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A Systematic Review of Academic Library Spaces as Facilitators of Student Engagement in Higher Education Learning

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Abstract

This research paper has been designed to systematically examine and synthesize existing published research documents on the role of academic library spaces in facilitating student engagement in learning within higher education contexts. Portraying a comprehensive analysis of published research documents form different academic contexts, the study synthesizes several findings from the past few decades to explore how academic library spaces are fostering in engagement of students in learning in higher education. The review indicates that these academic library spaces provide a platform for engaging students in their different learning activities in the university. This study has been based on the published research documents extracted from digital databases including Google Scholar, Web of Science, Sage, Tylor & Francis, Springer Nature, Emerald Insights, etc. Researchers continued to extract data on the subject till reaching the point of saturation (97 published research documents). Thematic analysis has been done to present the qualitative data. The findings emphasize that academic library spaces have been dissected into different spaces including collection spaces, special use spaces, user setting spaces, discussion spaces, silent zone spaces, audio\video spaces, and staff workspaces. The review also has studies engagement of students in learning in higher education, and it includes creative learning, collaborative learning, communication skill learning, active learning, cognitive learning, effective learning, and job oriented learning. The study findings assert that engagement of students in learning has been linked with the academic library spaces in higher education.

Key Words

Academic Library, Library Spaces, Systematic Review, Students Learning, Higher Education

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Introduction

Academic library is consisted of collection spaces (Shoaib, Tariq, Shahzadi, & Ali, 2022). These collection spaces include textbooks sections, encyclopedia section, reference section, journals, magazines, review articles, and published papers that students need for their learning, training and research. These collection areas provide unpaid services to the students and have an essential role in engaging them for learning (Safwat et al., 2024; Scherlen & McAllister, 2019; Shotick, 2024). In all over the world, there are special spaces in library for disabled and modernized persons. These special spaces are facilitated with assistive technology, digital content, computers and

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specialized learning material (Shoaib, Shehzadi, & Abbas, 2024b). Increase the engagement of special people in higher education libraries likewise schools and colleges aid in building their self-confidence and provide mental and physical support (Cannon & Kapelis, 1976; Phan & Le, 2025; Shields, 2016). Academic libraries have well organized user setting spaces that create an ideal environment to focus by providing quiet learning area, adoptable hours and advance technology (Ahmad, Shoaib, & Shaukat, 2021). Different counter and elevated tables in learning area assure that the seating space is easy and relax. Comfortable seats with good lights help the student in focusing on the learning without any interruption ((Shoaib, Fatima, & Jamil, 2021). Learning spaces of the library is particularly designed for conversation and debate to fulfill the knowledge requirement of the students (Shoaib, Ali, & Akbar, 2021). It is observed that the practical learning take place in an environment that is facilitated with different advance technology and resources that improves understanding, debates and argumentation of the student (Biggeri, Diego, & Bellacicco, 2020; Champion & Gunnlaugson, 2018; Reyes-Mendy, Stefan, & Opazo-Pina).

In university, libraries silent areas had a space that include use of mobile, group conversation and audible music are strictly restricted (Ahmad, Ahmad, Shoaib, & Shaukat, 2021). It is especially for the students to provide them calm and noise free environment to focus on their learning with minimum sound distraction (Graham, 2012; Vallis et al., 2025; Yu, D., & Burke, 2021). In the whole world, to facilitate the student learning through advanced tools an area equipped with audio and video spaces for digital resources consisting of computer, projectors and LEDs to improve student learning skills by providing a friendly environment to use technology in higher education (Vallis et al., 2025). Staff working space is library has been designed with work room, storage room and e-mail room to maintain the decorum of the library (Shoaib, Shehzadi, & Abbas, 2024a). It provides a healthy environment to do work effortlessly and efficiently. Different techniques and library rules have been made to collaborate between students and library staff (Dickerson, Joy, & Stockwell, 2016; McKay & Robson, 2023; Scoles et al., 2021). Hence, this study has been designed to systematically examine and synthesize existing published research documents on the role of academic library spaces in facilitating student engagement in learning within higher education contexts.

