

FROM TRADITIONAL LIBRARIES TO LEARNING COMMONS: A NEED FOR A SHIFT IN NIGERIAN LIBRARY SPACE DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

A library is a building or space attached to any level of educational institution which serves two complementary purposes to support the school's curriculum, and to support the research in the institute and for students. While Learning Commons is a student-centered physical and virtual learning space designed under the guiding principles of openness, flexibility, comfort, inspiration, and practicality, it is aimed at fostering collaborative and independent active learning by providing technology, resources, and services that help to engage students in the learning process. Library space designs in Nigeria are rigid, too formal and not designed and configured to meet the students' needs and demands for motivated learning and research purposes that fosters collaborative and independent learning. Every appropriate space in the library should be reconfigured for the researchers and students to take any relaxed position appropriate to assist high assimilation as well as allow for the use of electronic devices within the library spaces. This study is meant to assess the need for adopting a new design philosophy for the redesign of Nigerian library spaces into Learning Commons. This is with the view to catch up with high level international standards and also to negotiate with the

traditional library space designs of Nigerian learning institutions. This study methodology employed the case study approach to compare the extent to which some foreign libraries shift from the traditional paradigm to the Learning Commons paradigm and the need for our local libraries to adopt this transforming world class approach. This attempt will be useful to recommend an upgrade in the design and layout of spaces for future libraries. This study is expected to be useful in providing architectural design guidelines to create more comfortable and convenient study spaces for researchers and students or library users in Nigeria from an architectural point of view.

Keywords: *Library, Space design, Learning Commons, Collaborative*

INTRODUCTION

In learning institutions all over the world, libraries are the most useful and important facilities that supports learning and research at all level for the development of human resources. During the past centuries to the present, library buildings in all learning institutions have been built and have been developing throughout the country in both tertiary institutions of learning, some secondary institutions, community or public libraries. Library facilities are still developed with little or no considerations for the new library design paradigm required to meet the demand of the 21st century learning environment that fosters collaborative and independent active learning. It does this by providing technology, resources, and services that help to engage students in the learning processes which are yet to be adopted in the design and development of our libraries.

The current designs and space configurations of our libraries are still done and maintain their rigidity, which users perceive to be a boring, or to be visited only when necessary. This affects the studies and reading culture in Nigerians. Adopting the new library design philosophy which shows a proven result in the level of learning of students and researchers, integrating the Learning Commons into our library design and space configurations could be critical components in efforts to motivate users to use the libraries and to help in restoring the reading culture already fading away.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

A review of pertinent libraries/learning commons literature was required as an additional step in the plan development process. According to the literature reviews, libraries can be classified as the following categories.

TABLE I CATEGORIES OF LIBRARIES [1]

Public Library Serve cities and towns of all type

Library

Academic Library	It is attached to academic institutions like schools (serve students from Kindergarten to grade 12/Secondary), colleges and universities. Serve more specifically the students, research scholars, teachers and staff of the academic institution.
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Special Libraries	It's a library which serves a particular group of people, such as the employees of a firm of government department, or staff and members of a professional or research organization. It deals essentially in information. [2]
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National Libraries It serves as preeminent repository of information for that country. It collects and preserves the literature of the nation within and outside the country, and its community is the nation at large.

Learning Commons Characteristics

Literature survey had shown that students have different needs, yet one space can be designed to meet all of those needs at the same time (Franz, 2016). At all category of library in the world, three (3) distinct planning zones define the Learning Commons, with each zone having a specific architecture, furnishings and physical organization to best support the various learning styles. These zones are as follows:

1. **The Collaborative Zone:** This zone focuses on project-based learning and group work, with the arrangement of seats and tables done in such a way that it can be easily moved and reconfigured.
2. **Social Learning Zone:** This zone is design and configured to be playful, casual and comfortable, which take on a living room feel with ample of soft seating and a variety of work surfaces.
3. **The Individual Study Zone:** This zone is for students who want to study or work on their own. This may be categorized as the quiet reading areas that are the configuration of the traditional library, which has some elements of privacy such as privacy screens, carrels, etc.

Spatial Requirements of Learning Common

The spatial requirements for the design of Learning Commons are features that detailed the 3 space planning zones of Learning Commons characteristics. These are: [3]

- a. Flexible Computer Workstation.
- b. Service Desk.
- c. Collaborative Learning Spaces
- d. Presentation and Support Center.
- e. Electronic Classroom.
- f. Meetings, Seminar and Event spaces.
- g. Lounge and Café area.
- h. Wi-fi Browsing Spaces/Gardens
- i. Reading Area
- j. Gallery

a. Flexible Computer Workstation Cluster

This new computer configurations are known as pod and clusters. They also allow some space for students to write and spread some materials.

b. Service Desk

The Service Desk is an essential section of the learning commons where a user is free to ask the support staff question. Librarians and information professionals are providing these support needs to the users by integrating service at a single desk or by staffing separate but co-located desks.

c. Collaborative Learning Space

The difference in design of spaces for the learning commons as opposed to traditional academic library is the addition of group study spaces/rooms which

encourage collaborative learning and satisfy users desire to interact and work.

