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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRUCTURAL ALIGNMENT AND USER'S UPTAKE OF NATIONAL LIBRARY SERVICES IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

National libraries play a vital role in preserving cultural heritage, fostering literacy, and providing equitable access to information. Despite this mandate, user uptake of Kenya National Library Services (KNLS) has been declining, raising concerns among stakeholders. This study assessed the relationship between structural alignment and users' uptake of KNLS services. Anchored on the Resource-Based View theory, the study adopted a correlational research design and was conducted at the KNLS head office in Nairobi County, targeting 225 employees across departments. A sample of 144 respondents was determined using the Yamane formula and selected through stratified and simple random sampling. Data was collected using structured questionnaires, with reliability confirmed through Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($a = 0.852$). Descriptive analysis employed means and standard deviations, while correlation and regression analysis tested the hypotheses. The findings revealed a moderate positive correlation between structural alignment and user uptake ($r = 0.427$), although regression analysis indicated that structural alignment ($\beta = 0.411$, $p > 0.05$) was not a statistically significant predictor. The model accounted for 36.5% of the variation in users' uptake, suggesting that structural alignment alone does not directly predict service utilization but contributes indirectly by creating an enabling organizational environment. The study concludes that enhancing centralization, formalization, and departmentalization within KNLS could improve interdepartmental coordination and service delivery. It recommends embedding structural optimization metrics into KNLS policies to strengthen responsiveness and user engagement. These findings are valuable to KNLS management, policymakers, and scholars interested in organizational alignment and service delivery.

KEYWORDS: *Structural alignment; User uptake; Kenya National Library Services (KNLS); Organizational structure; Service delivery; Public libraries; Strategic management*

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The concept of structural alignment refers to the extent to which an organization's internal structures, processes, and resources are harmonized with its strategic goals and the evolving needs of its stakeholders (Venkatraman & Henderson, 1993; Tushman & O'Reilly, 2017). In library science, structural alignment entails configuring organizational units, service delivery frameworks, human resources, and technological systems in ways that enhance efficiency, responsiveness, and user engagement. Forms of structural alignment typically include organizational alignment (how departments and functions are structured), technological alignment (integration of ICT and digital systems), human resource alignment (capacity building and role specialization), and strategic alignment (ensuring goals and activities are consistent with user needs and societal demands). Effective alignment therefore ensures that libraries are not static repositories of information but dynamic institutions responsive to changing environments.

Globally, structural alignment has been adopted as a critical strategy for organizational resilience in libraries. In advanced systems such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, alignment has taken the form of service reorganization, collaborative networks, and ICT-driven service delivery. For instance, American research libraries have increasingly integrated research data management services and digital scholarship units into their

organizational structures to meet the emerging needs of scholars and students (Harland, Stewart, & Bruce, 2021). Similarly, academic libraries in Europe have restructured around user-centric models, consolidating reference, instructional, and digital services into unified departments (Corrall & Jolly, 2019). Cox (2021) notes that libraries embracing structural realignment have reported improved efficiency, greater staff flexibility, and enhanced user satisfaction, particularly in the face of digital disruption.

In Africa, where resource constraints are more pronounced, structural alignment has also emerged as a critical determinant of library performance. Here, adoption has often centered on decentralization, staff retooling, and service diversification. Nigerian public and academic libraries, for instance, have introduced specialized units for digital literacy and e-resources, even under limited funding (Omosekejimi et al., 2019). In Ghana, Baada et al. (2020) observe that structural reforms, such as expanding community outreach services and integrating ICT-supported reading programs, have improved user uptake despite infrastructural limitations. Recent studies also emphasize that without alignment, African libraries risk stagnation and marginalization as users turn to alternative digital information sources (Nwaigbo & Edom, 2023).

