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## **Library Aesthetics as a Determinant of Effective School Library Use**

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## **Introduction**

School libraries stand as sanctuaries of knowledge, offering students a haven for exploration, discovery, and academic growth (Montano, 2017). Indeed, school libraries are essential to help students in all dimensions of learning such as cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. This is because students can read to acquire knowledge, engage in stimulating games and also be exposed to mind enriching information through carefully curated materials (Strong, 2013; Ayaz et al., 2017). The 'power' of school libraries, however, lies in effective use by students and teachers. Consequently, librarians are usually concerned about various factors that drive school library patronage. In the modern environment, school library patronage is not solely driven by the abundance of resources they house; rather, the ambiance and aesthetics of the library environment play a crucial role in shaping students' engagement and utilization of these resources (Stevenson et al., 2019).



According to environmental psychology, the physical environment exerts a profound influence on human behaviour, emotions, and cognitive processes (Choi, Van Merriënboer, & Paas, 2014). Similarly, Bower, Tucker, & Enticott, (2019) submitted that the aesthetic of interior environments affects human emotion. As such, the design and aesthetics of educational spaces, including libraries, can significantly impact students' attitudes, motivation, and learning outcomes (Belotindos & Cansancio, 2024). However, while the importance of library aesthetics has been acknowledged in educational discourse, empirical research specifically addressing its role in school libraries remains scant.

Nigeria, Croatia, Indonesia and Malaysia boast of vibrant educational landscapes, with numerous schools striving to provide quality learning environments for their students. Amidst this backdrop, understanding the nexus between library aesthetics and effective library use becomes imperative for educators, administrators, and policymakers alike. By elucidating the relationship between these variables, stakeholders can garner insights to optimize library spaces, thereby fostering enhanced learning experiences and academic achievement among students.

This research aims to fill a notable gap in the literature by shedding light on the degree of interplay between library aesthetics and student engagement within school libraries in aforementioned countries. Through a comprehensive investigation encompassing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, this study seeks to unravel the multifaceted dimensions of library aesthetics and its impact on students' utilization of library resources. Ultimately, the findings are poised to furnish valuable insights that can inform strategic interventions aimed at cultivating more conducive and enriching library environments for the benefit of students' educational journey.

## **Statement of the Research Problem**

School libraries are globally recognized as integral tools for educational development. However, while many countries are taking a holistic approach to school library development; focusing on collection, staffing, technology, and the physical space, others, especially in the low- and middle-income countries, have focused more on developing relevant library collections, paying scant attention to library aesthetics. Despite the recognition of libraries as essential educational spaces, there is a dearth of research focusing on the role of aesthetics in library utilization

among students. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the relationship between library aesthetics and effective library use among students.

## Literature Review

Library aesthetics is a concept that has caught the attention of librarians all over the world. This attention to aesthetics has been borne mainly out of the concern to provide library patrons with a wholesome experience (Jennath & Nidhish, 2016). Scholars such as Jiu-yun, (2007) have long opined that while library collections by themselves are intrinsically aesthetic, the building and the whole environment should look attractive to make the whole library visit pleasing. This attention to aesthetics has a solid theoretical backing.

Kaplan's seminal work on environmental psychology posits that individuals' preferences and behaviours are influenced by the aesthetic qualities of their surroundings (Kaplan, 1987). This notion underscores the importance of creating visually appealing and conducive library environments that resonate with students' sensibilities and foster a sense of comfort and belonging. Research conducted in diverse educational contexts has corroborated the positive correlation between aesthetic quality and user satisfaction, highlighting the role of aesthetics in shaping individuals' attitudes and experiences within library spaces (Montano, 2017).

Scholars have linked library aesthetics to library patronage. Fasola (2024) submitted that various elements of library aesthetic, such as interior design, lighting, and overall ambiance in the library, play crucial roles in attracting users to the library. Fasola (2024) and other scholars such as Bakrin and Bakare-Fatungase (2024) have identified the importance of the physical library environment as a factor in library patronage. These studies found that physical attributes of a library is an important factor in its acceptance among students. Therefore, to attract students, libraries should be spacious, clean, and take good advantage of natural lighting. According to Bakrin and Bakare-Fatungase (2024), libraries with large windows, good ventilation, and comfortable furniture have a better chance of attracting more users. Existing evidence also shows that, just like the external face of the library, the interior layout is also important.

