

THE NEED TO RECONCEPTUALIZE KNOWLEDGE AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN KENYA: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Abstract

The primary goal of this systematic literature review is to explore how knowledge management (KM) has been conceptualized in the Kenyan context. The analysis reveals challenges in operationalizing KM practices due to poor coordination and issues with KM infrastructure. At the heart of this problem lies a foundational problem—the lack of a local and African understanding and conceptualization of KM. The systematic literature review includes 32 research articles published in scientific journals. The results reveal that Kenyan scholars focusing on KM have yet to define the meaning of knowledge and KM based on African philosophy and epistemology.

Keywords: Explicit knowledge; Tacit knowledge; African philosophy; Codification; Personalization.

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1. Introduction

KM has become a buzzword in the Kenyan corporate world. In fact, Dr. Mohammed Omar, a director in the Vision 2030 Delivery Secretariat (Economic Pillar), indicates Kenya's desire to become a knowledge-based economy by 2030. He explains that in such an economy, skills, knowledge, and technology would play a considerable role in the overall economic growth and competitiveness compared to other factors of production, including capital, labor, and natural resources (Omar, 2020). The State Department of Planning (2020) also emphasizes the importance of KM in Kenya, highlighting knowledge as a valuable resource with the potential for socio-economic development, sound governance, and effective service delivery.

Scholars in the country have also explored KM and its implications for Kenya's economy and companies. For example, Langat and Kimutai (2023) have explained how KM can help address some challenges within the Kenyan tea sector. Onjolo (2025) examined how KM can moderate the relationship between intellectual capital and overall employee performance within the Kenyan public sector. Besides, Ndiege and Wamuyu (2019) conducted investigations into the adoption and application of KM principles in Kenyan counties, reporting that these practices were informal, isolated, uncoordinated, and rarely communicated and documented. Furthermore, the study by Ndiege and Wamuyu (2019) concluded that Kenya, particularly county governments, lacked adequate policy frameworks to support various KM practices.

Kenyan scholars have made considerable attempts to explain why KM practices have failed to take root in public and private enterprises within the country. For example, Ondari-Okemwa and Smith (2009) suggested that bureaucratic systems and a lack of incentives were primarily responsible for the lack of knowledge creation and sharing. Besides, since their study focused on the public sector, the author suggested that civil servants continually resist KM practices, given that they believe knowledge hoarding increases their value and enhances their competitiveness in their workplaces. In complete agreement, Mosoti and Masheka (2010) contend that people are disposed to hoard knowledge. The study partly attributes the failure to support knowledge sharing and motivate employees to share knowledge with poor leadership. Murumba et al. (2020) blame

the low adoption of information and communication technology in implementing KM practices.

The systematic literature review intends to assess whether knowledge and KM have been conceptualized using the African philosophy in the Kenyan context. It is inspired by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), who emphasized the need for nations to consider their local understanding of knowledge and how it can be applied to organizations to thrive amid global uncertainties. Scholars Nansubuga and Munene (2020) have urged organizations and experts in KM to embrace the Ubuntu episteme in defining KM and operationalizing it within their systems. In Malawi, Kanyundo et al. (2023) suggest that KM operationalization has been hindered by firms not understanding its importance, hence the need for a locally based solution. Fombad (2024) has focused on how KM, which utilizes indigenous knowledge, can help combat climate change challenges in South Africa. Studies in the Kenyan context, such as those by Otswana et al. (2025) and Chambon et al. (2025), have focused on utilizing local knowledge to address emerging issues, including threats to reef fishes and climate change.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Conceptualization of Knowledge

For centuries, people have attempted to define the meaning of knowledge. Consequently, the explanation of what knowledge means is rooted in the traditions of a specific society. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) contrasted the meaning of knowledge based on Western and Japanese traditions. One of the most famous philosophers who attempted to define knowledge is Plato, who described knowledge as a justified true belief. Plato suggested that this required a knower to be able to give an account. In this explanation, Plato implied that knowledge requires reason, which is particularly essential when a knower is questioned (Hoitenga, 1991). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) critique this simple definition of knowledge by implying that it is far from perfect based on its logic. According to these authors, the pursuit of knowledge in Western society is marked by skepticism, necessitating numerous philosophers to search for methods to establish the ultimate truth of the concept of knowledge beyond a doubt.

