

JEL Classification Codes: O32, D83, I23, M10

Introduction

Since its beginning, knowledge management (KM) has been attracting more attention within organizations (Matta & Saad, 2012), although it emerged as a scientific field only in the early 1990s (Skaik, 2016). It has been investigated in various domains such as business, economics, government, technology, management, and others (Noordin et al., 2011). KM has become a fundamental necessity for any organization (Javed et al., 2024) that wants to continue and stay ahead of competitors (Sahoo et al., 2023) because of its role in developing human capital, and sustaining competitive advantage (Elistia et al., 2024). KM not only provides intellectual and practical support to organizations, but also has an increasingly important and crucial impact on most human activities (Ben Omar, 2021).

The full implementation of KM has significant benefits for the organization and its staff. KM is one of the trends followed by institutions and organizations of different kinds, to highlight the importance of human capital, in addition to make full use of individual and organizational knowledge assets, since the creation and dissemination of knowledge depends primarily on human capital (Amer, 2016). Indeed, researchers argue that organizations achieve competitive advantage by identifying strategies for the creation, storage, dissemination, and utilization of organizational knowledge (Javed et al., 2024). Also, individuals' ability to use knowledge successfully is improved through knowledge management. This, in turn, increases the organization's ability to produce new knowledge, which results in enhanced performance, more efficient operations, lower costs, and more innovation (Elistia et al., 2024).

The world is currently witnessing a great interest in competitiveness, as one of the elements of survival (Ben Omar, 2021). It is the factor and motivator that regulates individuals' steps and encourages them to work and achieve excellence and distinction over their peers or competitors (Alfaware & Atan, 2021), in addition to achieve the highest levels of production and profitability (Abusharekh et al., 2019). The world today lives in the age of knowledge, as the features are radically different from all the previous ones, and therefore impose on everyone the necessity to adopt new concepts and mechanisms. The most serious impact of this new age is the emergence of competition as a basic fact that determines the success or failure of organizations (Ben Omar, 2021). Hence, higher

education institutions have become in a position to work hard and continuously to gain competitive advantage (CA).

Higher education institutions such as “universities are science centers established to generate and provide knowledge, and to equip people with the best education in order to serve their societies and uplift the well-being of mankind” (Skaik & Othman, 2018, p. 153). They seek to achieve success, durability, and organizational goals in the knowledge-based age (Skaik, 2016), have constant performance improvements, and enhance education, research, and scholarly work (Skaik & Othman, 2018). Thus, it is essential to employ KM in universities to generate knowledge, achieve creativity and distinction (Al-Hmaid, 2019). It enables universities to re-plan, organize, and determine their goals and policies accurately, thus redesigning their processes and achieving CA (Al-Oss, 2019). Consequently, Palestinian universities are demanded to provide basic requirements for KM as a very essential criterion for progress and competitiveness (Abusharekh et al., 2019).

Higher education in Palestine actively contributes to providing the labor market with trained competencies, through 55 higher education institutions including universities, university colleges, and community colleges (MOHE, 2023). Based on the rapid developments that have taken place in the higher education sector in Palestine, stakeholders have shed light on the importance of KM for universities (Abusharekh et al., 2019). This forces universities to make greater efforts in this area since intellectual capital and KM are the bases on which solid foundations are built in developed countries (Amer, 2016; Elistia et al., 2024). This constitutes a goal and a challenge for universities to build their strategies and obliges them to make qualitative transformations to adopt KM (Javed et al., 2024).

Problem Statement

Excellence, creativity, and innovation in universities are seen as a gateway into an age of competition and economic globalization (Marczewska et al. 2024). They are also the fundamental qualities of university education that distinguish it from other types of education, in light of the modern technology, innovation, and globalization in the present era (Abusharekh et al., 2019; Alfawaire & Atan, 2021). This has resulted in increased competition between universities at the local and global levels (Al-Hmaid, 2019). Universities today are one of the most vital elements in the progress of any country and can even be seen as a key factor for its development and advancement. Therefore, in order for

universities to achieve CA, they must benefit from knowledge, apply creativity in KM processes, apply strategies based on KM, and invest in human and material resources (Al-Badawy, 2017; Alfawaire & Atan, 2021; Marczewska et al. 2024).

Palestinian universities suffer from competition pressures among themselves (Abusharekh et al., 2019) due to the available number of higher education institutions and the diverse faculties offering numerous academic programs whether at bachelor, master, or Ph.D. (MOHE, 2023). In order to achieve success and permanence, universities must constantly improve, develop, innovate, advance, and keep abreast. More importantly, they must adopt KM to attain excellence, distinction, and competitiveness (Abu Naser et al., 2016; Alfawaire & Atan, 2021). The importance of KM lies in raising the level of the educational process, improving the performance and operations of higher education institutions (Elistia et al., 2024), and achieving competitiveness while meeting their objectives (Amer, 2016; Javed et al., 2024).

Despite the growing interest in KM and its application in higher education institutions in recent years as well as its importance in achieving CA in universities, there is still lack of research on this topic in developing countries (Alfawaire & Atan, 2021; Al-Hmaidly, 2019; Javed et al., 2024). Reviewing the literature shows that previous research has not addressed the perceptions of academics on KM, its practice, and its relationship with CA in new settings such as Palestinian universities. Given the importance of KM in universities and its implications for their development and permanence through the development of human capital that has become the fundamental pillar of CA, this study aims to investigate the role of knowledge management in achieving CA.

Research Purpose and Questions

This study aimed to investigate academics' perceptions of KM and its benefits, explore the degree of its implementation and the level of CA achievement, and identify the impact of KM application on achieving CA at Al-Aqsa University in Palestine. Thus, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. Do the academics know about knowledge management and does the university adopt it?