According to Esan and Ifijeh (2023), when libraries are augmented with attractive wall art, signage, and soothing colour schemes, it improves the appeal of such libraries among the

patrons. Usuka, Nwachukwu, and Nwachukwu (2019) added that libraries that incorporate aesthetically pleasing elements such as vibrant colours and good interior designs are perceived as more attractive by university students. Esan and Ifijeh (2023) also added that the library should not only be about attractive aesthetics but it should also incorporate functional aesthetics. This suggests that library aesthetics also include floor plans, arrangement of library shelves and resources as well as the accessibility of the library to all categories of users.

Some of the functional aesthetics that are expected in libraries include air conditioning, adequate power outlets for devices and flexible seating arrangements among others (Usuka, Nwachukwu, & Nwachukwu 2019; Cuong, 2024). Kaplan (1987) has emphasised the influence of pleasing physical environment on the human mind. In the same, Cuong (2024) has remarked on the recognition among educators that providing a dynamic and aesthetic environment to learners can evoke positive feelings, making them more interested in visiting the library and even more likely to return after their first visit.

Indeed, scholars have observed that library aesthetics also has secondary outcomes such as improved academic performance (Fasola, 2024). According to Bakrin and Bakare-Fatungase (2024), libraries with proper aesthetics attracts students and ensure that they have productive times in the library thereby which also enhance students' academic performance Cuong (2024), in their survey reported that students are now paying attention to aesthetic features of their library and many of them feel dissatisfied with the some aspects of library aesthetics.

In the realm of primary and secondary education, where students' cognitive and emotional development is intricately intertwined with their learning environment, the impact of library aesthetics becomes even more pronounced (Scardina, 2018). Studies have shown that well-designed library spaces, characterized by elements such as ample natural light, comfortable seating arrangements, and aesthetically pleasing decorations, can evoke feelings of relaxation and focus, thereby enhancing students' concentration and academic performance (Duvall, 2015). On the other hand, environments lacking in aesthetic appeal may engender feelings of disinterest and disengagement among students, leading to underutilization of library resources and diminished learning outcomes (Marušić, 2018).

However, while the theoretical underpinnings of the relationship between library aesthetics and effective library use are well-established (Belotindos & Cansancio, 2024),

empirical research specific to the Nigerian, Croatian, Indonesian and Malaysian contexts remain limited. Given the unique socio-cultural and educational landscape of the countries, there exists a pressing need to examine how schools perceive and prioritize library aesthetics, and how these perceptions translate into students' utilization patterns. By elucidating these dynamics, researchers can identify opportunities for enhancing library environments and maximizing their impact on student learning and academic achievement.

