

COMPETENCIES IN SEARCHING AND EVALUATING AUTHENTICITY OF INFORMATION AS PREDICTORS OF STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE SHARING CAPACITY IN UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA.

¹Isiwu, B. N., ²Unagha, A. O and ³Ibenne, S. K

¹ Department of Library and Information Science, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State.

^{2&3} Department of Library and Information Science, Abia State University, Uturu, Abia State.

Abstract

The study examined competencies in searching and evaluating authenticity of information as predictors of knowledge sharing capacity of postgraduate students of public universities in South-east Nigeria. Two research questions were answered, two hypotheses were tested while correlational survey research design was adopted in carrying out the study. The population for the study was 13,654 postgraduate students from the ten public Universities in south-east Nigeria. Taro Yamane method was adopted in sampling 400 postgraduate students as respondents across the ten public universities. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire and interview schedule. The instrument was subjected to validation by three experts while the reliability coefficient of the instrument was obtained using Cronbach Alpha reliability technique which yielded an overall Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.81 indicating high reliability of the instrument. Eight research assistants were engaged in data collection for the study. Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire administered, 386 copies were retrieved and completely filled representing 96.5% return rate. Data were analysed using mean values for answering research questions while correlation statistics based on the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at 0.05 level of significance was used for testing the hypotheses. The results of the study showed that competencies in searching information and evaluating the authenticity of information highly predict knowledge sharing ability among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria. The study among others recommended adequate in-service training, capacity building and skill update of lecturers in public universities in media and information literacy competencies for effective teaching and media and information skill acquisition of the postgraduate students that will enhance their knowledge sharing.

Keywords: Competencies, information searching, evaluation, authenticity, knowledge sharing.

INTRODUCTION

Information Literacy is a careful combination of information and media literacy with focus on ability to interact with the latest information technologies for knowledge acquisition. The two concepts were strategically brought together as a combined set of competencies

necessary for life and work in this digital and technology proliferation era (Aduloju, 2021). Information literacy forms a set of skills, without which a 21st century citizen may find it difficult to understand the surrounding world (Feris, 2017). According to UNESCO (2015) Information Literacy is a set of skills that equip learners to access, retrieve, comprehend, appraise and utilize information and media contents using a variety of tools and platforms such as the internet to participate and engage in personal, professional and societal activities. Information literacy is fundamental among today's learners for a good number of reasons. For instance, information literacy provides a conceptual framework and methodology to develop students' awareness, access, analyze, critically evaluate, and produce media contents in their various forms. This also helps to introduce students to the fundamentals of media and information as channels for the development of learners and society in general. It also aims to develop students to be creative and critical thinkers as well as responsible users and competent producers of media and information. Aduloju (2021) posited that information literacy empowers students with informed judgments as users of information and media contents, as well as becoming competent in searching and evaluating the authenticity of digital information and contents.

The ability to search and locate specific information efficiently involves the process of recognizing a need, knowing which databases or search engines to use, constructing targeted queries, and evaluating the retrieved content for relevance and credibility (UNESCO, 2021). According to Lindow (2021), the skills for searching, sourcing, and critically evaluating materials is perfectly suited for the school teacher-librarian to assist the students in effective classroom teacher with, or deliver themselves. The European Union (2026) stated that the internet has provided us with a wealth of information at our fingertips. The challenge that often arises is having too much information to choose from which sometimes create difficulty in sorting between real information, misinformation, opinions, and bias. University of Johannesburg Library (2026) identified some of the most common information searching strategies as: boolean logic, parenthesis, phrase searching, truncation, wildcards and field searching. UNESCO (2021) shared that locating information efficiently on the internet requires mastering a combination of advanced search engine operators, strategic digital navigation and evaluation of authenticity of information acquired online.

Evaluating online information requires critical thinking and strategic fact-checking of digital contents and information (University of Johannesburg Library, 2026). According to Setu (2025), evaluation of authenticity especially of web materials is important for review of the sources critically even if research is only for personal purposes. Dungan (2021) affirmed that the internet is home to a tremendous amount of information, but not all of it is reliable or true. Since anyone is free to build website, much of the information available is not subject to the same level of quality control found in resources like scholarly journals. Many Internet resources do not undergo any editing or fact-checking to ensure that the information is truthful and accurate. The Singapore Government Agency (2025) observed that in the digital age, evaluating online information is essential for making informed decisions. A critical competency is learning to assess content using three key criteria: accuracy, authority, and currency. Hence, in the context of this study, determining the reliability of internet-based information or other materials requires a systematic approach and set of competencies.