The Data and Methods

This study adopts a systematic review research methodology to synthesize existing literature (published research documents) on the role of academic library spaces in promoting engagement of students in learning in higher education. It has been observed that a systematic review is an established method for identifying, integrating, and evaluating findings from relevant studies to generate evidence-based conclusions. The study follows a qualitative systematic review design. The review of literature has been structured around academic library spaces and engagement of students in learning in higher education. The inclusion criteria have been based on peer-reviewed journal research articles, published in previous recent years, English language, and higher education context. However, grey literature, studies outside the higher education context, and not focusing on diversity or inclusion have been excluded from this study. The published research documents have been extracted from different databases including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and PsycINFO. Different search terms with different combinations have been used to extract the data. Screen and selection process has also been done based on inclusion criteria. Qualitative content analysis has been employed to identify recurring themes and patterns in the data. The data analysis has been completed based on the thematic analysis of 97 published research documents till reaching point of saturation. It is important to mention here that this study has not involved data collection from humans directly. Hence, this study has not affected humans, animals, and the environment.

Results and Discussion

The existing body of literature pointed out that students with cognitive or physical disabilities' academic engagement is decreased by limited accessibility options (Vogus, 2020). As mentioned in the study findings

indicated that students general academic well-being and cognitive performance were enhanced by green design aspects (Carrapatoso, 2021). Similarly, the study asserted that students who believe that library spaces represent their needs and ideals were more motivated to study (Mathew & Ibrahim, 2023). Likewise, the crux of the study clinched that students in media communication and technology disciplines benefit most from digital innovation in libraries (Foster & Siddle, 2020). Moreover, the analysis of the study revealed that ineffective temperature control reduces user happiness and cuts down on the amount of time spent on schoolwork (Brown et al., 2024). In the same token, the study findings articulated that involving students in space remodeling fosters a sense of responsibility and raises academic engagement levels overall (Al-Mekhlafi, Essam, Waleed, & Jadhav, 2025). Moreover, the research revealed that the benefits of artificial illumination were varied; some students claim that prolonged study sessions give them migraines (Sun, Shih-Jou, & Chao, 2019). The study conducted in the past reported that group project rooms were essential for facilitating cooperative research projects and team-based academic learning (Arshad, Anwar, & Shoaib, 2024; Hlatshwayo & Shawa, 2020).

The existing body of literature pointed out that to guarantee fair academic access for all students, regardless of ability, accessibility audits were crucial (Jin, Qiang, Weiyan, Yanan, & and Zhao, 2024). As mentioned in the study findings indicated that studies show that logical layouts and well-organized shelves promote autonomous study and scholarly discoveries (Järvenoja, Piia, & Törmänen, 2019). Similarly, the study asserted that proper lighting, background ambiance, and seating arrangements improve reading comfort (Tyrer, Joanne, & Corke, 2013). Likewise, the crux of the study clinched that well-kept, aesthetically beautiful library spaces were associated with higher academic productivity, according to students (Ali, Zaman, & Shoaib, 2024; Bryson, 2016). Moreover, the analysis of the study revealed that promote open academic involvement, security must strike a balance between comfort and safety at university level (Comunian & Ooi, 2016). In the same token, the study findings articulated that students' academic confidence is down, and online research efforts were undermined by poor Wi-Fi access (Lehtomäki, Josephine, & and Posti-Ahokas, 2016). Moreover, the research revealed that digital learning zones facilitate flexible academic multitasking and enhance resource accessibility (Nielsen, 2014; Shoaib, Zaman, & Abbas, 2024). The study conducted in the past reported that first-year students benefit from clear library orientation seminars that guide them through academic resources (Chiu, Weiyan, & Kuan, 2021).