RQ2. What are the academics' perceptions of knowledge management benefits for the university?

RQ3. What is the degree of implementing knowledge management at Al-Aqsa University?

RQ4. What is the level of achieving competitive advantage at Al-Aqsa University?

RQ5. Is there any correlation between knowledge management implementation and competitive advantage achievement?

Research Significance

Knowledge management is increasingly acquiring acknowledgment as a main factor in organizational success due to its importance in organizational development, efficiency, innovation, competitiveness, and durability. Furthermore, it largely contributes to the individual's enrichment, enhancement, and distinction. Therefore, implementing KM in academic institutions is quite critical as it helps in their development, maintaining success, achieving competitiveness, continuing profitability, and meeting organizational objectives. Moreover, it helps academics themselves to enhance their knowledge, performance, teaching skills, innovation, and interaction, as well as enrich their experience and achieve their academic goals. The significance of this study arises from the fact that it seeks to provide the Palestinian universities in particular, and the Ministry of Higher Education in general with important information and findings about KM, and the role it can play in enhancing the CA of Palestinian universities. In addition, the study seeks to contribute to the existing literature about KM and CA in higher education.

Firstly. Literature Review

1. Knowledge Management

KM developed as a result of the input of various domains including organizational science, cognitive science, anthropology, sociology, library and information science, information and communication technology, education, storytelling, linguistics and writing, journalism and communication, and collaborative technologies (Skaik, 2016). Reviewing the literature reveals several definitions of knowledge management, Khoualdi and Binibrahim (2019, p. 96) defined it as “a management system that is helpful in enabling the organization to increase and manage the knowledge it possesses by facilitating the movement and flow of information among individuals”. It is also defined as the processes, tools, and behaviors that are jointly formulated and

performed by the patrons of the organization, to acquire, store, and distribute knowledge; to be reflected on business processes to reach the best applications with the intention of long-term competition and adaptation (Al-Kubaisy, 2005).

Meanwhile, Noordin et al. (2011, p. 2) defined it as an “approach to manage the essential and useful knowledge in an appropriate manner”, which leads to accessing and utilizing stored knowledge. Al-Zatma (2011) defined it as an ongoing dynamic process involving a range of activities and practices aimed at identifying, locating, developing, distributing, using, preserving, and facilitating knowledge retrieval, leading to higher performance, lower costs, and improved adaptation to the rapid change in the organization’s environment. It is also known as applying a collection of processes to improve organizational performance by creating, capturing, organizing, retrieving, disseminating, sharing, and using knowledge (Maponya, 2005). Similarly, Danish et al. (2014), indicated that KM refers to the application of systematic strategies to manage an organization’s knowledge in the best possible way. Al-Hmaidy (2019, p. 448) defined it as “a set of processes aimed at locating, acquiring, generating, organizing, storing, developing, and applying knowledge to achieve competitive advantage”.

1.1 Knowledge Management Benefits

The full implementation of knowledge management has significant benefits for the organization and its staff. Abdul Kalam (2004) emphasizes on the benefit of helping the organization gain insight and understanding from the employees’ experience. KM enhances the organization’s ability to learn from its environment, incorporate knowledge into its processes, as well as create new value for the organization by improving its efficiency, competency, and competitiveness (Chennamaneni, 2006).

Hijazi (2015) indicated several benefits including (i) providing knowledge in the organization and making it available to everyone to apply it to achieve strategic goals, (ii) relying on experiences to improve the work and decision-making process, (iii) extracting the knowledge, expertise, and skills of employees, and turn them into intellectual capital to be invested for the benefit of the organization, (iv) finding creative solutions for the problems faced by the organization, (v) spreading the culture of learning by creating an organizational environment that

encourages the exchange and sharing of knowledge among employees, and (vi) increasing the productivity and growth of the organization by providing employees with the opportunity to search for knowledge and utilize it in raising the efficiency of their work.

According to Obaid (2015), KM has many benefits including (1) building learning potentials and spreading a culture of knowledge, motivation, and competition, (2) ensuring the institution's effectiveness and transforming implicit knowledge into explicit knowledge, (3) maximizing the returns from intellectual capital through using the organization's inventions and knowledge, (4) working to collect smart ideas from the field, and disseminating best practices in the organization, (5) reaching ideal management based on the usage of available knowledge for the organization's advancement, (6) creating an organizational environment that encourages everyone to share knowledge to raise the level of their knowledge, and (7) attracting a greater intellectual capital to develop solutions for the problems facing the enterprise.

Meanwhile, Al-Ziyadat (2008) and Arqawi et al. (2018) stated other benefits including (a) simplifying processes and reducing costs by eliminating lengthy or unnecessary procedures, (b) improving customer service by reducing the time spent in providing the required services, (c) adopting creativity by encouraging the principle of free flow of ideas, (d) increasing financial return by marketing products and services more effectively, and (e) activating knowledge and intellectual capital to improve the delivery of services. Finally, Amer (2016) pointed out that the main benefit of KM is to provide knowledge to the organization and translate it into practical behavior that serves the organization's objectives.

To sum up, organizations can still gain the same benefits from KM even if they have different knowledge roadmaps, motivations for implementing KM strategies, or methods for gauging the effectiveness of KM techniques. Therefore, organizations must adopt KM to achieve success, competitiveness, and permanence.

1.2 Knowledge Management Importance

Knowledge management is one of the contemporary intellectual developments that concern staff who engage in knowledge activities. Asrar-ul-Haq and Anwar (2016) stressed that KM is as important as other assets and resources for the survival and success of the organization. The focus of KM is on ‘doing the right thing’ instead of ‘doing things right’ (Malhotra, 1998), making it possible to get the right information into the hands of the appropriate people at the time they need it to make the right decisions. Skaik (2016) stated that “as long as knowledge management seeks to make full use of the knowledge within the organization’s intellectual capital, while creating new knowledge in the process, then knowledge management is about capturing and utilizing the knowledge of the employees” (p. 61).

