

Aesthetic Appreciation, Library Patronage, and Academic Progression in Southwest Nigerian University Libraries

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the perception of users on the impact of aesthetic appreciation and human environment on library patronage cum academic performance in Southwest Nigerian university libraries. The survey method was used to collect data from respondents. Eighteen universities were purposely selected to represent federal, state, and private ownership in the six states. Random sampling was further used to select two thousand six hundred (2600) respondents distributed at 40%, 40%, and 20% among the three categories of universities. A structured questionnaire was administered to the respondents via the university libraries. One thousand three and thirty-seven (1337) copies were returned and found eligible for analysis. Findings show that the architectural designs of the libraries measure up to the expectations of the users despite some deficiencies in interior decoration, lighting, and landscaping of the outer environment. Also, there is a formidable impact of library aesthetics on library patronage cum academic performance (increased visitations, improved proficiency in courses, acquisition of additional skills and success in class tests). The library should therefore collaborate with other stakeholders to make provisions for the observed shortcomings.

Keywords: Library Aesthetics, Aesthetic Appreciation, Human Environment, Library Patronage, Academic Progression

INTRODUCTION

The peak of human aspiration in life is success in all endeavors he gets enmeshed. Education, a core element within such lively programmes, is not exempt from such aspirations. Thus, the library is directed at fulfilling the users' information needs to facilitate the aspirations of the individual library users. It is therefore not coincident when Ranganathan laws of library science advocated accessibility to information resources which help to communicate the intents of the authors and guarantee users' satisfaction; this is the core focus of user services in the library (Ali, 2018). With the Phigital and hyper-custom generation z potential library users, Safii (2018) has further contextualized the Ranganathan laws to prioritize user engagement. Illangarathne and Yingming (2015) noted that the suitability of Ranganathan's five laws of Library Science for contemporary library functions, services, and development is still being determined. The laws are

replete with management skills relevant to modern library operations and can engender satisfaction of users' information needs. These laws have been the sum and source of librarianship from inception till date and poised to remain so for a long time to come (Nalinakshi 2019).

Presently, there are two hundred and sixty-two public and private universities on the shores of Nigeria (NUC, 2023). Each of these institutions possesses an academic library as a complementary entity to the educational curriculum of the university. However, beyond the traditional services provided to users, the beauty of the library has become part of the enticement baits for library patronage. Globally, there is a sharp tilt towards a reassessment of the impression of the human environment on the structural appreciation of the library. There is a reconsideration of the value of the aesthetic appearance of one of the most significant fabrics of the ivory towers. Considerable attention is now devoted to the beautification of the human environment of the library for a proper synergy between the intellectual beauty of ideas and thoughts on the illuminated pages of the books on one hand and the alluring aroma of an ever-inviting surrounding. As a human, library patrons cannot be indifferent to such expectations and appreciation when the architectural design, visual improvements, space adornment, and finesse arrangement of books and information resources spice the intellectual fragrance of the content. Thus, it can be argued that there is a synergy between academic progression and sensuous enjoyment of the surrounding beauty.

Library aesthetics, though a longtime entrenched value in the libraries of the global North, is a new phenomenon in the South, especially in West African countries where Nigeria is geographically located. This study thus plunges into a new area of librarianship that hitherto had remained unexplored. There is, therefore, the need to redirect the attention of the library service providers and professional librarians to the essence of this emerging provision in information management strategies. Habits and socially accepted norms are the most complex and unyielding to change. Most academic librarians have been known to place greater emphasis on the quality and quantity of library collection, giving it most of their and the more significant percentage of the library's yearly budget even when this does not reflect in users' attitude to library patronage. Orientation towards a new way of librarianship requires documented shreds of evidence and literature to gain permanency.

The literature provided by Nigerian researchers on this phenomenon is inadequate. This work is an addition that will open the eyes of other authors to the need to populate literature in this new area of study. Sometimes, researchers hesitate to venture into areas of study with little existing literature; this work, therefore, serves as an impetus to propel others to come on board. Also, the library schools in Nigeria require re-jigging the curriculum to accept new areas in librarianship. This study will serve as a veritable tool for curriculum committees of Nigerian universities to tap from in reassessing the needs of a modern LIS syllabus. Present library managers who were trained decades back will continue to hold sway for some time to come. Their contact with studies like this will serve as a key instrument in positive library reorientation among the top management who decide the structural and architectural designs of the library.

