PUBLIC LIBRARY: A THIRD PLACE FOR CHILDREN IN ZARIA METROPOLISES

IBRAHIM Joy Oiza
Ahmadu Bello University Zaria

TAKAI, Grace
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Theresa Imeh
Ahmadu Bello University Zaria

Abstract
This study focused on public library as a third place for children in Zaria metropolises Three research objectives were used in the study. These are, to find out the alternative third place used by children in Zaria metropolis, to find out how often and for what purpose children use the third place, to find out how public libraries can be improved to suit the children's needs as a third place. A qualitative research was adopted for the study. Data was collected through semi-structured interview and focus group discussion. Purposive sampling technique was used to select twenty participants in the four focus group used for the study. The findings of the study revealed that there are influences that affects the selection of alternative third place for children these are majorly sociological interaction, leisure activities, parental influences and the proximity of the third place freedom of access to churches, mosque, playground football field, most children rarely visit the library and the majorly use it for reading and home work but needs more gaming services that will attract them to use the public library, it was also discover that children will be willing to select the library as a third place if there are more fun activities were their friends and family would go there just as it happens in places of worship. The study concluded that public libraries are not considered as a third place for children and that services that will attract the children to use the library as a third place are lacking It was recommended among other that Librarians should device a means of creating more fun activities and services that will attract and make children use the library as a third place

Keywords: Children Services, Public Library, Third Place

Introduction

Libraries have long been recognized as valuable community institutions and serve as a traditional "third place" alongside homes and schools. The concept of a "third place" was popularized by sociologist Ray Oldenburg, who argued that

these informal gathering spaces are essential for fostering social interaction, community engagement, and personal development. In recent times the notion of libraries as a social space has become prevalent in the academic and public library literature and libraries are gradually being referred to as another third place (Aarhus, 2016). However, there is need to research libraries as a third place for children and this is because parental involvement at home has been on the decline due to work and personal responsibilities and the desire for children to have a third place away from the home where they can be comfortable and accepted among peers has become very important. Children library services have been researched to have a very positive impact on children's literacy levels, social, intellectual and emotional development. Libraries are primarily information service providers. however the changing roles of libraries have led to them being referred to as a third place, a third place is a place where both parents and children can learn, relax, play games, have fun, make new friends and socialize making the library a home away from home.

Contemporary scholarship has argued that the public library environment fulfills the characteristics of the Third Place as a realm of escape, sociability and leisure imbued with a loose structure and sense of equality (Harris, 2007; Lin, Pang & Luyt, 2015; Potet, 2015; Morehart, 2016; Bruxvoort, 2017; Besson, 2018; Castro, 2018; Child, 2018; Hardenbrook, 2019) in Bailin (2011). A third place is a place where people can go freely to relax and socialize other than home which is the first place and school/work which is the second place. The incorporation of social spaces in the library as opposed to just the quiet reading areas it is known for is what has qualified it to be called a third place.

Libraries inspire children's imagination and creativity through storytelling, arts and crafts activities, and access to a diverse range of literature and can spark a love for reading and storytelling, which are essential for cognitive development. They are also generally safe and inclusive spaces that welcome children from various backgrounds. They provide an environment where children can feel comfortable, explore their interests, and interact with diverse individuals, fostering tolerance and understanding.

Statement of the Problem

Researchers observed that children library services in Zaria metropolis have not migrated from the traditional reading and lending borrowing services it used to and public library being a third place is supposed to serve as that pleasurable and convenient place where children and their families can visit, relax, play, socialize and make friends making it a home away from home and a third place for them, but this is not the case in our public libraries children hardly visit the public library and do not see it as a third place or an attractive place for

them to visit. Hence this research focuses on libraries as a social space, a third place for children in Zaria metropolis. This research will contribute greatly in building an innovative public library service for children developing them socially, intellectually and emotionally.

Objectives of the study

The research has the following objectives:
1. To find out the alternative third place used by children in Zaria metropolis
2. To find out how often and for what purpose children use the third place
3. To find out how public libraries can be improved to suit the children's needs as a third place

Literature Review

The incorporation of social spaces in the library as opposed to just the quiet reading areas it is known for is what has qualified it to be called a third place. (Rankin & Brock, 2012) notes this as she reflects on the current trend in library redevelopments and renovations. There has been an increase in the inclusion of group study areas, discussion rooms, seminar rooms, round discussion tables, a report about future library services for children gave ten recommendations and one of which is for public libraries to work with play as a valuable activity and an important cultural expression. It has being agreed that the library is an important space for playing. An outdoor platform play areas should be designed as a family space were both parents and children can relax and have fun these areas should support different types of play for different age groups that will enhance the children cognitive thinking skills, language as well as social skills. The library is not bound by formal learning goals the users visit in their spare time and it's a non-commercial service. Users flock to library buildings and spaces that are attractive, centrally located, technologically current, and arranged to meet the needs of groups as well as solitary users (Bailin, 2011). It is noteworthy to consider the fact that as different users would have different study needs; the library must be able to cater adequately for the differing needs of users especially the children (Waxman, 2007).