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) affirm that the Western philosophy approach to knowledge can be categorized into rationalism and empiricism. The rationalistic approach contends that actual knowledge is not the outcome of our sensory experiences, but rather the result of ideal mental processes. Based on this explanation, these authors suggest that some Western philosophers recognize the existence of knowledge that cannot and does not require justification by sensory experiences. In contrast, these authors note that empiricism posits no prior knowledge and that sensory experiences are the sole source of knowledge. The view holds that everything in the world has an intrinsically objective existence. Undeniably, these two epistemologies differ sharply in their understanding of what constitutes the actual source of knowledge.

Hunt (2003) attempts to explain his understanding of word knowledge in his study. According to this author, knowledge can be understood as a characteristic that influences behavior. Hunt (2003) suggests that since people cannot directly observe knowledge, it can only be inferred from observing performance. He adopts Plato's definition of knowledge by stating that knowledge refers to actual and justified beliefs. However, this author, oblivious of the philosophical complexities that the word 'true' presents, adopts the word 'correct' to define and indicate the agreed-upon and explicit criteria standard among scientists and researchers. Based on this, it is argued that a false or incorrect belief cannot be considered knowledge.

As Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) argue, the philosophy that scholars or experts in KM adopt is crucial in operationalizing this concept within their organizations. For instance, their book highlights how the adoption of Western philosophy undermines knowledge creation and sharing in Western nations, in contrast to Japanese philosophy, which has enabled Japanese firms to create companies that thrive in uncertain environments by constantly learning and adopting strategies that make them more competitive. The above explanations suggest that a potential weakness in how KM is operationalized in Kenya (and to a large extent, Africa) may lie in scholars and professionals' failure to adopt an understanding of KM that is well understood by workers in their respective corporations.

In African epistemology, philosophers have carefully distinguished

between knowledge and belief. In this context, knowledge is initially gained through observation, firsthand information, and sensory experience (Nwosimiri, 2019). The mentioned knowledge is subject to verification, confirmation, and also falsification. In contrast, belief is gained through second-hand information but could become knowledge through some empirical testing. As evident in African tribes and societies, knowledge is highly based on sensory perception, emphasizing the visual perception of the world. Interestingly, in line with the Japanese emphasis on the unity of the body and mind, African ontology does not separate the individual from the object to be known; instead, there is a fusion of the two in a highly cooperative relationship.

The deep understanding of the fusion between the knowing subject and the object is explained by Anyanwu (1981). The author explains that in the African setting, there can be no knowledge of reality when people detach themselves from it. In Africa, people are not passive spectators but active participants in daily life events. Based on this, knowledge originates from the cooperation of all human experiences and faculties. Africans feel, see, things, imagine, and reason and intuit simultaneously. Anyanwu (1981) affirms that the African claim to knowledge is only through this approach. Indeed, this approach, which is the explanation adopted for this study, is how Africans acquire trustworthy knowledge of reality, which is based on intuitive and personal experience. Specifically, this echoes an observation by Oni and Olalere (2024) that knowledge is a product of culture, both through language and the circumstances of individuals' daily lives.

2.2 Conceptualization of Knowledge Management

Some scholars have credited Kael Wing with proposing the phrase "knowledge management" at a 1986 conference (Kharabe et al., 2016). In contrast, other researchers have implied that the concept of KM can be attributed to Peter Drucker, who coined the phrase "knowledge worker" in the 1960s (Cortada, 2009). Generally, it is widely accepted that KM emerged as a crucial concept in the 1970s and 1980s, as management practitioners and theorists, such as Drucker, explored the growing importance of knowledge in rapidly changing corporate environments. In the 1990s, uncertainty and rapid changes compelled organizations to focus on knowledge as a crucial source of competitive advantage.

