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Information and Knowledge Sharing among Academics in Umaru Musa Yar’adua University, Nigeria and University of Zululand, South Africa

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Abstract
The study is aimed at exploring the academic information and knowledge sharing activities in the two selected institutions in a bid to unveil the obstacles associated, with a view focusing towards strengthening collaborative research culture and maximizing research output through cross fertilization of ideas among academics. Part of the objectives are: to determining who shares information and knowledge; exploring the reasons and comparing the type of information and knowledge shared; ICTs used for sharing; problems associated with sharing and possible solutions. To achieve these, some research questions were formulated which has to do with who shares, what is shared, why sharing, ICTs used, problems experienced and possible solutions to such problems. Survey research was adopted using questionnaire and the population comprised of all academics in the two institutions where 100 (50 from each of the two institutions) respondents were selected for the study. The research found out among other issues that: majority of the academics in the two institutions have Masters Degrees as their highest qualification; Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences have the highest number of Academics; the type of information and knowledge mostly shared is during seminars, conferences and workshops; Academics in UNIZULU are more motivated in terms of research support than their counterparts in UMYU; It is also found out that, a significant percentage of publications in UMYU are not visible on the internet which makes it difficult to ascertain the true output of the academics. It is however, recommended that, awareness and sensitization expiditions be organized to bring many academics to the understanding of the crucial importance of information and knowledge sharing; UMYU must consider increasing research sponsorship and incentives; modern ICTs training, provision and accessibility be given to all academics in order to equip them with the necessary skills and expertise to compete in the global arena; Academic Libraries in both Universities should be well equipped with the necessary latest ICT gadgets and also personnel to support Information and knowledge sharing.

Keywords: Information, knowledge, sharing, Academics,
Abbreviations: UMYU-Umaru Musa Yar’adua University; UNIZULU-University of Zululand
INTRODUCTION

The world has transformed into what is now referred to as global village and it is continuously moving through various stages of technological advancements known as information and communication technologies (ICTs) age, this requires people in all walks of life to strive towards maintaining relevance in their varying fields of expertise. ICTs are electronic devices used for easy and remote transfer, processing and storage of information and knowledge, a number of scholars have stressed the importance and relevance of ICTs in all sphere of human activities e.g. (Preston, 2004:35); (Staton and Nicholson, 2005:282); (Thompson, 2005:312) Information and ultimately knowledge is an indispensable resource as it equips individuals and groups with the required insight towards executing a particular function for development and achieving desired objectives, information is a crucial resource for achieving better results thereby creating a more knowledgeable society. To become up to date in any field of endeavor an individual, groups, firms or nations require effective, efficient and timely free flow of information through various sources and means possible, the continuous accumulation of such information transforms into knowledge as a result of experience and practice over time. To acquire Knowledge effectively learning has to take place (Hunt, 2003), i.e. some kind of learning process has to take place for one to become knowledgeable. These transformations in a number of positive ways enhance practices, services and performances in line with the millennium development goals. Information and ultimately knowledge is considered to be the most valuable resource for technological, economical, social, educational and developmental advancements. Marker et al. (2004:14), stated that, there has been a dramatically reduction in costs with regards to global information and knowledge resources availability and accessibility via the internet and other technologies like the mobile telephone and satellite communications. Ugah, (2008:7) believed that, the more information one gathers in pursuit of a purpose, the more likely that individual is equipped with the necessary ingredient to achieve the desired objectives. Nonaka, (1994) opined that, the creation and smooth utilization of knowledge is more efficient when people share with one another. This in turn makes the individual more knowledgeable and goal oriented as a result of continuous quest and utilization of the acquired information over time. Hence, the two terms (information and knowledge) cannot be separated, owing to the fact that, information acquired and utilized over time makes us more knowledgeable and through the transformation and transfer of expertise and experience more information is produced for utilization and vice versa i.e. Explicit to Implicit and Implicit to Explicit.

