4 (1.1)	83 (22.9)	0 (0.0)	2.36	.95
H	I share only important knowledge on library matters with colleagues	5 (1.4)	111 (30.7)	164 (45.3)	80 (22.1)	0 (0.0)	3.00	.79
<b>Weighted Average</b>		<b>2.31 (50.3%)</b>						

**KEY:** NAA= Not at all, S = Slightly, A = Averagely, MTA= More than average, VHL= Very high level.

The data collected for the study reveals that librarians in federal university libraries in Nigeria averagely share knowledge on issues such as readers' services and important library matters, while they slightly share knowledge on other matters such as library users, serial usage and library automation with among themselves. The total mean of their responses is 2.31 rated as weighted average of 50.3%. This is not too encouraging and it shows that librarians slightly share knowledge among themselves

#### 6. Discussion

The study reveals that librarians in federal universities in Nigeria have positive perception on knowledge sharing and they understand the concept of knowledge sharing. This is encouraging because the environment in which librarian work is constantly changing. It is therefore, necessary for them to keep updating their knowledge through networking with one another so that they will not be found wanting in meeting the needs of their clientele. In support of this, Anna and Puspitasari (2013) claimed that library needs to reform their product and services as well as their image and brand, to be able to achieve this; librarians have to be very resourceful and knowledgeable. Peng, *etal* (2010) on the other hand observed that if experience professional share their thinking

and opinion of work and how it should be performed it may help new workers to succeed in their jobs and benefit the organisation. It is thus very important for librarians to have a positive perception about knowledge sharing in order to improve their attitude of knowledge sharing because this will help them in improving their job performance.

Despite the fact that librarians in federal university libraries had positive perception on knowledge sharing, it is amazing that the level at which they share knowledge was very low. This can be connected to the fact that there were no incentives to motivate knowledge sharers. It is assumed that if incentives are given to knowledge sharers in the federal university libraries the level at which they share knowledge would improve.

Nonetheless, majority of the respondents share knowledge through verbal discussions, while sharing knowledge during staff meeting came second. It is assumed that this may be due to the fact that Africans are basically oral in their tradition but this should not have prevented the federal university librarians from taking advantage of emerging technologies around them in sharing knowledge. Mentoring and community of practise were slightly used by the respondents in sharing knowledge; this is not encouraging because method such as mentoring would have guarantee that the experience and knowledge of older employees would still be available in these libraries even when such employees must have left (because according to the data collected; majority of the respondents were still young on the job). This would enable younger employees to tag from such knowledge and later build on it. In addition one would have expected that in this age of information communication technologies, more ICT facilities would have been employed in sharing knowledge among the librarians.

It was discovered that there were no incentives given for knowledge sharing in federal university libraries in Nigeria. According to Gu and Gu (2011) knowledge sharing is not a spontaneous processes since those who master knowledge tend not to transfer it. Therefore it will take something to force out the knowledge and that is where incentive comes in. Syed-Ikshan and Rowland (2004) postulated that employees need a strong motivation in order to share knowledge because it is unrealistic to assume that all employees will be willing to easily offer their knowledge without considering what may be gain or lost as a result of the action. However, most of the University Librarians (the Library Managers) of the federal university libraries did not consider the use of incentives as a way of motivating librarians to share knowledge. Efforts should therefore be made to introduce a kind of incentives to motivating librarians in order to improve knowledge sharing practices in their libraries.

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The essence of acquiring knowledge is to enable one perform well in ones' endeavour and if one is exposed to other peoples' knowledge it is possible that one' will be able to perform his/her task better, hence; the importance of knowledge sharing in an organisation cannot be over emphasised. The study shows that librarians in federal university libraries in Nigeria slightly share knowledge with one another, despite, the fact that they understand the importance and concepts of knowledge sharing. This has therefore, corroborated Aswath and Gupta (2009) and Kumaresan (2010) studies that a large portion of staff knowledge is tacit which is embedded in individual experience, judgment and intuition and is like a trade secret that any employee will like to hold back. Nonetheless, if incentives are given to librarians, it can motivate them, to improve knowledge sharing among them. In view of this, the following recommendations are made to improve knowledge sharing among librarians in federal university libraries in Nigeria;

1. The use of incentives should be introduced to motivate librarians to share knowledge.
2. Methods such as mentoring and community of practise should be encouraged in sharing knowledge among the librarians.
3. Knowledge sharing policy should be made which will make knowledge sharing compulsory among librarians.
4. Librarians should be encouraged to join platforms such as librarians' forum and other networking sites to exchange knowledge and interact with colleagues

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