Finally, policymakers like library administrators, government officials, and other stakeholders involved in library construction projects in academic communities will find references in this work to guide their thoughts and future deliberation when formulating new

policies on library construction. The study will achieve this with its creation of a link between library aesthetics and the essence of education (academic progression)

Statement of Problem

Literature has uncovered a link between academic performance, library patronage, and aesthetic appreciation of academic libraries. Globally, there are attempts to alter the architectural design and reorganize the effect of the human environment on the activities and the service delivery in the library and the perception of the entire gamut by the library patrons. Handa (2021) advocated for a paradigm shift in library concern from the primary focus on collections to the physical structure of the library building and environmental and aesthetical upgrades of the interior and exterior. However, in Nigeria, the volume of literature on this emerging consideration in librarianship is minimal with few authors addressing this important topic. There is a need for further investigation into this area of study to harness the perception of library stakeholders and scholars across Nigeria.

Additionally, many reasons have been responsible for the low patronage of library resources in recent times (Borteye, Atiso, & Asare-Kyire, 2018). Many patrons have indicated in a research finding in a state university in south-west Nigeria their disgust with the aesthetic and environmental situation of libraries, precisely the academic ones, which make their patronage non-appealing to users (Oyewumi, Olatunji & Adegun, 2017). Similar observations were made by Usuka, Nwachukwu, and Nwachukwu (2019) in research on students of federal universities in the southeastern part of the country. Also, Ig-Worlu and Ekong (2021) conducted similar research on federal university libraries in the South-South of Nigeria. All of these point to the link between the physical look of the library and users' patronage, even though the aesthetics in these libraries were not adequate. Therefore, this study intends to include all universities in South Western Nigeria for all-inclusiveness and to allow straightforward generalization of the study.

Objectives

The study surveys the perception of university students in South West Nigeria on the aesthetic look of the academic libraries and their opinion with regard to the impact of this aesthetics on library patronage and academic performance. In particular, the work will:

- a. Evaluate how users perceive the aesthetic qualities of academic libraries within Nigerian universities.
- b. Assess the impression of the human environment in Nigerian university libraries and its impact on library patrons.
- c. Investigate the relationships between the aesthetic values of academic libraries and the patronage by the clientele in Nigerian university libraries.
- d. Examine library users' perceptions of the influence of aesthetics-induced patronage on academic performance in Nigerian universities

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Library Aesthetic Appreciation

Taste is complementary to the attraction (Carroll, 2016). Attraction to the library would influence the possibility of tasting the content. Storage of current publications and other information materials can only be truly appreciated when they are utilized. It is therefore right as observed by Bailey-Ross (2019) that the human gaze is naturally directed to areas and views that are of important attraction. It may be correct to state that the unattractive outlook of Nigerian university libraries is a disincentive to users who would ordinarily come into the libraries if a premium had been placed on revitalizing the aesthetic of the libraries. Oyewumi, Olatunji, and Adegun (2017) noted that the library's environmental situation and interior aesthetic needed to be improved and made satisfactory to most of the patrons of a Nigerian university library. They held a staunch belief that library aesthetics would motivate library usage. Thus, beyond the acquisition of resources and collection development, attention should be considerably tilted towards developing and upgrading the aesthetic, physical structure, and environment of the library to look attractive and alluring to gain the attention of readers and consequently fulfill its cherished position as the heart of the institution.

The architecture of modern library edifice must provide accommodation for change as a constant phenomenon accompanied by self-organization; flexibility and change remain the keywords. This is what has been conceptualized by Carroll (2016) in his consideration of the library as a place. The author advocated the involvement of planners with a clear vision of the library as an enterprise with an entrepreneurial outlook in search of customers via an aggressive marketing outlook. Users' demands and services should determine a new configuration of the learning spaces and their use. Thus, the space provided in the design of the modern library must be susceptible to accommodating emerging changes in use. The aesthetic futures of such design will assist in predisposing it to new alteration.