The transfer, utilization, storage, transformation and dissemination of information and knowledge are referred to as “sharing” without which, the whole process will be impossible. A number of researchers have paid more attention and studied much on information and knowledge sharing having recognized its importance like (Van den Hoof, et al. 2003); improving information and knowledge sharing flat forms design (Donate and Guadamillas, 2011) and the
competitive advantage of information and knowledge sharing (Afiouni, 2004). Aliyu, (2007:14) stated that, if one is willing and able to share with members of their group, then the individual occupies a central position in that group. As the saying goes “taste of the pudding lays in the eating” so also the quality, relevance and authenticity of any form of information and knowledge lays in the sharing, this idea is supported by a number of researchers such as (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2002), (Reus and Liu, 2004), (Umar, 2009). Sharing can be done between one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one and many-to-many and some of the reasons for sharing are:

- Research productivity enhancement
- Quicker and easier information and knowledge accessibility
- Promotes understanding and strengthen collaboration
- Cross breed of ideas
- Cost effectiveness in terms of shared responsibility
- Avoid duplication of efforts and improve efficiency in service

Apparently, this is why the African Union (AU) categorically declares that, the agency has placed a high priority upon making Africa a stake holder in the global information and knowledge community (NEPAD, 2004).

The academic environment is characterized by teaching, research, self development and community service, therefore, to perform better in these characteristics there is need for the accessibility and free flow of relevant and timely information for knowledge creation over time, a number of scholars have reiterate the relevance of information and knowledge such as (Byerly and Brodie, 1999), (Mohammed, 2006), (Aliyu, 2007) and (Fari, 2010). Sharing makes it possible to scrutinize the value of information and knowledge among individuals, colleagues, corporate bodies and especially among professionals and academics, owing to the fact that, advancement in science and technology, education, economy, social life and community development are some of the ultimate goals of academic institutions. Hence academics do not work in isolation considering the importance of sharing this is in a bid to poster understanding from a variety of perspectives through cross breed of ideas, information and knowledge. This is in line with Okee (2005), who believes that, most academics and scientist do obtain their information and knowledge as a result of face-to-face encounter with colleagues, telephone conversations and other correspondences. Therefore, information and knowledge sharing among academics is a basic ingredient through which advancements and progress are achieved in all fields of expertise.

Despite the enormous advantages associated with information and knowledge sharing it is observed that a number of academics in Africa and especially in the study areas do not explore the vast opportunities in the practice, thereby reducing their research productivity and affecting the research collaborative culture. It is therefore, imperative to explore the sharing practice of these institutions in comparison so as to uproot the problems and make suggestions for
improvement. Being a pilot study this will go a long way in revealing some facts, first hand information and will surely pave the way towards realizing a more effective main study. Curved out of the main objectives the study answered the following questions: What type of information and knowledge do academics in UMYU and UNIZULU share/prefer to share? What are their reasons for sharing? What are the ICTs used for sharing? What are the common problems affecting sharing? What are the possible solutions to these problems?

METHOD
Survey research design was used for the study; this is found to be the most appropriate as the study focused on a dispersed population spread across two distinct environments. Sambo (2005) opined that studying small or large populations across varying environments can best be tackled using survey research. Hence the purpose of adopting survey research technique is that it enabled the researcher to gather the required data for the study with minimum expense in funds, time and effort using questionnaire as a tool. Population of the study comprised of all the academic staff in the Universities, out of which a total of 100 (50 each from the two Universities) were selected using stratified random sampling from various faculties and departments. The sample selection was in line with Gay’s (1996:125) guiding points:
- The larger the size of study population, the smaller the required percentage to represent it.
- There is absolutely minimum need of sampling for smaller population where (N<100)
- 20% is enough to represent a population size of around 1,500
- A sample of 400 is enough to represent a population beyond 5000
The data obtained is presented and analyzed by the use of descriptive (charts, tables and percentages) statistics. Relationships among variables were compared to make interpretations. Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used to process the developed coding scheme with regards to the questionnaire.