The existing body of literature pointed out that research indicates that collaborative spaces encourage active student knowledge construction and academic discussion participation (Maguire, Arlene, Philip, & Maguire, 2017). As mentioned in the study findings indicated that research emphasizes the importance of clear signage in directing efficient use of academic library space (Bish & Lommel, 2016). Similarly, the study concludes asserted that badly designed spaces frequently deter students from participating in worthwhile academic or research activities (Bish & Lommel, 2016; Naseer, Shoaib, & Naseer, 2022). Likewise, the crux of the study clinched that adaptive environments promote inclusivity and academic equity by supporting both introverted and extroverted learners (Nguyen-Viet & Nguyen-Viet, 2023). Moreover, the analysis of the study revealed that libraries' aesthetic appeal enhances emotional comfort and increases students' willingness to study for longer periods of time (Juusola, 2023). In the same token, the study findings articulated that students' ability to concentrate and persevere through difficult assignments are directly impacted by noise levels (Garcia-Cepero, 2008; Shoaib, Mehmood, & Butt, 2022). Moreover, the research revealed that greater visibility of libraries makes them more approachable, which enhances students' ability to get academic support and direction (Kyndt, Vincent, David, & Van Petegem, 2014). The study conducted in the past reported that flexible furniture allows for simple reconfiguration to accommodate a range of educational requirements in a single, dynamic area (Shoaib, Shehzadi, & Abbas, 2023; Zhang & Hamilton, 2010).

The existing body of literature pointed out that library staff members may concentrate on providing valuable academic help increasing efficiency using automated methods (Gale & Mills, 2013; Shoaib, Abdullah,

Naqvi, & Ditta, 2024). As mentioned in the study findings indicated that excessive control of noise regulations may impede academic collaboration or creativity at higher education (Crosling, Mahendhiran, & Vaithilingam, 2015). Similarly, the study asserted that for the best learning results greatly impacted on academic libraries environment (Shoaib, Naseer, & Naseer, 2023; Zhu, Martin, & Schellens, 2010). Likewise, the crux of the study clinched that study was improved by technology boost collaborative confidence and the success of multimedia projects (Farrier, 2024; Shoaib, Usmani, & Abdullah, 2023). Moreover, the analysis of the study revealed that frequent evaluation of library uses aids in the improvement of student engagement tactics (Ito & Takeuchi, 2022; Shoaib, 2023b). In the same token, the study findings articulated that academic performance is closely correlated with discomfort from noise or temperature in higher education by several factors (Baglier & Caswell, 2016; Shoaib, 2024e). Moreover, the research revealed that within libraries, student artwork expresses a common academic identity and promotes ownership at tertiary level (Havsteen-Franklin, Jasmine, & Anas, 2023; Shoaib, 2024c). The study conducted in the past reported that wear and tear on furniture significantly impacts to limits academic usage and lowers the perception of institutional care (Shoaib & Zaman, 2025; Tilley & Murphy, 2018).

The existing body of literature pointed out that research indicates that collaborative spaces encourage active student knowledge construction and academic discussion participation (Burke, 2017; Shoaib, 2024d). As mentioned in the study findings indicated that research highlights the importance of clear signage in directing efficient use of academic library space (Cassner, Charlene, & Anaya, 2011). Similarly, the study asserted that badly designed spaces frequently deter students from participating in valuable academic or research activities (Biggeri et al., 2020; Shoaib, 2024b). Likewise, the crux of the study clinched that adaptive environments promote inclusivity and academic equity by supporting both introverted and extroverted learners (Seelmeyer, 2024; Shoaib, 2024a). Moreover, the analysis of the study revealed that libraries' aesthetic appeal enhances emotional comfort and increases students' willingness to study for longer periods of time (Sharp, 2017). In the same token, the study findings articulated that students' ability to concentrate and persevere through difficult assignments were directly impacted by noise levels (Crilly, 2024; Shoaib, 2023a). Moreover, the research revealed that greater visibility of libraries makes them more approachable, that enhanced students' ability to get academic support and direction (Patel & Appleton, 2024; Shoaib, 2021). The study conducted in the past reported that flexible furniture allows for simple reconfiguration to accommodate a range of educational requirements in a single, dynamic area (Poort, Ellen, & Hofman, 2022; Shoaib & Abdullah, 2021).

The existing body of literature pointed out that inadequate signage deters investigation and leads to under use of important academic were by some factors (Nichols Hess, Katie, V., & Lim, 2015). As mentioned in the study findings indicated that peer tutors in library settings offer one-on-one assistance, boosting confidence and academic success of students at higher education in developing countries (Leite, 2010). Similarly, the study asserted that the cultures of students foster a sense of belonging and greatly improves intellectual connection and motivation (Yun & Park, 2020). Likewise, the crux of the study clinched that library climate control discourages extended study or concentration by making severe circumstances uncomfortable at tertiary level (Zhao, Tanyel, Christine, & Nikkhoo, 2015). Moreover, the analysis of the study revealed that libraries were designed affects how serious academics were perceived to be and how committed the institution is to learn (Masika & Jones, 2016). In the same token, the study findings articulated that students steer clear of old libraries because they believe they have little resources and inadequate institutional support (Howard, 2019). Moreover, the research revealed that stress and a decreased perception of the educational value were significantly affected by crowded libraries during peak hours (Vlachopoulos, & Buckton, 2020). The study conducted in the past reported that soundproofing and openness should be balanced in collaborative spaces to guarantee concentrated academic engagement at higher education level (Bailin, 2011).