Libraries have also been addressed as traditional and virtual third places Rankin and Brock (2012) observed that there is a challenge for libraries to remain relevant in the 21st century. Many other places and activities are available to families and young people which can easily keep them away from library visit. This express the need for libraries to use evidence base data to improve services and meet the specific needs of users. Ellin and Lapin (2011) also echo the varied future needs of children who are inevitably influenced by the media and technology around them. Rankin and Brock conclude that libraries need to

provide 21st century services if they will remain relevant in this age and this means an inclusion of social, leisure and digital activities/services.

Library services to children are provided mainly by school and public libraries. There are a number of guidelines in the literature for the establishment of library services which include guidelines on space and design, infrastructure, collection, staffing, ethics and children's rights. The library association guidelines for public library services give a detailed overview of what type of service should be delivered to children. These services are to be delivered with the aim of promoting literacy and the love for reading, motivating children to be natural book lovers, supporting parents and carer's, helping individuals gain skills and confidence in using the library in a creative and welcoming environment (Rankin & Brock, 2012).

This review of existing literature has indicated that although libraries are advocating for lasting relevance in the 21st century and being refurbished to meet the criteria of third places in most countries, the primary role of information dissemination should not be tampered with and emphasis should be placed on making libraries a desirable third place for children so that true sustainability of the relevance of libraries can be preserved.

Methodology

Qualitative research methodology was used to find out opinions of children on current library services in Zaria metropolis and suggestions for improvement this was employed through focus group discussion and semi-structured interview. This was achieved by engaging the children in discussions in groups and interacting with them to collect data for analysis. The study targeted children within the age range of five (5) to ten (10) years, Convenience and availability of the participants was thus the technique used, the convenience sampling is where the participants are gathered conveniently not randomly or through some pre-designed methods (Wildemuth, 2009). Twenty (20) children were selected from within Zaria metropolises, Samaru, Zango, Graceland and Zaria city. A voice recorder was also used to record all the focus group and interview sessions, at the end of the data collection, the entire data was transcribed for the focus groups. The data collected were analyzed using a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a categorizing strategy for qualitative data which has been adjudged as one of the most common techniques of qualitative data analysis (Brystrom, 2012).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, observation notes, or other non-

textual materials that the researcher accumulates to increase the understanding of the phenomenon. The process of analysing qualitative data predominantly involves coding or categorizing the data. Basically it involves making sense of huge amounts of data by reducing the volume of raw information, followed by identifying significant patterns, and finally drawing meaning from data and subsequently building a logical chain of evidence (McNeil 2015).

Table 4.1 Data Analysis by categories and sub categories

Research Question	Categories Third place	Sub-categories influences
1 The alternative third places used by children in Zaria metropolis.	Church/Mosque	Social interactions, leisure activities, sense of belonging, parents/family
	Parks, playgrounds, football fields	Leisure activities, proximity and accessibility, sense of belonging
	Cinemas or Watching TV at home, computer/ Tech hubs or spending time on mobile phones	Leisure activities, influence of Technology
		Parents/family
	Public Libraries, reading hubs, reading at home	
2 How often and for what purpose do you use the public library as a third place	Reading Homework, Storytelling, Meeting friends Watch cartoons Borrow story books Use the internet Gaming activities	Daily, weekly, monthly, rarely

3 Improved Library Services to suit the needs of children as a third place	Friendly Librarians
	My friends and family should go as well
	food and drinks should be in the library
	The library should have a play ground
	Animated books with lots of pictures to explain
	Television and games should be in the library
	internet and computers should be introduced into the library

The 15 wide categories and 8 subcategories as shown in the data analysis in Table 4.1 above were analyzed based on each research objectives.

These are shown in the analysis below.

Interview Analysis
Theme one: Alternative Third Place
The objective sought to identify the alternative third places used by children in Zaria metropolis.
Church and mosque constitute one of the major alternative third place children visit after school, for example one of the participants said I usually follow my parents to church most evening, another said I and my other friends go to Islamic school after school everyday, however, participant from all the locations in this

study acknowledged that public library does not serve as an alternative third place for them, majority of the children who participated in the study mentioned that their alternative third place aside home and schools are churches and mosque, while others identified that play parks and football fields are their alternative third place. For example, one of the participant from the second focus group in Zango said my mummy usually takes me to play at a playpark very close to my house every weekend another of the participant said I and my friends play football games during our leisure time after school.