In Kenya, the Kenya National Library Service (KNLS) represents the largest public library network and plays a dual role as both a national and a public library system. Established under Cap 255 of the Laws of Kenya in 1965, KNLS is mandated to establish, equip, and manage public libraries across the country. Its 64 branches offer services such as mobile libraries, Braille services for persons with disabilities, community outreach programs, children's sections, and ISBN allocation (KNLS, 2023). However, structural alignment within KNLS has been uneven. At the organizational level, KNLS maintains a hierarchical administrative structure, but many branches operate with limited autonomy, constraining responsiveness to local user needs. At the technological level, KNLS has embraced digitization and e-library initiatives, yet adoption remains slow compared to the rapid expansion of private digital platforms. In terms of human resource alignment, staff training in ICT integration and modern service delivery remains inadequate, reducing the effectiveness of service innovation. Finally, at the strategic level, KNLS's expansive mandate has not always been matched by adequate realignment of strategies to address declining user membership, particularly among adult and institutional subscribers.

Recent trends highlight the urgency of structural realignment. KNLS data indicate that adult, junior, and institutional membership categories have all experienced sustained decline since 2019, reflecting broader shifts in information-seeking behavior toward digital platforms and alternative providers. This decline suggests a potential misalignment between KNLS's current structures and the changing expectations of users. Whereas global and regional libraries have strategically embraced structural reforms to remain relevant, KNLS continues to grapple with bureaucratic inertia, limited funding, and slow adoption of ICT-driven service models. These challenges call into question its long-term capacity to sustain user engagement and fulfill its statutory mandate.

Taken together, the literature demonstrates that structural alignment is not merely an administrative adjustment but a strategic imperative for libraries worldwide. Its various forms organizational, technological, human resource, and strategic are increasingly recognized as levers for improving efficiency, responsiveness, and user uptake. For KNLS, which anchors Kenya's knowledge and information ecosystem, examining the relationship between structural alignment and users' uptake of services is both timely and necessary. Such an inquiry will provide critical insights into how the institution can reposition itself in the face of shifting technological, social, and user landscapes, ensuring its continued relevance and contribution to national development.

Statement of the Problem

National libraries in Kenya are mandated to preserve cultural heritage, foster literacy, and provide equitable access to information for educational, recreational, and research purposes. Achieving these objectives requires effective structural alignment, particularly in the dimensions of centralization, formalization, and departmentalization, to ensure that internal processes respond to dynamic social and technological environments. Despite this, the Kenya National Library Service (KNLS) has experienced a persistent decline in user membership over the last five years. Adult membership dropped from 198,854 in 2017 to 75,005 in 2022, while institutional subscriptions fell from 52,121 to 35,385 in the same period (KNLS, 2023). This decline points to a possible misalignment between KNLS structures and the evolving needs of users. Centralized decision-making may be limiting branch responsiveness, excessive formalization may be constraining innovation, and rigid departmentalization may be reducing efficiency in cross-functional service delivery. It is therefore plausible that these structural characteristics, when interacting with

technological disruption and shifting user preferences, have contributed to the observed decline in membership and service uptake. While studies in other contexts have examined structural or strategic alignment and organizational outcomes, their findings remain inconsistent and are rarely situated within library systems. This creates a critical knowledge gap. Empirically investigating the relationship between structural alignment and users' uptake of KNLS services is essential to inform structural reforms that can reposition the national library system as a responsive, user-centered institution that contributes effectively to literacy, knowledge access, and national development.

Specific Objective

The study sought to assess the relationship between structural alignment and user's uptake of National Library Services in Kenya.

Research Hypothesis

$H_0$2: Structural alignment has no statistically significant relationship with the user's uptake of Kenya National Library Services.

LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL REVIEW

Structural alignment and users' uptake of national library services

The relationship between organizational structural alignment and service uptake is critical in assessing organizational effectiveness and customer engagement. Organizational structure typically encompasses hierarchy, communication channels, and decision-making processes, all of which shape how services are delivered and accessed (Sabihaini et al., 2023). According to Fu et al. (2022), structure may be evaluated in terms of the clarity, accessibility, and responsiveness of information and services to users. Scholars have examined this relationship using diverse metrics, producing mixed outcomes depending on sectoral and contextual factors.