Library Patronage

The paramount motive of users in accessing academic library services, irrespective of clime and user (tutors, graduate, and undergraduate students), is to enhance their studies (Ibrahim & Wada, 2021). Every service rendered by the library is targeted at empowering and satisfying the information needs of the user. This is implicitly evident in the second law of Ranganathan, which presents the library as essentially user-centric (Opara, 2017). Without patronage, the funds and efforts expended on library collection will accumulate into waste. Several scholars, therefore, advocate for a concerted effort to promote library patronage. In a research undertaken by Domínguez, García, Martínó, and Méndez (2015) to determine various strategies being deployed to encourage reading among pupils of elementary and middle school librarians in Puerto Rico, promoting reading as a habit was identified as a joint responsibility of all; the teacher, the librarian, the parent (children read when their parents read) and the society as an entity. Okunlola (2021) observed that though many private universities in southwestern Nigeria provide adequate access to electronic information resources for their students' use, these resources are only relatively utilized by graduate students. This triggered research into the causes of this negative attitude toward library patronage despite the vast resources committed to funding. Tella and Odunola

(2020), Abdulsalami and Efosa, 2020) Adegun and Hayatu (2020), Okunlola (2021) and Isibor, Elisha, and Unobe (2016) at different times identified this decline in library patronage and the possible causes.

To ameliorate this obvious decrease in patronage, Barbieri, (2024) found out that aesthetic appreciation could function as a gateway leading to curious perception by individuals who by this perception consider innovations as precious opportunities to attain unique knowledge. Therefore, there is a correlation between building aesthetic appeal and its anticipated functionality which includes patronage by the users (Jennath 2016). Unfavourable library environments were observed to have negatively affected the use of libraries by students in Delta State universities (Ejovwokoghene, 2022). Similarly, environmental factors had a significant influence on the students' patronage of library resources at the University of Uyo. Such factors Udo (2022) noted include aesthetics, library spacing, ventilation, and lighting. The aesthetic conveniences available in Southeast Federal University libraries included art drawings, signage, interior and exterior decorations, lighting, and ventilation. These facilities were perceived to have influenced users' patronage since they considered the environment to be comfortable and conducive to academic activities (Usuka, 2019). Even beyond the physical library environment, Tella (2018) found that the interactive nature of the library websites and their aesthetic perceptions could create a positive impression among students.

Between Aesthetics and Academics

By its nature and charge, the library is a tempo on which academic excellence is leveraged. Its fundamental role of creating literacy support, complementing the education curriculum, and stimulating current viewpoints and prospects serves as outlets for information resources and services (Adigun, Salvador-Olayokun, & Abdulazeez, 2011). From time immemorial, literacy has been accepted as an external evaluation of educational advancement. This will undoubtedly be unattainable in the absence of information resources that perform the role of reference points. This essential truth makes the library the storehouse of information materials (Matatiele, 2021), the propeller of literacy, whether adult or adolescent. Every level of academic learning, primary, secondary, and tertiary, is steered by a standards-based sequence of pre-planned items for ease of teaching and training. An organized library further supports these as a curriculum-enhancing platform both for the teacher and the learner (Dominiczak, 2014). It has been observed that there is a correlation between students' patronage of libraries and their academic performance. Banleman and Adjoa (2017), in a research conducted on students of the University for Development Studies Ghana, confirmed this. Thus, access to culture, knowledge, and awareness is created. Discoveries are made when knowledge of existing literature and findings are presented to intellectuals and authors in the sphere of research. However, many reasons have been responsible for the non-patronage of library resources in recent times (Borteye, Atiso, and Asare-Kyire, 2018).

