KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND MULTI-CAMPUS UNIVERSITY SYSTEMS: GHANA'S UNIVERSITY FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES LIBRARY IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study was aimed at exploring knowledge sharing activities among library staff in a library that serves a multi-campus university in Northern Ghana. This study made use of quantitative research methods and a descriptive design. A questionnaire was used to gather data from the staff of the UDS Library across all campuses and was analyzed using IBM SPSS v23. The findings revealed that knowledge acquisition was mainly through workshops/ conferences/ seminars, personal development, in-service training, formal education and through colleagues. The knowledge sharing strategies identified included personal conversations, workshops/ training/ seminars, formal meetings, emails, telephone calls, chat groups and SMS. Challenges identified among staff on the same campus were apathy, grapevine communication, internet challenges and poor knowledge sharing culture among others. Across campuses, challenges related to distance, time, finances, irregular trainings and unhealthy competitions among others were identified.

Keywords: Knowledge Sharing (KS), Multi-Campus University Systems (MCUS),

Knowledge Sharing Strategies (KSS)

Introduction

Large organizations, characterized by barriers like functional and geographical distances, need to manage knowledge in ways that would not obstruct workers knowing and benefiting from what is done. A multi-campus university system (MCUS) is an example of such large institutions that require strategic knowledge sharing with the purpose of transcending the limitations of geographical boundaries. The MCUS model, according to French (2003, cited in Dinye, 2016), ensures that human resources, academic services and support facilities are delegated to the different branches/campuses/peripheries based on specific needs although a central administration sees to the overall management of these resources and campuses. Libraries that serve such institutions are no exception when it comes to the administration and management. Akin to their parent institutions, such libraries have a central/main library which coordinates and manages the activities and operations of the other branch or campus libraries. This system of higher education is gaining prominence worldwide (Dinye, 2016) and Ghana is no exception with four out of 10 public universities and seven private universities operating the MCUS model (National Accreditation Board, 2019).

The University for Development Studies (UDS) was established in 1992 as a multi-campus university in Ghana (University for Development Studies, 2012) to serve the three Northern regions and has campuses in Tamale, Nyankpala, Wa and Navrongo. The Library that serves this institution has the centre in Nyankpala and branch libraries on all the campuses of the University. The Library was established with the inception of the UDS in 1992, to provide academic and research support for all faculties, departments, schools, institutes and centres.

A number of studies around the world [Burnette (2017); Balagué, Düren & Saarti, (2016); Aggarwal & Islam, (2015); Nove & Puspitasari (2013); Dube & Ngulube (2012)] have been conducted on knowledge sharing activities in academic libraries with an emphasis on knowledge sharing strategies, perceptions, retention and transfer of knowledge as well as challenges. In Africa, Muchaonyerwa (2015) and Plockey (2009) also conducted research on knowledge sharing activities of university libraries in South Africa and Ghana respectively. However, with the growing prominence of MCUS as a system of higher education, scarce research has been done on how this system affects its libraries and their knowledge sharing activities.

The purpose of this study is to identify knowledge sharing activities within a library that serves a multi-campus university system. This study's uniqueness stems from its focus on knowledge sharing in a multi-campus university, unlike mainstream research on a specific university or a comparison between universities. Thus, it reveals the strategies by which the UDS Library staff share the knowledge they acquire among themselves within and across campuses, and the challenges faced as well as providing a basis for further research.

Literature Review
Knowledge Sharing (KS)
A basic element of knowledge management is knowledge sharing which Bartol & Srivastava (2002) define as a deliberate and systematic transfer of relevant expertise, information, suggestions and ideas from individual creation or acquired through routine activities, or borrowed from one's social network.

Although interchangeably used, Zheng (2017) posits that knowledge sharing is different from knowledge exchange and knowledge transfer. Knowledge sharing is thus the process of absorption, understanding and usage of an individual's knowledge by others (Ipe, 2003). As reiterated by Lin (2007), its importance lies in the ability for knowledge residing with individual workers to be transmitted to the organization, where it is converted into competitive and economic value for the organization. It must also lead to the dissemination of innovative ideas considered critical to creativity and subsequent innovation in organizations.

Barriers to effective knowledge sharing, as concluded by Makayiso (2013) includes the knowledge itself, the people involved, organizational structure and management of the organization.