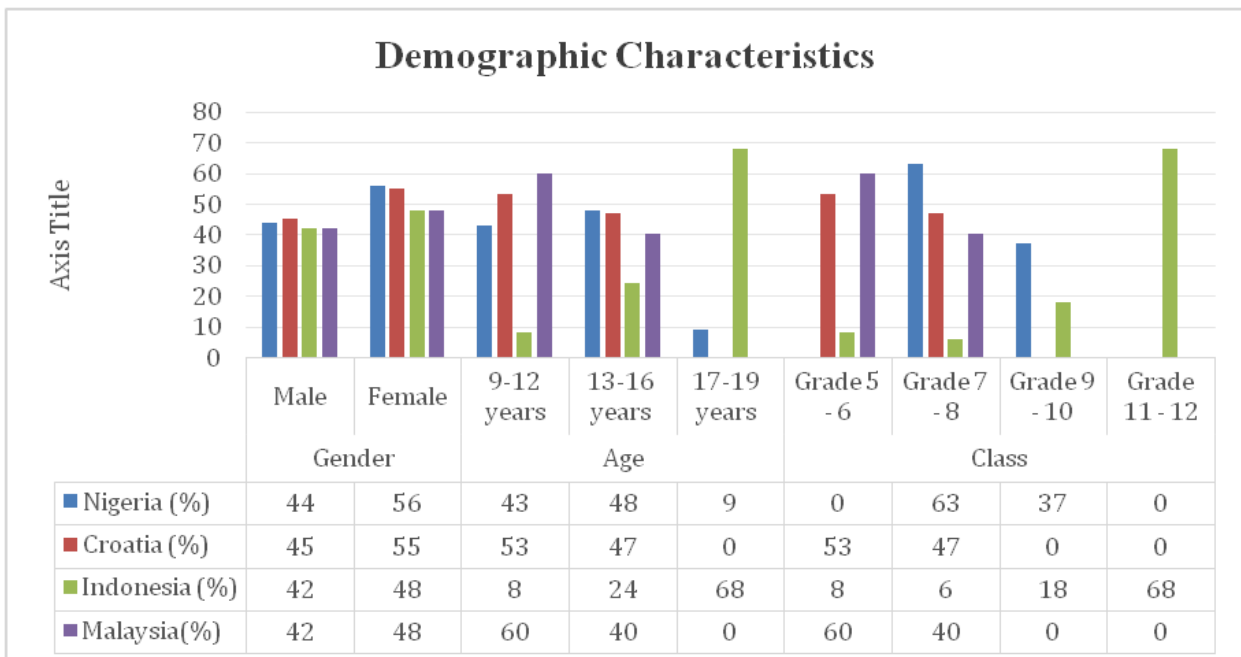
## Methodology

This study will employ a descriptive survey approach, to gather comprehensive data. The study will include 200 students from the four countries to make up 50 each from Nigeria, Croatia, Indonesia and Malaysia selected through stratified random sampling. The quantitative phase will involve administering structured questionnaires to assess students' perceptions of library aesthetics and their frequency of library use.

## Results and Discussion

### Demographic Analysis

**Figure 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents**

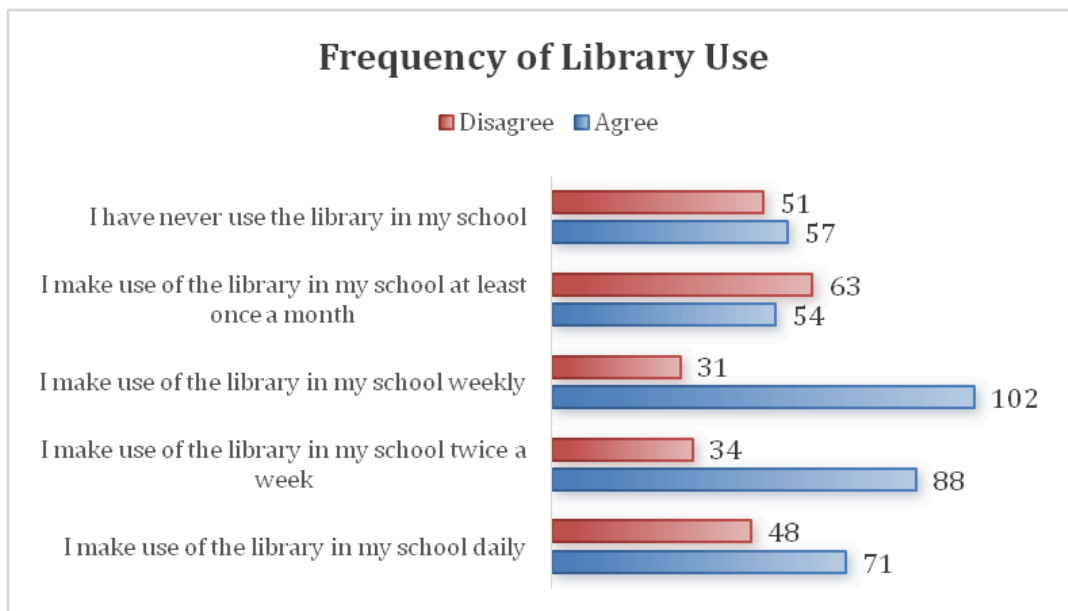


The population of the students consist of school children who were surveyed after necessary consents have been obtained. The demographic characteristics of the respondents is provided in figure 1. Gender wise, there are more females (57%) than male (43%). The trend is consistent across the four countries with females constituting more than half of the respondents. In terms of age distribution, the majority of the respondents are between age 9-12 (41%) and 13-16 (40%). The rest are within the range of 17-19 years (19%). However, only two countries account for the 17-19 years; Nigeria (5%) and Indonesia (34%). Furthermore, 39% of the respondents are between Grade 7 – 8; 31% Grade 5 – 6 while the rest are in Grade 9 – 10 (13%) and Grade 11 – 12 (17%). Overall, the sample represents a diverse group spread fairly among the countries.