d. Presentation Support Center

The advance technology facilities enable students/users in creating multimedia presentations. The presentation support centers include functions like; digital studios, media authoring labs, music studio etc. These spaces usually use purpose-built computers that are designed for specific purpose.

e. Electronic Classrooms

The design of the classrooms normally accommodates 20 to 30 workstations and the classrooms are configured in different variety to support different functions with the view of integrating the public spaces in the commons rather than trucking them away.

f. Spaces for Seminars, Meetings, Reception and Events Centres

The commons create spaces that offers communal exchange of ideas. These spaces bring the students as an integral part of the learning community and ways for students and faculty members interact with the seminar, meeting and events spaces blend both formal and informal learning in the same place.

g. Lounge and Café Areas

Literature survey had shown that having café and comfortable seating areas are the new innovations of the learning commons which encourages students to spend more time in their research process, there is need to offer them the opportunity for a quick break.

h. Indoor and Outdoor Wi-fi Gardens

Literature survey had shown that virtually all students in the colleges and universities own their electronic

notebooks and laptops which they use for their studies. It therefore, suggests that Learning Commons should integrate wi-fi services within the Library and outside for flexibility and the comfort of users.

FOREIGN CASE STUDIES

In this section, the two Libraries and Learning Commons at United States are selected as foreign case studies. Both Libraries and Learning Commons have different architectural features.

A. Douglas d. Schumann Library and Learning Commons:

This Library and Learning Commons, located at Wentworth Institute of Technology 550 Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA 02115, United States. This Library is remodeled and reconfigured into a Learning Commons in the year 2016 by Perkins + Wills, Architects.

The Schumann Library in Wentworth Institute of Technology aimed in achieving the educational goals of the Institute. In addition to working with faculty and students in the classroom, the library collections and services focused in new ways it can collaborate faculty and student work or innovative activities on campus. [4]

Learning Commons Facilities and Amenities

The facilities and amenities of this Library and Learning Commons are the Guarracino Family Gallery which provides a wonderful space where the students and staff can publicly exhibit project work, art, and scholarship. The gallery exhibits also provide an excellent opportunity for faculty and students to partner with the Library to engage in collaborative projects, with the whole of the ground floor

dedicated to group study and collaborative spaces, Learning Commons space on ground and first floor, large reading rooms (quiet study) on the first, second and third floor, a café on the ground floor, and other functions distributed across the floors which includes access services, referencing desk/section, journal/magazine, newspapers exhibition, vending and staff offices (see Fig.1-1.4). Moreover, this Library and Learning Commons also provides large window frames that allows for natural lighting and framed views of the external landscape for biophilic purposes.



Fig. 1: Site Plan of Douglas Schumann Library & Learning Commons [4]



Fig. 1.1: Ground floor Plan of Douglas Schumann Library & Learning Commons [4]



Plate 1.0: View of Learning Commons Section at Ground Floor [4]



Fig. 1.2: First Floor Plan of Douglas Schumann Library & Learning Commons.[4]



Plate 1.1: View of Learning Commons Section at First Floor. [4]



Fig. 1.3: Second Floor Plan of Douglas Schumann Library & Learning Commons. [4]



Plate 1.3: View of Learning Commons Section at Ground Floor. [4]



Fig.1.4: Third Floor Plan of Douglas Schumann Library & Learning Commons. [4]



Plate 1.4: View of Learning Commons/Open Group Study Section at Ground Floor. [4]



Plate 1.5: Exterior of Douglas D. Schumann Library & Learning Commons. [4]

Strength and Weakness

The architecture, furnishings and physical organization of the Library and Learning Commons are particularly important to the character of a learning commons, as spaces are often designed to be rearranged by users according to their needs. Another strength of this Library is the large window frames that allows for sufficient natural lighting and view of the outdoor landscapes.

B. Mary Helen Cochran Library and Learning Commons:

This Library and Learning Commons, located at Sweet Briar College 19km North of Lynchburg Virginia, United States. This Library is remodeled and reconfigured into a Learning Commons in the year 2014 by VMDO, Architects.

The Mary Helen Cochran Library aimed at achieving the educational goals of the research facility. In addition to working with faculty and students in the classroom, the library collections and services focused on new ways it can

collaborate faculty and student work or innovative activities on campus. [5]

Learning Commons Facilities and Amenities

The facilities and amenities of this Library and Learning Commons are the provision at the basement floor of digital media lab, learning commons, office and collections. While the ground floor has the integrated service point, learning commons, reading rooms, browsing, seminar room and club/cafe. The first floor has an open void, classrooms/ learning studios, offices and academic resource center (see Fig.2.1-2.5).

A Gallery also, which provides a wonderful space where the students and staff can publicly exhibit project work, art, and scholarship. The vaulted gallery along the front of the entry façade has been opened to use as a 24-hour study area with student art adorning the arcade's niches. A reading room, and learning commons spaces all at the first floor. Other floors also house the digital media lab, collaborative spaces, staff offices, classroom learning studio, etc. Moreover, this Library and Learning Commons also provides large window frames that allows for natural lighting and framed views of the external landscape for biophilic purposes.