Many patrons have indicated disgust with libraries' aesthetic and environmental situation, precisely the academic ones who make their patronage non-appealing to users (Oyewumi, Olatunji & Adegun, 2017). Eco (1986) had suggested before the boom in the patronage of information technology that reading rooms in the library should move away from mere functional spaces for book shelving and reading to attain the level of inviting venues for users who wish to spend their leisure period. Alegbeleye, Madukoma, and Dahunsi (2020) identified the poor state of the library

furniture as one of the challenges confronting the use of library materials by academic patrons in South-West Nigeria. The functions of the library and its aesthetics are inseparable in the sense that two complementary aspects espouse the educational value of the library, namely; the reading rooms should be viewed more like an art installation, and they should be contextualized in the form of the architectural outlook of the building (LaGuardia, 2013). Chou, Cheng, and Cheng (2016) conducted a year of qualitative research on children's reading motivation. It was observed that the children's reading attitudes and motivation were positively impacted when adjustments were made to the human environment where the exercise took place with a small quantity of aesthetic garnishing. The classroom aesthetic reading environment emerged as a stimulant for children's reading motivation, involvement, and control.

There are new developments in library aesthetic designs like the Seattle Public Library, which was opened in 2004 (Dominiczak, 2014). A misconception arises when library aesthetics is conceived as decoration of the outer and physical structure of the building. However, Handa (2021) has highlighted several variables that constitute this concept. It includes site and location, which should take care of location (accessibility of the place to users), site capacity (to accommodate the building, parking lot, landscaping, setbacks, and land for future expansion), and neighborhood compatibility (the social construct of the neighborhood). He further stipulated that it should include library interior design that contains general aesthetics, color selection, furniture and fixtures, lighting, and ventilation. Usuka, Nwachukwu, and Nwachukwu (2019) found that library aesthetics facilities available in federal university libraries of Southeast Nigeria included interior and exterior decoration such as signage, ventilation, art drawing, and lighting. They, therefore, advocated for the inclusion of aesthetics in the design, renovation, and upgrade of university libraries.

Academic Progression

De Jesus (2015) found that academic progression is a correlate of quality learning. Thus, there is a need for a systematic and explicit method that facilitates learning strategies and study skills among students in a conducive learning environment that guarantees knowledge retention. When students are positively engaged, and consequently, positive academic progression is attained, it contributes immensely to a positive academic expectation ending in positive educational trajectories (Almroth, La'szlo', Kosidou & Galanti, 2020). This is the gap that academic libraries fill beautifully. Students learn from their library experiences, which later facilitate their graduation from medical school (Carr, 2021). There is a link between the desired objectives and the aesthetic appreciation of the vehicles that make those objectives attainable. Iosifyan (2021) proved that a correlation exists between reading the minds of the artists in the film industry – this makes their goals and emotions easily understandable – and the aesthetic appreciation of the artistic beauty of the movies concerned. This is applicable in the case of academic performance in higher institutions of learning. Thus, a correlation exists between aesthetic appreciation, library patronage, and positive academic performance.

METHODOLOGY

The study applied a survey method to evaluate the perception of Nigerian university students on the state of aesthetics in and around the university library and the impact on library patronage and academic progression. Multistage sampling was used to first select eighteen universities out of the existing seventy-two universities in South-West Nigeria. Three universities (federal, state, and private) were selected based on the first to be established per each of the six states in the region. Random sampling was further used to select two thousand six hundred (2600) respondents distributed at 40%, 40%, and 20% among the three categories of universities. The proximity in the population of the federal and state universities informed the allocation of 40% to each. The percentage was distributed equally among the six universities within each category. A structured questionnaire was administered to the respondents via the university libraries. One thousand three and thirty-seven (1337) copies were returned and found eligible for analysis.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1

	Aesthetic Appreciation	SD	D	A	SA
1	A mention and glance at my university library gives me a perception of beauty due to its inclusive design	129 9.7%	327 24.5%	701 52.4%	180 13.5%
2	The interior decoration of the library is top-notch, provides for collaborative zones, and therefore gladdens my heart	209 15%	621 46%	315 23.4%	192 14.4%
3	The furniture and shelves in the library are modern and appealing	274 20.5%	673 50.3%	259 19.4%	131 9.8%
4	My library is a place to behold at night due to the lightning facilities and the artistic design of the building's exterior	421 32%	235 17.5%	533 39.9%	148 11%
5	The social space around the university library is landscaped, greened, and adequate for relaxation and other social activities	262 19.6%	594 44.4%	374 28%	107 8%

The above table presents the data on the aesthetic appreciation of the library by users where the majority, 701(52.4%) of the respondents agreed that a glance at the library gives them the perception of beauty due to its inclusive design; it also shows that concerning the perception of the users on the interior decoration of the library 621 (46%) respondents disagreed that the inner view of the library is top notch; the majority of the library users, 673 (50.3%) disagreed with the statement that furniture and shelves in the library are modern and appealing; the table was also used to reveal the extent at which the library users appreciate lightning facilities and exterior design of the library with 533 (39.9%) respondents who agreed while 421 (32%) strongly disagreed representing (39.9%). Finally, 44.4% of the library users disagreed with the statement that the surroundings of the university library are spacious, landscaped, green, and adequate for relaxation and other social activities.