Theme two: Frequency and purpose of using public library as a third place

Majority of the children who participated in the groups noted that the major libraries accessible to them were their school libraries and a few public libraries Thus, most of the participants visited their school library once a week during their library period, a good number of the participant in the group rarely use the public library and when asked the purpose why they use the public library, majority of the participants in the group agreed that they used the public library to read books, do homework, and borrow story books. It was noted that non of the participant in the group used the library for gaming activities, listening to story, watch educative cartoon, paint and draw or use the internet. One of the participant in the group from Grace land said I love using the library to study because its quiet, while another said anytime I enter the library I usually feel sleepy, another of the participant said the last time I visited the public library I saw a book I loved but I was not allowed to borrow it.

Theme three: Improved Library Services to Suit the Needs of the Children as a Third Place

The children who participated in this study were asked to contribute on how they will want their library to be improved to suit their need as a third place, interestedly all the participants in the four (4) focus group were so excited and eager to contribute on how the library service can be improved some of the participant in the first focus group in Samaru hastily said, I want a big library with a play park where my parents and friends can come freely with me, another child from the last focus group in Zaria said I want a library with a friendly librarian, also another participant said I want to be able to play games in the library while others want animated books and television. The children agreed that they would love to use the library more and make it a third place option if they are allowed to play games, socialize, eat, watch movies, use computers, surf the internet, draw, have group studies and events/activities that will educate and entertain them with a friendly librarian.

Discussion of Findings
The alternative third place used by children in Zaria metropolis
From the results we see that there are influences that affect the selection of a third place by children these can be divided into internal or external influences and the most predominant of these influences are majorly sociological interaction, leisure activities, parental influences and the proximity of the third place freedom of access to churches, mosque, playground football field and the other places the children identified make them an alternative third place for them. Libraries should be a place that is easily accessible to children and does not put any pressure on them to read or do something (Heeks, 2000).

Frequency and purpose of using public library as a third place
Studies have shown that "play is fundamental to children's happiness and well-being, and the evidence shows that it is also influential in their health and future life chances" (McNeil, 2015).). The effect of play on children justifies the need to incorporate play or gaming activities aside the normal quiet reading section in children library services as they will always play but should be provide with space, The children only seemed attracted to places that permit freedom of play and games to play. They are more interested in gaming activities such as baby corners, dress up games, puppet booth, pet corner, board games, video games, puzzles, It is therefore worthwhile to complement the classroom learning with availability of games in the library. Some games might not be evidently educational, but they provide a well grounded child with "skills like strategic thinking, innovative thinking and co-operation" (Missimer, n.d.a).

Improved Library Services to Suit the Needs of the Children as a Third Place
From the results we discover that children will be willing to select the library as a third place if their friends or family would go there just as it happens in places of worship. This particular point was ranked most importantly by the children alongside having a librarian that is friendly and receptive. A librarian is a very vital and determining factor of the success of a library meeting the needs of its users (John, 2005) therefore the children librarian must be very friendly and receptive in handling the children and helping them like the library as a third place. The second and third ranked suggested improved service is food and the aesthetic beauty of the library, these kids are in school; learning and reading. It could therefore come across as a boring repetition of the same daily activities the school offers if libraries provide only reading and borrowing services. There are many other activities run by libraries that can attract children to use the library asides reading and borrowing books. Activities such as story hours, storytelling, film showings, summer reading clubs, arts and crafts programs, dancing, creative dramatics, computer clubs, quiz/debate competition, the aesthetics of the

environment etc. , it was fascinating to realize that all the children were interested in redesigning their current libraries and turning them into comfort zones and fun places making it attractive, colourful, with decorations, books hanging from the roof, more free spaces, comfortable furniture, accessible shelves, relaxed atmosphere, ventilation, swimming pools, disco balls, also animated books with lots of picture alongside the introduction of television and games in the library and internet connection.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, it could be concluded that public libraries are not considered as a third place for children and that services that will attract the children to use the library as a third place are lacking, it was noted even those who use the libraries only use them occasionally especially during examination and they do not enjoy doing this and since they do not enjoy the activity we cannot say they would intentionally choose the library as a third place and to change this certain services should be introduce into the library that would make it a much fun place to be and enjoyable when visited so that children can consciously yearn to be in the library outside school and their home. This has brought the researcher to the conclusion that although libraries have the potential of being a third place for children in Zaria metropolises but it is currently not a third place option for them.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

➢ It is recommended that apart from the funding body of public libraries, other agencies, Non-Governmental Organization, community members, organization, schools, parents, philanthropist and influential individuals needs to be involved in supporting the public library services in making it an alternative third place for the children.

➢ Other public libraries should be erected and made accessible to the children as only few libraries are available in Zaria metropolises, bringing the library closer to the children's locality with variety of activities and services will make them use the library more frequently as a third place

➢ Librarians should device a means of creating more fun activities and services that will attract and make children use the library as a third place

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