According to Abu Sultan (2013), in an era where knowledge has become a valuable resource for attaining scientific progress, the importance of KM lies in enhancing the organization’s ability to retain and improve its performance based on experience and knowledge, in addition to identifying, documenting, developing, participating in, and applying the required knowledge. In the meantime, Al-Abbas (2006) and Hamoud (2010) attributed KM importance to helping in disseminating information and knowledge among all individuals of the organization, which increases their empowerment; raising the level of performance and achieving the efficiency and effectiveness of the targeted accomplishment; being a strategic source that supports the organization in achieving its objectives both in the near and far times; increasing employees’ participation due to easy access to all information related to the organization, its objectives, and policy.

Madhi (2010) highlighted the importance of KM in the following: (a) it is an integrative systemic process of coordinating the organization’s various activities in the direction of achieving its objectives, (b) it allows the organization to identify, document, develop, share, use and evaluate the required knowledge, (c) it is a tool for active organizations to invest their intellectual capital, (d) it is a motivating tool for organizations to encourage the creative abilities of their human resources to create useful knowledge, (e) it contributes to stimulating organizations to renew themselves and face unstable environmental changes, (f) it provides an opportunity for organizations to gain a permanent CA, by enabling the organization to adopt more innovations in the form of introducing new

goods and services, and (g) it enables the organizations to take advantage of all tangible and intangible assets.

KM offers any organization an outline within which to view all of its processes of generating, disseminating, and using knowledge to focus on the sustainability and endurance of the organization. Every aspect of the organization is handled with a simple approach to KM, applying both general and specific principles. The importance of leadership, strategy, and teamwork are general principles, whereas optimizing intellectual capital and acknowledging the role of knowledge in innovation are specific principles (Skaik, 2016). Therefore, KM is seen as an integral component of the organization's strategy of using individuals' expertise to create a sustainable CA. Indeed, it increases the organization's CA making it a strong weapon (Al-Abbas, 2006).

Lastly, there are many components to innovative and creative KM processes, but they are all held captive by knowledge due to being the primary element and the endless source of inspiration for these processes through management, creation, exchange, storage, and application, particularly when it comes to CA.

2. Competitive Advantage

In international trade, the notion of comparative advantage has expanded to include the term competitive advantage, which is based on the idea of relative availability of production factors. (Abu Sharekh et al., 2019). To better understand CA and its importance for organizations, a review of its definitions will be presented. Assaf (2015, p. 5) defined it as "an outstanding skill, technology or resource that allows an organization to perform its business in a way that is difficult for its competitors to imitate, by practicing activities at the lowest cost level". Hitt et al. (2001) referred to it as the possibilities and resources that will give the organization distinction from its competitors, and it is deepened by the functional skills of the organization such as marketing, manufacturing, research, and development.

According to Al-Oss (2019), CA is the organization's effectiveness and distinction from other organizations over a certain period of time. (Awwad, 2010) defined it as the organization's ability to ensure that it is superior to its competitors, and this is dependent upon the senior management decisions' quality. It is also the organization's utilization of its current resources to boost its performance and efficiency as well as its adoption of novel strategies to create a CA (Taherparvar et al., 2014).

Further, Abu Bakr (2020) described it as the organization's ability to formulate and apply strategies that make it better than others in the same field, and this can be achieved through the best utilization of technical, material, and organizational resources; in addition to the capabilities, competencies, and knowledge of an organization.

CA is also defined as the unique long-term position the organization develops through performing its activities in a distinctive effective manner, and exploiting its internal strengths towards providing super valuable benefits to its customers, that its competitors cannot offer (Tampoe & Macmillan, 2000). It is also defined as the organization's ability to outperform its competitors, leading to the satisfaction of its employees and customers, and achieving long-term excellence, distinction, and progress (Shaban, 2011). Al-Salman (2014) believed that the organization's CA varies based on the type of service or business offered; thus, the organization can change the value of inputs to very high-value outputs, exploit opportunities, and avoid external risks so as to create advantages that make it unique.

2.1 Competitive Advantage Importance and Characteristics

Having a competitive advantage is a fundamental goal pursued by organizations in light of the rapid transformations and changes in the era of globalization, as CA means the ability of an organization to accomplish any activities that are distinct or different from its competitors. In general, creating CA is one of the best means that any organization must employ to put itself in a position of relative safety from fierce competition in the market (Khoualdi & Binibrahim, 2019).

In terms of CA characteristics, they include (i) relative rather than absolute, i.e. achieved by comparison, (ii) leads to superiority and preference over competitors, (iii) originates from the organization and brings value to it, (iv) reflected on the efficiency of the organization's performance, (v) achieved for a long period of time when developed and renewed, (vi) derived from the customer's needs, and (vii) must influence customers to understand the organization's preferences and motivate them to buy from it (Al-Atoum, 2009; Abd Al-Ghafour, 2015). Meanwhile, Al-Oss (2019) indicated that the most important characteristics of the CA are determined by the following: (a) derived from the customer's wishes and needs, (b) makes an important contribution to the success of the organization, (c) provides the unique fit between the organization's resources and opportunities in the external

environment, (d) provides a base for future improvements, and (e) is long-termed and difficult to imitate by competitors.