Multi – Campus University Systems (MCUS)
Becker (2015), considers MCUS as a 21st Century model of higher education that is steadily attaining recognition among global private and public institutions of higher education. McGuinness (1991, cited in Dinye, 2016) states that as early as the 20th Century MCUS were introduced into the management and administration of higher education. A university or a college offering higher education with two or more campuses governed and controlled by a single or centralized management and mission is a multi-campus university system (Wu & Wu, 2013 in Dinye, 2016). Due to mergers of higher educational institutions at different locations and efforts by stakeholders and policy makers to extend activities across multiple geographical locations, multi-campus universities were born (Bumbie-Chi, 2018). This increasing adoption can be attributed to a need to maximize the use of existing limited resources; make higher education more accessible and closer to both urban and rural communities and students; expand educational facilities and market share; and additionally depopulate the main campus [Pinheiro, Charles & Jones (2017); Dinye (2016)]. The campuses/branches/peripheries are considered as subordinate units under the centralized management system (Fei, 2015) with the responsibility of coordination, policy formulation, distribution of resources and development planning resting with the central campus (Pelfrey, 2012).

Objectives
The main objective of this study was to explore knowledge sharing activities among library staff in a multi-campus university setting, taking into account how job-related knowledge is acquired, the strategies that exists for sharing and the challenges they face in sharing this knowledge.

Methodology
The study made use of quantitative methods of data collection and a descriptive research design. This was

to enhance an expansive assessment of the research problem and draw valuable conclusions. The total population of library staff in the University for Development Studies was 64 (see Table 1) out of which, 57 were selected to participate in this study. The University Librarian, the four Campus Librarians and the two Heads of Departments (seven in total) were exempted from this study. The reason for this selection was because, the study sought to explore and describe the knowledge sharing activities in the Library as it is, among the Library staff. The seven exempted, did not meet the criteria for the selection since they were in top managerial positions and the study was focused on the library staff that directly provided services to users on the various campuses. A semi-structured questionnaire, made up of five parts, aided the collection of the data for this study.

Table 1: UDS Library Staff Distribution

	Nyankpala Campus	**Dungu Campus**	**City Campus**	**Navrongo Campus**	**Wa Campus**	**Total**
Senior Members	12	1	1	2	2	**18**
Senior Staff	11	4	1	4	5	**25**
Junior Staff	7	4	1	3	6	**21**
Total	**30**	**9**	**3**	**9**	**13**	**64**

Source: UDS Library, 2019

The data collected for the study was analysed using the IBM SPSS version 23 package and Microsoft Excel.

Findings
Out of the 57 copies of the questionnaire that were distributed, 51 (89.5% response rate) were returned and found usable for analysis which, according to Babbie (2010), is adequate for analysis. The findings of the study have been presented using frequencies, tables, charts and graphs below.

Demographics
Table 2: Gender of Respondent

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	35	68.6
Female	16	31.4
Total	51	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2019

Table 2 shows the gender of participants who responded to the questionnaire. 68.6% of respondents were males and 31.4% were females.

Table 3: Age of Respondents

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
20-29	9	17.6
30-39	26	51.0
40-49	11	21.6
50-59	1	2.0
60+	1	2.0
No response	3	5.8
Total	51	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2019

In Table 3, it can be observed that the majority of respondents fall in the age range of 30-39 whilst the least fall above 50 years old. This shows a predominantly youthful composition of employees for the University for Development Studies Library according to the National Youth Policy of Ghana (2010) that defines youth as falling between the ages of 15-35.

Table 4: Campus of Respondent

Campus	Frequency	Percentage
Nyankpala campus	24	47.1
Wa campus	11	21.6
Navrongo campus	7	13.7
Dungu campus	7	13.7
City campus	2	3.9
Total	51	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2019

Since UDS runs a multi-campus system, it was imperative to take the campus of respondents into consideration. Nyankpala campus ranked highest in terms of staff strength, followed by the Wa campus whilst the City campus, recorded the least. These figures were not surprising since Nyankpala campus hosts the central library and all the major units and sections of the library.

There was a greater concentration of staff at the Reader services unit with a record of 56.9% whilst the Serials unit recorded the lowest of 3.9%. This could be attributed to the fact that all major units only exist at the central library (Bumbie-Chi, 2018) and thus provide bulk of the services whilst the other campus libraries are limited to the reader services unit where circulation services are provided. All other units recorded numbers of staff each less than 10 (see Table 5).

