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10-18-2023

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Otu, Godwin, "DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVE SPACES IN LIBRARIES: A CASE STUDY OF ABIA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, UTURU." (2023). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 8013.  
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**DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVE SPACES IN LIBRARIES: A CASE STUDY OF ABIA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, UTURU.**

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## **Abstract**

The study investigated the development of creative spaces in libraries: a case study of Abia State University Library. This study was guided by three specific objectives and three research questions. The design of the study is a descriptive survey, and the population is comprised of 20 librarians from Abia State University Library. Census sampling technique was used to collect the data. The instrument used to generate data for the study is a questionnaire tagged ‘‘Development of Creative Spaces in Libraries Questionnaire (DCSLQ), and the data generated was analyzed using the mean. The findings show that in the development of creative spaces, library personnel need certain skills, and when skills are strategically approached, there can be significant growth in the ability to participate and collaborate. In addition, it was found that the skills needed are leadership skills, interpersonal relationships, technological skills, problem solving skills, and knowledge of intervention skills. Some of the challenges are a lack of willingness among librarians to adopt innovative strategies in libraries and a lack of trained personnel to handle the creative spaces. It was recommended, amongst others, that the infrastructure and facilities for creative spaces should be maintained, hence providing an enabling environment for skill acquisition, interaction, and knowledge development.

**Keywords:** Academic library, Creative Skills, Librarians.

## **Introduction**

It is well known that libraries serve as intellectual centres where scholars can come to learn about and investigate novel library materials and trends (Okpala, 2019). All libraries found in educational institutions are collectively known as academic libraries or university libraries. Their primary objective is to meet both the students' and the knowledge community's curricular educational needs by supporting the knowledge community's diverse information needs. Umoh (2017), as cited in Fabunmi (2021), defines academic libraries as "organized collections of

information resources [including] print and non-print materials" (Umoh, 2017, p. The academic library in higher education is facing difficult times; as a result, it is no longer just a repository for books and magazines (Lee & Schottenfeld, 2020). In addition, academic libraries have generated a wealth of data about their operations, but like other organizations, they have not been fully explored or re-invented into the system to create a knowledge space for their own operations. Surprisingly, libraries are adopting creative spaces to keep patrons busy and productive. This is significant because libraries have the potential to promote inventions, creativity, and ingenuity through the use of creative spaces. When it comes to encouraging innovation, academic libraries have a formidable track record.

Libraries have been connected to the growth of literature and scholarship ever since the first one opened in Alexandria in the third century B.C. This fact alone reveals libraries' essential role in fostering the growth of knowledge. In addition, libraries foster the growth of knowledge creation and sharing because creativity is a multi-dimensional construct in which people, processes, products, and the surrounding environment all work together to generate novel and useful ideas. In a similar vein, libraries serve as incubators for new ideas by bringing people together, first through shared love of books and then, more recently, as community centres (Houghton et al. 2018).

According to Davee et al., (2017), the interdisciplinarity fostered in these environments better equips today's students and tomorrow's workers for whatever careers may lie ahead.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Libraries in the modern era have been affected and reshaped by the rise of online research and information accessibility. With the growing size of the knowledge society, institutions and organizations are constantly looking for new ways to support one another in a space, which is a natural evolution of the relationship between information sharing and the public. Since the needs of library patrons are always evolving, libraries must constantly adapt by creating new study areas. Therefore, libraries have had to design study areas to accommodate patrons' evolving needs and the dynamic nature of the information landscape. Libraries play a leading role in fostering and advancing content and knowledge growth; as such, they require improved creative space that is also up to date with user expectations. However, research shows that informal support for creative spaces is lacking, and the surrounding environment is not welcoming. This may be due to the unfamiliarity of the creative space as a learning space, the lack of collaborative skills and a physical environment, and the lack of collaborative tools and spaces. Unfortunately, in spite of the significance of creative spaces in enhancing learning and knowledge development, a literature search also revealed that there is still a dearth of empirical findings on the development of creative spaces in libraries, hence the need for this study.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the development of creative spaces in libraries: a case study of Abia State University, Uturu. The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify the types of spaces considered relevant for creative activities in Abia State University Library.

2. Ascertain creative skills needed by librarians for creative spaces in Abia State University Library.
3. Identify the challenges associated with development of creative spaces in Abia State University Library.
4. Determine the strategies that could be employed to enhance collaborative knowledge creation skills needed by librarians for information service delivery in Abia State University Library.