2.2 Achieving Competitive Advantage

According to researchers (Abu Sharekh et al., 2019; Al-Sheikh & Bader, 2004; Hill et al., 2014), four basic methods guarantee achieving CA, which are:

1. Superior efficiency: It relates to input costs for the production of specific outputs, where high productivity, appropriate organizational structure, and the organization's control systems help achieve high efficiency compared to competitors. The higher the organization's productive efficiency compared to others; the more can the organization achieve CA.
2. Superior quality: It is measured by customer satisfaction with products and services, and it is achieved by providing high-quality products and services that meet the customer's needs and demands. Given that quality is one of the highest entry points for achieving the organization's CA and prestigious reputation among other organizations.
3. Superior creativity: It means continuous renewal of services to keep pace with customers' needs, as well as any creativity and innovation in the organization's management methods and strategies. It is achieved by introducing new distinctive products or services that outperform those of competitors, given that creativity and innovation lead to the organization's CA.
4. Superior response: It means giving the customers greater value through continuous development and improvement in the operations, products, and services in a manner that meets customers' needs. It is achieved by accurate knowledge of customers' needs and working to meet them, which enables the organization to achieve competitiveness.

2.3 Competitive Advantage in Higher Education

Competitive advantage in higher education can be defined as the ability of higher education institutions to provide high-quality educational and research services by adopting and applying specific strategies that contribute to the achievement of CA (Al-Hmaid, 2019). Achieving CA in higher education results in universities being more effective and efficient. This will enable them to meet the requirements of the society and labor market by graduating students possessing knowledge, creativity, and innovation skills (Al-Hmaid, 2019).

The competitiveness of universities in the third millennium depends primarily on their knowledge stock, which is represented by the implicit knowledge of academics and administrative staff, the explicit knowledge gained, and the university's ability to use the knowledge it possesses in modernizing and developing the educational system in all its components (Waih, 2013). Besides, the global transformations and changes in the current age such as globalization, and the information and communication revolution that led to the emergence of a knowledge-based economy have called for paying attention to the importance of CA in higher education (Al-Hmaid, 2019).

Creating a knowledge-based economy through empowering human minds with 21st century skills calls for attention to education and investment in human capital to create intellectual capital. Moreover, the emergence of some modern management concepts such as strategic planning and total quality management increased interest in providing high-quality education by applying comprehensive quality standards to the entire components of higher education institutions (Waih, 2013). Applying such standards will guarantee continuous improvement, which will lead to a good reputation and achieve a CA for the university.

Undoubtedly, universities all over the world aim to be centers of excellence where knowledge is acquired and distributed to those who need it via exceptional teaching, learning, research, and engagement (Ogbogu, 2013). Therefore, the increased competition between universities at the local, regional, or international levels for a good scientific reputation and a prestigious place in the scientific community makes it imperative to achieve CA (Waih, 2013). Given the quick changes brought on by globalization, the knowledge-based economy, and the technological revolution, universities must reassess how they operate and how to achieve a CA to keep up with the 21st century rapid development (Alfawaire & Atan, 2021).

3. Knowledge Management and Competitive Advantage

One of the areas that still has to be achieved is the relationship between knowledge management and competitive advantage, but to do so, managers must be convinced of the significant strategic advantages of such a connection (Abu Sharekh et al., 2019). The relationship between KM and achieving CA has redesigned and rebuilt the concept of value and is currently developing innovative structures to make the most of resources (Ben Omar, 2021). The value of a human resource is

that knowledge improves processes products, and services, so attention must be paid to human resource, as the organization's most valuable asset, while providing sufficient investments to maximize the productivity of that resource (Amer, 2016).

KM offers several opportunities for organizations to gain CA in developed countries by creating new technologies and techniques (Al-Zamil, 2003). Thus, “it contributed to cost reduction, profits increase, and led to creating knowledge industry” (Skaik, 2016, p. 60). Hence, properly applying KM certainly leads to CA. Both public and private sector organizations continue to adopt KM strategies and processes to attain success, competitiveness, and sustainability. The focus has indeed increasingly been on improving competitiveness in service sectors like banking, telecommunications, health, and education.

As stated by Ben Omar (2021, p. 2) “Because of knowledge management, achieving CA, depends on the indefinite organic component of knowledge”. Thus, Dassy (2012) claimed that knowledge has become more valuable, and the knowledge of any intellectual and professional individual has become at the top of the list of enhancing CA. So human capital must be considered the most valuable resource of the organization, as it generates ideas, innovations, objectives, and strategies, and makes decisions. In this regard, Khoualdi & Binibrahim (2019) indicated that since higher education institutions heavily rely on producing and disseminating knowledge, KM helps them to achieve a CA.

Building or achieving CAs in any organization requires the adoption of KM, and the creation of knowledge capital, so as to increase its ability to innovate and improve processes and outputs (Al-Oss, 2019). According to Al-Ziyadat (2008), is difficult to imitate CA based on knowledge, because the knowledge on which it is based represents the strategic characteristics of the organization. In addition, for a resource to become strategic and have a CA, it must be valuable and scarce, cannot be imitated easily, and cannot be replaced.

Such mentioned characteristics are available in knowledge, because the value of human capital is demonstrated by the fact that knowledge leads to improvement in processes and products, and knowledge is scarce because it is linked to the accumulation of individuals' expertise and applied knowledge (Al-Oss, 2019). Attention must be paid to human resources through recruitment, competence selection, and career planning, under the umbrella of strategic planning aimed at achieving

and maintaining the organization's CA (Amer, 2016). Having said that, adopting the right KM strategies will enable universities to achieve their goal of competitiveness (Abu Naser et al., 2016).

4. Previous Studies

Reviewing previous studies that aimed at identifying the role of KM in achieving CA in different organizations including higher education institutions shows that they revealed the significant role of KM in achieving CA. The results were attributed to its effective role in improving the quality of existing services, developing new services, and keeping up with progress in order to build human capital capable of achieving CA. The rest of this section reviews these studies.