TABLE 5: UNIT/SECTION OF RESPONDENT

	Frequency	Percentage
Reader services	29	56.9
Cataloguing	6	11.8
Electronic resources/services	4	7.8
Technical services	4	7.8
Acquisitions	3	5.9
Institutional repository	3	5.9
Serials	2	3.9
Total	51	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2019

The ranks of staff of the library are categorized into senior members, senior staff and junior staff. Table 5 presents the ranks of respondents to this study. Senior members of the University Library are those who hold senior or junior management positions and are responsible for providing strategic leadership to their subordinates. The senior staff rank is a training and supervisory role whilst that of the junior staff is predominantly operational. From Table 6, the Senior Members were the least whilst the senior staff were the most.

Table 6: Rank of Respondent

Rank	Frequency	Percentage
Senior staff	23	45.1
Junior staff	17	33.3
Senior members	10	19.6
No response	1	1.9
Total	51	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2019

Table 7: Length of Service

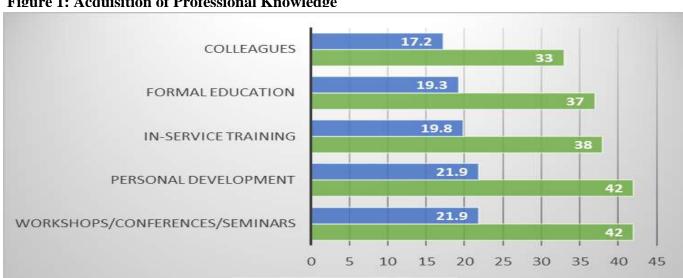| Duration (years)	Frequency	Percentage
1 - 5	14	27.5
6 - 10	22	43.1
11 - 15	4	7.8
16 - 20	5	9.8
21+	4	7.8
No response	2	3.9
Total	51	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2019

For this study, the researcher tried to determine the length of time respondents had served in the Library. The figures from the Table showed that a great number of respondents had between six and 10 years of working experience in the Library.

Table 8: Level of Education

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Master's Degree	18	35.3
Undergraduate Degree	12	23.5
Higher National Diploma	6	11.8
Diploma	6	11.8
SSCE/WASSCE	5	9.8
O Level / A Level	3	5.9
Post-Graduate Diploma	1	2.0
Total	51	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2019

Table 8 shows respondents level of education. The data revealed that, the greater number of respondents (35.3%) possessed a master's degree, followed by those who had an undergraduate degree (23.5%). This suggests that, on the average, UDS library staff have at least a tertiary qualification.

Figure 1: Acquisition of Professional Knowledge

Source: Field Data, 2019

This study needed to ascertain the channels by which the respondents acquired professional knowledge about their jobs as Librarians and Library Assistants. A number of options were made available and multiple choices were allowed. Figure one shows that, workshops/conferences/seminars and personal development activities, ranked highest with a frequency of 42 each. Personal development in the context of this study (as explained to respondents) was related to personal efforts at continuing professional development including, but not limited to, reading relevant materials, enrolling in relevant online courses, research activities and being members of professional and collaborative groups. In-service training recorded significant figures, suggesting that, the UDS Library is making huge efforts at rolling out in-service training sessions to augment professional needs of staff. The frequency of formal education as a knowledge acquisition channel shows that, respondents also pursued formal certification/degrees to enhance their knowledge base. Acquisition of knowledge from colleagues, unfortunately, recorded the lowest frequency. Colleagues here referred to peers within the same industry; that is colleagues working in libraries within the same institution or different institutions, nationally and internationally.

Table 9: Analysis of Trainings/Workshops/Conferences/Seminars

	Yes	%	No	%	Total (100%)
By Library on Same Campus	47	92.2	4	7.8	51
By Library on Different Campus	23	45.1	28	54.9	51
By Other Institutions	30	58.8	21	41.2	51
International Conferences	9	17.6	42	82.4	51

Source: Field Data, 2019

Attending trainings/workshops/conferences/seminars, ranked highest as a knowledge acquisition channel among respondents to the questionnaire. The study sought, therefore, to ascertain details regarding this and the results are presented in Table 9. About 92% of respondents revealed that they had attended such events that had been organized by the UDS Library on the campus they were stationed whilst just about 8% had never attended such events organized by the Library on their campus.