Ndabari (2021) argues that there is no universally accepted definition of KM. However, the author contends that scholars suggest that KM should be a systematic approach, rather than a personal initiative. According to Ndabari (2021), KM involves the corporate process of capturing, integrating, disseminating, and continually applying knowledge. Kharabe et al. (2016) refer to KM as a discipline that adopts and promotes an integrated way of identifying, managing, and sharing all corporate information assets. Broadbent (1997) defined KM as a form of expertise management that leverages tacit knowledge and makes it accessible to individuals for specific purposes. Additionally, Karadsheh et al. (2009) have defined KM as a structured process that encompasses multiple activities aimed at capturing, discovering, filtering, creating, storing, evaluating, and applying knowledge from people to promote and advance business core processes and meet corporate goals and objectives. As the previous subsection has revealed, adopting Western philosophy's approach to knowledge fundamentally affects how companies and organizational theorists treat knowledge.

3. Methodology

The main objective of this systematic literature review is to explore how knowledge KM has been conceptualized in the Kenyan context. Besides, the systematic literature review intends to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Kenyan researchers conceptualize knowledge and KM?

RQ2: How does conceptualizing these concepts affect KM practices within public and private enterprises?

A systematic literature review involves the formulation of a relevant research question, the identification of relevant studies, the appraisal of their quality, and the summarization of these studies using an explicit methodology (Khan et al., 2003). Khan et al. (2003) explain that the systematic and explicit approach differentiates systematic reviews from traditional commentaries and reviews. The search for studies in this systematic literature review was extensive, with the selection criteria flowing from the research questions. The structured review methodology was applicable in this study, as it helped to understand the primary issues, identify trends, and highlight existing literature gaps. The

methodology adopted also followed the guidelines by Khan et al. (2003) on the need to analyze the quality of research studies, summarize the evidence, and interpret the findings.

The study adopted a systematic literature review, as explained by Tadesse Bogale and Debela (2024), and adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines in conducting the research. It also employed inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the use of relevant studies for this systematic literature review. Examples of the inclusion criteria used in this analysis included search string, language, and search boundary. The focus of research studies on the issue of knowledge and KM practices in public and private entities determined the scope of the search. Besides, this search was limited to studies published in English within the Kenyan context. The study did not limit its publication date to ensure an adequate number of research studies, but rather aimed to comprehend the conceptualization of knowledge and KM within Kenyan organizations. Analyzing articles published over the last fifteen years can provide an overview of the foundational challenges that continue to affect the operationalization of KM. The search string in this study employed an inclusion criterion that focused on the theme of knowledge and KM. The exclusion criteria for this study included quality, relevance, and duplication. To assess the quality, the author focused on the rigor of the methodology and outcomes, as well as the authors' credentials and the reputation of the scientific journals. Ideally, this was achieved by reading the abstracts and overall conclusions of the selected articles from reputable databases, including SAGE, Wiley, Springer, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis, Elsevier, and ScienceDirect. The databases were selected because they contain high-quality, relevant, and full-text articles that align with this research. The keywords for the search included "knowledge," "knowledge management," and "knowledge management in Kenya." Figure 1 illustrates the article screening procedure adopted for this systematic literature review.