Competency is a set of skills possessed by an individual to properly perform a specific job. It is the ability to do something well, measured against a standard especially ability acquired through experience or training. Hence, competency in searching and evaluating authenticity of information is hypothesized to predict knowledge sharing ability of students. Knowledge sharing, according to Mohammad and Bhaskar (2016) is one of the most crucial yet overlooked aspects of workplace and academic progress. Ryan, (2021) noted that knowledge sharing connotes the exchange of knowledge, skills, and experiences which ensures that required knowledge and information is available for others that need it for intellectual and purpose of improving productivity. Hence, this study examined competencies in searching and evaluating authenticity of information as predictors of knowledge sharing capacity of postgraduate students of public universities in south-east Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study was to examine the competencies in locating and evaluating authenticity of information as predictors of knowledge sharing capacity of postgraduate students of public Universities in South-east Nigeria. Specifically, the study established the relationship between competencies in:

- i. searching information and knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria.
- ii. evaluating authenticity of information and knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria.

Research Questions

In line with the specific purposes, the study answered the following research questions:

- i. What is the relationship between competencies in searching information and knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria?
- ii. What is the relationship between competencies in evaluating authenticity of information and knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were developed and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between competencies in searching information and knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria.

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between competencies in evaluating authenticity of information and knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted correlational survey research design. Correlational research refers to a non-experimental research method which studies the relationship between two variables after data collection through descriptive survey. The population of the study was 13,654 postgraduate students from the ten public Universities in the five southeast states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo). All the ten public universities have established postgraduate programmes with students. The sample for the study is 400 postgraduate students used as respondents. In determining the sample size for the study, the Taro Yamane (1967) method was adopted since the actual population of postgraduate students in the public universities can be

ascertained from records obtained from postgraduate school of the concerned universities. Yamane (1967) provides a simplified formula to calculate sample sizes. A 95% confidence level and level of maximum variability ($p = 0.05$) was assumed. The instrument for data collection is a structured questionnaire and interview schedule developed by the researcher. The instrument for data collection was subjected to content validation by three experts. The observations and suggestions were strictly incorporated to improve the final copy of the instrument to ensure quality data collection.

Cronbach Alpha reliability method was used for ascertaining the reliability of the instrument, hence Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was of 0.81 was achieved for the instrument. Data were collected with the help of eight research assistants. The researcher coordinated the activities of the eight research assistants and collated the retrieved questionnaire for data analysis. Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire administered, 386 copies were properly responded to and retrieved, indicating 96.5% rate of return. Data collected were analysed using mean values for all research questions and correlation statistics based on the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at 0.05 level of significance. For the mean values, each table of analysis produce a grand mean with which the contents of that table were analysed. As a result, any item in each table with a mean value of up to or greater than the ground mean was deemed to have a positive or significant relationship. At the same time, any item in each table with mean value of less than the grand mean was deemed to have negative or insignificant relationship with knowledge sharing. The hypothesis of no significant difference was rejected when the p-value (sig.) is less than 0.05 level of significance. The hypothesis of no significant difference was accepted when the p-value (sig.) is greater than 0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research Question One

What is the relationship between competencies in searching information and knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of the Responses of the Respondents on Relationship between Competencies in Searching Information and Knowledge Sharing among Postgraduates Students

SN	Item Statements include:	SA	A	D	SD	Total	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
1	I possess a good knowledge of popular web search engines to download relevant research materials.	288	98	-	-	386	3.74	0.43	Sig.
2	My ability to utilize periodicals indexes and databases for locating information and media contents plays a big role in my knowledge sharing	277	104	5	-	386	3.70	0.48	Sig.
3	I am able to access and use databases that archive contents from newspapers, magazines and dissertations which factor motivates my knowledge sharing.	192	191	3	-	386	3.48	0.51	Not Sig
4	I am able to access my University library's websites and databases for locating information and media contents and this motivates me in sharing knowledge	245	135	4	2	386	3.61	0.53	Sig.
5	My ability to use the index to locate specific information and media contents makes my engagement in knowledge sharing more successful	236	148	2	-	386	3.57	0.49	Sig.
6	I am able to combine keywords and locate more specific and relevant information and media contents and this encourages me to engage in knowledge sharing	137	247	2	-	386	3.34	0.46	Not Sig
7	My ability to use my library's OPAC to locate relevant information resources motivates me to engage in knowledge sharing.	253	133	-	-	386	3.65	0.47	Sig.
8	My ability to search information on multiple sites makes my search more effective and yields information that motivates me to engage in knowledge sharing	126	260	-	-	386	3.32	0.46	Not Sig
Average Mean Score		-	-	-	-		3.55		