Another 45% reported that, they had had the opportunity to attend these events organized by the UDS Library at a different campus other than theirs whilst about 55% had not had such an opportunity. This could be attributed to the fact that most of the trainings/ workshops/ conferences/ seminars that had been organized in-house by the UDS Library were mostly at the Nyankpala Campus. Those at the Nyankpala Campus were therefore not required to move to a different Campus and also only a select few from the other campuses participated (Bumbie-Chi, 2018).

Furthermore, the study revealed that about 59% of staff had participated in such training events organized by institutions other than theirs whilst just about 17% had participated in international ones. This paints the picture that the UDS Library is making great efforts at providing training/workshop/conferences/seminar opportunities in-house to build the capacity of staff but limited international opportunities exist. This is something that needs to be critically reviewed since the exposure and access to advancements from international institutions will enhance the strides by the institution at incorporating various technological tools into service delivery (Akeriwe & Thompson, 2015).

Table 10: Opportunity to Pursue Formal Education

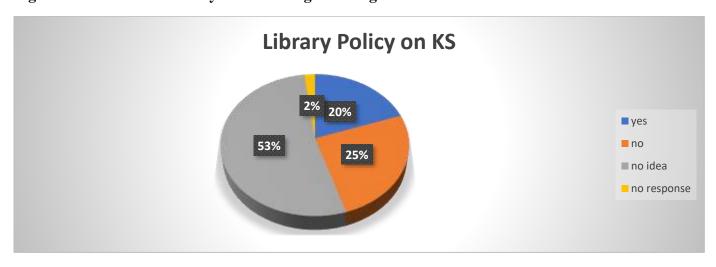| Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	37	72.5
No	11	21.6
No response	3	5.9
Total	51	100

Source: Field Data, 2019

Table 10 depicts the responses from participants of the study concerning the opportunities that existed to pursue formal education in the UDS Library as part of knowledge acquisition. A total of 72.5% of the respondents affirmed that within the period in which they worked in the Library, they had had the opportunity to further their education through formal channels. The other 21.6% said they had not had any such opportunity whilst the remaining 5.9% provided no response.

Table 11: Analysis of Knowledge Acquisition from Colleagues

Response	Never	Rarely (once a month)	Sometimes (2-3 times a month)	Often (once a week)	Very often (2-3 times a week)	Daily	No response	Total
Within the same campus library	1 (2%)	4 (7.8%)	5 (9.8%)	3 (5.9%)	11 (21.6%)	26 (50.9%)	1 (2%)	51 (100%)
From other campus libraries	14 (27.5%)	20 (39.2%)	5 (9.8%)	1 (2%)	2 (3.9%)	4 (7.8%)	5 (9.8%)	51 (100%)

Source: Field Data, 2019

Acquiring knowledge from colleagues was another way by which staff of the UDS Library stated they acquired knowledge related to their jobs. The study therefore probed this method of knowledge acquisition and this is presented in Table 11. Respondents reported that on an average, more knowledge was acquired from colleagues within the same campus library than from those on other campus libraries. The data shows that, 50.9% of respondents stated that they acquired job related knowledge from colleagues within the same library on a daily basis as compared to 7.8% from colleagues on other campuses. This shows that, majority of knowledge acquisition activities from colleagues are more pronounced within campus libraries than across. And this according to Pinheiro, Charles & Jones (2017) can be attributed to the distance between the branches of multi-campus university systems.

Figure 2: Awareness of Policy on Knowledge Sharing

Source: Field Data, 2019

Respondents were asked if there existed any policy regarding the sharing of knowledge within the UDS Library. This was necessary because the study tried to ascertain whether any formal direction to knowledge sharing

activities existed within the multi-campus university library. Figure 2 shows the responses obtained. About 20% of respondents affirmed that the Library had a formal policy on knowledge sharing whilst 25% stated that such a policy did not exist. It was interesting to note that majority of the staff (53%) had no idea whether such a policy existed or not. For those who stated that such a policy existed, they were further required to state what the policy entailed and their responses were as follows;

- Library seminar series for senior members and senior staff of the library across campuses
- Work and training schedules
- Proper channels of communication (upward or downward)
- Workshops, training and seminars

Table 12: Channels Available for Sharing Knowledge

Channels	Frequency	Percentage
Personal conversations (face-to-face)	46	18.3
Workshops/training/seminars	43	17.1
Formal meetings	42	16.7
Emails	34	13.5
Telephone calls	32	12.7
Chat groups	32	12.7
SMS	22	8.8
Total	**251**	**100.0**

Source: Field Data, 2019

Once the processes of knowledge acquisition had been identified, the researcher needed to determine how knowledge acquired was transferred from one person to another within the UDS Library. The channels which staff of the Library within this multi-campus university, made use of to share their job-related knowledge to enhance productivity were numerous. Table 12 presents the major channels by which knowledge sharing among the library staff was carried out. Personal conversations ranked highest with a frequency of 46, followed by workshops/trainings/seminars with 43 and formal meetings recorded a frequency of 42. Sharing knowledge through emails recorded a frequency of 34, telephone calls and chat groups each recorded 32 whilst SMS had the least frequency of 22.

