

# THE ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN THE LEARNING PROCESS AMONG IRAQI EFL POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN UKM

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the present study is to investigate students' attitude towards knowledge sharing with their class colleagues, and to determine the factors likely to motivate or inhibit knowledge sharing among the Iraqi EFL postgraduate students in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). The study adopted a quantitative approach through survey instruments design and the population of the study were the Iraq EFL postgraduate students in UKM University. SPSS software (Statistical Package for Social Sciences; version 22.0) has been used for the purpose of data coding, screening and data analysis. From a total of 50 questionnaires, 41 questionnaires were returned. Thus, the response rate was (82%). More details about the results of this study are also discussed.*

**Keywords:** knowledge sharing; the Iraqi EFL postgraduate students; Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysian

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years academic institutions are using different learning approaches to enhance students' learning experience. Therefore, studies were conducted in various educational fields to examine strategies and techniques that could contribute to developing students' attitudes towards learning (Al samadani & Ibnian, 2015). Collaborative learning is one of the established, popular and effective learning approaches. However, the success of this approach largely depends on students' attitude and behavior towards information and knowledge sharing with their peers (Majid & Chitra, 2013). It is argued that knowledge sharing is important in non-profit organisations such as academic institutes and universities (Mallasi & Ainin, 2015). However, knowledge sharing is a cooperative process which includes the distribution of the information, ideas and skills (Dokhtesmati & Bousari, 2013). Therefore, knowledge sharing is a demanding task that takes time and effort and requires students to be persistent and willing to interact with each other (Ghadirian, Ayub, Silong, Bakar, & Zadeh, 2014).

## 2. THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Iraqi postgraduate students in Malaysia are considered as a one of the largest Arab communities in Malaysia (Subhi & Yasin, 2015). However, developing students' attitudes towards learning is considered to be one of the most important issues that should be taken into account when discussing factors affecting the learning process (Al samadani & Ibnian, 2015). In addition, recognizing factors that impact knowledge sharing attitude in learning communities become critical (Ghadirian et al., 2014). Moreover, while there are broad researches about knowledge management and its processes in different areas, research about knowledge sharing specifically in higher education is quite limited (Fullwood, Rowley, & Delbridge, 2013; Skaik & Othman, 2015). Attitudes could highly influence how individuals approach many situations in life, including foreign language learning. In addition, it is believed that individuals with positive attitudes usually progress more rapidly in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) (Al samadani & Ibnian, 2015). However, there is limited understanding on the knowledge sharing in learning process especially for Iraqi EFL students in UKM Malaysian university. Therefore, the problem being investigated is to examine the perceptions and attitudes of Iraqi EFL students UKM university toward knowledge sharing with their class colleagues and the factors likely to motivate or inhibit knowledge sharing.

### **3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What are the perceptions and attitudes of Iraqi EFL postgraduate students in UKM toward knowledge sharing?
2. What are the factors likely to motivate or inhibit knowledge sharing among the Iraqi EFL postgraduate students in UKM?

### **4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

1. To investigate the perceptions and attitudes of Iraqi EFL postgraduate students in UKM toward knowledge sharing.
2. To determine the factors likely to motivate or inhibit knowledge sharing among the Iraqi EFL postgraduate students in UKM.

### **5. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Knowledge sharing takes place when information or knowledge is shared by individuals within a group and during the process the information or knowledge will also be negotiated and refined until it becomes common knowledge to the group (Yang, 2004). However, knowledge sharing should be strongly influenced by individuals' willingness to engage in the process and simply telling them that sharing knowledge will make you learn better do not automatically lead to knowledge sharing among members of the community (Ghadirian et al., 2014). Thus, many recent studies have given attention into finding determinants of knowledge sharing behaviour (Chang & Chuang, 2011; Goh & Sandhu, 2013; Hau, Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2013).

Jer Yuen and Shaheen Majid (2007) conducted a study on knowledge-sharing patterns among 180 undergraduate students in three public universities in Singapore. The results revealed that, generally students displayed a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing and were appreciative of its importance in peer learning. However, it noted that the respondents were less inclined to share knowledge for academic activities that were graded. The study also revealed that competition among students to outperform their fellow students and lack of depth in peer relationship were the two main factors that inhibited knowledge sharing.