RESULTS
Demographic details of the respondents
The academics in these two institutions were asked questions concerning their personal information with regards to gender, academic field, highest education, nationality and years of experience and the overall response rate was 100% this may be connected to the efforts of the researcher and research assistant in administering the survey.

Gender
The gender of respondents from Umaru Musa Yar’adua University (UMYU) shows that the male population is the dominant among academics recording (43; 86%) as against the female academics who were only (7; 14%). While at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) the gender disparity in academics is as follows male (39; 78%) as against female who were (11; 22%).

Nationality
Nationality of the respondents was also sought and in UMYU it was revealed that the highest percentage of academics are Nigerians (48; 96%) there were no South Africans (0; 0%) and few
of academics (2; 4%) from other countries. While in UNIZULU the number of academics based on their nationality are as follows, Nigerians (6; 12%), South Africans (29; 58%) and other Nationalities (15; 30%).

**Highest Qualification**

The qualification of respondents as obtained from UMYU shows that masters’ degree holders are more in number among the academics with (34; 58%) followed by PhD (17; 34%) and bachelors’ degree holders were the lowest in number with just (4; 8%). In UNIZULU however, the responses obtained shows that PhD has the highest number with (34; 68%) followed by masters’ (12; 24%) and the least (4; 8%) goes to bachelors/honors degree.

**Discipline**

The respondents fields of expertise with regards to faculties is obtained from UMYU with Arts and Social Sciences recording the highest number of academics (23; 46%), Education faculty is second with (16; 32%) while Faculties of Pure Sciences, Medical Sciences and Engineering recorded (5; 10%), (4; 8%) and (2; 4%) respectively. The trend is similar in UNIZULU as Faculty of Arts has the highest number of academics (24; 48%) followed by Education (12; 24%) and then Pure Sciences (8; 16%) and the least number goes to Medical Science and Engineering having (4; 8%) and (2; 4%) respectively.

**Years of Experience**

Years of experience in the academia was part of the demographic data collected and in so doing it reveals that, the highest population of academics in UMYU (22; 44%) has between 11 to 20 years experience, 1 to 10 years recorded (15; 30%) being the second in terms of population and 21 to 30 years recorded (10; 20%) while those academics with more than 30 years experience were only (3; 6%). Looking at the same aspect in UNIZULU the following data was obtained 1 to 10 years (14; 28%), 11 to 20 years (25; 50%), 21 to 30 years (7; 14%) and above 30 years (4; 8%).

**Information and knowledge sharing among the academics**

The research considered investigating the information and knowledge sharing trends among the academics in terms of type, reasons and pattern/ways of sharing. Also, the type of ICTs used by the respondents for sharing were asked, in the end, problems encountered were explored and possible solutions to such problems from the respondent’s perspective were sought.

**Type of information and knowledge shared/preferred**
Chart 1: Type of information and knowledge shared/preferred in UMYU [n=50] and UNIZULU [n=50]

The type of information/knowledge shared/preferred by academics in UMYU were on visiting, part-time and sabbatical jobs which occupies the highest percentage of (43; 86%) while in UNIZULU the figures indicated that only (14; 28%) of the academics share/prefer such type of information/knowledge. Other types of information and knowledge that interests more academics in UMYU are scholarship availability where (39; 78%) of the academics agree to share and prefer while information and knowledge on research supervision recorded (34; 68%) but academics in UNIZULU indicated that only (17; 34%) and (27; 54%) among them share/prefer information on scholarship availability and research supervision respectively. This may not be unconnected to the disparity in salary package standard between these institutions where UMYU academics tend to seek for more extra engagements to meet up with their financial needs.