Note: $\bar{X}$ = Mean; **SD** = Standard Deviation; **Sig.** = Significant; **Not Sig** = Not Significant.

The result on research question one presented in Table 1 above revealed that the mean values on items 1, 2, 4, 5 and 7 are 3.74, 3.70, 3.61, 3.57 and 3.65 respectively which are all greater than the average mean score of 3.55. This signifies that items 1, 2, 4, 5 and 7 are competencies in searching information that have significant relationship with knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria.

The mean values of items 3, 6 and 8 are 3.48, 3.34 and 3.32 respectively which are less than the average mean score of 3.55 implying that items 5, 6 and 7 are competencies in the use of search engines that have no significant relationship with knowledge sharing among postgraduates students of public universities in South-East Nigeria.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between competencies in searching information and knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) Analysis of Relationship between Competencies in Searching Information and Knowledge Sharing among Postgraduates Students.

Variable	PPMC(r)	Level of Significance	P-Value	Decision
There is no significant relationship between competencies in searching information and knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria.	0.515	0.05	0.000	Sig* (H₀ rejected)

Note: Sig* = Significant at 0.05.

The data presented in Table 2 showed that the Pearson Product Moment correlation (PPMC) coefficient (r) of the test of significant relationship between competencies in searching information and knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria is 0.515 and positively significant as indicated by the p-value of 0.000. This implies that competencies in searching information predicts about 51.5% of knowledge sharing ability of postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria. Hence, there is strong and positive relationship between competencies in searching information and knowledge sharing ability of postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria.

Research Question Two

What is the relationship between competencies in evaluating authenticity of information and media contents and knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean Ratings of the Responses of the Respondents on Relationship between Competencies in Evaluating Authenticity of Information & Media Contents and Knowledge Sharing among Postgraduates Students

SN	Item Statements include:	SA	A	D	SD	Total	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
1	My ability to evaluate integrity and relevance of information & media contents for academic purposes enhance my knowledge sharing.	120	263	2	1	386	3.30	0.48	Not Sig
2	My ability to determine the credibility of media and information providers improves my knowledge sharing.	262	120	2	2	386	3.66	0.51	Sig
3	My ability to prioritize the potential information sources by type of information source, date, topic, author and keywords has greatly assist my knowledge sharing	251	135	-	-	386	3.65	0.47	Sig
4	My ability to determine the diversity of information and media contents provided by information providers and media has helped me a great deal in knowledge sharing	261	126	-	-	386	3.67	0.46	Sig
5	My ability to distinguish formats of information and media resources has further boosted my knowledge sharing potentials.	278	105	3	-	386	3.71	0.71	Sig
6	My ability to group and organize information and media contents appropriately is part of the factors that motivate my knowledge sharing.	260	125	1	-	386	3.67	0.47	Sig
7	My ability to run similarly check on academic materials before use is a boost to my knowledge sharing skills.	226	144	15	1	386	3.54	0.58	Not Sig
8	My ability to effectively assess the quality of an academic resources and suitability for use play a big role in my readiness for knowledge sharing.	253	131	2	-	386	3.63	0.56	Sig
Average Mean Score		-	-	-	-		3.60		

Note: $\bar{X}$ = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; **Sig.** = Significant; **Not Sig.** = Not Significant.

The result on research question three presented in Table 3 above showed that the mean values on items 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8 are 3.66, 3.65, 3.67, 3.71, 3.67 and 3.63 respectively which are

all greater than the average mean score of 3.60. This indicates that items 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8 are competencies in evaluating authenticity of information and media contents that have significant relationship with knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria. The mean values of the remaining two items 1 and 7 are 3.30 and 3.54 respectively which are less than the average mean score of 3.60 signifies that items 1 and 7 are competencies in evaluating authenticity of information and media contents that have no significant relationship with knowledge sharing among postgraduates students of public universities in South-East Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between competencies in evaluating authenticity of information and knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) Analysis of Relationship between Competencies in Evaluating Authenticity of Information and Knowledge Sharing among Postgraduates Students.

