

SPACE MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

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Abstract

The paper posited that space management in Nigerian University in contemporary times has become an issue to contend with by academic planners and University administrators. This is as a result of the ever increasing demand for University education; use of its facilities by the public without compromising the attainment of the overall goals of the system. Space management in this paper is therefore conceptualized as the meaningful, purposeful, and all inclusive physical planning, setting, allocation and utilization of facilities in an objective, efficient and productive manner in a University system. Achieving academic excellence and environmental sustainability in an era of climate change amidst scarce resources is through effective and efficient space management in Nigerian University system. The paper however acknowledged that a major challenge to space management is the exponential growth in students' population especially in public Universities and the seemingly lack of professional academic planners, physical facilities planners/estate managers and administrators with innovative skills poised to making space management a priority in University campuses. The paper however suggested amongst others that government, university proprietors and administrators should endeavour to engage all relevant stakeholders at the planning and implementation stages of the system. This is to assure efficiency in the continual space management without affecting negatively the core mandate of the system.

Keywords: Space management, University, Effective, Academic Planning and Administration.

Introduction

The global demographic increase arising from improvement in human standard of earning has reflected in low death rate. However, the phenomenal population increase in less developing countries of which Nigeria is one is exerting a great pressure on natural assets such as land; social, political and agricultural facilities. Thus, the scramble for space utilization for all kinds of human endeavor including education. In Nigeria today, there are 198 legally recognized Universities; (public and private) with over 20million students. This implies that the rational management of space for academic and non academic activities in the University amidst the ever increasing rate of students' enrolment has become problematic.

In this circumstance, University administrators and academic planners have been constantly challenged on how to effectively use the physical space either on full-time, or part-time basis to achieve the objectives of the system. Central among the roles of the University education is human capital development via training and re-training, promotion and encouragement of intellectual capacity of individuals to understand both local and international environment amongst others (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2013).

The International Institute for Educational Planning (1994) asserts that the effectiveness and efficiency (success) in providing adequate space and facilities in University system is linked to the institutions admission policies, availability of infrastructures and other resources provided. The various programmes offered and the application of technology (innovation) contribute significantly to space and facilities management.

Concept of space management

Avalanche of literatures abound with regard to the concept of space management. According to Newcastle University (2007), space management is the ability to allocate space to a specific user or for specific use. This definition appears non-specific in terms of the user and the purpose. Rymarzak (2014) posits space management within the context of a University setting as the objective, efficient and productive use of the space and equipment owed by the University. It thus suggests that the design and setting of Ivory towers is aimed at providing a functional teaching, research, social, religious, and economic environment that is secured and friendly. Atkin and Brooks (2009) define space management as integrated approach to operating, maintenance, improving and adapting the building and infrastructure of an organization in order to create an environment that strongly supports the primary objectives of the organization. It is on this strength Osaigbovo and Ikedasin (2022) advise that for effective teaching and learning objectives to be attained in a school system, school facilities mapping and maintenance both visual and audio-visual materials are imperative.

Space and facilities management in the opinion of Pitt and Tucker (2008) involves the integration and alignment of non-core services, including those relating to premises. The physical and social environment in an academic setting should exude aesthetic value with great psychological and intellectual stimulation to both staff and students including visitors. Space management, therefore, covers issues bothering on space strategy establishment, space planning, space environment management and space utilization auditing (Ibrahim, Yusoff & Bilal, 2012).

From the foregoing, space management is holistic and comprehensive. It involves taking short and long term decisions related to how best to utilize what is often limited space. This include park and garden areas, common lounges, hostels, staff quarters, recreational facilities, office accommodations, laboratory workshops, sitting areas, waste facilities etc. A critical element of space management according to Rymarzak (2014) is finance which is essential to construction of new facilities; refurbishment of the existing buildings and facilities (school plants).

In a University space management process therefore, critical stakeholders such as the Governing Council, Vice-chancellor, Academic Planning Unit, Estate Department, Faculty Deans and Directors including the Heads of Departments have various roles to play. They must and should ensure that space availability, utilization, and management is congruent to the vision and mission of the academic institution. This is on the strength that the effectiveness of space management in relation to the goals of the University is maintained. The University top management team must therefore constitute management committee members; develop model or technique and ensure that employees and users are responsible to space management (NAO, 1996).

Space planning model and utilization

The desire for effective space management needed to achieve maximum benefits of all the numerous services rendered in the University requires a space planning model and utilization. O’Neil & Wymer (2009) note that the fluidity and dynamism currently experienced in the breath and location of various work activities in the University call for space management model that will proffer solutions to the problem arising from academic environment. A planning model will promote synergy, collaboration, learning, and socialization aiming at the critical stakeholders in the management of the University education.