### **Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the types of spaces relevant for creative activities in Abia State University Library?
2. What are the creative skills needed by librarians for creative spaces in Abia State University Library?
3. What are the challenges associated with the development of creative spaces in Abia State University Library?

### **Literature Review**

Interior design is only one component of the larger creative space system, which includes many more factors and considerations. As a result, it is essential to gain a deeper familiarity with the characteristics of creative spaces and the potential effect they may have on the library and its patrons. According to Thoring et al., (2019), in order for creative spaces to be developed and used effectively, they must include modalities for individual privacy, group work, individual creation,

public display, and private discussion. Therefore, the goals of both traditional and digital library "creative spaces" are to promote and reorganize information in order to generate new forms of understanding (Johnson, 2017). In the knowledge economy, knowledge creation and learning have emerged as the primary means of sustaining a competitive edge over the long term. According to Fontaine and Lesser (2020), modern businesses operate in a highly competitive economy, and as a result, they view the expertise of their employees as a valuable but underutilized resource. Lee (2018) agrees with this sentiment in the context of libraries by stating that the expertise and experiences of library workers are invaluable resources that should be made available to the public. The value of this signifies the importance of knowledge to academic libraries.

Librarians and libraries depend on people's ability to think creatively to ensure their continued relevance. As a result of recent progress in the library and information science sector and the emergence of the knowledge-based society, the development of new skills is essential. These skills, according to Nilson (2003) as cited in Abubakar and Attahir (2018) include:

- **Leadership skills:** Leadership is a multi-faceted phenomenon that redefines its meaning, keeping in view the organizations or individuals' goals. This skill is to enable library and information science professionals to demonstrate their potential and influence, as well as enhance, develop, and share ideas.
- **Interpersonal relationship skills:** To address the needs of society and librarians, the pedagogical paradigm in higher education has shifted to provide individuals with collaborative skills, hence the focus on interpersonal relationships. Such a relationship enables the librarian to collaborate and work as a team. As collaboration has become a core competency of the 21st century academic curriculum and business workplace, libraries and



librarians are changing to accommodate the need for collaboration and socialization. It is an iterative process during which knowledge is constructed in learners' minds while operating within a social context.

- **Technological skills:** In the area of information explosion, libraries and their professionals need to acquire relevant technological skills to be able to work effectively and efficiently. Thus, IT skills are the skills that a library professional has to learn and enrich his or her IT awareness (Ganapathi, 2018).
- **Problem solving skills:** Problem-solving skills lead to the development of ideas and act as a way by which solutions are made and developed, aiming towards goal realization. Such skills become pivotal in the analysis, identification, and making of library and information professionals more proactive, productive, and innovative.
- **Knowledge of intervention skills:** Knowledge and intervention skills are important for creative spaces, as they include demonstrated ability and skill in choosing and using a variety of personal and procedural interventions across libraries and assist information seekers in filling the gaps that might arise.

Franklin and Harmeleon (2019) affirm some of the challenges to collaborative knowledge, such as institutional and administrative policies, ICT restrictions, accessibility problems, differences in skill bases, the risk of uncertainty of success, overload, development, privacy, and confidentiality. Since the rise of technologically savvy library patrons is a result of this trend, librarians now have an incentive to alter the traditional means by which information is disseminated (Parirokh et al., 2018). According to the research of Aiyebilehin et al. (2018), some of the most common problems in this area include the following: a lack of trained personnel to manage the creative spaces; a

negative perception of traditional librarians; and a reluctance to implement new methods in libraries. Overton (2020) adds that librarians should stop pointing fingers and start taking credit for the good things that happen when people work together.

**Methodology**

The study adopted is a descriptive research study. Twenty (20) experienced librarians from the library at Abia State University will make up the sample for this research. When choosing librarians, a census-sampling strategy was used. A questionnaire titled "Developing Creative Spaces in Libraries Questionnaire" was used to glean the relevant information (DCSLQ). We gave out a total of 20 questionnaires, and we were able to use every single one of them. The mean was used to analyze the data collected from the respondents. Items with a mean cut-off point of 2.5 or higher were considered to be agreed upon, while items with a mean cut-off point of 2.5 or lower were considered to be disagreed upon.

**Results and Discussion**

Following the format of the research questions, the results are organized under three headings: the types of spaces thought to be appropriate for creative activities, the creative skills needed by librarians for creative spaces, and the challenges associated with the development of creative spaces.

