Conducive library environment: A motivational factor for library use in public university libraries in Nigeria

Blessing Solomon Uwakwe, PhD, CLN, and Charity Onyenonachi Iwuchukwu

1Imo State University Library, Owerri, Nigeria
2Federal University of Technology Library, Owerri, Nigeria
E-mail: 1Ihechi.bless@gmail.com, 2Ciwuchukwu9@gmail.com
Cell: 1+2348063905005, 2+2348064237062

Abstract
The paper takes a look at conducive library environment as a motivational factor for library use in public university libraries in Nigeria. The work adopted the narrative content analysis in its methodology and used secondary data to review related literature on the subject of the study. It reviewed some concepts such as university library, library usage, environment, conducive university library environment, and factors that motivate library use. The study concludes by proffering strategies that engender conducive library environment which motivate library use.

Keywords: Conducive library environment, motivation, public university libraries, library usage

Introduction
The issue of poor usage of university library by students and other library users in Nigeria public university libraries has been a source of great concern to the university library management in its efforts towards the pursuit and actualization of its support services for teaching, learning and research. This is because, the use and of course, effective use of the library resources not only defines the relevance and value of library in educational parlance but also justifies the huge allocation of resources and enormous investments being made in the library. Hence the overall objective/ goals of the library are tailored towards the use of its resources.

Many scholars have identified a positive correlation between use of library resources by students and their academic performance and consequently, they posit that the panacea for dwindling or poor academic performance of students should reflect among other things, the efforts to ensure proper use of the library. Library managers have also been packaging and repackaging library resources to ensure and enhance the use of the library, but the rate at which students and in fact, other library users visit and use the resources in the library appear quite discouraging, if not worrisome. Many students can spend all their years of study in the university without paying a single visit to the library. Some students do not even know where the university main library is located, in the university. (Onuoha, U. D. 2013; Poopola, & Haliso, 2009; Oji & Abana, 2012)

Some of the reasons for poor or non-use of the library have been identified to include but not limited, to poor reading orientation, culture and habits of students and the influence of the internet on students, lack of awareness, time and perceived relevance, overconfidence by students, students temperament, as well as the image of the librarian. The internet has among other things, made the global village accessible from the comfort of our homes and so, students prefer to read at, or from their homes. Other factors are poor and or, insufficient library facilities such as non-

Apart from the factors relating to student’s reading behavior, the other factors which influence students’ use of the library can be classified under environmental factors. Oluyomi and Njoku (2016) observe that library environment has to do with library building, sitting arrangements, availability of information resources, library furniture, library personnel, and temperature within the library, interior designs, signage within and outside the library, electricity supply, as well as internet connectivity.

The availability of these facilities in the library can engender a conducive library environment capable of attracting and motivating the interest of the students to use the library, while the absence of same, may definitely pose a serious challenge in an effort to achieve effective utilization of the library. A conducive library environment can therefore be aptly described as a motivating factor for library use, especially in Nigerian public universities.

This paper adopts purely secondary data analysis and also narrative in nature, will consider certain concepts such as university libraries, library usage, environments, conducive public university environment, characteristics of conducive university library environment, motivations, and causes of poor usage of public university libraries in Nigeria. It will also proffer some strategies that can motivate patrons to use public university libraries and conclusion.

**University libraries**

Obinyan, Adetona & Obinyan (2019) states that university libraries are libraries domiciled in universities with the cardinal aim of providing the faculty, students and researchers easy access to information-bearing materials for the purposes of learning, teaching, knowledge discovery and creation through research. According to them, the need to meet these requirements therefore form the objective function of building a quality collection that reflects the needs and objectives of the university as the parent body. Akidi and Umebali (2019) noted that the university libraries are the hub of academic activities of the universities, the nervous system, the heart of the institutions and therefore play a pivotal role towards the realization of the tripartite function of universities, which include teaching, learning, research and community service. According to them, as the beehive of academic activities in their institutions, they play a primary role in the realization of teaching, learning, research and community service, making the faculty, students, researchers, and other staff to rely on them for academic nourishment and excellence.

Okoro and Bamidele (2019) stated that, university libraries are the single largest academic resource of last resort. According to them, university libraries are known as citadels of learning, as information contained in them is a very indispensable factor for promotion of development of society, and also an essential part of a nation’s resources. Igwe, Ugwuogu,Echem & Ukaegbu (2019), note that before now, university libraries have been the main source of information for teaching, learning, research and community services of the universities. Students rely on information resources and services of the university libraries for meeting their academic, research, information and self-development needs.
Ajibero (2013), identified the role of the university library to its parents institutions as acquisition of resources to support teaching and learning process in the university, provision of information resources necessary for research, and to meet the requirements of the faculty by developing a network of academic library resources which will be at the disposal of all students and teachers, open the door to a wide range of resources that lie beyond the borders of one’s own field of specialization; to bring information resources to the door step of students and scholars under conditions which encourage reading for pleasure, self- discovery, personal growth and sharpening of intellectual curiosity. However, irrespective of all these relevant and impressive information services by the university libraries, public university libraries are facing the challenge of under-utilization of information resources by the library patrons. Public universities spend heavily on acquisition of both printed materials and database subscriptions, but, users feel reluctant to visit or use the university libraries collection. 

