THE IMPACT OF LIBRARY SEATS AND NOISE ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE LIBRARY ENVIRONMENT: A STUDY OF JIANGSU UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Isidore Komla Zotoo, Zhangping Lu**, **Guifeng Liuand Emmanuel Anyigbah*****

[a]School of management; Institute of Science and Technology Information, Jiangsu university, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province, 212013, China.

[b]Institute of Science and Technology Information, Jiangsu university, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province, 212013, China
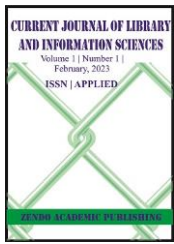
Abstract: A good library environment is crucial to an individual's learning process. This study examines the influence of library seats and noise levels on students' perception of the library environment at Jiangsu University. A quantitative approach was used to collect data through a survey questionnaire administered in a face-to-face manner. Results showed that 45% of respondents had a preferred seat, and 57% always looked for a specific seat. Small clusters of tables were preferred for studying, while designated areas around the staircase were found to be uncomfortable. Although the majority of respondents (41%) were comfortable with the library's noise level, some indicated discomfort, particularly during exam periods. The study recommends dedicating a specific floor for loud reading and others for quiet reading only. It also highlights the importance of providing users with their seat preferences to ensure a positive perception of the library environment.

Keywords: Library environment, seats, noise, student perception, Jiangsu University Library

INTRODUCTION

The library is a repository of information, and many people go in there to find resources. Today the advent of the internet constitutes a challenge as many people rely on digital information and resources. Despite this, the library building continues to be an essential place for research and learning. However, their role is shifted from a traditional library to a place for group discussion and study. In this context, there is a need for the library to rethink the concept of building in order to remain relevant. The purpose of having a building is of essence, as over utilized space is often targeted for enlargement (Garnar 2021). Furthermore, the things that are in the library can have a significant impact on the patrons and how they perceive it. Therefore, the kind of environment the library operates is critical for patrons to continue to visit. Many reasons will attract patrons to the library: librarians' attitudes, availability and access of resources, and a good environment, including décor, seat, and noise level (Mohanty 2002). There is a debate as to how vital seats are and which seat is the best. The debate emanates from the fact that different kinds of seats are available.

While some see that the type of seat matters (Mount 2019), others argue that there is no relationship between library visitation and seat (Gayton 2008) There are many types of seat in the library, but which one is mostly preferred by the patrons. Selecting a seat may not be voluntary because one can only select from what is available in the library; however, the library must provide users with their preferences. Some libraries require that patrons reserve a seat before coming to the library. For others, it can be selected on

arrival. What then determines user choice and preference? A library decor that is not fit can be unacceptable to patrons if not appropriately or attractively designed.(Allen and Moyer 2021). In this context, the librarian must understand that the expectation of patrons and how these needs are met are necessary conditions for its continuous existence. This study focuses on the kind of seats that are provided against the most preferred and the noise level in the library.
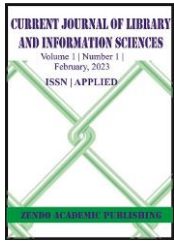
Background and context

Jiangsu University Library (JUL) comprises the main library and the branch library located on Mengzi, Beige and Jingjiang College. There are four reference rooms located in schools of Humanities, Foreign languages, Management, and Arts. All have developed into a comprehensive university library, with each providing coordinated loan and return services.

The focus of our study is on the main library. We selected this because many students often visit and can satisfy all the patrons' needs. In addition, the university is celebrating the 20th anniversary of consolidation and the 119th anniversary of the establishment of Jiangsu University. The library comprises a six-story building of 43,969 square meters and has more than 4000 reading seats. There are in all 17 reading rooms, 28 study rooms, two spacious seminars and a conference room. There is also a library bar to take care of students' needs relating to drinks and snacks. The library is also built with several information exchange spaces such as the Remote Video Conference Room, the Multifunctional Auditorium, and the Air Classroom.