TABLE 13: PREFERRED CHANNELS OF SHARING KNOWLEDGE

Response	FREQUENCY	RANK
Personal conversations (face-to-face)	41	1
Workshops/training/seminars	30	2
Formal meetings	24	3
Chat groups	23	4
Telephone calls	16	5
Emails	11	6
SMS	1	7

Source: Field Data, 2019

In terms of preference to making use of the identified knowledge sharing channels, a greater number of respondents (41) stated they preferred using personal face-to-face conversations as a medium to share their knowledge with colleagues. It can be observed from Table 13 that, the next preferred channels were workshops/trainings/seminars, formal meetings, chat groups, telephone calls, emails and SMS (in that order).

Table 14: Challenges of Knowledge Sharing Activities

Challenges	Yes	%	No	%	No response	%	Total (100%)
Within same campus library	19	37.3	28	54.9	4	7.8	51
With other campus libraries	17	37	29	63	5	9.8	51

Source: Field Data, 2019

Table 14 presents the challenges that respondents faced in engaging in knowledge sharing activities within the libraries they worked as well as with other campus libraries. About 37.3% of staff indicated that indeed some challenges existed in effective knowledge sharing activities within their libraries whilst 54.9% stated otherwise. Also, when it came to the challenges they faced with knowledge sharing activities with other campus libraries, 37% recorded a positive response to the existence of challenges whilst 63% did not. Some of the challenges respondents provided were;

Table 15: Challenges to Knowledge Sharing

Within same campus	With different campuses
➢ Apathy and disinterest from colleagues on knowledge sharing activities ➢ Grapevine communication ➢ Resources and time constraints due to varying work schedules ➢ Poor appreciativeness from management and colleagues ➢ Personal behavioural attitudes of some colleagues ➢ Poor internet connectivity ➢ Unwillingness to consult when in need of information ➢ Poor knowledge sharing culture ➢ Unappreciative value of knowledge by colleagues ➢ Political affiliations ➢ The prejudice of juniors being ignorant and seniors being knowledgeable ➢ Staff duty rotation	➢ Distance barriers ➢ Financial resources constraints ➢ Irregular trainings at the campus level ➢ Poor internet connectivity and improper technology use ➢ Time consuming since most workshops were at Nyankpala and required staff on the other campuses to travel ➢ Inadequate communication and technology tools ➢ Poor knowledge sharing culture among staff ➢ Limited opportunity to meet all staff from the various campuses and interact ➢ Lack of Interest from colleagues ➢ Unhealthy competitions among colleagues

Source: Field Data, 2019

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of the research findings was carried out according to the objectives of the study. Mars (2018) and Yousaf, Tariq & Soroya (2013) have depicted librarianship as a female dominated career but the case is different for the UDS Library which indicates a higher concentration of male staff compared to females (see table 2). The least number of years of service with the Library recorded was 1 year and the highest was above 20 years. However, a greater proportion of staff (43.1%) had been with the UDS Library for between six and 10 years and about 35.3% possessed a Master's degree. The Library also had a youthful employee population according to the National Youth Policy of Ghana (2010) with a high number of staff being 39 years and below (see Table 3). The staff were categorized into senior members, senior staff and junior staff with the majority falling in the senior staff category whilst the minority were the senior members (see table 6).

Knowledge Sharing Activities in an MCUS Library

The main objective of this study was to explore knowledge sharing activities among staff of a Library serving a multi-campus University in Northern Ghana. In order to holistically probe the research problem, the study took into account knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing strategies and challenges to knowledge sharing.

Knowledge Acquisition in an MCUS Library

For respondents to participate effectively in knowledge sharing activities, it is imperative that they equip themselves with the relevant skills, information and expertise to enhance service delivery throughout the library system. The study thus focused on identifying how staff acquired professional knowledge that could be shared.