The existing body of literature pointed out that inflexible seating limits chances for collaboration and deters impromptu scholarly discussions (Lomer & Anthony-Okeke, 2019). As mentioned in the study findings indicated that help desk visibility boosts academic engagement, particularly for inexperienced or hesitant users (Buchele, 2021). Similarly, the study asserted that over time, customized study spaces foster comfort, consistency, and enhanced concentration (Mantzios & Egan, 2019). Likewise, the crux of the study clinched that during intense academic study, distracting décor may impair cognitive function (Almarghani & Mijatovic, 2017). Moreover, the analysis of the study revealed that designs with high ceilings were said to stimulate greater intellectual thinking and creativity (Reiter, 2015). In the same token, the study findings articulated that gaining knowledge of commons promotes multidisciplinary contact, that in turn encourages greater academic curiosity and teamwork (Yang, Jinwen, Miaoyan, Runde, & Chen, 2024). Moreover, the research revealed that in order to minimize outside distractions and keep up intellectual momentum, some students choose enclosed rooms (Whitton & Langan, 2019). The study conducted in the past reported that students were more likely to seek academic help on a frequent basis when staff members were friendly (Zhang, Sheng, Jinlan, & Jin, 2022).

Theoretical Insights

Social Learning Theory: According to social learning theory, learning takes place in an environment by the social interaction (Bandura & Walters, 1977). Distinctly, individuals adopt same behaviors through perceiving the others behavior. This is especially correct when the observed behaviors are related to the positive behaviors or containing rewards. The imitation needs the person to physically reproduce the observed activities. Hence, this theory has been linked with the learning of students.

Constructivist Learning Theory: This theory shows that knowledge is created through learners by the involvement and observation (Floyd & Dunham, 2025). It boosts the progression of spaces that support collaboration and cooperation. Academic libraries are adoptable, and source filled spaces included with collaborative learning areas and silent zones with advance technologies to provide an educational environment to students. So, the constructivist learning theory shows that the academic libraries improve the educational environment for students at higher level.

Cognitive Apprenticeships: As Collins (1991) explains the learning comprises of student engagement in a specific task that is closely related to the skills and knowledge established through the experts of study. The space includes the demonstration of the layout of learning environment. Libraries contain spaces that help in reliable and cognitive learning. Students practice the cognitive skills by observations to the trained and experienced experts.

Student Engagement Theory: Malia (2020) stated that the engagement of student in learning is mainly emphasized by the learning environment. It is also indicated that language endorses the development of the crucial thinking, logics and reasoning to support student knowledge. For authentic learning, it is important to communicate and interact with other students and professional. In learning spaces, students are encouraged to practice their academic learning process in an effective way.

Conclusion

The conclusion of the study based on systematic review has demonstrated that academic library spaces play an evolving and critical role in fostering student engagement in learning in higher education. The findings reveal that inclusive library environments, flexible, and well-designed significantly contribute to students' social engagement and academic by supporting a range of promoting collaborative activities, learning preferences, and encouraging self-directed learning in higher education. Key factors including as spatial design technological integration, accessibility, and alignment with learning needs emerged as central to maximizing the impact of library spaces on student engagement. The review also emphasizes the importance of continuous user-centered planning and

assessment in library space development to respond effectively to change student expectations, comfort zone, and learning practices. In conclusion, academic libraries are not merely repositories of information but vital learning environments that enhance student engagement and success in higher education.

Future Research
There remains a need for more longitudinal and mixed-method studies that capture the nuanced ways in which students interact with library spaces over time.

Policy Implication
Institutions should therefore prioritize investment in library spaces as integral components of their educational mission.

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