Library usage
Libraries are for use and it involves consulting, reading, borrowing of library resources, and obtaining information and professional services from librarians. It also entails paying of visits to the library to consult the collections or maintain remote access to library digital collections. Library use also involves library patronage. Udo and Edidon (2022), observe that patronage brings library users to the library to consult information resources and services offered in the library in order to satisfy their information needs. According to them, patronage implies that one party offers something the other party needs or desires and the desiring party comes or goes to take that thing. Scholarwork.edu. affirm that the public university libraries are major providers of information materials especially within the university environment. They further note that academic success of undergraduates is attributed to some variables one of which is library utilization. In their study on the impact of library usage in university of Cambodia students’ academic performance, Lim Vichea et.al (2018) confirm that libraries are sources of reliable information and play an important role in improving students’ performance in the university. Library use and patronage reflect the utilization of library resources which on the other hand enables library managers to adopt and implement policies that go a long way in actualizing the goals of supporting teaching and learning in the university.

However, the rate of use and patronage of library resources are strongly sustained by the environment or environmental conditions under which the library services are offered. Hence the environmental condition of any library not only defines the strength of the library but also determines its patronage and use.

Environment
Merriam Webster dictionary (2023) defines environment as the circumstances, objects or conditions by which one is surrounded. It is the complex of physical, chemical and biotic factors (such as climate, soil and living things) that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form or survival. Relating this to the library, Udo and Edidon (2022) define the university library environment as all the circumstances, people, things and events around the library. Environment can be both internal and external. Internal library environment refers to all such conditions inside a library while the external environments refer to the library structure and its state of aesthetics. The
environmental condition of every system or organization plays very vital roles in the life of that organization. Using the library environment as a case study, Amusa and Iyoro (2013) conducted a study on the influence of library environment, instructional programmes and user-librarian on library use, and found out that the majority of undergraduates strongly agree with the statement that library environment such as conducive reading atmosphere, location of the library, seating arrangements, shelf guidance and arrangement, etc, affect the use of the library. The environmental condition of any library can be regarded as the strength of that library. Oluyomi and Njoku (2016) observe that library environment has to do with library building, sitting arrangements, availability of information resources, library furniture, library personnel, and temperature within the library, interior designs, signage within and outside the library, electricity supply, and internet connectivity. Collaborating this, Ibrahim and Sakiyo (2015), posit that the aesthetic facilities are those items in the library that add to the beauty of the library and attractiveness of the library usage in terms of indoor and outdoor environments such as good landscaping, colour, interior decoration, lighting, ventilation, temperature, signage/direction.

An academic library that possesses a library environment which are adequate in content and pleasing with a good aesthetic value can be described as a conducive academic learning environment which is capable of attracting the interest and patronage of users. Obviously, the reverse becomes the case in an environment where the aforementioned are lacking. Attraction or interest informs use, and nature always flows to where it is being attracted, thus the rate at which students are attracted to the library serves as an acid test of the conduciveness of the library environment.

**Conducive public university library environment**

A conducive public university library environment refers to the spaces and context in which a student can study and learn with comfort. According to Ogugua, Emereole, Chukwu & Amadi (2019), a conducive library environment include various strategies deployed by the university libraries to attract their users to read books provided for them in the university libraries for their studies and to further encourage them to develop a lifelong habit of reading and learning.

Oluyomi and Njoku (2018) aver that in the information world, environmental changes are continuously putting new pressures on libraries performance and relevance. According to them, libraries, especially those within the educational and research institutions are now formulating and implementing strategies to reorganize and repackage the way information products and services are produced and disseminated to users. A good and conducive university library can greatly improve the university experience of students (Walkins, 2021). According to him, the university library gives students the location, resources and skills needed to do their assignments and research works. Makinde and Oyewumi (2002) note that conducive university library environment is crucial to effective use of the library by patrons. According to them, a conducive library environment encourages periods of concentrated work thereby, making the university library a place to return to again and again. Safe hands private school (2019) posit that a conducive learning environment is a platform devoid of both physical intimidation and emotional frustration. A conducive library environment should possess both internal and external conditions which are designed to attract and sustain the interest and satisfaction of
students and other library users in order to utilize the resources of the library.