The library consists of Administration Office, Resources Development Department (Teaching Materials Section), Circulation and Reference Department, Rare Books & Special Collections Department, Web Service Department, Discipline Service Department, Scientific Information Institute. There are over (Library 2021) students made up. On a typical day, Jiangsu university library has over 5000 visitors. It is open for almost 14 hours a day. This current library is due to a competing space issue from the former located around the Sanjiang building. The current total enrolment of fulltime students amounts to over 40,000, including 13,000 plus postgraduates and 3,000 plus international students. JSU offers 97 undergraduate programs, 213 master programs, and 64 Ph.D. programs. The programs cover 12 academic fields: Engineering, Agriculture, Science, Medicine, Management, Economics, Medicine, Law, Education, Literature, Art and History. The university has 13 post-doctoral research stations. It is evident from this statistic that more space is needed to accommodate the growing number of students; as such, the need to investigate the type of seat and their perception about noise in the library.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue about the library building has become topical. Many researchers have studied library building and it transformation over the year. It was found that with the discovery and use of the internet, the statement of Mann 2001 that services such as copyrighted books" and "site-licensed databases" (Mann 2001) of resources must be accessed within the library building for the library to remain relevant no longer hold as with time this services can now be accessed without necessarily coming into the library. Instead, the librarians must look at a more innovative way to keep patrons coming to the library building. It was found in Garnar and Tonyan (2021) that the shift towards online research has led to complaints that academic libraries have become "expensive 'book warehouses' and 'study halls.'". It, therefore, means that the library must keep its traditional role and at the same time conform to the changing need. Besides, the need to preserve an intellectual, productive atmosphere in the face of new ways of research and information

access is seen by increasing noise levels in academic libraries. The reason is that the library has to serve diverse groups of people in different learning contexts, including group learning, technological base learning, learning grid, and other forms of learning, which has brought some challenges transforming some libraries from quiet places to noisy places. The librarian is now faced with maintaining a good learning environment to meet the dynamic demand of its patrons (Garnar 2021). Irrespective of visiting the library, one may need a seat to perform whatever task. It may seem that seat and furniture's and their position play no role in the library, but according to Mount (2019), one need only to see the appearance of interior design to realize the collective effects of these elements on some particular spaces. Cornell (2003) argues, "If properly designed and placed, furniture is more than a place to sit; it can be a strategic asset" (p. 42). While furniture may not be a reason why a researcher will come to the library building, ,it can positively influence users' pleasure and length of stay (Jaskowiak, Garman et al. 2019) and most probably leave a good impression about the library. The type of seat can provide some comfort for learning. According to a survey by Allen and Moyer (2021), patrons mostly use small tables with two to four seating capacities. However, in the survey conducted by (McGinnis and Kinder 2021) majority of patrons preferred traditional tables and chairs.
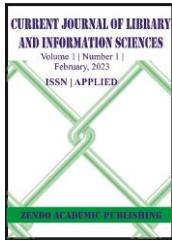
For a library to become a study hall, specific other conditions must be met. The condition includes but is not limited to a conducive library environment where noise is reduced to the barest minimal and the seat type available in the library. In a survey conducted at Gold Coast University Gou, Khoshbakht et al. (2018), most participants frequently indicated that "quiet" is the most mentioned reason, followed by library view, privacy, and minimal distraction as reasons for their current sitting. Participants also rated quiet and furniture as the factor influencing seat selection. Quiet is needed for complete concentration.

Outcome

By 2020 the seating arrangement needed to be changed due to the covid19 protocol to avert the pandemic. According to the protocol, users are not to sit face to face. In addition, the social distance needed to be observed. As a result, Jiangsu library needed to do some restructuring to accommodate the growing number of students visiting the library. It means that more space needs to be created, and that particular seat will be more convenient than the other. Seats are arranged on the corridors which use not be the case. The arrangement may conflict with the user preference. Though the Covid-19 case has reduced seating arrangement has not changed much at such the need to assess the performance for future procurement and adjustment in the library.