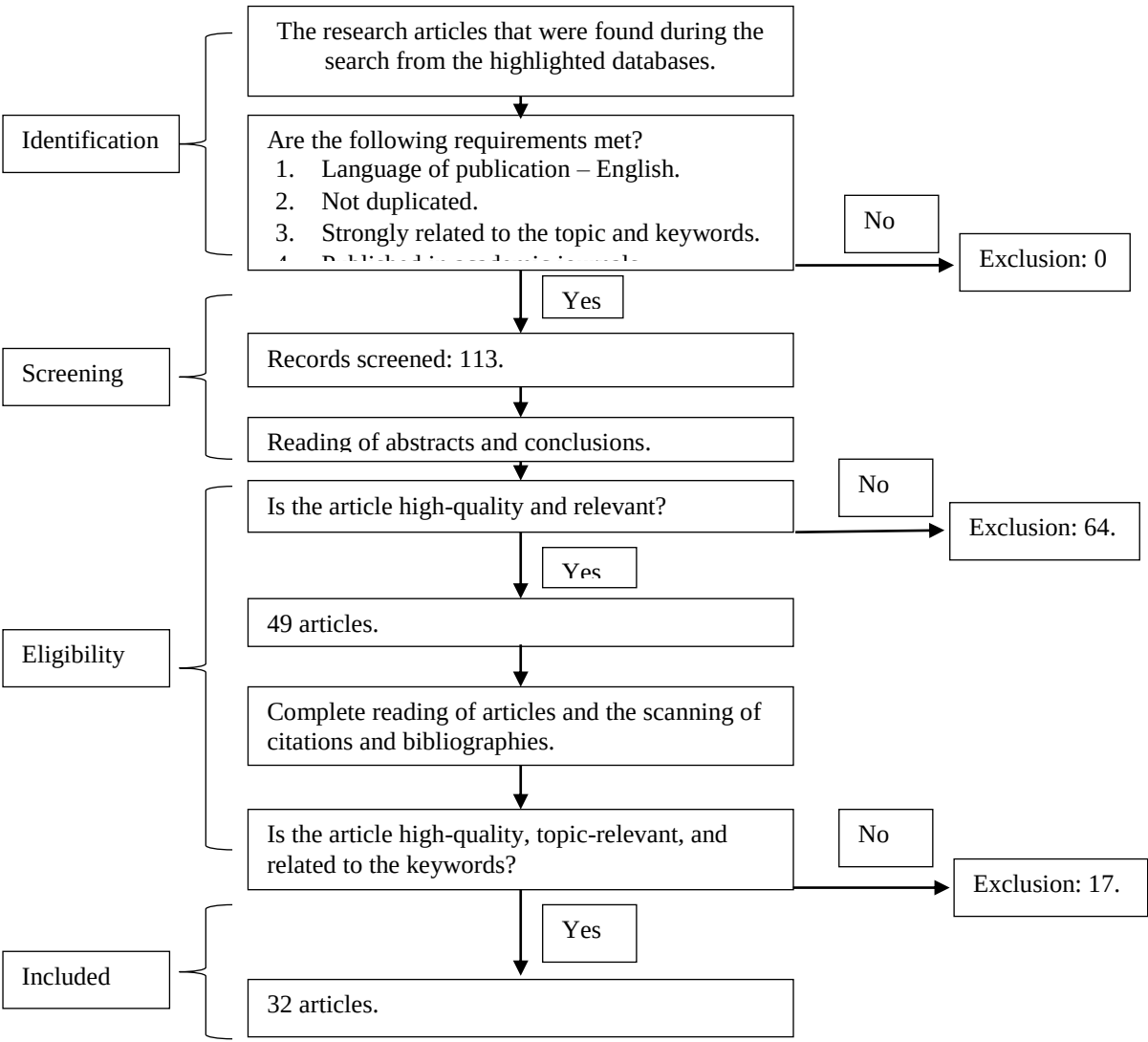


Figure 1. The Systematic Literature Review Process

4. Results

Year	Source	Type of Study	Knowledge and KM Conceptualization	Key Findings
2025	Onjolo	Explanatory design.	Adopts a Western conceptualization of knowledge and KM; quotes Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) to define knowledge.	KM infrastructure has a positive impact on job satisfaction, particularly in manufacturing companies.
2024	Kioko &	Mixed methods.	No conceptualization of KM and	Knowledge sharing has the