The data indicated that the main avenues by which staff of the UDS Library acquired professional or job-related knowledge to enhance service delivery were through workshops/conferences/seminars, personal development activities, in-service trainings, formal

education and from colleagues (see Figure 1). However, workshops/conferences/seminars and personal development activities ranked highest while colleagues ranked least. The opportunity to attend trainings organized by the Library on a respondent's campus was greater as compared to attending at other campuses whilst external and international training programmes, according to respondents, were rather limited.

Formal education was another identified way of knowledge acquisition. The data revealed that 72.5% had been given the opportunity to pursue formal education at various levels during the time spent working with the Library. Majority of staff (see Table 8) possessed a degree in Information Studies (undergraduate and postgraduate) which the American Library Association (2006), deems an acceptable minimum professional qualification for a librarianship career and as such, were well equipped to drive knowledge transfer to other para-professionals.

Colleagues as a source of knowledge acquisition, though ranked lowest, recorded a significant frequency of 33. More knowledge was acquired from colleagues within the same campus library than those on other campus libraries (see table 11). About 39.2% of respondents rarely (about once a month) acquired any form of knowledge from colleagues on other campus libraries whilst 50.9% did so on a daily basis. Pinhiero, Charles and Jones' (2017) cited geographic distances as creating challenges with respect to the coordination and management of activities in their study of multi-campus university systems and hence influences participation in knowledge sharing.

Knowledge Sharing Strategies in an MCUS Library

Holsapple, (2003), cited in Muchaonyerwa, (2015) describes a library without a formal knowledge sharing strategy as one that has failed to influence intellectual capital for new innovation and creativity among its staff. This study probed the strategies by which staff of the UDS Library carry out knowledge sharing activities.

The data revealed that numerous channels for sharing knowledge existed but the most preferred were personal face-to-face conversations (Plockey, 2009), workshops/training/seminars and formal meetings (see

Table 13). The least preferred channels included chat groups (WhatsApp), telephone calls, emails and SMS. This preference for physical over abstract communication channels (telephone, texts, emails) confirms Holsapple (2003, as cited in Muchaonyerwa, 2015) assertion that humans are social beings and tend to depend on more informal relationships for communication, such as storytelling. This physical and personal preferred channels are appreciable within campus libraries but due to differences in geographical locations, time and resources, are not suitable across campus libraries and therefore impacting negatively on knowledge sharing activities across the campuses. Another interesting discovery from the data, is the low adaptation to the use of technology assisted communication channels which have broken the boundaries of traditional ones and can be harnessed to bridge geographical barriers as well as to establish an enhanced communication network to ensure fast responses and quick decisions as required by multi-campus university systems (Dhliwayo, 2014).

As to whether a policy existed or not, to guide knowledge sharing activities, the responses received showed that majority of the library staff had no idea whether such a policy existed or not (see Figure 3). This may be attributed to ineffective communication resulting from geographical distances and the underutilization of technology assisted communication channels as stated above.

Challenges of Knowledge Sharing in an MCUS Library

The study discovered a number of challenges to knowledge sharing among library staff in UDS. The data presented shows that majority of staff do not encounter challenges in their knowledge sharing activities within their campus libraries and across campus libraries (54.9% and 63% respectively) as compared to numbers that did (37.3% and 37% respectively). The challenges that existed on the same campus pertained generally to people whilst that across campuses were concerned with organizational structure and management as presented in Table 15. These challenges do not deviate entirely from what other academic libraries face (Mayekiso, 2015) and therefore, measures implemented by other academic

libraries to curb some of such challenges can be modified to fit the UDS situation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has shown that though staff of the UDS Library engage in knowledge sharing to some extent, there are deficiencies in formalized strategies, tools, organizational structures and processes that will encourage compliance and participation in such activities. Since the UDS Library serves a multi-campus university with patrons from diverse backgrounds and geographical locations, it is imperative that UDS Library and its staff ensure identical products and services provision across all campus libraries. Effective information, knowledge and skills dissemination among staff should be properly coordinated in order to reduce the gaps related to staffing and services provision that may be existing between the centre and the other campus libraries.

The study therefore recommends that, a formal policy be implemented to direct knowledge sharing activities and encourage a knowledge sharing culture among staff to achieve the maximum desired impact. Also, technology enhanced communication tools should be incorporated in mainstream communication and staff should be supported to attend international workshops and training programmes to improve their knowledge base.

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