Academic Library Learning Space and Its Impact on Users: University of Jos Perspective

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Abstract

 Change has been the only constant event in the world; rapid change from the social structure of the society to the meager social institutions therein. Over the years, academic libraries have witnessed tremendous change also. From change in the way the libraries operate to even change in the learning environment provided by academic libraries. The focus of this research is to look at the impact of space in aiding study capacity and invariably, success of its users. Overtime, one aspect that has not been given much needed attention in the teaching and learning process is the impact of space in fostering teaching/learning capacity. This paper examines the impact of Academic Learning Space on University of Jos Library Users. Data was collected through the circulation unit via their two hourly daily statistics among other methods. Hence, the researchers made use of primary, secondary data and observatory mechanisms in order to collect data, backup findings, conclude their analysis and draw conclusions. The research concludes that considering learning space and environment when building academic libraries is critical for the attainment of the libraries' goal (provision of conducive environment and access to quality information by users). The researchers are of the opinion that learning spaces actually works; formally and informally hence seven recommendations are postulated. It concludes by reiterating the need for a conducive learning space in every 21st century library.

Key Words: *Academic Library, Library, Learning Space, Learning, Library users, Library Services, University of Jos Library.*

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I.   Introduction

Traditionally, Libraries are known as brick and mortar buildings that house a collection of books, journals, catalogues etc. The evolution of library space over the past 20 years is well-known to practitioners. For many years now, colleges and universities have abandoned the notion of libraries as large warehouses that store massive physical collections. More recently, libraries responded to changes in pedagogy, technology, and student learning styles by creating spaces called information and then learning commons. Debates and theories pertaining academic libraries in the twenty-first century and its proper efficacy cannot be said to be complete without the consideration of physical space; library design trends; modern architecture, interior designs and furniture because it is geared towards meeting the needs of users (students and scholars) by reimagining the spaces they use or need to use. Hence the words of Oblinger (2006) as cited by Spencer and Watstein (2017):

"Space—whether physical or virtual—can have an impact on learning. It can bring people together; it can encourage exploration, collaboration, and discussion . . . Space can carry an unspoken message of silence and disconnectedness . . . More and more we see the power of built pedagogy (the ability of space to define how one teaches) . . . Spaces are themselves agents for change. Changed spaces will change practice".

Concern about the quality of student learning is front-and-center for educators, higher education administrators, regional accrediting agencies, and legislators at the state and federal level alike. This goes to show that with changes in the world, libraries are evolving by adopting aesthetically pleasing library spaces that appeal more to their users which implies user friendly library and leads to excellence in performance of both the library and users. Academic research librarians of the 21st century are in tune with understanding and appreciating the place of spaces in libraries not just to spur reflection, creativity, innovation, and exploration, but also impact the process of learning and learning proper in tandem with the emerging paradigms for undergraduate and graduate education which are primarily experiential learning, collaborative learning, students as knowledge creators etc. To buttress this, Spencer and Watstein (2017) state that "the conceptualization and creation of libraries designed for learning reflect an increasing focus on student-centered design on our campuses".

Today, the myriad of information resources and services which libraries provide is expected to meet these needs, however academic libraries especially in Nigeria is recording less use of the information resources

and services which they provide. This means that in addition to the information resources and services they provide, they must also provide and create spaces that spur users to effectively use the resources and services they provide. Users today are known as Generation Z (Gen Z) or Digital Natives who have been born with the knowledge of the use of modern technology. They demand instant gratification in all aspects of their lives and Information sourcing is not left out.

On information sourcing, academic libraries have a lot of content that have been sourced by trained and professional librarians to offer to its users, however, content without use amounts to no usage. These professionals know that if users are not drawn to use its space, it affects the utilization of the information resources and services they provide. With the advent of technology mostly having an influence on students' visit to libraries, they recognize the fact that academic libraries should no longer just be about its stacks but should also offer comfort and modern innovative designs of both the space and furniture aimed at meeting the needs of users which in turn improves the success rate in students' performance as well as making them life-long learners.

Learning, as mentioned above and learning theory are now emerging as important elements in library space planning. The learning spaces comprises of activities, technologies, and participants both virtually and in person. In these spaces, users (students and scholars) need to be able to sort, create, retrieve, display and share information. Rook et al (2015) opined that "Learning theories provide notions of how people learn and how pedagogy impacts the learning process. Learning spaces often promote a specific type of teaching and learning". As a result, academic librarians' definition of space is rapidly changing because they now deliver space as service to users. It is imperative to add here that these physical learning spaces can be formal or informal, social spaces or information spaces as well. In many ways, the informal learning spaces in academic libraries have the potential to be the ideal learning environment because this is the avenue for students to bring out their intellectual capacity and opinions out without any restraints or official backlash.