	Muriuki		knowledge based on African philosophy; adopts the Resource-based View Theory.	most significant impact on the performance of the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute, while knowledge acquisition has the least significant impact.
2024	Okoth et al.	Quantitative, comparative study.	Based on Vroom and Yetton's decision participation contingency theory, Organizational Learning Theory, and KM System Modelling Matrix.	KM is linked to maintaining a competitive advantage. Organizations must scrutinize themselves and explore the best ways to generate, access, and transfer knowledge. KM is a relatively new concept in Africa.
2023	Keter et al.	Mixed research design.	KM capacity building is vital in providing resources to companies. Primary steps in KM include creation, acquisition, storage, and application—no attempt at conceptualization based on African philosophy and epistemology.	KM effectiveness could increase by utilizing process and infrastructure capabilities. Companies can improve KM capacity planning through multiple knowledge activities.
2023	Langat & Kimutai	Explanatory and descriptive research design.	Describes KM as a new concept, focusing on capturing, storing, and retrieving information—no attempt at conceptualizing KM and knowledge using African philosophy.	The Tea Research Institute has the capabilities to capture, share, and store knowledge. KM has a positive effect on the projects' implementation.
2023	Meso et al.	Mixed methods (quantitative and „small qualitative component”).	Based on the Organization Learning Theory—no attempts were made to define KM and knowledge in relation to African philosophy.	KM can contribute to improving work performance in Kenyan law firms. There is a need to increase awareness about KM in this sector.
2023	Mkalla & Kising'u	Descriptive survey design.	Anchored in Knowledge-based Theory, Intellectual Capital Theory, and Organizational Learning Theory.	The port's database was up to date, despite the lack of robustness in research and development. Need to develop knowledge protection measures to retain it, including offering incentives to workers.
2023	Oduli & Wambiri	Descriptive survey methodology.	Focuses on the challenges affecting KM implementation in the public sector, without a conceptualization of knowledge or KM.	The most significant barriers to KM in the public sector are time, awareness, and culture. There is a need to create and nurture a culture that values knowledge sharing.
2023	Otundo	Literature Review.	No conceptualization of KM or knowledge based on African philosophy.	There is a need for greater collaboration between universities and SMEs through knowledge transfer partnerships, maximizing research, and promoting e-collaboration.
2023	Ouko & Gatero	Descriptive survey research	Focuses on Knowledge Re-use Theory and Human Capital Theory—no	Knowledge acquisition and application lead to increased

		design.	attempt at conceptualization based on African philosophy and epistemology. The KM definition is based on the Western understanding of knowledge.	service innovation in Kenyan public entities and should be based on formal training, research, and development.
2022	Abuki & Muchemi	Descriptive and explanatory research design.	Adopts the Knowledge-based View and the Upper Echelons Theories.	A positive relationship exists between knowledge creation and performance. Health facilities should invest in knowledge creation to attain superior performance.
2022	Kirugumi et al.	Descriptive research design, a cross-sectional survey.	Focuses on explaining knowledge based on the Knowledge-Based View Theory. Knowledge is a crucial organizational resource—no attempt at conceptualization based on African philosophy and epistemology.	Organizational capabilities, including KM, impact the internationalization of public universities in Kenya.
2021	Gatiti	Quantitative	Adopts the SECI Model by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) to explain knowledge sharing within organizations—no focus on African philosophy in attempts to conceptualize KM and knowledge.	Technology plays a crucial role in enhancing and facilitating the process of knowledge extraction, sharing, and dissemination. It influences knowledge sharing in relation to firm size.
2021	Kigungu et al.	Descriptive survey research design.	Adopts multiple theories, including Resource-Based View Theory and Human Capital Theory—no focus on African philosophy in attempts to conceptualize KM and knowledge.	KM has a positive impact on organizational performance and encourages public entities to support knowledge creation and sharing by allocating sufficient human and financial resources.
2021	Ndabari	Conceptual Review.	Adopts multiple theories, including Resource-Based View and Knowledge-Based View—no explanation of knowledge and KM from the perspective of African philosophy.	Access to relevant information and knowledge can enhance decision-making, enabling companies to register higher profits and benefit from new insights.
2020	Chebet & Njuguna	Descriptive research design.	Anchored on Organizational Conversion Theory, Adaptive Saturation Theory, and Resource-Based Theory—no attempt at conceptualizing KM and knowledge using African philosophy.	Organization promotes knowledge sharing through publicizing lessons, exchanging experiences, and awarding recognition. Knowledge applications are evident using modern information technologies. The entity focused on knowledge storage through record keeping, and training.
2020	Mburia & Bett	Cross-sectional, explanatory, descriptive research designs.	Anchors the primary arguments on Knowledge-Based Theory and Organizational Learning Theory—no attempt at conceptualization based on African philosophy and epistemology.	Knowledge creation has a positive impact on both organizational and project performance.
2020	Murumba et	Qualitative	Adopts the definition of tacit	Tacit knowledge is imperative