The academics in UNIZULU are more concerned with information and knowledge on seminars, workshops and conferences (43; 86%) as against their counterparts in UMYU (32; 64%); information on new technologies, current/ongoing research, collaboration among academics in UNIZULU recorded (41; 82%), (37; 74%) and (31; 62%) as against the record among UMYU academics with (22; 44%), (24; 48%) and (19; 38%) respectively. From the above figures it could be seen that academics in UNIZULU are more concerned about new technologies, sharing current/ongoing research and participate more in collaborative research activities than their
UMYU counterparts, even though in the area of seminars, workshop and conferences they also record high percentage.

**Reasons and ways/patterns for information and knowledge sharing**

When asked about their reasons for sharing information and knowledge and a number of options were listed to choose from, such as, avoiding duplication of efforts, being current in their field, strengthening academic culture, improving research output and exploring new ideas etc. all the academics in these institutions (50; 100%) and (50; 100%) agreed to all the listed options and therefore there was no difference in opinion. The same applies to the pattern/ways of sharing information and knowledge among the academics both in UMYU and UNIZULU there were no distinction as they both agreed to the listed options and there were no other comments to indicate whether additional issues were left unidentified among the list.

**Use of ICTs for information and knowledge sharing**

![Chart 2: Type of ICTs used for information and knowledge sharing in UMYU [n=50] and UNIZULU [n=50]](chart2.png)

Survey findings with regards to ICT usage for information and knowledge sharing among academics in the two institutions reveals that among various ICT facilities listed on the questionnaire, Mobile Phones appears to be the most widely used gadgets for sharing where all the respondents (50; 100%) and (50; 100%) from all the institutions attest that they use mobile technology for the purpose of sharing, on the use of USB/CD-ROMs academics in UMYU (33;
66%) as against (50; 100%) in UNIZULU attest to the usage which shows a huge difference in the use of these devices in UNIZULU even though the usage is percentage is also high in UMYU. The use of computers and internet facilities for sharing among academics in UMYU recorded (33; 66%) and (36; 72%) as against the full compliance and usage of (50; 100%) and (50; 100%) respectively recorded in UNIZULU, the difference in the use of these facilities as observed comes from the senior academics in UMYU where most of them were found to be less ICT oriented. Other ICT facilities listed were teleconferencing, videoconferencing and social media where in UMYU the percentage of use recorded was (14; 28%), (13; 26%) and (24; 48%), while in UNIZULU these same ICT facilities were found to be highly used by academics for sharing among themselves with (32; 64%), (32; 64%) and (38; 76%) records respectively.

Problems associated with information and knowledge sharing

![Chart 3: Common problems affecting information and knowledge sharing among academics in UMYU [n=50] and UNIZULU [n=50]](chart3.png)

The respondents were asked to identify some common problems associated with information and knowledge sharing among academics with a list of options to choose from, the data collected shows that in UMYU there was high inadequacy of required information resources as the respondents (43; 86%) indicated while in UNIZULU only (14; 28%) of the respondents indicated that information resources were inadequate. Another crucial problem militating against effective
sharing is poor research management especially in UMYU where (46; 92%) of the respondents indicated, while the academic in UNIZULU seems to be comfortable with their research management office where only (17; 34%) faults the system, looking at the problem of research incentives there is correlation with research management response in UMYU as the highest number of academics (38; 76%) indicated that incentives were not encouraging in any way but reverse is the case with regards to UNIZULU research incentives where only (13; 26%) of the respondents were not satisfied. Research communication gap is another problem hampering effective sharing in UMYU where (38; 76%) attest to that and it is glaringly correlating with poor seminar, workshop and conference attendance where (38; 76%) of the respondents indicated. These same problems do not make any significant effect on academics in UNIZULU as only (12; 24%) and (12; 24%) of the respondents indicated having issues with communication gap and poor attendance respectively. Looking at willingness and attitude of academics towards sharing it is revealed that, academics in UMYU display a high level (43; 86%) of negative attitude towards sharing as indicated; there is a significant level (22; 44%) of negative attitude towards sharing among academics in UNIZULU too.