They tend to learn through diverse opinions put together, after series of intellectual arguments and criticism by fellow students or colleagues. Such learning processes seem to stick more as it usually seen in the students believe and attitude pattern more often. All these they can greatly acquire in libraries with learning spaces. As Spencer and Watstein (2017) put it; "the design of a learning environment has the potential to hinder or promote the learning process". In other words, "the design of a learning space has an effect on the learning process… it is important to design a learning space with the learning process in mind" (Rook et al, 2015).

University Of Jos Library

University of Jos library is a teaching library, it incorporates all subject libraries in its service and space provision to users both as students and as researchers. (Reference)

According to Akintunde and Ojoade (1996):

"The organization of the University of Jos library is derived from teaching library concept adopted by the university in 1979. This automatically meant that the library was structured subject libraries with two service departments: Administration and support services".

Hence, the University operates the "Subject Library Model" (Akintunde, 1999). In this model, the subject librarians head the subject libraries representing the all faculties of the institution. These heads have relevant and pertinent background on the faculties they handle. (Akintunde and Ojoade, 1996), opines that the University of Jos Librarians play the following roles:

a) Developing the collection in specific discipline or disciplines
 b) Providing reference and information service to given fields
 c) Liaising with relevant teaching department(s) from which they monitor closely the academic programmes of the department(s);
d) Mounting of user- education programmes: in this arrangement, each teaching department is expected to elect a library liaison lecturer to join subject librarians in carrying out these roles.

In extension of the Teaching Library services of the University of Jos, it introduced Learning Space as a response to the user-focused dynamics of research and learning environments. The University Library consists of four interwoven libraries: Bauchi Road Campus Library, Lamingo Campus Library (Medical Library), Law Library, and Naraguta Campus Library. It has provided for response to the need of library patrons today, especially in the renovated Bauchi Road Campus Library, the medical Library in Lamingo and recently renovated Central Library at the Naraguta Campus. Primary to these needs include the Creative Learning Spaces. As (Akintunde, 2020) puts it, "Creative learning Space recognizes the culture of today's learner and the pedagogy of learning". He added that "technology, collaborative and individual learning are key identities of today's user of the library".

Haven highlighted the above, this paper seeks to posit the importance of learning space in libraries, bringing out the perspective of the University of Jos users and the impact it has made on them.

II.   Aims And Objectives

The purpose of this paper is to determine the impact of Academic Library learning space on students. The objectives in specific terms include:
 1. Establish a general understanding of Library learning Space
2. Establish the place of University of Jos in Library Learning space
3. Establish its impact on the library users of University of Jos

III.   Conceptual Framework

Libraries today are shifting from not only populating their shelves but to also realizing that they need to create spaces that students can use and learn in. Learning spaces can be defined as the spaces created to support, facilitate, stimulate, or enhance learning and teaching (Unge et al., 2018).

Learning Space

The meaning of 'space' or 'environment' in the context of this research is related to the ways in which, teaching and learning are defined or organized and not necessarily physical arrangements. Harvey and (Kenyon, 2013) opined that learning space is central for the success of higher education institutions. Studies of new classroom designs are producing helpful evidence that intentionally designed learning spaces improve classroom participation and learning outcomes. It is therefore defined as "architectural embodiment" of learning theory (Monahan, 2002), which he further describes as a "built pedagogy". (Brown,(2005) as cited by (Akintunde,(2016), "Learning spaces encompass the full range of places in which learning occurs, from real to virtual, from classroom to chat room"

Library

Libraries are seen as the nerve and heart of any academic institution and is very central to any organization. (Igboechesi and Dang, 2019) stated that the foremost objective of any library is to Manage and administer information resources intended for reading and learning. Walton (2006) listed some of the reasons why library is used:
i.   To access resources;
ii.   ii. To use learning space; and
iii.   iii. To benefit from the environment.
Academic Library champions the same course but centers on supporting teaching, learning and research (Igboechesi and Dang, 2019). Thus, academic libraries are libraries that cater to the research and learning needs of students, faculty members and researchers. The goal of any academic library is to adequately meet the information needs of its users. Apart from classrooms, libraries are spaces students use for their academic work.

IMPACT OF LIBRARY LEARNING SPACE ON USERS IN UNIVERSITY OF JOS

 Spencer and Watstein (2017) opines that students learning is core to our libraries' and our institutions' educational missions. This connects to the idea that students' performance are indicated in how well students perform during their various period of study to make them excel as well as make them life-long learners.

For the University education, as opined by (Dzeng, Lin, & Wang, 2014) provides an arena of training for these outcomes through learning and related activities carried out on campus as well as outside campus. In any case, these activities, especially those on-campuses are conducted within a learning environment specifically designed to maximize such learning outcomes and satisfaction. The learning environment therefore must be able to fulfill the task of stimulating students' desire to quest for new knowledge. This includes providing physical space on campus that allows students to carry out interactive learning exercises that facilitate "learning by doing" and these can be achieved in the spaces libraries provide. Fred Kent, architect and founder of Project for Public Spaces (www.pps.org), says that even though people no longer need to go to the library to have their information needs met, they will go if a library is a "desirable place". The implication of the above statement is that learning environment in the library should be attractive enough to study better than the home environment.