In higher education, Abu Sharekh et al. (2019) studied the relationship between KM and CA at Al-Quds Open University in Palestine surveying faculty and administrative staff. They found a positive relationship between KM processes and CA, i.e. the higher the degree of applying KM, the greater the degree of CA. Also, Abd Al-Ghafour (2015) examined the relationship between KM and achieving CA in Gaza Strip universities from students' perspective. The results found a strong relationship between KM and CA, and found that universities provide KM requirements in many dimensions including manpower, organizational culture, IT, and organizational leadership.

Al-Hmaidly (2019) explored the role of KM in achieving CA at Taif University from the faculty staff's perspective. The findings revealed that the level of KM and CA achievement is moderate and that KM strongly influences CA. Moreover, Ibn Qifla (2016) studied the relationship between KM processes and achieving CA in Yemeni universities from the perspectives of senior management members and faculty staff. The study found a significant statistical relationship between KM processes and CA, moderate practice of these processes, and moderate level of CA.

Mohammad's (2010) study explored the impact of prevailing KM processes on achieving CA at the Jordanian Communications Group. The study found that KM highly impacts CA, and found statistically significant differences in the impact of KM processes on CA attributable to duration of service; while there were no differences attributable to the job title. Ben Omar (2021) examined the degree of implementing KM in the Libyan Foreign Bank, and the relationship between KM and CA. The

study found moderate implementation of KM and a positive relationship between KM and CA.

Secondly. Methodology

It is essential to select the most appropriate research method, sampling technique, data collection, and analysis techniques to achieve the main objective of any research. For this study, the selection was mainly influenced by the nature of the phenomenon under investigation, the research questions, the setting, and the sample (Sekeran, 2003). The quantitative research methodology proved to be the most suitable for conducting this study based on the research purpose and questions. This study adopted a quantitative descriptive approach using a cross-sectional survey design. This type of research is referred to as an opinion poll, which usually consists of simple questions that give numerical results, enabling the researcher to give correct explanations by comparing those numbers (Skaik, 2016). A cross-sectional study describes the characteristics of the population, where samples are drawn from the relevant population simultaneously and within rather a short period of time and studied at once (Alotaibi & Skaik, 2019).

1. Sample

The sample consisted of academics working at the faculty of management and finance at Al-Aqsa University in Gaza, Palestine. As for the sample selection, the researchers used a purposive sampling technique since the study targeted academics working at the Faculty of Management and Finance. Purposive sampling was used “to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information” (Kelly, 2010, p. 317). Moreover, purposive sampling is a technique for locating and choosing cases to efficiently utilize the few research resources available (Palinkas et al., 2015). The sample was composed of 39 academics at the said faculty.

2. Instrument

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from the targeted population. It was developed from previous studies. The questionnaire consisted of four sections, the first collected the participants' personal information (gender, age, level of education, years of experience). The second section asked if they know KM and if the university applies it, the third section was about KM importance and application, while the fourth section was about CA. The items were designed using a five-point Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree, 2=

disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree). A copy of the questionnaire is enclosed in Appendix A. To measure the questionnaire validity, it was shared with a group of arbitrators for content comprehensibility, clarity, and wording. For reliability, internal consistency was measured using Cronbach Alpha coefficient value 0 - 1 indicating zero to perfect internal consistency (Skaik, 2016). The Cronbach Alpha value was 0.95 implying high internal consistency, which means the questionnaire was appropriate.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection phase took place during the second semester of the academic year 2022/2023 and lasted one week. Once the participants finished answering the questionnaire, the data were transferred into SPSS to conduct the required statistical tests. To calculate the sample personal information and answer research questions one to four, descriptive statistics including mean scores, standard deviations, and percentages, were used. Meanwhile, to answer research question five, a bivariate Pearson Correlation was used.

Thirdly. Results and Discussion

Starting, the section displays the personal information of the 39 academics who participated in the study. As seen in Table 1, the majority were males aged between 34 and 55 years, holding Ph.D.

Table N°01: Participants’ personal information

Item	Category	No.	%
Gender	Male	35	89.7
	Female	4	10.3
Age	23–33 years	3	7.7
	34–44 years	24	61.5
	45–55 years	11	28.2
	Above 55 years	1	2.6
Education	Bachelor	1	2.6
	Master	11	28.2
	Ph.D.	27	69.2
Years of experience	0–10	3	7.7
	10–20	19	48.7
	20–30	15	38.5
	More than 30	2	5.1

RQ1 ‘Do the academics know about knowledge management and does the university adopt it?’, the results displayed in Table 2 show that 89.7% of the participants know about KM, while only 5.1% said they either do not or may have heard of it. Moreover, 46.2% of the participants answered the university adopts KM, meanwhile 23. 1% replied no to this question. The results reflect that the academics are well aware of KM, which may be attributed to the fact that they work in the faculty of management and finance so it is self-evident that they know about KM. However, when it comes to the university, it does not seem like there is a culture of KM as inferred from the academics’ answer.

Table N°02: Participants’ familiarity with KM

	Yes	No	May be
Know about knowledge management	89. 7%	5.1%	5.1%
The university adopts knowledge management	46.2%	23. 1%	30. 8%

RQ2 ‘What are the academics’ perceptions of knowledge management benefits for the university?’, the results show that most of the participants agreed with the given statements. The mean scores for the six statements ranged between 3.62 and 3.97, with the highest mean scores for the sixth and third statements. Meanwhile, as seen in Table 3, the overall mean score for all the statements was 3.77, which is high revealing the participants’ positive perceptions of KM benefits. The results indicate that the academics are well aware of KM and the benefits it can bring to the university. This result is expected since the academics answered being aware of KM in the first part of the previous question, so definitely, they have positive perceptions of its benefits.