Space management and facilities planning models need to be given priority because of its relevance to political, economic, socio-cultural, policies, objectives, implementation and legal bases for the establishment of an academic institution (Gbadamosi, 2005).

Other factors that need to be considered in adopting a planning model for a higher academic institution include the following:

- i. Educational status and headcount. This includes accurate census of physical buildings, personnel including lectures and support staff, furniture and recurrent cost.
- ii. Supply and demand of academic staff (number of professors, readers, senior lecturers, intermediate and junior academics).
- iii. Design of school buildings, construction equipment and maintenance.
- iv. Curriculum activities. This include types of academic programmes, courses and Department in line with minimum benchmark standards approved by the regulating agency like Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC).

Table 1: Typical Space Allocation Benchmark for Programmes in Nigerian universities

| Item required | Undergraduate Programme | Postgraduate Programme |
|---|----------------------------------|--|
| Physical Facilities: For effective running of each programme, Dean’s and HOD’s offices must be provided with adequate facilities. | Accommodation: (m ²) | Accommodation: (m ²) |
| | Professor’s Office 24 | Professor’s Office 18.50 |
| | HOD 24 | HOD 18.50 |
| | Senior Lecturer 16 | Tutorial/Teaching Staff’s office } 13.50 |
| | Lecturer 12 | Tech. Staff Space 7.00 } Secretarial space 7.00 } |
| | Assistant Lecturer 8 | Seminar space per student 1.85 |
| | Snr. Admin Staff 12 | Adequate Classroom Exam. Halls/Theatre with enough chairs and tables |
| | Junior Tech. Staff 5 | |
| | Studio space 4 per student | |
| | Lecture space 0.5 per student | |
| Seminar space 0.5 per student | | |

Source: NUC (2007 & 2013)

Ajayi (2007) remarks that the fundamental reason for space planning and facilities management is to ensure the efficiency in the use of resources in meeting the educational needs of the society. He adds that the physical and educational needs of the students are stable in a conducive teaching and learning environment where there is proper planning and adequate management.

Rationale for space planning and management

It is therefore crucial to plan and manage space including its facilities in the University system for the following reasons:

- i. It helps to coordinate the various activities, achieve maximum effectiveness, efficiency and productivity.
- ii. It ensures judicious use of scarce resources of facilities including land needed to achieve educational goals within a given time.
- iii. It ensures adequate prediction, projection, and forecasting of the needed facilities to achieve academic excellence.
- iv. It helps to prioritize alternative choices of facilities.
- v. Pressure from population explosion calls for adequate planning of space and facilities management.
- vi. For the purpose of innovation, science and technology, planning and management of space together with its facilities is necessary.

Challenges on space management and development

A major challenge to space management in most Nigerian Universities is the consistent high students' enrollment and corresponding increase in number of academic and non academic staff recruited. The enormous growth in staff and students' population has resulted to progressive reduction of available space and inadequate provision of essential educational facilities. Facilities like lecture theatres and halls, office space for staff, hostel accommodation, workshops, laboratories and their holdings are grossly inadequate. This problem is further compounded by poor financial support/provision by government for public Universities (African-American Institute, 2015). This account for one of the reasons the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is constantly demanding for increase in Universities' funding and provision of special revitalization of funds to Universities management to improve the academic learning space in Universities.

Several empirical studies by researchers in Nigerian higher education have found that there is a strong relationship between management and development of academic learning space and Institution effectiveness. Among them are Ajayi, Awosusi, Arogwade and Ekudayo (2011); Animasahun and Odeku (2014); Okolie and Ogunoh (2013).

Another challenge is paucity of professionally experienced academic and physical planning personnel in the University system. The available ones lack innovative skills on how ivory towers in contemporary times are designed, developed and managed. Global changes in workspace as a result of climate change, technology, innovation and economic pressure has posed a challenge to the experiences of the space managers and learning infrastructures in Nigerian Universities. Abdullahi *et al.* (2017) lament that there is no operational and functional interaction between space managers and the various academic units in the University system on regular basis in order to identify current facility

requirements in terms of benchmarks, impairment and sustainability of the existing ones. An experience which personnel in physical and academic planners and Nigerian Universities copiously by lack.

Related to the challenge of personnel experience is the issue of information and technology. Space managers do not have the required information and technological know how to connect an understanding of conducive academic workspace in relation to the location and provision of equipment and facilities. The lite span, frequency and carrying capacity of facilities in a physical learning space can be determined by modern technology which school facilities managers is lacked in Nigerian academic milieu.