METHODOLOGY

This survey uses a quantitative method by adapting a structured questionnaire and administered on face-to-face approach for data collection. This methodology was used because we wanted to get the habitual users of the library as they have the opportunity to choose a seat by themselves and not to just occupy what is available. Questionnaires from (McGinnis and Kinder 2021) were adapted with few modifications. The modifications were mainly on the area of noise pollution in the library. The questionnaire was translated from English to Chinese and administered from 8:30 to 11 AM because most people visit the library during that period. For someone to be considered, he or she must be a student of Jiangsu and must be a frequent user of the library. So anyone that answered "rarely" to how frequent do you use the library was disqualified. Data were organized and coded using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and saved in the CSV format for further processing and analysis using SPSS statistical software based on 500 respondents' questionnaires received from those that visit the library often. Forty-eight (48) questionnaires were unfit for

analysis as they contained unanswered portions and others with more than one option selected. They are in all 13 questions in order to assess i.The preferred study space
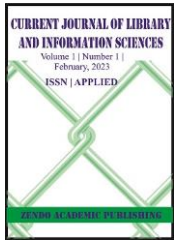
ii.   The preferred seat
iii.   The influence of noise on the study.
iv.   The use of reading areas

Demographic

  In all, 51% of respondents are female, and 45% are male. 4% preferred not to be identified. It could mean that there are more female visitors than men. The majority of respondents ranged from 18 to 22 years and 14 % between 23 and 30. The result means that most library visitors are undergraduates, as most postgraduate students have an office and prefer to study in their studio or laboratory.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Reasons for using the library	Study	74%
	Socialize	3
	Use a computer	1
	Sleep	1
	Other	21%
Study space preferred	small clusters of tables	35
	study surrounded by books	28
	study by a window	22
	large open spaces with a lot of tables	3
	in an individual study room	12
What type of seating do you prefer?	Couch	11
	Comfortable Lounge Chair	45
	Traditional table and chair	42
	Study Carrel	2
Do you actively search for a particular type of seating?	Yes	57
	No	43
How important is it to have moveable	Very important	76
	Important	23

furniture	Doesn't Matter	1
Are you ok with the noise in the library	Yes	25
	No	5
	somewhat	41
	It does not matter	28
Does the level of noise disturb your learning?	Yes	21
	No	6
	Not really	62
	It does not matter	11
are you ok with the place designated for reading aloud	Yes	16
	No	2
	Somewhat	76
	It does not matter	6

Table 1 shows the result .From table 1, it was found that the majority of patrons visit the library to study only, amounting to 74% of the respondents attesting to the fact that more space is needed as such more seats, this is expected as most of the undergraduates do not have an office and relied on the library for study. There was, however, a strange finding as 1% indicated that they come to the library to sleep. This may be because the weather is perfect all the time due to air conditioning in the library especially during winter; however, it could not be true that they sleep throughout their stay when they come to the library. It could mean the environment makes them sleepy.

Library space

About the library space, 35% preferred learning around a small cluster of tables against 28% who preferred studying around books. Only 12% preferred to study at the individual table. This is an indication that the majority preferred learning as a group and not as an individual. More share tables should be provided instead of single ones. This provision will help to minimize the space and accommodate more people in the library.