Table 2

	Library patronage	SD	D	A	SA
1	Library aesthetic values attract me to use the resources in the library often	66 5%	213 15.9%	635 47.5%	423 31.6%
2	Even when I do not intend to read, I prefer to loiter around the library due to its splendor	257 19.2%	321 24%	637 48%	122 9.1%
3	I derive internal pleasure from visiting my university library because of the beauty of its internal and external design	187 14%	385 29%	534 40%	231 17.2%
4	I am always attracted to taking pictures within the reading areas in my library reclining on the superlative furniture	328 25%	527 39%	342 25.6%	140 10.5%
5	My patronage of the library has increased lately due to the new look, comfort, and ease of reading	310 23.2%	139 10.4%	539 40.3%	349 26.1%

Concerning library patronage, the above table shows that the majority of library users, 635 (47.5%) and 423 (31.6%) agreed and strongly agreed that they are attracted to use the library resources often because of its aesthetic value. Also, the table reveals that the majority of the library users, 637 (48%) would prefer to loiter around the library due to its splendor even when they do not intend to read. In addition, 534 (40%) library users agreed that they derive internal pleasure from visitation to their university library because of its internal and external design. Ironically, 527 (39%) respondents disagreed that they are attracted to taking pictures within the reading areas of the library due to its inferior furniture. Lastly, in this table, 539 (40.3%) respondents agreed that the level at which they patronized the library increased due to the new look, comfortability, and ease of reading.

Table 3

	Human environment impact	SD	D	A	SA
1	I can relate the serenity and beauty of the environment to the required solemn concentration needed for academic engagement	162 12.1%	310 23.2%	592 44.3%	273 20.4%
2	The quality of the library environment affects my perception of the academic values in the library collection	71 5.3%	372 28%	673 50%	221 17%
3	My engagement with the university library is influenced by the colour and splendor of the surrounding environment	298 22.3%	125 9.3%	491 36.7%	423 32%
4	The architectural and infrastructural endowments of the library are obvious in the way people mill within its vicinity	276 21%	355 26.5%	552 41.2%	154 11.5%
5	I can see a relationship between the aesthetic environment and the functionality of the library facilities	118 8.8%	155 11.6%	713 53.3%	351 26.3%

The impact that the library's human environment has on its patrons was assessed using the table. Of the respondents, 44.3% agreed that they can connect the beauty and tranquility of the library to the serious concentration necessary for academic engagement; additionally, 673 (50%) respondents agreed that the quality of the library's environment influences how they view the academic values found in its collections. The table also shows that 491 (36.7%) respondents agreed that the beauty and color of the library's surroundings affected their interaction with it; in the same way, the majority of respondents (41.2%) agreed with the statement that the library's architectural and infrastructural endowments are evident in the way that people congregate around it. Of those surveyed, 713 (or 53.3%) agreed that they can always tell how the attractive surroundings of the library relate to the usefulness of its resources.

Table 4

	Academic Progression	SD	D	A	SA
1	My recent patronage of the library has positively affected my skills in some sub-subjects areas of my programme	127 9.5%	112 8.4%	679 51%	419 31.3%
2	Spending more time in the library has afforded me the opportunity of acquiring additional certifications in related skills and vocations	229 17.1%	121 9%	645 48.2%	342 25.6%
3	Inquisitiveness and interest in research have further developed in me due to my stay for longer in the library lately	262 20%	237 17.7%	703 52.6%	135 10%
4	Ever since I started patronizing the library, I have observed an improvement in my scores during periodic tests	192 14.4%	351 26.3%	409 30.5%	385 28.8%
5	My lecturers have not stopped to wonder what has been the secret of my recent participation in class activities	151 11.3%	318 23.8%	637 47.6%	231 17.3%