Girod and Whittington (2017) investigated organizational reconfiguration, restructuring, and firm performance in the United States, moderated by dynamic capabilities and environmental dynamism. Drawing on dynamic capability theory, the study used panel data from 50 Fortune 500 corporations between 1985 and 2004. Restructuring was measured by changes in roles, departmental functions, reporting systems, and communication channels, while reconfiguration was assessed through the creation, merging, or splitting of units. Findings revealed that restructuring was positively correlated with firm performance, while reconfiguration had a significant negative effect. Moreover, in dynamic environments, outcomes varied depending on whether dynamic capabilities were aligned, suggesting that structural changes must be accompanied by capability alignment to yield positive results. This study, which relied on long-term panel data, contrasts with the current research, which applies primary survey data.

Sabihaini et al. (2023) analyzed antecedents of strategic alignment and business resilience in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Their study examined organizational structure, communication effectiveness, environmental uncertainty, and IT management as drivers of strategic alignment, targeting 94 SMEs through multiple regression analysis. Results indicated that organizational structure positively influenced resilience, with decentralization and improved communication between managerial levels enhancing productivity. While this highlights the importance of structure in shaping outcomes, the study was limited to SMEs and focused on business resilience, whereas the current research emphasizes users' uptake of library services.

In Nigeria, Momoh (2022) assessed the influence of organizational structure on information service delivery in public universities. Using a descriptive design, data were collected from librarians and students across four universities through questionnaires. Findings showed that downward communication flows, centralized authority requiring multiple approvals, and highly formalized rules delayed decision-making, undermining innovation and responsiveness in service delivery. Although the study established a significant relationship between structure and service outcomes, its descriptive design limited the ability to test hypotheses and establish causal significance.

In Kenya, structural alignment has also been investigated in various sectors. Karuga, Wairimu, and Yatich (2023) examined the influence of structural decision strategies on the performance of cement manufacturing firms. Employing a concurrent triangulation design and regression analysis, they established a positive and significant relationship between organizational structure and performance. However, the study's focus on processing industries limits its applicability to service-oriented organizations such as libraries. Similarly, Anene, Oloko, and Orwa (2019) studied the moderating effect of liberalization on strategy implementation and performance in Kenya's airline

industry. Findings indicated that structural elements ownership, centralization, departmentalization, and formalization negatively influenced performance. While informative, these results stem from the airline sector, making it difficult to generalize to the library context.

The reviewed studies demonstrate that structural alignment through centralization, formalization, and departmentalization plays a pivotal role in shaping organizational performance and service uptake. Yet, existing research has largely focused on corporate, SME, industrial, or higher education settings, with minimal attention to national libraries. This gap justifies the present study, which investigates how structural alignment influences users' uptake of services in the Kenya National Library Service (KNLS)

Theoretical framework

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory was first advanced by Edith Penrose (1959) in her seminal work The Theory of the Growth of the Firm. She emphasized that the growth and sustainability of an organization are largely dependent on how effectively it organizes and utilizes its internal resources. Later, Birger Wernerfelt (1984) expanded the theory in A Resource-Based View of the Firm, emphasizing that firm-specific resources, when organized and aligned strategically, create sustained competitive advantages. These resources must be valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) to strengthen organizational positioning (Davis & DeWitt, 2021).

According to Pereira and Bamel (2021), RBV has significantly shaped strategic management by shifting attention from external market conditions to internal organizational structures and capabilities. Structural alignment, as an internal resource, determines how effectively human, financial, and technological assets are deployed through well-defined roles, reporting relationships, and communication systems. By ensuring that the organization's structure supports its strategic priorities, firms can maximize efficiency, responsiveness, and service delivery, ultimately creating conditions for sustained competitive advantage.

Despite its relevance, critics such as Girod and Whittington (2017) argue that RBV often downplays the influence of external factors such as environmental dynamism, regulatory shifts, and user expectations. Similarly, Davis and DeWitt (2021) highlight that RBV is more descriptive than prescriptive, offering limited guidance on how resources, including organizational structures, should be developed or realigned. These shortcomings have led to the incorporation of complementary theories, such as the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) and Contingency Theory, which consider both internal structures and external environmental demands.