Type of seat

The seat is vital. How comfortable one seat could determine how long a user will be seated (McGinnis and Kinder 2021). It will affect the amount of time spent learning. Most respondents indicated they preferred comfortable lounge chairs and traditional tables and chairs with 45% and 42% respectively (Fig.1). Our hypothesis was confirmed as we anticipated more, reason for which library provided more of such seats. However, our study revealed that user-preferred moveable furniture with many indicated very important and important, representing 99%. In all, 57% also responded that they always search for a particular seat against 43% who do not care much. Most of the people who search for a particular seat always come early.
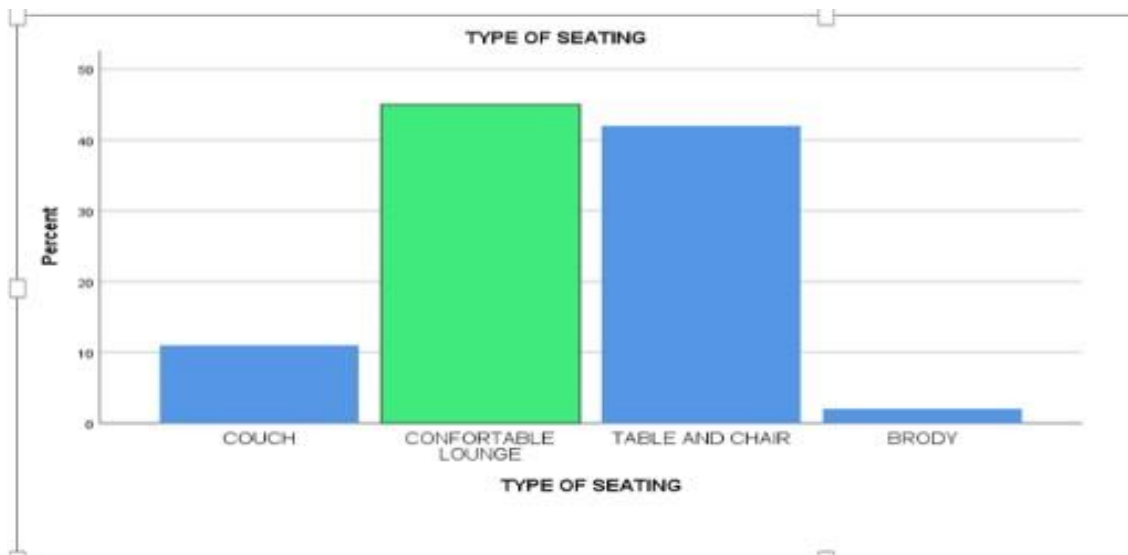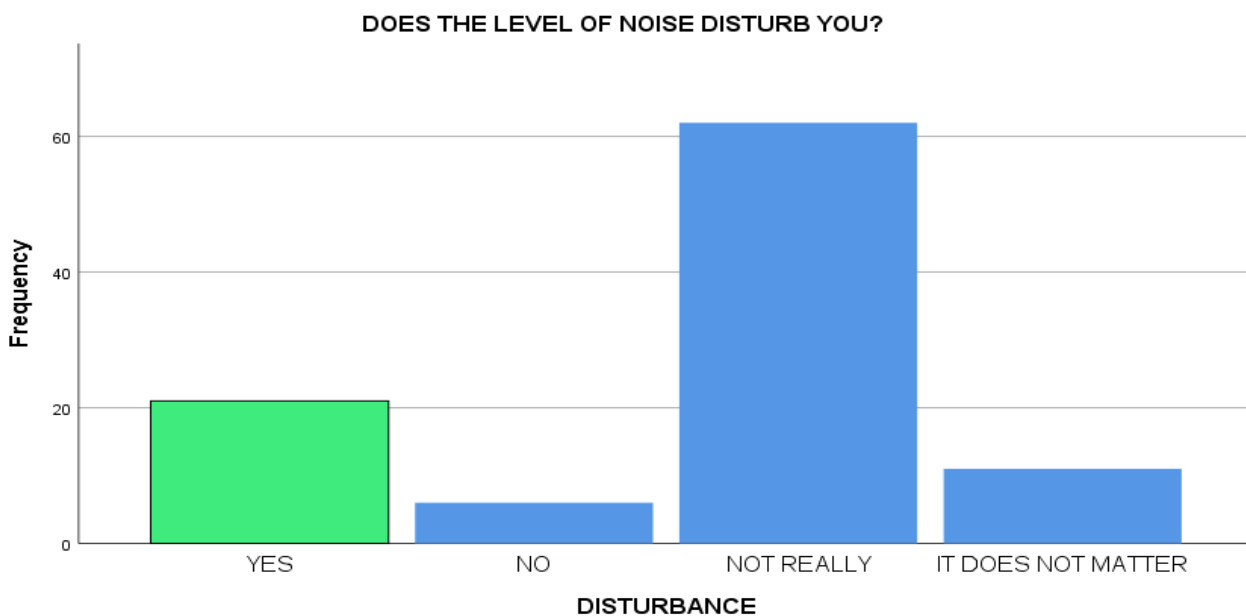
Fig.1 Seat Preference