**Table 1: Mean score of respondents on types of spaces considered relevant for creative activities in ABSU Library**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	DECISION
1	Personal Space	7	8	3	2	3.00	Agreed
2	Collaborative Space	7	7	4	2	3.30	Agreed
3	Experimentation Space.	4	7	3	6	2.45	Disagreed

4	Interpersonal skills	6	7	5	2	2.85	Agreed
5	Presentation/Sharing Space.	5	8	4	3	2.75	Agreed
6	Relaxation Space.	8	7	4	1	3.10	Agreed
7	Virtual Space.	6	5	4	5	2.60	Agreed
8	Incubation Space.	6	7	4	3	2.80	Agreed
9	Intermission Space.	8	3	3	3	3.05	Agreed
						<b>2.87</b>	<b>Agreed</b>

**Source: Researcher’s field work, 2023.**

Table 1 shows the mean scores of the types of space considered relevant for creative activities. The mean score ranges from 2.60 to 3.30. The respondents agreed that the library, in developing creative spaces, needs all these spaces except the experimentation space, which had 2.45. Thoring, Mueller, R.M., Badke-Schaub, and Desmet (2019) assert that for creative spaces to be developed and function properly, there should be modalities for: personal space, collaborative space, making space, presentation space, and intermission space.

**Table 2: Mean score of respondents on creative skills needed by librarians for creative spaces in Abia State University, Library**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	DECISION
1	Leadership skill	6	8	4	2	2.85	Agreed
2	Interpersonal relationship skills	4	9	5	2	2.75	Agreed
3	Technological skills,	6	8	3	3	2.85	Agreed
4	Problem solving skills	7	5	3	5	2.70	Agreed
5	Knowledge of intervention skills	6	5	3	6	2.55	Agreed

**Source: Researcher’s field work, 2023.**

Table 2 shows the creative skills needed by librarians for creative spaces. The mean score ranges from 2.55 to 2.85. Staff in libraries need a wide range of expertise because patrons of such

institutions tend to use them for artistic pursuits. This lends credence to the research of Bacon (2017), who concluded that significant progress can be made in the ability to participate in and collaborate with members of a social and intellectual network of learners when interpersonal skills are approached strategically. Also, Nilson (2018), as cited in Abubakar and Attahir (2018), opined that skills needed are leadership skills, interpersonal relationships, technological skills, problem-solving skills, and knowledge of intervention skills. This shows that for creative spaces to be developed, librarians need these skills and must be versatile so as to collaborate among one another, as it will encourage knowledge creation, idea development, and transfer.

**Table 3: Mean score of respondents on challenges associated with the development of creative spaces in Abia State University Library**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	DECISION
1	Lack of infrastructure and accessibility of resources	6	8	3	3	2.85	Agreed
2	Lack of policy	8	6	4	2	3.00	Agreed
3	Lack of collaborative skills/physical environment	5	6	6	3	2.65	Agreed
4	Lack of collaborative tools.	4	8	5	3	2.65	Agreed
5	Lack of adequate training	6	3	5	6	2.45	Disagreed
6	Lack of skilled staff	6	4	7	3	2.80	Agreed
						<b>2.65</b>	<b>Agreed</b>

**Source: Researcher's field work, 2023.**

Table 3 shows the challenges associated with the development of creative spaces. With the mean score ranging from 2.45 to 3.00, the respondents agreed that in developing creative spaces, there are challenges. This supports the findings of Aiyebilehin et al. (2018), who opined that some of the most encountered challenges in this regard include a negative perception of traditional librarians, a lack of willingness of librarians to adopt innovative strategies in libraries, and a lack of trained personnel to handle the creative spaces.

## **Conclusion**

Unarguably, libraries are counted on to supply the wide range of services and information required to satisfy these demands. However, academic libraries are seeing a decline in patronage of their information resources and services, particularly in Nigeria. Therefore, libraries must not only furnish and design spaces that encourage users to make good use of the information resources and services they offer but also provide and create such places. Therefore, creative spaces play a significant role in facilitating the dissemination and incorporation of information and have positive links to the realization of objectives.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following were recommended:

1. The infrastructure and facilities for creative spaces should be maintained, thus providing enabling environment for skill acquisition, interaction and knowledge development.
2. The library space should inspire users to think critically, remember information, and ultimately, learn something new.
3. The role of libraries should expand beyond just providing access to information; instead, they should educate and inspire their patrons to become lifelong learners by adopting a more holistic and far-reaching vision.

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