**Characteristics of conducive university library environment**

Safe hands private school identified the following as characteristics of a conducive learning environment:

- The university libraries should always be neat, well ventilated and spacious to allow for free movement
- The reading tables and chairs should be orderly arranged, and the shelves properly arranged
- Under no circumstances should a library staff use disparaging remarks to users especially to those who are physically challenged in the university libraries
- The reputation of a conducive university library is heightened through repackaging with the latest trends in library and information services and constant awareness creation of the available products and services of the library.

Librarians should display competence and professionalism in their work and be aware of the fact that students can easily discern mediocrity from excellence. Librarians should therefore be conscious of their reputations by comporting themselves well, and render effective library services.

A conducive university library environment should also contain beautifully designed library building, conducive seating arrangement, availability of both print and electronic information resources, fancy good quality furniture, conducive temperature within the university libraries, steady lighting and power supply, interior decoration of the university libraries should be colourful, availability of internet connectivity within the university libraries, availability of Wi-Fi within and the university libraries, and friendly university libraries personnel. Ejirghene (2021) states that, since Library design can affect the conduct and satisfaction of university library user, the university libraries should therefore be designed to fulfil the information requirements of users.

The public university libraries should create a welcoming library environment that encourages reading for pleasure. The university libraries out-look and feel are critical in getting students to come and read, and help them to feel at home in the library. The university libraries need to inspire, support and encourage students to read and study for pleasure by providing an inviting, relaxed, safe and comfortable place that stimulates and motivates studies.

**Motivation**

Yourdictionary.com (2023) defines motivation as the reason why someone is doing something, or the level of desire you have in doing something. According to Jucious (2019), motivation is the act of stimulating someone or oneself to get a desired course of action, to push the right button to get a desired result. He further states that motivation could be seen as stimulating, inspiring, and inducing people to perform to their best capacity. For instance, motivation is the driving force that draws a student to visit the university library for studies or research. In the same vein, the condition of the library environment can serve as a motivation for use of the library.

Oyedu and Nwalo (2011) agree that an ideal learning environment in which all the learning enabling factors such as adequate ventilation, noise free reading areas, adequate lightings and furniture are provided can positively influence and motivate the users. Lending credence to this, Markinde and Oyewumi (2002) also share the view that attention should be paid more
to providing an attractive exterior, a convenient layout and a pleasing condition for users as necessary component of conducive environment that can motivate users.

In the light of the foregoing, there is no gainsaying the fact that any academic library and learning environment in general must be functional, aesthetically pleasing and inviting in appearance for motivation of its readers and patrons.

However, safehandsprivateschool.org (2019) states that library and learning are very important to any student for proper development. Students need order and security, love and sense of belonging, and even fun. These factors can motivate students to study with positive attitude in the university libraries. Other factors, that can create conducive learning environment and motivate students use of the library can be summarized as follows:

- Appreciation of library users: library users should be made to feel welcomed and happy by appreciating their regular visit to the library.
- There should also be a safe learning environment where the students can study without any cause of insecurity and threat to their life.

**Strategies to motivate patrons to use public university libraries**

The need to motivate patrons to use the public university libraries by devising and creating a conducive library environment is a task before the university library management and other stakeholders in education. Today, many Nigerian public university libraries are showing greater concern in creating a desirable university library environment for students and other library users. Modern and innovative strategies are also being deployed to achieve greater use of the information resources in the university libraries by patrons. It has been observed that students can cultivate the habit of studying in the university library if the library environment is conducive. Watkins (2021), identified several ways to improve the library environment in order to motivate and, or improve patrons use of the library. Some of these include the following:

- The quality of the university library has a strong effect on the use. Libraries with comfortable areas for reading, quiet areas for working, as well as group study rooms for academic collaboration can attract users to do their work and study in such a library.
- University library staff needs to be friendly and helpful, so that students can have access to personal research assistance/ service. They can also help stressed out research paper writers.
- Following the vast advancement in technology which is diverting the attention and interest of students nowadays, effort should be made to capture the attraction of students to the library by creating awareness of the library content and new arrivals, especially those that are relevant to students’ academic programme.

The following strategies can be used to improve the environmental condition of the library which can increase the interest of library users and motivate them to make optimal use of the library:

**Collaboration between the lecturers and library for effective use of library resources:** There should be collaboration and synergy between the lectures and the library, by designing and implementing a teaching aid that draws the students to the library. This may involve giving students assignments
Design and adoption of library technology and innovative games: Libraries should design and adopt certain technology oriented and innovative games, light intellectual programmes/activities, capable of relaxing the mind, reducing stress and academic tension. Some of these programmes include some indoor games, television, scrabble etc., others include light reading materials like riddles and jokes. Federal University of Technology (FUTO) Library has an ‘innovative library unit’ where different games, television, and light reading materials such as newspaper/magazines are kept and consulted by users on regular basis. These activities are capable of drawing and sustaining the interest of students to use the library.