Fig.3 Disturbance characteristic

There are three extensive areas designated as reading areas, but as a result of the growing number, the places around the main staircases have been added and marked reading areas to provide more opportunities to people who want to read aloud. The changes were done to control the noise level. Our study found that 62% are somewhat affected by the level of noise in the library (Fig.3). According to (Kpang and Dollah 2021) the major source of noise is from people, others are from automobile, mobile phones and equipment. The finding is in line with our study as we observed that most of the noise is from people reading aloud.

This is because many people do not use such areas designated for reading aloud as 76% of respondents indicated being not really satisfied with the place designated for the reading aloud.
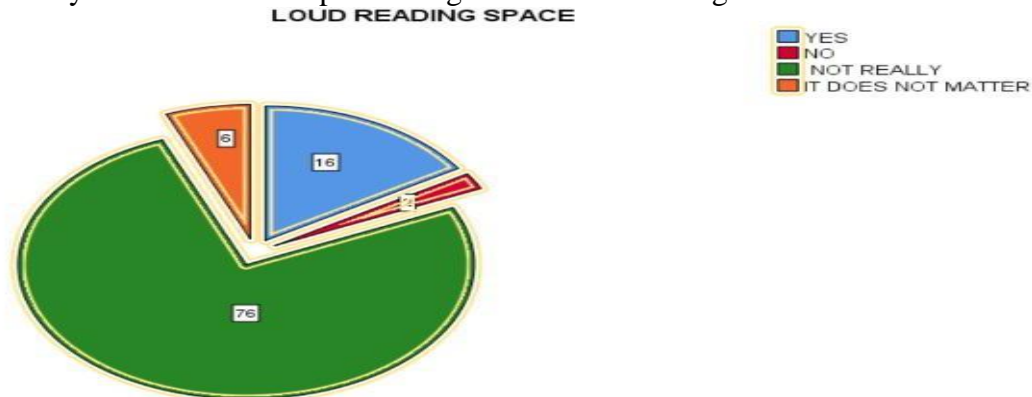

Fig.4 Loud reading space

One could argue that the temperature around that area may not be conducive, especially during winter. There is a need for improvement regarding noise control. One may not expect a noise-free environment, but it should be conducive for study. According to (Nikta and Karydis 2021) 40-45 dB is recommended acceptable noise level in the library. Many students use the corridor of each floor to read aloud, amounting to the level of effect identified in this study.
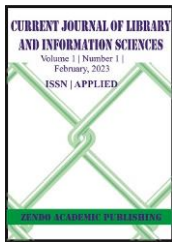
CONCLUSION

The importance of the library depends on providing a welcoming environment for patrons. Focusing only on the resources for academic success will be challenging without a serene environment. The goal of our study is to investigate library space. Specifically, this study investigated seat preference and the noise in the library. The result reveals that users are critical of the type of seat, and the majority preferred a comfortable seat; besides these, the noise is also a factor. We recommend firstly that librarians encourage patrons to minimise noise in the library and enforced punishment. Secondly users be encouraged to use the reading areas as it is mainly empty by improving the temperature. If possible, a floor can be designated for reading, preferably the last floor since the first to the fourth floor is open while the fifth and sixth floors are closed type from each other. So having people on the 6th floor will reduce noise and prevent people from being distracted by movement as people from the first to the fourth floor cannot see them. Our study implies that developing countries can learn from this and readjust library sitting arrangements to serve more students in the library. It can also be the basis for future furniture procurement. The noise control recommended here can help minimize noise and make the library environment enjoyable.
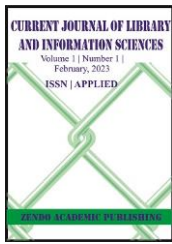
Acknowledgement

REFERENCES

Allen, F. R. and M. Moyer (2021). "A library seating census: Gathering seating occupancy data in an academic library to reveal furniture preferences and inform future planning." The Journal of Academic Librarianship **47**(5): 102427.

