

Creative Learning Space: University of Jos Library's Transition

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Abstract; The library continues to be the hub of academic activities in all institutions despite the increase in information and communication technology and advances in the acquisition and dissemination of information and the fear of the library going extinct. The use of creative learning spaces helps to improve the look and feel of libraries which leads to more patronage and also helps to improve academic performance

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I. INTRODUCTION

Libraries and Librarians are today faced with diverse changes in their profession; changes have occurred in information generation, creation, gathering, use, dissemination, the types of services they provide, the means of service provision and the category of users they serve. The library continues to fulfill its role as the heart of the university, despite the move away from print and towards electronic resources. The work the library undertakes contributes directly to the institution's academic mission and to equipping students with the skills and knowledge they need to achieve academically and to maximize their employability (Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL), 2017)

According to (Sinclair, 2007), "The idea of the information commons as a space for students to gather and work with technology has been with us for over a decade now. Carving out these areas has allowed many university libraries to remain relevant in the academic lives of students. Just as libraries have historically provided reading rooms for users to access and work with print collections, they now provide common spaces for them to access and work with digital collections. The information commons is a natural extension of the library's traditional mission in a wired world".

University of Jos Library and its management has the mandate to promote and provide world class learning styles for its patrons for the promotion of teaching and learning in line with worlds best practices. Flexible learning space has been found to contribute positively to student engagement, collaboration, flexibility and learning (Neill and Etheridge, 2008).

(Zickuhr, 2013) posits that, libraries are listening to the needs of the public and making critical changes in order to stay relevant in the eyes of modern education. More than ever libraries are listening to the needs of the public and doing whatever they can to accommodate them. From creating elaborate digital laboratories to providing maker spaces and meeting places, libraries are working hard to remain relevant in a digital society. With these new elements in place, libraries of today may grow alongside technology and help educate the public in ways like never before (University of Southern California (USC), 2014). Similarly, according to (Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) posit that many libraries have found creative answers, developing spaces that allow users to make discoveries, put technology to imaginative use, learn, perform, and relax, as well as to read. In the process, libraries have often come to be the school's focal point.

The library is much more than a passive repository for knowledge. For the undergraduate, the library as a place, and the library as a service are central to their experience of university. The library represents an important point of continuity for students during their time at university as does their relationship with its staff. Furthermore, despite the move to e-resources, students are visiting their university library more often and spending more time when they do. Undergraduates may well spend more time with their librarian than with their lecturer. That time is spent supporting students to become self-directed learners (Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL), 2017).

II. UNIVERSITY OF JOS CREATIVE LEARNING SPACE

Just like libraries all around the world, the University of Jos Library has constantly transformed itself in order to keep pace with new advances in information technology, and to improve its services to patrons (Akintunde, 2012).

From its inception in 1972, when it served an academic population of just under 600 staff and students, the library has continuously expanded its services to meet the needs of the students, instructors, and researchers of a growing university. The philosophy for service, installed by the library in 1980s –A Teaching Library, promotes a client-oriented service. Dating back to the 1980s, the library has always embraced innovation, particularly in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), to improve and expand its services.(Liverpool, et.al, 2015)

The University of Jos Library (Main Campus) was a library that was in dire need of renovation as it had very big and obvious holes in the ceilings, broken down chairs and tables etc. and as such patronage to the library was low and poor, thereby resulting in the non-use of its vast resources. Renovation was agreed to be carried out on the building to give it a better look and feel, and work was to be carried out on the ceiling and the main frame of the building. Some reasons for the renovation included and was not limited to:

- Water leakage
- Dilapidated structure
- Conducive reading /working environment
- Accreditation exercise

III. AWARD OF CONTRACT

Contract was awarded by Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) in December, 2012 and by January 2012, removal/packing of library materials, properties and furniture began. Work began on 4th of February, 2013 after the library was vacated by library staff and closed off to users. During the renovation, the main library was gutted by fire on the 23rd of March, 2013. The fire was blamed on an electric fault which led to the loss of more than half of the books and equipment's. The fire destroyed all reserve collection books, public catalogue server, computer systems, furniture's and the library building, turning the library into a shadow of its own self. After the fire incidence, the renovation work continued. The work was finally completed and handed over to the Vice-Chancellor on the 19th of December, 2013. By January 2014, the move back to the library began, rearrangement of books on the shelves, furniture's back to offices etc. to restore the library back to its former state. Since most of the reading area was affected by the fire incidence, the library was left with an open hall without furniture's, computers and offices.

The management of University of Jos Library decided to turn the library into a creative space and this led to another award of contract by TETFund for the furnishings of the library. The library remained without furnishings for a year plus after renovation causing limited space to users who wanted to use the library.