In the context of Kenya National Library Services (KNLS), RBV theory provides a useful framework for examining structural alignment as a critical driver of user uptake. The decline in membership and subscriptions suggests misalignment between KNLS's structure and evolving user needs. For example, a highly centralized structure that delays decision-making and innovation may hinder responsiveness to technological changes or shifting user preferences. By re-aligning reporting lines, decentralizing decision-making, and streamlining communication flows, KNLS can better leverage its internal strengths to deliver timely, user-centered services.

Therefore, RBV is highly relevant to this study because it anchors the independent variable of structural alignment, emphasizing how effective organization and deployment of internal structures can create unique advantages and enhance the uptake of national library services.

Conceptual Framework

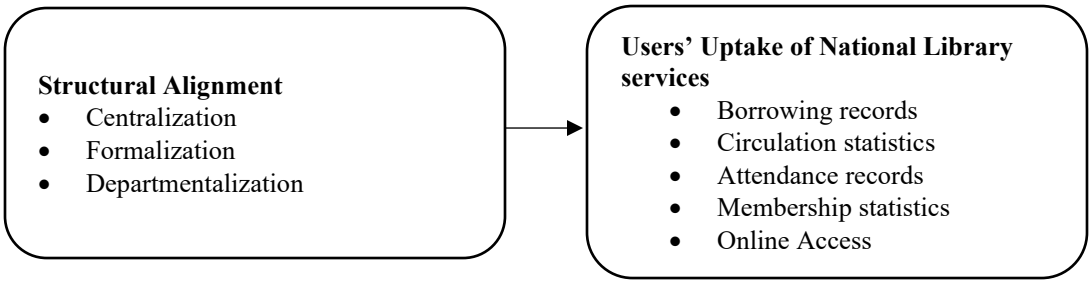


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational research design to examine the relationship between strategic alignment dimensions and users' uptake of services at the Kenya National Library Services (KNLS), focusing on natural associations among variables without manipulation. Conducted at the KNLS headquarters in Nairobi County, the study targeted 225 employees across top, middle, and lower management, from which a sample of 144 respondents was scientifically determined using Yamane's (1967) formula and selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representativeness. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising demographic items and Likert-scale questions addressing structural alignment, resource alignment, staff retooling, and digital alignment. To ensure instrument quality, content, construct, and face validity were established through expert review, while reliability was confirmed via Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.852 after a pilot test. Data collection followed all necessary ethical approvals, with questionnaires administered through a drop-and-pick method after informed consent and assurances of confidentiality. The data were cleaned, coded, and analyzed using SPSS Version 26, applying descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) and inferential statistics (correlation, regression, and ANOVA) to test hypotheses and measure the direction and strength of relationships among variables. The regression model assessed the effect of the predictor variables structural alignment, resource alignment, staff retooling, and digital alignment on users' service uptake, with the coefficient of determination (R^2) used to explain the variance in uptake attributable to these predictors. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, ensuring voluntary participation, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any stage, thus safeguarding the integrity of the research process

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic information

The study achieved an exceptionally high response rate of 99.3%, with 143 out of 144 questionnaires returned, far surpassing the 70% benchmark recommended by Mugenda and Mugenda (2013), thereby ensuring the reliability and credibility of the data. Analysis of the demographic characteristics revealed that most respondents were well-educated, with over 61% holding at least a bachelor's degree, reflecting a workforce capable of contributing meaningfully to strategic alignment and service innovation. Gender distribution was fairly balanced, with a slight predominance of females (52.4%), while the majority of respondents were in the youthful to middle-aged brackets (28–47 years), indicating a dynamic and adaptable workforce. In terms of organizational hierarchy, 81.2% of the respondents were from top and middle management, highlighting strong representation from key decision-makers. Most participants had worked at KNLS for over five years, demonstrating significant institutional knowledge and experience with organizational practices. Finally, nearly half of the respondents (49.7%) had participated in strategic formulation processes, while the other half had not, ensuring a balanced perspective between those engaged in strategy development and those primarily involved in implementation.