	al.		knowledge from Western scholars, such as Polanyi (1966)—no attempt at conceptualizing knowledge and KM based on African philosophy and epistemology.	in influencing corporate performance. Knowledge storage is vital to enhance decision-making. Human resources are crucial repositories of tacit knowledge.
2019	Kamau & Kwanya	Case study.	No conceptualization of knowledge and KM based on African philosophy.	KM tools are vital for gaining a competitive advantage within the Kenyan insurance sector. Companies should adopt structured KM techniques. There is a need to benchmark with other sectors that are successful in KM to boost competitiveness.
2019	Kwanya	Content analysis of KM education and training materials.	Adopts definitions from Western scholars—no attempt at conceptualizing knowledge and KM to understand KM-related training in Kenya.	Access to KM-related training has increased in the past few years. Gaps in depth, scope, and delivery of KM programs are indicated.
2019	Otieno & Abong'o	Qualitative (interviews).	Based on the Social Representation Theory proposed by Serge Moscovici, a French sociologist, there is no conceptualization of knowledge rooted in African philosophy and epistemology.	Fewer Kenyans are speaking indigenous languages. The use of „sheng” (an urban slang combining English, Swahili, and other local languages) is detrimental to the application of indigenous knowledge.
2019	Ndiege & Wamuyu	Qualitative (interviews and document analysis).	Conceptualizes KM as comprising knowledge discovery, capture, storage, sharing, and application; no definition of KM and knowledge based on African philosophy.	In the five counties explored, no evidence of KM practices was found. Where KM practices are available, they are uncoordinated, informal, isolated, and poorly documented, due to inadequate policy promoting KM in the public sector.
2019	Sirorei & Fombad	Qualitative research approach and a case study research design.	Emphasizes KM as a process broken into acquisition, creation, transfer, organization, and application; no attempt at conceptualization based on African philosophy and epistemology.	The KM application at the university was not formalized, resulting in limited knowledge sharing, creation, transfer, and application. The expertise of retired staff or those who had resigned was not captured. Leadership buy-in is needed.
2018	Chebii et al.	Explanatory and descriptive research design.	Adopted the Resource-Based View theory; lacks conceptualization of knowledge and KM within the African or Kenyan context.	Knowledge creation does not significantly affect performance in terms of return on assets. It has a positive impact on corporate performance.
2017	Gichohi & Guyo	Descriptive survey design.	Adopts the Knowledge-based Theory; no attempt at conceptualization of KM or knowledge based on African	Organizational structure and culture have a considerable effect on the implementation of

			philosophy and epistemology.	KM within Kenyan firms.
2016	Mwachinalo & Dosho	Quantitative	Adopts multiple theories, including Competency-Based Theory, Resource-Based Theory, and Knowledge-Based Theory—no attempt to conceptualize KM and knowledge based on African philosophy.	Kenyan banks adopt proactive and moderate KM strategies to promote organizational change. KM provided firms with dynamic capabilities to achieve their objectives and corporate transformation.
2015	Kwanya et al.	Functional analysis of KM jobs in Kenya.	Adopts Western philosophy and epistemology in defining knowledge, illustrating the dichotomy between explicit and tacit knowledge. No African philosophy is adopted to explain knowledge and KM.	Most Kenyan organizations have little understanding of what KM specialists do. The current KM positions are ambiguous, and there are diverse job requirements and descriptions.
2015	Wangare	Surveys	Adopts the Western philosophy of knowledge and KM, describing knowledge as invisible and intangible.	Knowledge sharing occurs through informal interactions, with retention relying on photographs. KM needs to consider the constraints and unique nature of the informal sector to promote sustainable development.
2014	Yusuf & Wanjau	Census survey (quantitative).	Relies on Western scholars, such as Peter Drucker, to explain key concepts—no conceptualization of knowledge or KM based on African philosophy.	The Kenyan government has hierarchical corporate structures that affect KM. The current corporate culture does not support knowledge creation. It includes inadequate skills in information technologies, as well as a lack of clearly defined responsibilities for the KM specialist.
2011	Njiraine & Le Roux	Review	Focuses on tacit knowledge as tangible knowledge; explains indigenous knowledge; adopts a model from Earl's Model—no attempt at conceptualization based on African philosophy and epistemology, no consensus on the KM definition.	Indigenous knowledge is often marginalized despite being a crucial source of tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge can undergo various processes to be converted into explicit knowledge for broader application.
2010	Mosoti & Masheka	Not clearly explained.	Defines knowledge and KM based on Western philosophy and epistemology.	Knowledge encompasses both tacit and explicit knowledge. Organizations in Nairobi, Kenya, do not fully understand KM processes. Most firms use technology as an enabler of KM practice.
2009	Ondari-Okemwa & Smith	Literature survey.	Definition of knowledge and KM based on Western scholars, including Alavi and Leidner (1999); no conceptualization or explanation of KM and knowledge from the African	KM can enhance service delivery within the civil service. KM has not been fully integrated into the public sector, and challenges include limited

			philosophy perspective.	incentives and bureaucratic systems. Knowledge hoarding is a key issue in the Kenyan public sector.
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Table 1. Summary of Key Findings from the 32 Selected Research Articles