In respect to University of Jos which is the case study of this research, the Bauchi road campus is the scope of the study but emphasis will be stretched out to Naraguta campus as well. The Bauchi road campus library was remodeled in 2015 to provide better creative learning space as well as to fit modern trends and aspiration of users. The learning space features an innovative use of space, organization of the library, and creative seating arrangements. There is space for personal and group reading: different sizes of groups – from 2 to 9 persons. There is a computer laboratory with capacity for 100 three-in-one touch screen computers; and internet access through wireless connectivity all-over the library. The space is in different category; for undergraduate students' postgraduate students and lecturers (Akintunde, 2016). The Naraguta campus library on the other hand was engulfed by a fire incidence in October 8th, 2016. The inferno destroyed the entire library

building and its collections including the neighbouring departments and offices. The library was later renovated into a world class academic library with space for creative learning activities and exquisite furniture to fit the modern learning trends. Hence the stretch in scope of the study.

Recently, scholarly attention has been dedicated to the use of library space by students of higher learning in Jos. For example, (Akintude, 2016) posited a research finding on use of the library space by the students of University of Jos and reported that the use of the space to access online learning resources through the internet wireless facility has been significant as 93 percent of respondents in the focus groups, 37 percent in interviews and 21 percent photo interviews supported this. This is based on the fact that the library is perhaps the only learning space on campus where comfort and internet connectivity is more reliable. The key word here being "online learning recourse" got a rise as a result of the conducive learning space in place; this is substantiated by the words of a Lecturer in Fine and Applied Arts of the university:

"The atmosphere is good, the aesthetics of the area. . . I talk more of aesthetics as an artist because the beauty of an area is what really draws people to come to a place and that aids learning, because aesthetics is part of learning . . . people like things that are not too rigid" (Akintunde, 2016).

Given the above postulations, this research seeks to consolidate its view using a tabular library monthly official statistics collated by the circulation unit. For the purpose of this work, the statistical data for the months of January through June 2019 was used.

UNIVERSITY OF JOS BAUCHI ROAD LIBRARY STATISTICS: JANUARY- JUNE 2019

MONTH	PATRONS	BOOKS CONSULTED
January	3,692	206
February	12,526	12
March	81,432	814
April	35,631	798
May	47,561	950
June	70, 801	1,755

Source: Circulation Unit, Bauchi Road Main Library, University of Jos, Nigeria. (2019).

The above table glaringly shows that library users are on the increase every month at the University of Jos Bauchi Road main library. Also, from the number of books consulted above, it is very clear that these users are mostly drawn to the "online learning recourse" as given by (Akintunde, 2016) in his submissions. (Crawford, 1999 as cited by Adeyemi, 2017) identified a natural connection between libraries and study, even if library materials were not involved. The above statistics is nothing compared to the expected turn out the renovated Naraguta campus library. This is because of the

For generations, libraries provided safe haven for those who cannot study effectively at home or in their dormitories. Provision of spaces for study, reading and quiet contemplations as well as research remained a major service offered by the library. This is the exact opinion of Law 100 Level student who participated in a focus group discussion by (Akintunde, 2016). Her words:

"It's a beautiful setting, you can just sit down and read your books, cross your legs and read, like your father's house and read; very friendly to everyone that wishes to utilize the facilities therein. There are a lot of computers for research, and with wifi access to internet, you can read on."

From the above quotation extract from a focus group discussion, one can clearly note great emphasis on the power of conducive environment. How conducive the environment is in terms of space, aesthetics and general setup of the library goes a long way in attracting users. Statistical data from the circulation unit in the library reveals a daily increment in number of users ever since the remodeling of the library. This is to say that the physical change in the library environment attracts more people into the library.

A study conducted by Littleton and (Rethlefsen, 2008) also shows that "users flock to library buildings and spaces that are attractive, centrally located, technologically current, and arranged to meet the needs of groups as well as solitary users". These identified elements by different scholars, adds pedigree to the assertion of this research on the great impact the university of Jos (learning space) library has on its users.

IV.   Suggestions And Recommendations

For Libraries to continue attracting their users, the following suggestions/recommendations are hereby postulated by the researchers.
1.   There should be constant power supply to the libraries.
2.   Internet services should be robust, fast and reliable 24/7.
3.   The furniture's for creative learning spaces should be maintained constantly.
4.   The Library should be kept neat at all times.
5.   Tools for effective service and maintenance of technology equipment in the Library are vital and should be available.

V. Conclusion

From all that has been said, it is on clear terms that new and reinvented academic library spaces should be such that it can influence the mind of users leading to creativity, retention, learning and success as they use the library. This is because the traditional learning patterns have since been transformed to better forms of learning. Libraries have gradually keyed into the learning revolution to break even the pattern of learning from its own perspective and angle. This is why learning space is not only redefined now but also a primary aspect of library services rendered to its 21st century users in making sure that the expectation of these users are met, while the relevance and importance of the library grows too.

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