Table N°03: Participants’ perceptions of KM benefits

#	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
1	KM builds learning potentials and spreads a culture of knowledge, motivation, and competition	3	5	5	17	9	3.62	1.206
2	KM spreads a culture of learning and knowledge by creating an environment that encourages knowledge exchange	2	5	4	17	11	3.77	1.158
3	KM ensures the university’s excellence and distinction and transforms implicit knowledge into explicit knowledge	1	5	7	11	15	3.87	1.151
4	KM simplifies processes and reduces costs by eliminating lengthy or unnecessary procedures	0	5	7	19	8	3.77	0.931
5	KM provides and disseminates knowledge, translating it into practical behavior that serves the university's goals	3	6	4	16	10	3.62	1.248
6	KM creates new value for the university by improving its academic competencies, scientific level, and rank	2	4	5	10	18	3.97	1.224
	Total						3.77	1.153

RQ3 ‘What is the degree of implementing knowledge management at Al-Aqsa University?’, the results show that the participants’ answers varied between neutral, agree, and strongly agree. As seen in Table 4, the mean scores ranged between 2.85 and 3.33, where the highest mean scores were for the seventh, second, sixth, fourth, and eleventh statements. The overall mean score for all the statements was 3.03, which indicates that the university highly implements KM. However, it is noticeable that although the participants’ answer to the first question was that they believe the university adopts KM, their answers to this question show they are either not sure or somehow agree on implementing KM.

Previous studies (Al-Hmaidy, 2019; Ben Omar, 2021; Ibn Qifla, 2016) that explored the level of implementing KM found a moderate degree of KM application, while the result in the current study was high.

Table N°04: Degree of applying KM

#	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
1	The university adopts KM practices and processes	4	10	9	16	0	2.95	1.050
2	The university publishes a strategic vision for KM	3	7	13	12	4	3.18	1.097
3	The university provides an appropriate budget to support KM processes	4	8	16	10	1	2.90	0.995
4	The university is keen to spread knowledge sharing culture among academics	4	7	13	12	3	3.08	1.109
5	The university supports knowledge sharing through activities, events, etc.	3	11	11	10	4	3.03	1.135
6	The university encourages academics to develop their knowledge	5	8	8	13	5	3.13	1.260
7	The university facilitates access to the university's knowledge bases	5	5	7	16	6	3.33	1.264
8	The university holds courses to train academics on KM systems	3	11	12	12	1	2.92	1.010
9	The university provides high-quality computers and devices to support KM	4	10	14	10	1	2.85	1.014
10	The university provides ready-made software with high specifications that help spread knowledge	2	12	14	9	2	2.92	0.984
11	The university is characterized by providing high-quality fast electronic services to facilitate obtaining and dissemination of necessary knowledge	6	6	12	9	6	3.08	1.285
	Total						3.03	1.210

RQ4 ‘What is the level of achieving competitive advantage at Al-Aqsa University?’, as seen in Table 5, the mean scores ranged between 2.87 and 3.64, where the highest mean scores were for the eighth, ninth, second, and sixth, statements. The overall mean score for all the statements was 3.23, which indicates that the level of CA at the university is high. The results show that the participants’ answers again varied between neutral, agree, and strongly agree, with moderate mean scores, which reflects the participants believe the university needs to work on its CA. Previous studies (Al-Hmaid, 2019; Ibn Qifla, 2016) that explored the level of CA found it was moderately achieved, yet the result in the current study was high.

Table N°05: Level of achieving CA

#	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	S.D.
1	The university supports new and innovative ideas to achieve competitive advantage	5	12	3	17	2	2.97	1.224
2	The university encourages creativity and innovation among academics to achieve competitive advantage	2	8	9	16	4	3.31	1.080
3	The university is developing new administrative methods that distinguish it from other universities	6	9	12	8	4	2.87	1.218
4	The university is interested in increasing the efficiency of administrative processes and supporting a continuous development process	2	9	10	15	3	3.21	1.056
5	The university adopts a development policy through providing information	4	10	11	11	3	2.97	1.135
6	The university develops new distinctive courses to serve the labor market	3	7	8	17	4	3.31	1.127
7	The university provides distinctive educational services to compete with other universities	4	8	11	13	3	3.08	1.133

8	The university supports scientific research and development to compete with other universities	0	6	9	17	7	3.64	0.959
9	The university seeks to develop its academics by encouraging conferences, scientific research, and necessary events	3	7	8	16	5	3.33	1.155
10	The university is characterized by providing better electronic services than other universities	7	7	8	14	3	2.97	1.267
11	The university provides a quality guide and adheres to all international quality standards	10	4	9	12	4	2.90	1.373
	Total						3.23	1.157

RQ5 ‘Is there any correlation between knowledge management implementation and competitive advantage achievement?’, the result of the Pearson correlation coefficient for KM implementation and CA achievement is displayed in Table 6, showing a statistically significant linear correlation ($r=.864$, $p < .001$). The result indicates that KM and CA are positively correlated, which means that greater KM is associated with greater CA. This result is consistent with those of previous studies (Abu Sharekh et al., 2019; Al-Hmaid, 2019; Ibn Qifla, 2016), which were also conducted in universities targeting faculty staff, employees, or students.