Another study conducted by Chin Wei, Siong Choy, Geok Chew, and Yee Yen (2012) in the public and private universities in Malaysia on 423 undergraduate students to identify knowledge sharing patterns of the students. The findings showed that students of both public and private universities generally share positive attitude towards knowledge sharing. Ugochi Isika, Akmar Ismail and Fauzi Ahmad Khan (2013) conducted another study in Malaysia on knowledge sharing behaviour of postgraduate students in University of Malaya. The researchers found that the motivating factors for knowledge sharing among postgraduate students differ from what is found in the corporate world, due to the difference in goals of students.

Chen, Chen and Kinshuk, (2009) conducted a study to examine the factors influencing participants' knowledge sharing behavior in virtual learning communities among 396 full-time senior college students and MBA students. The results showed that attitude, subjective norm, Web-specific self-efficacy and social network as good predictors of knowledge sharing intention which, in turn, is significantly associated with knowledge sharing behavior. Knowledge creation self-efficacy did not significantly impact knowledge sharing intention. Moreover, Usman and Oyefolahan (2014) conducted a study on knowledge sharing using web 2.0 technologies the data were collected through 287 students in International Islamic University Malaysia. The results show that students used web 2.0 technologies in learning and sharing knowledge among them. In addition, the study found eight items on ways to encourage and enhance knowledge sharing among students in the University. These items include create awareness, provide facilities, internet accessibility, ease of use, encourage teamwork, materials availability, improved and response, and motivation.

A comparative study of knowledge sharing pattern among the 350 undergraduate and postgraduate students of private universities in Bangladesh were done by Rahman, Khan, Alam, Mustamil and Chong (2014), the result suggested that there are significant differences in the knowledge-sharing pattern between undergraduate and graduate students. In addition, the result revealed that the postgraduate students shown higher perceived attitudes towards knowledge sharing, compared to undergraduate students. Another study conducted by Rosaline and Kehinde (2014) on knowledge sharing behaviours of 503 postgraduate students in selected Nigerian universities. The results showed that of the three factors of individual, institution and technology factors influencing knowledge sharing among the postgraduate students.

Majid and Chitra (2013) conducted a study on knowledge sharing in the learning process on 226 junior college students. The result revealed that the top three sources for seeking study-related information were the internet, teachers, and classmates. The primary motives of sharing knowledge were to improve understanding of the concepts discussed in the class. For group assignments, more knowledge sharing occurred within the group members than with other groups. The major barriers to knowledge sharing were the lack of time, lack of a sharing culture.

The only on study founded on knowledge sharing in the area of English learners conducted by Hiew and Hoon (2014), the authors studied the factors affecting knowledge sharing among ESL undergraduates in completing collaborative writing tasks using Wiki and Skype. The findings indicated that social presence and team leadership are significantly affecting knowledge sharing through online collaborative learning, and students' participation in online interaction is highly related to social presence and team leadership. Moreover, the results indicated that Skype is more beneficial for collaborative learning.

However, there have been no empirical studies on knowledge sharing among EFL students which is considered as a gap in the literature. Therefore, to address this gap, the current study will investigate the the role of knowledge sharing in the learning process among Iraqi EFL students in UKM.

## **6. METHODOLOGY**

For the purpose of conducting this study, Iraqi EFL students in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) were randomly selected to take part in this study. The primary instrument of data collection in this study is the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three sections and the first section of the questionnaire is the demographic information of the respondents. The second section deals with students' attitude towards knowledge sharing. Section three of the questionnaire measures the factors likely to motivate or inhibit knowledge sharing. SPSS software (Statistical Package for Social Sciences; version 22.0) was employed in this study for the purpose of data coding, screening and data analysis. And to identify descriptive statistics of sample population based on gender, age and educational level.

This study adopted and modified the items of knowledge sharing measurement from two different studies (Chen et al., 2009) and (Majid & Chitra, 2013). The original instrument of Chen et al. (2009) was to measure students' attitude towards knowledge sharing among 396 full-time senior college students and MBA students, the number of the items were only four. Therefore, the researcher reviewed the work of Majid and Chitra (2013) on students' attitude towards knowledge sharing among 226 students in 12 junior colleges from Singapore. Therefore, the current study adapted and modified four items from Chen, Chen, and Kinshuk (2009) and the other three different items from Majid and Chitra (2013), thus, the total number of seven items used in the current study for measuring the Iraqi EFL students' attitude towards knowledge sharing in UKM Malaysia.