Variable	PPMC(r)	Level of Significance	P-Value	Decision
There is no significant relationship between competencies in evaluating authenticity of information and knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria.	0.707	0.05	0.000	Sig* (H0₃ rejected)

Note: Sig* = Significant at 0.05.

The data presented in Table 4 revealed that the Pearson Product Moment correlation (PPMC) coefficient (r) of the test of significant relationship between competencies in evaluating authenticity of information and knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria is 0.707 and positively significant as shown by the p-value of 0.000. This indicates that competencies in evaluating authenticity of information predicts about

70.7% of knowledge sharing ability of postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria. Therefore, there is strong and positive relationship between competencies in evaluating authenticity of information and knowledge sharing ability of postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

This study on research question two identified five competencies in searching information that have significant relationship with knowledge sharing among postgraduates students of public universities in South-East Nigeria which include that: the possession of a good knowledge of popular web search engines to download relevant research materials, ability to utilize periodicals indexes and databases for locating information and media contents plays a big role in knowledge sharing, ability to access my University library's websites and databases for locating information and media contents and this motivates in sharing knowledge, ability to use the index to locate specific information and media contents makes engagement in knowledge sharing more successful and ability to use my library's OPAC to locate relevant information resources motivates engagement in knowledge sharing.

The finding of this study corroborated that of Rasto, et al (2021) who investigated the factors that influence of knowledge sharing and competence among 100 students in Baudung. The authors among others found that there exists a significant positive relationship between students' location, information literacy competencies and their knowledge sharing ability. Also, the findings of this study substantiated that of Ikegunu and Elekwachi (2022) who examined knowledge management and information technology competency of public universities in Rivers State and found that knowledge generation, knowledge transfer (location) and knowledge codification and storage had a very strong positive relationship and significant influence on information sharing competency.

This study as regards research question three identified six competencies in evaluating authenticity of information and media contents that have significant relationship with knowledge sharing among postgraduate students of public universities in South-East Nigeria. These identified competencies include that: ability to determine the credibility of media and information providers improves knowledge sharing, ability to prioritize the potential information sources by type of information source, date, topic, author and keywords has greatly assist in knowledge sharing, ability to determine the diversity of information and media contents provided

by information providers and media has helped in a great deal in knowledge sharing, ability to distinguish formats of information and media resources has further boosted knowledge sharing potentials, ability to group and organize information and media contents appropriately is part of the factors that motivate knowledge sharing and ability to effectively assess the quality of an academic resources and suitability for use play a big role in readiness for knowledge sharing.

The results of this study on relationship between competencies in evaluating authenticity of information and knowledge sharing conformed with the findings of Ugwu and Ezema (2012) who examined the competences for successful knowledge management applications in Nigerian academic libraries and found that the librarians identified strategic skills of evaluation of information as essential for successful knowledge management and sharing. The finding of the current study also agreed with that of Okpala, et al (2017) who examined information literacy skills possessed by the postgraduate students of university of Nigerian, Nsukka and found that one of the skills possessed by the majority of the postgraduate students was the skill on evaluation of information and search engines as more than 98 percent of the postgraduate students conformed this as major skill that also enhance their information and knowledge sharing ability.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined competencies in searching and evaluating authenticity of information as predictors of knowledge sharing capacity of postgraduate students of public universities in south-east Nigeria. Data were collected from Postgraduate students in public Universities in the southeast Nigeria with the use of structured questionnaire. From the data analysed and the findings of the study, it was concluded that competencies in searching and evaluating authenticity of information are predictors of knowledge sharing capacity of postgraduate students of public universities in South-east Nigeria. Hence, the study recommended:

1. adequate in-service training, capacity building and skill update of lecturers in public universities in media and information literacy competencies for effective teaching and media and information skill acquisition of the postgraduate students that will enhance their knowledge sharing.

2. Integration of information literacy skills into the postgraduate programmes of public Universities in southeast Nigeria to further enhance media and information literacy competencies of the postgraduate students for knowledge sharing.

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