Descriptive Statistics

The findings on the relationship between structural alignment and user uptake of National Library Services in Kenya show that KNLS exhibits generally strong structural practices, though with areas requiring improvement. Respondents expressed the highest agreement on the efficiency of the chain of command (mean = 3.83, SD = 1.20), highlighting effective communication flows that support coordination and service delivery. Similarly, centralized management direction (mean = 3.78, SD = 1.07) and separation of duties (mean = 3.74, SD = 1.19) were viewed positively, indicating that leadership and role clarity contribute to organizational coherence and efficiency. However, delegation of responsibility (mean = 3.47, SD = 1.21) and employee involvement in decision-making (mean = 3.47, SD = 1.45) received lower ratings and greater variability, suggesting mixed perceptions about empowerment and participatory governance within KNLS. These findings align with existing literature that underscores the importance of clear hierarchies, centralized leadership, and role separation in enhancing service performance, while also emphasizing the need for improved delegation and inclusive decision-making to fully optimize user service uptake.

Inferential Statistics

To assess the nature of the relationship between the variables, correlation and regression analysis were carried out.

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was carried out to establish the direction and strength of the relationship between structural alignment and user uptake.

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Table 1: Correlation between Structural Alignment and User's Uptake of KNLS Services

Variables	Structural Alignment	User's Uptake of KNLS
Structural Alignment	1	.427**
User's Uptake of KNLS	.427**	1

**N = 143; **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between structural alignment and users' uptake of KNLS services ($r = 0.427$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that improvements in organizational structure, including decision-making hierarchy, communication flow, and operational frameworks, are associated with enhanced service utilization by users. These findings are consistent with prior studies, such as Corrall and Jolly (2019) and Sang, Ngamau, and Ragama (2018), which emphasized that structurally responsive institutions are better positioned to meet dynamic user expectations and service demands.

Regression Analysis and hypothesis testing

The study investigated the effect of structural alignment operationalized through centralization, formalization, and departmentalization on the uptake of services at the Kenya National Library Services (KNLS).

Table 2: Model Summary for Structural Alignment

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.605	.365	.347	.67398

a. Predictor: Structural alignment

The findings of this study reveal that structural alignment manifested through centralized decision-making, clarity in the chain of command, and separation of duties explains a significant proportion of variance in the uptake of KNLS services ($R^2 = 0.365$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.347$). This suggests that the way organizational structures are designed and realigned has a substantive influence on how effectively services are utilized. A well-aligned structure fosters coordination, ensures accountability, and reduces role ambiguity, thereby enabling smoother delivery of services to end users. These results align with Corrall and Jolly (2019), who observed that libraries with responsive structural designs are better positioned to meet evolving user demands and institutional priorities. Similarly, Sang, Ngamau, and Ragama (2018) emphasized that structural responsiveness enhances institutional efficiency, ultimately leading to improved service uptake.

Recent scholarship reinforces the critical role of organizational structures in contemporary libraries. Large-scale reviews of academic and research libraries indicate that purposeful structural reorganization improves not only service efficiency but also user engagement, especially when workflows are tightly aligned with strategic goals (Corrall & Jolly, 2019). Likewise, international library leadership forums highlight that incremental and targeted structural reforms such as introducing cross-functional teams or streamlining reporting channels are more effective than wholesale restructuring, since they maintain role clarity while enhancing collaboration (Sabherwal et al., 2019). This resonates with the present findings, where KNLS's partial effectiveness in structural alignment has led to measurable but not optimal levels of user uptake.