Furthermore, since this study was conducted among Iraqi EFL students in UKM, some items were modified according to the specific context of the current study. Therefore, sharing knowledge with classmates was used instead of sharing knowledge with others. As well as, the beginning of the some items were also rephrased, for example: (With proper awareness and motivation, it is possible to develop a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing) were rephrased while preserving the original meaning (example: I believe that proper awareness and motivation develop a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing with classmates).

In addition, for the purpose of measuring the factors likely to motivate or inhibit knowledge sharing among the Iraqi EFL students in UKM, the original questionnaire of Majid and Chitra (2013) was used in their study to measure factors that contribute to motivate or inhibit the knowledge sharing among the student in 12 junior colleges from Singapore. Therefore, the current study adapted and modified the measurement of Majid and Chitra (2013) in order to measure the factors likely to motivate or inhibit knowledge sharing among the Iraqi EFL students in UKM Malaysia. Furthermore, the respondents will rate on five Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

## **7. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

SPSS software (Statistical Package for Social Sciences; version 22.0) was employed for the purpose of data coding, screening and data analysis. Cronbach's alpha was used in this study for the purpose of estimating the reliability. The values for Cronbach's alpha for the three variables of this study

were .78, 84 and 83 respectively. These values were higher than the value of .70 as suggested by George and Mallery (2005). From a total of 41 questionnaires, 29 (71%) of the respondents were male and 12 (29%) were female. Thus, the responses for this study were primarily male participants. The respondents were also stated their age, and the majority of the respondents 21 (51%) were less than 30 years old, 30 to 40 were 16 comprised (39%) of the respondents, and only 4 (10 %) were aged 41 years and above. Table 1 characterizes the frequency of age.

Table 1: Frequency of Age

Group	Frequency (No.)	Percentage (%)
Less than 30 years	21	51
30 to 40 years	16	39
41 years and above	4	10

The respondents were also asked to verify their current study. The data showed that more than three-quarters of the respondents 32 (78%) were Master students, and 9 (22%) were completing their Ph.D degree. Table 2 shows the frequency of current study.

Table 2: Frequency of Current Study

Group	Frequency (No.)	Percentage (%)
Master	32	78
PhD	9	22

## 7.1 A TTITUDE TOWARDS KNOWLEDGE SHARING

A set of statements was used to obtain opinions of the Iraqi EFL postgraduate students about the different aspects of knowledge sharing. Table 3 below displays the means of the perceptions and attitudes of Iraqi EFL postgraduate students in UKM Malaysia toward knowledge sharing assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. The mean was applied as a measure of central tendency and it was found that the means of all variables were far away from their midpoint level (3).

Table 3: The respondents' attitude towards knowledge sharing

No:	Items	Mean
1	I believe that sharing knowledge with classmates is useful for learning new knowledge.	4.20
2	I believe that sharing knowledge with classmates will help me learning more efficiently.	4.05
3	I believe that sharing knowledge with classmates gives me the opportunity to learn from more people.	3.85
4	I believe that sharing knowledge with classmates is useful for enhancing my learning performance.	3.95
5	I believe that proper awareness and motivation develop a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing with classmates.	3.73
6	I believe that too much emphasis on grads discourages students from sharing their knowledge with classmates.	3.29
7	The belief of "knowledge is power" discourages knowledge sharing with classmates.	3.29

As shown in Table 3, the means of all 7 items number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 were 4.20, 4.05, 3.85, 3.95, 3.73, 3.29 and 3.29 respectively with a minimum scale of 1 and maximum scale of 5. The highest mean by item 1 with 4.20 refers to the sharing knowledge with classmates is useful for learning new knowledge followed by item 2 with a mean of 4.05 which refers to the importance of sharing knowledge that will help for learning more efficiently. The mean of 3.95 goes to item 4 that refers to importance of sharing knowledge which is useful for enhancing the learning performance and item 3 with a mean of 3.85 which refers to sharing knowledge with classmates gives the opportunity to learn from more people. Item 5 with a mean of 3.73 refers to proper awareness and motivation will lead to develop a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing and finally the lowest mean goes to items 6 and 7 with a mean of 3.29 respectively which refer that too much emphasis on grads and the belief of "knowledge is power discourages students from sharing their knowledge with classmates. Based on the results it has been shown that the students had positive attitudes toward knowledge sharing and the sense of the importance of knowledge sharing with other students.