Besides the physical/learning space has been compromised in terms of aesthetics, technology, adequacy and convenience because of numerous programmes in most higher institutions. Some institutions run full time, part time, weekend, open-distance learning coupled with so many religious, political and sporting activities. All these exert strains on the effective management of space and its related facilities.

Other challenges are lack of sustainable policy frame work by government and proprietors of University education in terms of space planning development and management; proliferation of Universities with attendant poor infrastructural quality and unattractive physical setting. Poor maintenance culture and lack of transformative skills by the leadership of some Universities are inhibiting the expected serene atmosphere, security and high academic excellence.

Implication for academic planning

Space management is very critical to any tertiary education poised to the achievement of its mandate in an effective and efficient manner. To this end, the educational planners, academic planning unit, University managers, Estate planners and administrators have great responsibilities in this direction. Physical planning units in the University needs to be responsive and proactive in this regard. The physical planning and estate management units owe a duty to ensure that physical facilities especially building structures are built in well-laid out areas that can stand the test of time in terms of quality, durability, sustainability, and occupancy besides the aesthetics that is required.

The core value of a University system which is teaching, research and community services can be fully realized if University facilities are planned and managed in available space within a tertiary institution. Lecture theatres in multiple storey buildings and regulated lecture hours with regard to various academic programmes will reduce the scrabble for learning space by both staff and students which often result to conflict especially during examinations. Occupancy of space by various users in the University at a given time need to be guaranteed by both physical facilities managers, academic planning unit and school administrators.

Effective utilization of facilities in the University can be predicated on the skills and ingenuity deployed in the management of space on which the facilities are built. The architectural design and the inclusiveness in the space management and facilities therein is very important. The physically challenged should always be factored into the effective utilization of learning space and facilities provided in the University for ease of access and use.

The deployment of technology in the management of learning space in contemporary terms has become imperative in a bid to provide access and e-learning to ever-growing population of people seeking tertiary education. Therefore, academic planners and University need to be innovative and technological in the provision of virtual and cyber learning space. Band with, internet connectivity; sight lines for wireless technology in libraries and lecture/classrooms be properly planned and provided in the present day campuses. A flexible and technological driven learning space will improve quality education and promote students restiveness in schools.

Space facilities management should not undermine environmental sustainability and green park. The effect of climate change on human existence has become phenomenal. To this end, University administrators and relevant authorities in the system must improve and preserve green space and parks for environmental sustainability. The natural ecosystem should be preserved for a healthy living in the midst of effective and efficient space management in the Nigerian University system. The environment should therefore be neat, attractive, aesthetic, serene and psychologically soothing.

Effective space management in the University serves academic, recreational, social, religious, political and economic purposes. All critical stakeholders including staff and students need to collaborate through exchange of ideas continually towards space management for the overall goals of the University. It implies that play a University setting and its space management is a responsibility of the critical stakeholders and end users especially.

The academic brief of a University often include the physical setting and facilities mapping of the structures. It therefore behoves on the academic planning unit of every University to be part of the space management. Academic programmes that are related should be contiguous to each other for shared facilities and ease of accessibility. The learning space should be managed for physical, emotional and learning convenience without distortion of aesthetic and natural landscape that must be preserved by all.

Conclusion

Space management in Nigeria University system like in other climes has become an important aspect of University administrative system that cannot be glossed over. The strategic goals, effective utilization of school plants, and environmental sustainability is largely predicated on facilities planning and academic space management. Thus, high academic success, relative peace among staff and students; cost reduction in environmental maintenance will be achieved if learning space is faithfully managed for maximum goals attainment of University education.

Suggestions

The following suggestions are made in order to improve management of space in Nigeria University system.

1. Facilities planning and space management should be based on the principles of inclusiveness to the needs of everybody in the University environment.
2. University administrators should constitute park and garden committee saddled with the responsibility of maintenance and utilization of physical land space while ensuring that green environment is preserved.
3. Academic offices, lecture rooms, hostel accommodations and students' centre, conference hall should be built to specification as prescribed by the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC).
4. University management team; Vice Chancellor; the Directors of Academic planning unit, Deans, Academic Heads of Department should ensure the lecturers adhere to lecture hours and make use learning space provided. This will guarantee effective utilization of learning space and of course reduce conflict that could arise.
5. Effective management of space is anchored on adequate funding. School administrators therefore needs to make provision for maintenance, renovation and upgrade of the architectural landscape of University environment when necessary.
6. During resource verification and academic programme accreditation, NUC should include effective space management of the University as one of the key areas for assessment. To this end, the culture of space management will be entrenched in Nigerian University administration.
7. University administrators should deploy technology in space management. Also, strong data bank where both qualitative and quantitative information with regard to space facilities management can be stored and retrieved for use.

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