Library readership promotion: Libraries can design and develop readership promotion activities by organizing reading competition with award, create separate room for group studies, using library social media platform to promote the university library activities. As part of the ways of ensuring conducive library environment that motivate users, Proctor Free (2021), state that librarians must promote creativity, exploration, and independent thinking in new formats. According to Proctor Free (2021) for public university libraries to be conducive, the following factors should be considered:

- Hosting of university events/services in the library: The library can host some University programmes and events. For instance the library of Federal University of Technology (FUTO) Owerri in South-East of Nigeria carries out plagiarism test of all academic staff, the thesis and dissertations of all postgraduate students. These service/event attracts both the lecturers and students of the university to the library for library services University libraries can also organize graduation events and invite Celebrities and prominent Alumni to give motivational speech to students and even the university community to inspire and sustain their vision after graduation.
- Tea and snacks shop in the library: The provision of Tea/snacks shop in the library can provide a good platform that can attract the university community to the library for social interactions and meetings. The snacks shops can also sustain the length of time the patrons stay in the library.
- Award programme: O’Neil (2018) notes that, award programmes are part of the ways by which university libraries can attract and reward students for hard work. It is on record that Federal University of Technology Library, Owerri organized a quiz competition for FUTO students, as part of its activities to mark 2019 information literacy year. Prizes and awards were also given to performing students, while everyone who participated in the programme was entertained, with light refreshment.
Federal University of Technology (FUTO) Library, Owerri has a comfortable air-conditioned big room called, “research common”, which is reserved only for matured library patrons, lecturers and post-graduate students studies and research. These spaces are created to maximise the opportunity to engage the readers for extensive university library use.

Proctorfree.com (2021) notes that modern university libraries have transformed their libraries into centres for digital media and engagement. The explosion of technologies has made university libraries to be more adaptive on how to serve the students and other library users. University libraries must encourage students to engage with the libraries while in campus. 21st Century university library users are very active online, libraries and librarians should therefore connect effectively to the digital information environment. Emezie and Nwohiri (2022) state that, for libraries and librarians to appeal to their existing audiences and engage new ones, they need to offer generation of hyper-connected patrons. This will make public university libraries part of users academic journey, as mobile library apps have the potential to open channels for user engagement and collaboration. Providing conducive, attractive and comfortable reading facilities will motivate students to spend greater part of their time to study while in the university. Furthermore, Edoka (2000) states that public university libraries need to create spaces for remote access, relaxation, games, in addition to the age long traditional university library services. Libraries and librarians therefore, need to find ways to make the public university library environment conducive for effective study and research, and making online information easily accessible.

Oluyemi (2021) suggests that university libraries can organise program to welcome students back with festivities like games, with the chance to win prizes, and the opportunity to meet the librarians. This program could be an annual event. According to Oluyeme, it is an outreach to students, welcoming them back to campus and letting them know about the services, some of these programme is “Readership program or Search- it-up” video program which will highlight the importance of reading and how best to make use of them for research purposes. According to Oluyeme, a committee could be set in the university library to organise and effect this programme for positive result. The program is a way to let the students know that the library and librarians are there for them.

Pinch Blog, opine that libraries and librarians should transform the university libraries into a community space where people gather to find information, play games, eat and drink, relax, and read books, newspapers/magazines or watch television. They should implement innovative technologies at the university libraries, and get people interested to use them. Use social media tools to create voice for the library, by using social media channels. Users can also stay connected to the libraries newsfeed and events. We can also use social media such as Facebook, Twitter or WhatsApp platforms to attract users to the university libraries.
Conclusion
University libraries are quite indispensible in university education and national development, but its relevance and value can only be measured by the use of its resources. A conducive university environment plays a vital and positive role in attracting and motivating students’ use of the library resources. Consequently, the library management should design and adopt strategies and innovation, such as have been highlighted in this work, to ensure a conducive university environment capable of motivating the users’ use of the library resources.

References


8 tested means that attract more users to the Library, https://princh.com/blog-8-tested-means-that-attract-more-users-to-the-library/#YyebETMo-Cw


Blessing Solomon Uwakwe and Charity Onyenonachi Iwuchukwu: Conducive library environment: A motivational factor for library use in public university libraries in Nigeria


Safehandsprivates chool (2019), Conducive
Blessing Solomon Uwakwe and Charity Onyenonachi Iwuchukwu: Conducive library environment: A motivational factor for library use in public university libraries in Nigeria