## 7.2 FACTORS MOTIVATING KNOWLEDGE SHARING

The respondents were asked what factors are likely to motivate them to share their knowledge with peers. Table 4 below shows the results of an examination on the motivation factors of knowledge sharing.

Table 4: Factors motivating knowledge sharing

No:	Items	Mean
8	To improve understanding of concepts learnt in the class through sharing ideas with other students	3.88
9	To develop relationships with other students	3.80
10	To feel belonged to and fit into a group	3.49
11	To gain respect from others by portraying image of a knowledgeable person	3.44
12	Self-satisfaction	3.44
13	Out of altruism to help others	3.37
14	For rewards e.g. class or online forum participation marks	3.61
15	To impress teacher	3.29

As shown in Table 4, the highest motivating factor was by item 8 with mean 3.88 refers to improve understanding of concepts learnt in the class followed by item 9 with mean 3.80 refers to develop relationships with other students. It indicates that the students were aware of the importance of knowledge sharing during their study. Item 14 with a mean of 3.61 refers to if students get rewards and marks, this means that there is a important role for instructors by encouraging students through the rewards and marks for the purpose of motivating them to share the knowledge with the other students. However, the lowest motivation factor of knowledge sharing was item 15 to impress teacher with mean with 3.29. This indicated that the students do not share the knowledge to impress their teachers.

## 7.3 FACTORS INHIBITING KNOWLEDGE SHARING

The respondents were also asked about the factors inhibiting knowledge sharing with peers. Table 5 displays the results of an examination on the factors inhibiting knowledge sharing.

Table 5: Factors inhibiting knowledge sharing

No:	Items	Mean
16	Lack of time	3.44
17	Lack of knowledge sharing culture in the college	3.34
18	Lack of depth in relationship	3.39
19	Fear of providing wrong information	3.12
20	Lack of initiatives to voluntarily share information	3.41
21	Students only share with those who share with them	3.27
22	Fear of being portrayed as “show-off”	2.95
23	Fear that other students may outperform me in studies	3.20
24	Fear that a clash of opinions may spoil relationship	3.15
25	Lack of appreciation for knowledge sharing	3.22
26	Do not know what to share	2.41
27	Limited opportunities for face-to-face interactions with other students	3.29

As shown in Table 5, the highest mean rating belonged to the lack of time with mean of 3.44 followed by lack of initiatives to voluntarily share information with mean 3.41, and for lack of depth in relationship the mean was 3.39. However, the two least factors for preventing knowledge sharing were fear of being portrayed as “show-off” with mean 2.95 and the factor of do not know what to share with mean rating 2.41. This may be due to the postgraduate students are aware of the importance of knowledge sharing.

## 8. DISCUSSION

This section provides further discussion of the main findings from the data analysis and a comparison with previous studies. The first objective of this study was to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of Iraqi EFL postgraduate students in UKM Malaysia toward knowledge sharing. The results of this study indicated that the students hold positive significant attitudes toward knowledge sharing. These results were in line with that of Majid and Chitra (2013), who pointed out that the students had a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing and were aware of its importance during studies. The second objective of this study was to determine the factors likely to motivate or inhibit knowledge sharing among the Iraqi EFL postgraduate students in UKM Malaysia. The highest motivating factor was to improve understanding of concepts learnt in the class and to develop relationships with other students. This finding is generally consistent with previous studies (Chin Wei et al., 2012; Majid & Chitra, 2013; Zaqout & Abbas, 2012) that illustrate at the importance of social networking in knowledge sharing. Moreover, the highest barriers of knowledge sharing were

lack of time, lack of initiatives to voluntarily share information and lack of depth in relationship. These results are consistent with previous studies (Hussein & Nassuora, 2011; Majid & Chitra, 2013; Yaghi, Barakat, Alfawaer, Shkokani, & Nassuora, 2011) that reported these barriers to knowledge sharing.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to examine students' attitude towards knowledge sharing with their class colleagues, and to determine the factors likely to motivate or inhibit knowledge sharing among the Iraqi EFL postgraduate students in UKM Malaysian University. Overall, the findings of this study indicated that the students hold positive significant attitudes toward knowledge sharing. In addition, this study has also identified certain other barriers to knowledge sharing such as lack of time and lack of initiatives to voluntarily share information. Therefore, this indicates that the university needs to do more to encourage knowledge sharing among students and to decrease the barriers which contribute to inhibit knowledge sharing which in turn may strengthen the knowledge sharing.

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