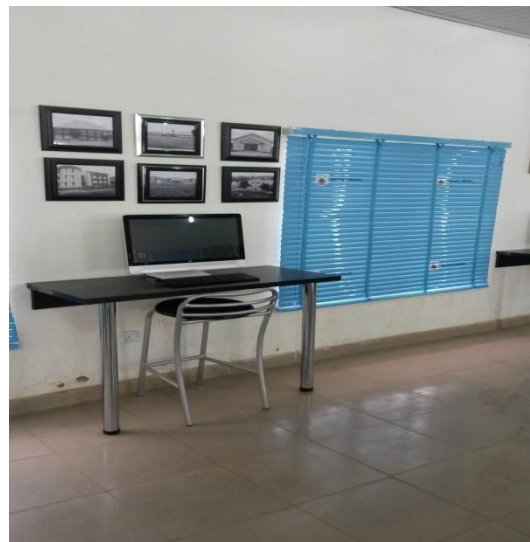
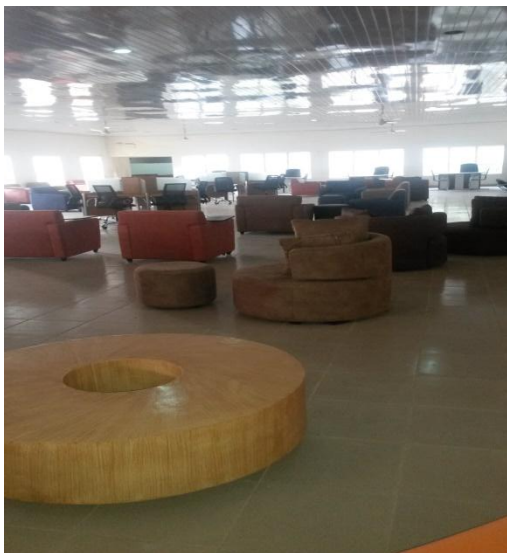
IV. REMODELLING

The Library was closed to users for a period of three weeks to allow for the installation and arrangement of new furniture. A classy, state of the art remodeled library was inaugurated by the Vice Chancellor (V.C) of University of Jos on Tuesday, April 28, 2015

The V.C. commended the University Librarian and the entire library for a job well done. According to him "we charged them not to limit themselves to what they can see, but also to be futuristic so that the library will stand the test of time". Extremely comfortable and looks like a lounge than a reading room, designed for different types of learners and learning styles, definitely better than it looked before the inferno.

University of Jos library has managed to preserve the identity of the library alongside a modern space that has significant additional functionality and services that are closely Located but do not interfere with the group, quiet and silent study spaces the library provides





V. REACTION FROM USERS

After the launch, the library was reopened to users and it was with amazement that users entered the library. The remodeled library which is the first of its kind in Nigeria has allowed users explore their creative potentials, enabling them have a different experience from the traditional library setting as was obtainable before the renovation.

Most users expressed their awe and shock immediately they stepped in and agreed that it will promote their reading habits. Since the remodelling, the number of users who come into the library has increased as against the number of users who entered the library in previous years.

Many users have admitted that the library is no longer a place where buckets were lined up, nails sticking out from chairs etc. but has become a place to make discoveries, put technology to imaginative use, learn, perform, and relax – as well as to read. In the process, the library has become the school's focal point.

VI. ADVANTAGES

University of Jos library has become a space where multiple activities can take place simultaneously. Such as:

- Quiet study areas
- Group activity areas

- Spaces for individual reading
- Spaces for instruction
- Online library registration
- Online Public Access Catalogue
- From plastic/wooden chairs to swinging chairs
- Competition

VII. CHALLENGES

With the influx of activities and users, the library faces a lot of challenges with the most pressing being the issue of sustainability. TETFund as a body only sponsors the provision of equipment's and infrastructure and is not responsible for maintenance. Some of the problems encountered with the new system include:

1. Rowdiness
2. Theft
3. Mutilation of tables and chairs
4. Breakage of chairs
5. Relaxation spot (has become a place of meeting with friends rather than a creative space)
6. No understanding of the new system
7. No clear direction/signage
8. Low Bandwidth

The pertinent question now is if TETFund as a body doesn't sponsor maintenance, who then is saddled with the responsibility of maintaining the library as the library doesn't generate enough funds to maintain/replace broken chairs, tables, stolen computer parts etc.

VIII. WAY FORWARD

- The University of Jos Library should begin to look for new ways of generating revenue to enable them imbibe a maintenance culture so the new face of the library doesn't wear off completely in a year or so to come.
- Library users should be taught the use of the new features of the library as many expressed ignorance on the new set up since they were only familiar with the traditional settings
- Clear and proper signage should be done to specify the various sections of the library. Students should therefore be taught to be good ambassadors and strive to maintain public property as getting an education embraces all facets of human development.
- In addition to being comfortable, the space should be inspiring and feel dynamic with artwork that inspires users to tap into their creative impulses, high definition widescreen monitors throughout the library that feature rotating displays of student's arts and projects to inspire users.

IX. CONCLUSION

Creative learning space in academic environments have been found to be great boosters for improving the use of library spaces as well promoting creativity and learning among students. However, maintenance culture should be emulated to ensure longevity. This research was carried out to bring to the lime light where University of Jos Library started from and where they are headed to.

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