Table N°06: Pearson correlation results

		CA	KM
CA	Pearson Correlation	1	.864**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	39	39
KM	Pearson Correlation	.864**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	39	39

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Conclusion

Developing knowledge management policies and strategies as well as adopting its processes and practices would definitely help higher education institutions achieve their strategic goals, become local educational hubs, and guarantee longevity and progress. Furthermore, giving KM more attention due to its great relationship with the achievement of CA is a must in higher education institutions, especially in light of the race among universities to be among the best in the world rank. Consequently, higher education institutions would reach the stage of excellence and distinction, and attract the elite of academics and students. In addition, universities and higher education institutions would achieve CA through contributing to science and knowledge by conducting research, establishing studies and research centers, and equipping students with the necessary skills. This study sought to provide a range of findings aimed at developing mechanisms for achieving CA through KM and contribute to attracting researchers' attention to conducting further studies in the field of KM and its relationship with CA in higher education sector.

This study investigated the role of KM in achieving CA in one Palestinian university in Gaza City targeting academics working at one faculty only. Other universities or faculties are beyond the scope of this study due to constraints in time, human, and financial resources.

Finally, the researchers recommend that the university (i) provide incentives for academics to participate in scholarly works and scientific research which will improve the university's CA; (ii) avoid bureaucratic administrative methods and follow modern management methods; (iii) subscribe with scientific databases to facilitate access to scientific journals; and (iv) allocate budget to support KM processes.

References

1. Abd Al-Ghafour, S. (2015). *Requirements of knowledge management and its role in achieving competitive advantage in Gaza Strip universities*. Unpublished Master Thesis. Alaqsa University.
2. Abdul Kalam, A. P. (2004). Digital library and its multi dimensions. President of India's Speech at *the Inauguration of International Conference on Digital Libraries (ICDL) - 2004, New Delhi: February 24, 2004*.
3. Abu Bakr, M. M. (2020). Human resources: Introduction for competitive advantage. University House.

4. Abu Naser, S. S., Al Shobaki, M. J., & Amuna, Y. M. (2016). Promoting knowledge management components in the Palestinian higher education institutions-a comparative study. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 73, 42-53.
5. Abusharekh, N. H., Ahmad, H. R., Arqawi, S. M., Abu-Naser, S. S., & Al Shobaki, M. J. (2019). Knowledge management processes and their role in achieving competitive advantage at Al-Quds open university. *International Journal of Academic Accounting, Finance & Management Research*, 3(9), 1-18.
6. Abu Sultan, T. M. (2013). *The reality of knowledge management processes in Palestinian university libraries in Gaza governorates from the perspective of postgraduate students and ways to develop them*. Master Thesis. Al-Azhar University, Gaza
7. Al-Abbas. H. (2006). Alignment of higher education with the age of knowledge management and economy. *Cybrarians Journal*, 11, 39-50.
8. Al-Oss, J. (2019). The role of knowledge management in achieving the competitive advantage in the Syrian public universities. *Tartous University Journal for Research and Scientific Studies -Economic and Legal Sciences Series*, 3(1), 9-27.
9. Al-Atoum, M. (2009). *The organization's mission and its impact on achieving competitive advantage: Field study on the Jordanian pharmaceutical industry sector*. Unpublished Master Thesis. Middle East University, Jordan,
10. Alfawaire, F., & Atan, T. (2021). The effect of strategic human resource and knowledge management on sustainable competitive advantages at Jordanian universities: The mediating role of organizational innovation. *Sustainability*, 13(15), 8445. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13158445>
11. Al-Hmaid, M. H. (2019). The role of knowledge management in achieving the competitive advantage in the Saudi universities: Empirical study at University of Taif. *Scientific Journal of the Faculty of Education - University of Asyut*, 35(5), 441-480
12. Al-Kubaisy, S. (2005). *Knowledge management*. Arab Organization for Administrative Development.
13. Alotaibi, S., & Skaik, H. (2019). University digital library usage: A case study from Malaysia. *Modern Directions in Libraries and Information*, 26(51), 179-211.
14. Al-Salman, A. R. (2014). *The role of strategic planning in achieving competitive advantage*. Unpublished doctoral Thesis. Suez Canal University, Egypt
15. Al-Sheikh, F. N., & Bader, F. M. (2004). The relationship between information systems and competitive advantage in the Jordanian pharmaceutical sector. *General Administration Quarterly*, 44(3), 627-668. doi: 10.36715/0328-044-003-003

16. Al-Zamil, R. (2003). Knowledge management for a competitive Arab society. *Al-Jazirah Telecom and Digital World Magazine*, 16. <http://www.al-jazirah.com/digimag/13042003/agtes50.htm>
17. Al-Zatma, N. M. (2011). *Knowledge management and its impact on performance excellence: Empirical study on middle and technical colleges and Institutes operating in the Gaza Strip*. Unpublished Master Thesis. Islamic University, Gaza
18. Al-Ziyadat, M. (2008). *Contemporary trends in knowledge management*. Dar Safa' for Publishing and distribution.
19. Amer, H. F. (2016). *The role of knowledge management in enhancing the competitive advantage in the Palestinian universities - Northern provinces*. Master Thesis. Al-Quds University, Palestine.
20. Arqawi, S. M., Al-Hila, A. A., Abu Naser, S. S., & Al Shobaki, M. J. (2018). The Impact of Obstacles to the Application of Knowledge Management to Performance Excellence. *International Journal of Engineering and Information Systems (IJEAIS)*, 2(10), 32-50. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3278081>
21. Asrar-ul-Haq, M., & Anwar, S. (2016). A systematic review of knowledge management and knowledge sharing: Trends, issues, and challenges. *Cogent Business & Management*, 3(1), 1-17.
22. Awwad, A. S. (2010). The influence of tactical flexibilities on the competitive advantage of a firm: An empirical study on Jordanian industrial companies. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 6(1), 45-60.
23. Ben Omar, G. H. (2021). *Role of knowledge management in achieving competitive advantages in Libyan foreign participation banks*. Master Thesis. Near East University, Nicosia.
24. Chennamaneni, A. (2006). *Determinants of knowledge sharing behaviors: Developing and testing an integrated theoretical model*. Doctoral dissertation. The University of Texas at Arlington.
25. Danish, R. Q., Asghar, A., & Asghar, S. (2014). Factors of knowledge management in banking sector of Pakistan. *Journal of Management Information System and E-commerce*, 1(1), 41-49.
26. Dassey, W. H. (2012). The role of knowledge management in achieving competitive advantage: An applied study in Syrian government banks. *Researcher's Journal*, 2012(11), 165-176.
27. Dudovskiy, J. (2022). *Purposive sampling*. <https://research-methodology.net/sampling-in-primary-data-collection/purposive-sampling/>
28. Elistia, E., Purwana, D., Sebayang, K. D., Effendi, M. S., & Yohana, C. (2024). The role of knowledge management and dynamic capabilities on sustainable competitive advantage in Indonesian private higher