The above table illustrates that 679 (51%) respondents representing agreed that using the library more recently has improved their proficiency in some sub-subject areas of their programme. Similarly, the majority of the library users, 645 (48.2%) agreed that spending more time in the library has given them the opportunity of acquiring additional certification in related skills and vocations. Also, 703 (52.6%) respondents agreed that their recent longer library visits have increased their curiosity and interest in research. Then, 409 (30.5%) and 385 (28.8%) respondents agreed and strongly agreed respectively that since they have started using the library they have seen an increase in their test results regularly. Finally, 637 (47.6%) also agreed that their lecturers have not stopped to wonder what has been the secret behind their recent participation in class activities.

Discussion

The study found that there is a mixed feeling among the student users of the university libraries in Southwest Nigeria about aesthetic appreciation of the structure of the library. While the exterior design and look of the libraries constitute a cause for attraction and appreciation especially during the night when the superb lightning magnifies the beauty of the architectural design, the stale furniture and shelves coupled with the poor inner decorations was a sour point. Similar displeasure was found concerning the landscaping and greening of the library surroundings. This finding aligns with the position of Bailey-Ross (2019) that the human gaze most times is directed at points of attraction. So also is the discovery by Alegbeleye et al (2020) further affirmed that the furniture of the library is out of taste with modernity. It also further strengthens what Oyewunmi et al had said that improvement in interior decoration in libraries could be a motivation for users' attraction. Thus, the advice of Handa (2021) that library aesthetics should be comprehensive enough to include landscaping, lighting, decorations, etc is critical to an all-inclusive library design.

Also, the study discovered that the aesthetic value of the library is instrumental to library patronage by the student users confirming that their rate of patronage increased due to the new look of the library and the internal pleasure brought by this. Notwithstanding that, they cherish that the internal decoration could align with the external design. There is also cordiality between the concentration on reading, intellectual values of the collection and usefulness of the library resources on one hand, and the impact of the human environment of the university library buildings. The results of the study agree with the earlier findings of Chou et al (2016) and Barbieri (2024) that library aesthetics is a sure gateway to patronage. Similarly, the result further aligns with Jennath (2016) that there is a correlation between environment and functionality and Udo (2022) that the condition of the library environment affects its usage. Alegbeleye et al (2020) noted that the poor state of the library furniture had negatively impacted patronage.

Similarly, the study found that increased library patronage occasioned by library aesthetics has led to proficiency in subjects, acquisition of additional skills and certification, and good performance in tests. This academic progression has been noticed by the lecturers who considered it a positive change. Students whose library patronage has so increased have developed more interest in research. These findings are not new but a further affirmation of those before it that academic performance and progression are enhanced through library patronage. This was the position of Banleman and Adjoa (2017), Spivey et al (2020), Carr (2021), and Ibrahim and Wada (2021)

Conclusion

This study reinforces the invaluable premium that aesthetics commands about library appreciation, patronage, and its contribution to the promotion of academic performance and progression in Southwestern universities. Indications are that the architectural designs of the libraries measure up to the expectations of the users as well best global standards. Even then, it is not yet Uhuru as the improvement in aesthetics is deficient in interior arrangement and packaging of furniture and shelves as well as the lighting and landscaping of the outer environment. This finding requires further improvement to ameliorate the obvious shortcomings. It is however heartwarming that increased library aesthetics in Southwest Nigerian universities is contributing

to enhanced patronage of the libraries and the information resources acquired with hard-earned resources in this era of global economic downturn. Ultimately, this study highlights the potentiality of the library to contribute to academic performance at a time when other social engagements have won students over. Constant visits to libraries even if for taking selfies can subsequently lead to effective usability and improved performance.

To maximize this attraction to the library, managers of these information service delivery centers should accommodate other neglected areas of aesthetics to provide a comprehensive service provision. Also, the library should collaborate with other stakeholders to enlighten them on the comprehensive requirements of library aesthetics including the environment while library personnel oversee the reorganization of the interior.

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