However, the results also suggest that structural alignment, though important, cannot operate in isolation. KNLS strategic reviews note that structural reforms must be complemented by digital innovations and adequate resourcing if their benefits are to fully materialize (Anamanjia & Maina, 2022). This is consistent with global trends where structural reforms in libraries only achieve their intended impact when coupled with enabling infrastructures such as ICT systems, professional development, and resource mobilization (Fu et al., 2022; Karuga, Wairimu, & Yatich, 2023). Therefore, while the present study underscores the significance of structural alignment in predicting user uptake, it also points to the need for integrated strategies that combine organizational restructuring with resource and technology support to maximize service delivery outcomes.

Table 4: Regression Coefficient for Structural Alignment.

Predictor	β (Unstandardized)	Std. Error	Beta (Standardized)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.035	0.352	–	2.943	0.004
Structural alignment	0.411	0.115	0.349	3.588	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: User uptake of KNLS services

The regression analysis results presented in Table 4 indicate that structural alignment has a positive and statistically significant influence on the uptake of KNLS services ($\beta = 0.411$, $t = 3.588$, $p < 0.001$). The unstandardized coefficient of 0.411 implies that a one-unit increase in structural alignment measured through centralized decision-making, chain of command, and role separation leads to an increase of 0.411 units in users' uptake of library services, holding other factors constant. This demonstrates that well-structured organizational frameworks substantially enhance service accessibility and utilization.

In line with the study's first hypothesis (H01: Structural alignment has no statistically significant relationship with user uptake of KNLS services), the regression results provide sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. Instead, the findings support the alternative proposition that structural alignment exerts a significant and positive effect on user uptake. This outcome aligns with earlier empirical studies, such as Corrall and Jolly (2019), who emphasized that clearly defined organizational structures strengthen institutional responsiveness, and Sang, Ngamau, and Ragama (2018), who demonstrated that structural efficiency directly enhances public service delivery in knowledge institutions.

The results underscore the critical role of structural alignment in shaping user engagement with KNLS. Specifically, by maintaining centralized leadership for strategic direction, ensuring a functional chain of command to streamline communication, and promoting separation of duties to enhance accountability, KNLS can significantly improve its ability to attract and retain users. However, as highlighted in broader literature (Fu et al., 2022; Karuga, Wairimu, & Yatich, 2023), such structural reforms need to be complemented by supportive resourcing and digital infrastructure to maximize their impact.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that while structural alignment is moderately associated with users' uptake of Kenya National Library Services, its predictive power is not statistically significant when considered alongside other alignment factors. This suggests that structural elements such as organizational frameworks, roles, and reporting relationships though necessary for internal coordination, may not independently drive user engagement with library services unless reinforced by other strategic enablers

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the study found no statistically significant direct effect of structural alignment on users' uptake of KNLS services, the moderate positive correlation observed suggests that organizational structure remains a critical enabling factor for effective service delivery. Structural alignment provides the foundation upon which other strategic levers such as resource allocation, staff capacity building, and digital integration can operate efficiently.

Based on these findings, KNLS should prioritize restructuring its governance and operational frameworks to enhance institutional agility. This may include clarifying roles and responsibilities, improving interdepartmental coordination, and strengthening accountability mechanisms. Furthermore, streamlined communication channels are essential to ensure timely information flow across hierarchical levels, thereby reducing bureaucratic delays and enhancing responsiveness to user needs. While centralized leadership is vital for strategic direction, selective decentralization of decision-making functions is recommended to empower lower-level managers and staff to respond more effectively to operational challenges and user demands.

From a policy perspective, the Ministry of Sports, Culture, and Heritage should consider embedding structural optimization metrics within national library service standards. These metrics could include benchmarks for decision-making efficiency, communication effectiveness, and interdepartmental collaboration. Such an approach would institutionalize best practices, ensuring that KNLS and similar public knowledge institutions remain adaptive and user-centered in an increasingly dynamic service environment.

In terms of theoretical and practical contribution, this study demonstrates that structural alignment, while not directly predictive of service uptake, plays a pivotal supporting role in creating the enabling environment within which other strategic elements can thrive. Future research may therefore explore structural alignment as a mediating or moderating factor, shaping how resources, staff competencies, and digital systems jointly influence service utilization.

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