- education. *Qubahan Academic Journal*, 4(3), 263-284.
<https://doi.org/10.48161/qaj.v4n3a701>
29. Hamoud. K. (2010). *Knowledge organization*. Dar Safa' for Publishing and distribution.
30. Hijazi, R. (2015). *Patterns of organizational culture prevailing in Palestinian universities in Gaza governorates and their relationship to knowledge management*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Islamic University, Gaza.
31. Hill, C. W., Jones, G. R., & Schilling, M. A. (2014). *Strategic management: Theory & cases: An integrated approach*. Cengage Learning.
32. Hitt, M. A., Ireland, R. D., & Hoskisson, R. E. (2001). *Strategic management: Competitiveness and globalization*. South.
33. Javed, A., Latif, K. F., Sahibzada, U. F., & Aslam, N. (2024). Knowledge management towards sustainable competitive advantage in higher education: an analysis of productive and counter-productive behaviors. *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, 2051-6614
34. Kelly S. (2010). Qualitative interviewing techniques and styles. In. I. Bourgeault, R. Dingwall, R. de Vries (eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative methods in health research* (pp. 307-326). Sage Publications.
35. Khoualdi, K., & Binibrahim, H. (2019). Knowledge management in banking sector and its impact on competitive advantage: An applied study to banks in Jeddah Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Computer Science and Network Security*, 19(5), 95-102.
36. Madhi. I. (2010). *The role of knowledge management in ensuring the quality of higher education: Case study of the Islamic University of Gaza*. Master's thesis. Islamic University Gaza.
37. Malhotra, Y. (1998, February 19). Knowledge management, knowledge organizations & knowledge workers: A view from the front lines. *Mail Business Newspaper*. <http://www.brint.com/interview/maeil.htm>
38. Maponya, P. M. (2005). *Knowledge management practices in academic libraries: A case study of the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg Libraries*. Doctoral dissertation, Loughborough University.
39. Marczevska, M., Weresa, M. A., & Lachowicz, M. (2024). Towards creativity and innovation in universities: Study on Central and Eastern Europe. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, 15(1), 1363-1385.
40. Matta, N., & Saad, I. (2012). Guest editorial. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, 10, 299-300. doi:10.1057/kmrp.2012.58
41. Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) (2023). *Palestinian Universities and Colleges*. <https://www.mohe.pna.ps/Higher-Education/Institutions/Universities>
42. Noordin, M. F., Othman, R., & Zakaria, N. A. (2011). Peopleware & heartware – The philosophy of knowledge management. *Paper presented*

- at the International Conference on Research and Innovation in Information Systems (ICRIIS), November 23-24, 2011, Kuala Lumpur. <http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?arnumber=06125675>
43. Obaid, G. (2015). *Dimensions of knowledge management and its relationship to decision-making: A field study on commercial banks in the Gaza Strip*. Unpublished master's thesis. Al-Azhar University, Gaza
 44. Ogbogu, C. O. (2013). Policy issues in the administration of higher education in Nigeria. *World Journal of Education*, 3(1), 32-38.
 45. Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and policy in mental health and mental health services research*, 42, 533-544.
 46. Sahoo, S., Kumar, A. and Upadhyay, A. (2023). How do green knowledge management and green technology innovation impact corporate environmental performance? Understanding the role of green knowledge acquisition. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 32(1), 551-569, doi: 10.1002/bse.3160
 47. Sekaran, U. (2003). *Research methods for business: A skill building approach* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
 48. Shaban, M. (2011). *Intellectual capital and its role in achieving the competitive advantage of the Palestinian cellular communications company Jawwal: A case study*. Unpublished Master Thesis. Islamic University, Gaza,
 49. Skaik, H. (2016). *Academics' knowledge sharing behaviour in United Arab Emirates*. LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, Germany.
 50. Skaik, H., & Othman, R. (2018). Exploring the determinants affecting academics' knowledge-sharing behavior in United Arab Emirates public universities. In W. B. Lee & F. Sabetzadeh (Eds.), *Contemporary knowledge and systems science* (pp. 151-191). IGI Global.
 51. Taherparvar, N., Esmaeilpour, R., & Dostar, M. (2014). Customer knowledge management, innovation capability and business performance: A case study of the banking industry. *Journal of knowledge management*, 18(3), 591- 610. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JKM-11-2013-0446>
 52. Tampoe, M., & Macmillan, H. (2000). Strategic management, process, content and implementation. *International Journal of Business Ethics and Governance*, 79-103.
 53. Waih, M. A. (2013). The requirements for intellectual capital development to achieve universities' competitive advantage: A field study at Banha University. *Journal of College of Education*, 24(95), 239-244.