5. Discussion

RQ1: The analysis confirms that KM is recognized as a crucial process in Kenyan firms due to its potential to improve organizational performance and competitive advantage. Apart from this, there have been renewed efforts by universities and firms to train specialists and to improve their career prospects. Within public and private entities, KM involves utilizing a multifaceted mix of techniques, strategies, and tools that individuals, groups, and organizations employ to generate maximum value from their intellectual assets. Kenyan researchers Wangare (2015) and Mosoti and Masheka (2010) contend that there is no universally accepted or agreed-upon definition of KM. Despite this, some Kenyan scholars (Ondari-Okemwa & Smith, 2009) describe KM as a systematic process involving the creation, acquisition, capture, storage, organization, sharing, application, and retention of knowledge. In the study by Kwanya et al. (2015), knowledge is conceptualized as an intangible abstraction that resides solely in the human mind, reflecting insights, experiences, intuition, expertise, and overall judgment.

The current systematic literature review underlines the significance of focusing on African philosophy and epistemology in conceptualizing knowledge and its impact on KM, especially in the Kenyan or African context. As Table 1 shows, nearly all the frameworks analyzed have been borrowed from developed Western contexts and may not be practically applicable to developing nations. According to Otieno and Abong’o (2019), indigenous knowledge is described as a complex set of knowledge that involves utilizing technologies, such as social media, to benefit individuals in specific geographic regions, including urban areas. However, this systematic literature review observes that in the African context, knowledge is deeply embedded in language, culture, and the lived experiences of various individuals. Hence, indigenous knowledge in Africa remains historically and epistemologically relevant to this day. Indeed, this cultural embeddedness requires a localized understanding of knowledge, rather than relying entirely on

Western conceptualizations.

RQ2: As the findings indicate, the key distinction between the Western and African conceptualization of knowledge lies in the continued emphasis on sensory experience and tacit knowledge in Africa, which contrasts with the Western focus on codified information sharing and explicit knowledge (also the case for Japan, as Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) observe). Tacit knowledge, which is difficult to formalize, highly personal, and deeply rooted in procedures, values, emotions, and actions, is a crucial component of the African indigenous knowledge. For example, African proverbs, such as “when an old man dies, the entire library is burnt,” underscore the essence of the intangible and oral nature of this knowledge (Mosoti & Masheka, 2010, p. 111). In contrast, Western thought typically confines knowledge to systematic, formal, and explicit forms, with assessment metrics promoting codified procedures. The objective in KM research, especially in the African Indigenous Knowledge, should be to convert tacit knowledge into tangible formats.

Undeniably, the lack of localized understanding of knowledge and KM significantly affects the effective implementation of KM in Kenyan organizations. Hence, firms in the country, including universities and academic libraries, continue to exhibit a superficial awareness and even ignorance of what KM entails, with experts misinterpreting KM as the mere sharing of information or content management. Indeed, this is why most managers explain the technologies they have adopted (instead of human resources) when asked about KM and its operationalization in their organizations. Besides, the emphasis is misplaced by exploring new storage and sharing techniques instead of focusing on knowledge creation. The conceptual ambiguity is also evident in the shallow and varied job descriptions of KM professionals, as organizations often fail to understand their key role—knowledge creation. Based on these studies, KM practices in Kenya are primarily informal, uncoordinated, poorly documented, and poorly communicated, often resulting in isolation, which is further exacerbated by inadequate policy frameworks in both the public and private spheres. Unfortunately, Kenya’s ambition to become a knowledge-based economy within the next five years is at risk. It cannot be met with the insufficient local capacity-building programs in KM.