Garnar, M. and J. Tonyan (2021). "Library as place: Understanding contradicting user expectations." The Journal of Academic Librarianship **47**(5): 102391.

Garnar, M. T., Joel (2021). "Library as place: Understanding contradicting user expectations." The Journal of Academic Librarianship **47**(5): 102391.

Gayton, J. T. (2008). "Academic libraries:"Social" or "communal?" The nature and future of academic libraries." The Journal of Academic Librarianship **34**(1): 60-66.

Gou, Z., et al. (2018). "The impact of outdoor views on students' seat preference in learning environments." mdpi**8**(8): 96.

Jaskowiak, M., et al. (2019). "We're all in this together: An examination of seating and space usage in a renovated academic library." Library Philosophy: 1-17.

Kpang, M. B. T. and O. C. Dollah (2021). "Monitoring noise level in cities: A step towards urban environmental quality management in Nigeria." World Journal of Advanced ResearchReview**10**(3): 348-357.

Library, J. U. (2021). "Resources." Retrieved October 21, 2021, from https://eng.ujs.edu.cn/Resources/Library.htm.

Mann, T. (2001). "The importance of books, free access, and libraries as places—and the dangerous inadequacy of the information science paradigm." The Journal of Academic Librarianship **27**(4): 268-281.

McGinnis, R. and L. S. Kinder (2021). "The library as a liminal space: Finding a seat of one's own." The Journal of Academic Librarianship **47**(1): 102263.

Mohanty, S. (2002). Physical comfort in library study environments: observations in three undergraduate settings**:** https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:2588a2596c-2582eeb4287-2589cd2586-2588e2197a6199a2581.

Mount, E. (2019). Selection of Equipment and Furnishings. Creative Planning of Special Library Facilities, Routledge**:** 29-33.

Nikta, M. and C. Karydis (2021). "THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE FUTURE." Qualitative Quantitative Methods in Libraries 9(4): 633-654.

Appendix

1. How frequently do you come to the library? a. Several times a month b. Once a week c. Daily d. Several times a week e. Rarely.

2. What is your age? a. Under 18 b. 18–22c. 23–30 d. 31–45 e. 45–65 f. Over 65

3. What is your gender? a. Male b. Female c. I prefer not to identify
4. What is your primary reason for using the library? a. Study b. Socialize c. Use a computer d. Sleep e. Other
5. Which type of study space do you prefer? a. I prefer to study in an area with small clusters of tables. b. I prefer to study surrounded by books c. I prefer to study by a window d. I prefer to study in large open spaces with a lot of tables. e. I prefer to study in an individual study room
6. What type of seating do you prefer? a. Couch b. Comfortable Lounge Chair c. Traditional table and chair d. Brody (computer pod) e. Study Carrel f. Beanbag g. Other 7. Do you actively search for a particular type of seating? a. Yes b. No
8. Do you use the same type of seating each time if possible? a. Yes b. No
9. How important is it to have moveable furniture a. Very important b. Important. c. It doesn't Matter
10. Does the colour or arrangement ever affect your preference of seating? a. Yes b. No c. Somehow
11. Are you ok with the noise in the library a. no b. somehow c. Yes. d. It does not matter
12. Does the level of noise disturb your learning? a. Yes b. No c. Not really d. it does not matter 13. Are you ok with the place designated for reading aloud a. Yes b. No c. Somehow d. It does not matter?