Solutions to the problems militating against effective sharing
The opinion of respondents was thought as to the possible solutions towards minimizing the common problems associated with information and knowledge sharing and a range of solutions in relation to each problem identified were itemized, the indicators are as follows: provision of adequate information resources; effective E-resource services; functional research management unit; timely communication on academic gatherings; improved research support/incentives; attitudinal change among academics. These solutions were well itemized and all the respondents both in UMYU (50; 100%) and UNIZULU (50; 100%) agreed upon the relevance effectiveness of the solutions towards curtailing the existing crippling factors towards achieving the desired goals with regards to information and knowledge sharing among academics.

Discussion and conclusions
The results indicated that while the highest number of academics in UMYU is Masters Degree holders (58%), there were more PhD holders in UNIZULU (68%), but the gender of respondents in both institutions indicates that male academics are the majority. The highest number of academics appears to be from the Arts and Social Sciences in both institutions, this is apparently due to the larger number of departments under the faculties. The highest percentage regarding years of experience of the respondents in the academia is between 11 to 20 years in both institutions and there are no South African citizens among the academics in UMYU while Nigerians make up to (12%) in UNIZULU. The dominant types of information and knowledge shared/preferred by academics in UMYU are information on part-time, visiting and sabbatical jobs; scholarship availability and research supervision and these are all geared towards providing extra income to the academics while the
type of information and knowledge shared/preferred by academics in UNIZULU are on
seminars, workshops and conferences; new technologies; current and ongoing research; research
collaboration. There was no difference recorded between academics in the two institutions with
regards to their reasons for information and knowledge sharing and ways/patterns of sharing.
The use of ICT in sharing is significantly advantageous hence the data presented indicate that
apart from the usage of mobile phones, computers and internet by UMYU academics even
though in lesser degree to their counterparts in UNIZULU all other ICT devices were not
significantly explored the academics in UMYU hence may not be as conversant and up to date in
information and knowledge sharing especially in teleconferencing, videoconferencing and social
media as the academics in UNIZULU.

Problems associated with information and knowledge sharing from the data collected are more
severely affecting UMYU academics in the areas of Inadequate information resources, poor
research management, poor research incentives, research communication gaps and negative
attitudes to sharing among the academics themselves but these problems appears to be less in
UNIZULU as compared to UMYU even though this might not be adequate when compared to
global standards. In order to see to the realization of effective information and knowledge
sharing among academics in both institutions there has to be adequate information resources
provision, functional research management system has to be in place, improved research support
and incentives and more importantly attitudinal change by academics towards sharing.

In conclusion, it is observed that a number of academics in UMYU are not exploring the vast
opportunities associated with information and knowledge sharing this is apparently due to poor
research management in the institution and many academics especially the seniors are not ICT
oriented and therefore their publications are not visible online hence accessibility becomes a
burden. It is also observed that most academics in UMYU have to sponsor themselves to attend
seminars, workshops and conferences which lead to poor attendance. The academics in
UNIZULU are found to be more ICT oriented, receiving more motivation in information and
knowledge sharing through sponsorships to attend workshops, seminars and conferences yielding
more research output and collaboration and most importantly the publication are readily
available online.

Recommendations
In view of the above conclusions, it is recommended that:

- More awareness and sensitization be embarked upon in a bid to trigger the zeal and willingness
to participation in information and knowledge sharing among academics.

- More research support and incentives be provided towards enhancing collaborative research,
seminars, conferences and workshops attendance especially in UMYU.

- The research management office must be given high attention towards managing research
activities in the institutions.

- There should be a shift towards online publication culture especially in UMYU as many of the
publication and floating journal as observed were not visible online.
• Government and Institutional authorities need to improve the provision of basic services like electricity supply especially in UMYU and internet connectivity in general.
• Research to be conducted in the areas of information literacy in these institutions and designing frameworks for effective information and knowledge sharing activities.
Reference