The perverse nature within Kenya and Africa presents a unique challenge in the operationalization of KM. Evidently, it is challenging to capture and systematically document this kind of knowledge. The retirement and movement of experienced staff members from various organizations, such as universities, result in a significant loss of knowledge, as these professionals' valuable tacit knowledge is not formalized. Ideally, while social interactions are vital for the transfer of tacit knowledge, one observes that a culture of knowledge sharing is still lacking in Kenya, with some traditional cultural norms sometimes discouraging this process. Additionally, as one study has shown, civil servants tend to hoard information; possessing such information makes them more competitive and increases their personal value. The outcome contrasts with the overall imperative for KM to facilitate the conversion of tacit to explicit knowledge, a process that can be challenging and may lead to information loss.

Fundamentally, as El-Farr and Hosseingholizadeh (2019) contend, there is a continued shift in focusing on KM as techno-centric, which makes KM similar to information management. Indeed, this issue is evident in the Kenyan context, where managers focus on KM as a function of technology rather than the social creation of knowledge within organizations. The correct conceptualization of KM should place people at the center of this crucial model, focusing more on avoiding the objectivist approach to KM in favor of personalization or the "epistemology of practice" (El-Farr & Hosseingholizadeh, 2019, p. 3). Knowledge codification within Kenyan organizations attempts to separate knowledge from the owner. Indeed, civil servants and other professionals cannot be blamed for hoarding knowledge when this is the primary understanding of what KM is really about in their workplaces. Unquestionably, technology within organizations should serve as mere enablers of KM rather than the centerpieces of knowledge creation and sharing. Person-to-person engagements in organizations should be promoted over continuing efforts to codify and store knowledge in databases and repositories.

The broader implications of this systemic literature review reveal that, despite global awareness of the benefits of KM, its implementation in Kenya remains limited to universities and academic libraries, focusing mainly on application rather than core processes. Kenyan firms could be struggling with KM since they view it as an alien concept that requires significant infrastructure

investments. Instead, the correct conceptualization of KM would enable these firms to understand that KM has been present within their operations, and that the new development aims to promote knowledge creation and sharing, ensuring that firms remain competitive and perform well in rapidly changing corporate environments. The primary pitfall noted is the over-reliance on technology for KM, given that this fails to deliver the desired outcomes when human resource factors are overlooked.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the African conceptualization of knowledge differs from the Western understanding of the same, as the former emphasizes sensory experiences and tacit knowledge. The typical Kenyan business, especially in the informal sector, cannot implement KM strategies successfully without understanding the localized version of knowledge and how it ought to be operationalized. The Japanese example demonstrates that KM must be understood from a local context to ensure that firms adopt these measures to improve performance and increase knowledge creation activities. The Kenyan experience demonstrates that KM is primarily viewed from a Western perspective, with an increased emphasis on information technologies rather than human resources. The outcome is a codified system that values explicit knowledge and seeks to promote it through regular training sessions and information updates. Alternatively, Kenya and other African countries should promote a deeper understanding of the knowledge lifecycle, grounded in an African perspective, emphasizing the creation, sharing, and retention of knowledge. Localized techniques, such as knowledge mapping, apprenticeship, mentoring, and storytelling, are highly recommended to facilitate the explained processes. Furthermore, there is a need to increase awareness of what knowledge and KM mean in the local language and the benefits of adopting organization-specific contexts in operationalizing KM. The focus should be on brainstorming sessions and informal meetings, rather than formal training programs that merely transfer explicit knowledge. Efforts should now be channeled towards how professionals can integrate indigenous knowledge into KM, preserve its inherent value, and deal with issues arising from knowledge creation, communal ownership, and the benefits of sharing.

6. Recommendations

As this systematic review reveals, there is a need for Kenyan scholars, and primarily African experts in KM, to adopt a local or African understanding of knowledge and KM. Future research should highlight how local KM-related practices can be operationalized within firms. Indeed, this might require scholars to rely on indigenous knowledge and translate foreign concepts into languages that every employee in an African business context can understand. KM professionals can develop case studies to demonstrate how African or Kenyan businesses have used KM and create models that can be replicated in other organizations. Ultimately, this will entail developing an African framework, for instance, by utilizing African philosophies such as Ubuntu and Harambee, to address KM-related challenges.

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