Fig. 2.1: Site Plan of Mary Helen Cochran Library & Learning Commons. [5]



Fig. 2.2: Ground floor Plan of Mary Helen Cochran Library & Learning Commons. [5]



Fig.2.3: First floor Plan of Mary Helen Cochran Library & Learning Commons. [5]



Fig.2.4: Mezzanine floor Plan of Mary Helen Cochran Library & Learning Commons.[5]



Fig.2.5: Second floor Plan of Mary Helen Cochran Library & Learning Commons. [5]



Plate 2.1: Reading Lounge of Mary Helen Cochran Library & Learning Commons. [5]



Plate 2.2: Reading Lounge of Mary Helen Cochran Library & Learning Commons. [5]



Plate 2.3: Study Room of Mary Helen Cochran Library & Learning Commons. [5]

Strength and Weakness

The architecture, furnishings and physical organization of the Library and Learning Commons are uniquely awesome to the character of a Learning Commons, as spaces are often designed to be rearranged by users according to their needs. Another strength of this Library are the variety of furniture that allows for comfort and choice among users in the spaces as well as the large window frames that allows for sufficient natural lighting and view of the outdoor landscapes.

LOCAL CASE STUDIES

The local Libraries selected for this study are the Central Library Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

C. Central Library Rivers State University Port Harcourt:

This Library is located at Rivers State University, Nkpolu - Oruworukwo, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. This Library is constructed and commissioned in the year 1996.

The Library is aimed at achieving the educational goals of the research facility. In addition to working with faculty and

students in the classroom. The library collections and services are still the traditional library which is not focused on new ways it can collaborate faculty and student work or innovative activities.

Library Facilities and Amenities

The library facilities, amenities and space organization are the traditional library setting, which does not reflect the features of the learning Commons in any way. Services in all the floors are basically large reading areas (quiet study) with offices (see Fig.3-3.3).



Fig.3: Basement floor Plan of Central Library Rivers State University.[Author]



Fig.3.1: Ground floor Plan of Central Library Rivers State University. [Author]



Fig.3.2: First floor Plan of Central Library Rivers State University.[Author]



Fig.3.3: First floor Plan of Central Library Rivers State University. [Author]



Plate 3.1: Side View of Central Library Rivers State University. [Author]



Plate 3.2: Side View of Central Library Rivers State University.[Author]

Strength and Weakness

The library is lacking in collaborative spaces such as the group study rooms, Learning Commons spaces, lounge/café, digital media lab, gallery, etc. the grave yard appearance of the library makes it uninviting and unattractive to users, thus, making it a ghost structure with low degree of patronage and activities. The library setting is designed one sided only, by

making provision for individual reading spaces (quiet study) with no thought of collaborative spaces, and social spaces.

COMPARATIVE STUDIES

After studying the local and foreign libraries and Learning Commons, the following factors are found to be considered comparatively for providing adequate Learning Commons and the modern facilities for the future Libraries in Nigeria institutions.

1) Zoning Classification and Ratio

According to the studies, the zoning of the Learning Commons in the foreign case studies were classified as collaborative zone, social learning zone and the individual study zone. Which were the transforming factors of the libraries into a Learning Commons, that revitalized them to active spaces after their remodeling. Among them the ratio of collaborative zone is often higher than that of other zones. This is with the view of fostering collaborative and independent active learning.

The local case study uses the traditional library design philosophy which only employs the use of one zone i.e. the individual study zone. This might be the reason for the decline in the use of library facilities in the country as research is changing from analogue into technological interface.

2) Facilities and Amenities

By field observation and literature reviews, the facilities and amenities of the Learning Commons can be described as follow.

Table 2: Studies on Facilities and Amenities of Local Commons

Facilities Amenities	& Literature	Foreign Case Studies	Local Case Studies
<i>Flexible Computer Workstation.</i>	P	P	A
<i>Service Desk.</i>	P	P	P
<i>Collaborative Learning</i>	P	P	A
<i>Presentation and Support Center.</i>	P	P	A
<i>Electronic Classroom.</i>	P	P	A
<i>Seminar and Event spaces.</i>	P	P	A
<i>Lounge and Café area.</i>	P	P	A
<i>Wi-fi Browsing Spaces</i>	P	P	P
<i>Reading Area</i>	P	P	P
<i>Gallery</i>	P	P	A

Key: P= Present; A= Absent

CONCLUSIONS

Learning Commons could be critical component in efforts to motivate potential library users to utilize the library in Nigeria, where studying and reading culture is drastically fading away. We therefore, strongly recommend all level of libraries be it public libraries or academic libraries be

reconfigured into a library and learning commons to meet the 21st century user needs. We also urge professional architects or firms involved in institutional planning and designs to change their ways of thinking and adopt the new design philosophy for libraries and learning commons, for the purpose of functionality and sustainability of the design master piece. This is because our designs could either be the cause of a problem or solution to current and future challenges.

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