### Use of School Library

The use of school libraries is examined with frequency and purpose of use in order to obtain a clearer picture. Figure 2 provides a breakdown of the responses. Although there were 200 respondents, each respondent was free to decide on whether to respond or not. Therefore, some of the items do not receive 200 responses. The item that received the highest responses was on the weekly use of school libraries. More than hundred respondents (102) indicated that they use the school library weekly while 31 respondents indicate otherwise. Also, 88 of the students indicated a twice weekly visit to the library while 71 say they visit the library daily. What should be of much concern is that 57 out 200 indicated that they have never used the school library. Incidentally, the majority of those who indicated they have never used the library are from Croatia (37) and Nigeria (11) suggesting that librarians in these countries still have much to do to boost library patronage.

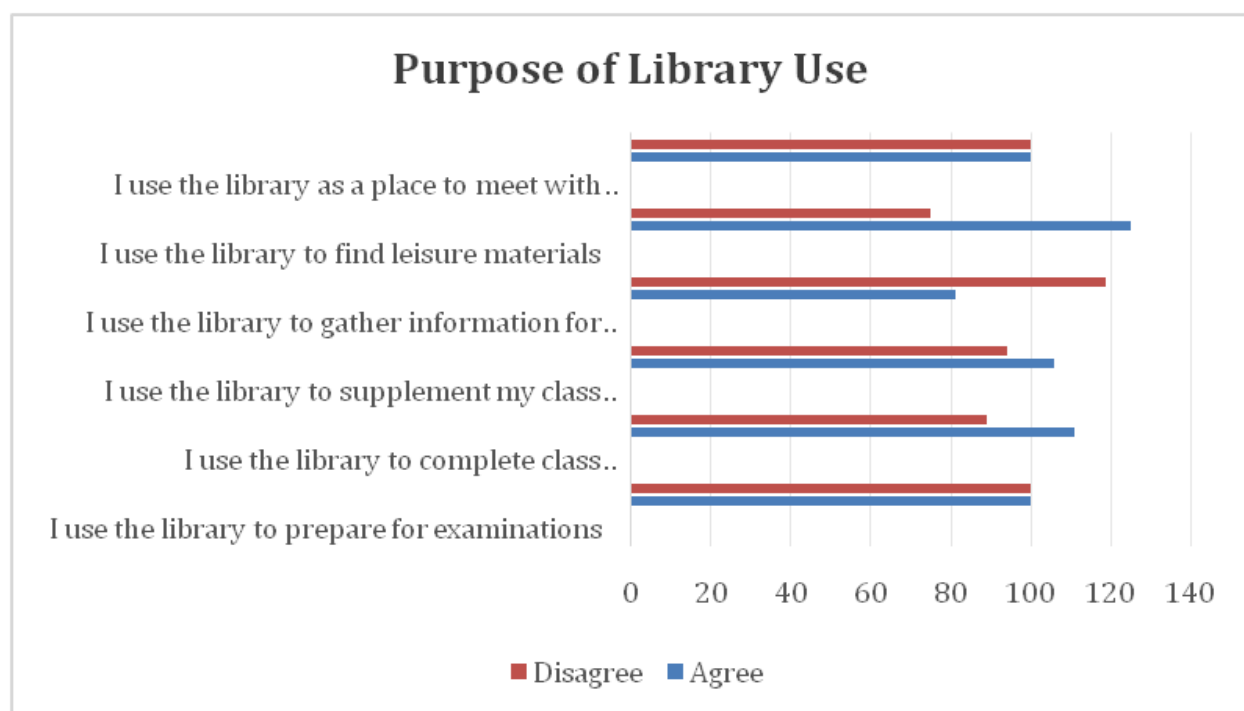
**Figure 2: Frequency of Library Use**



The purpose for which the students use the library can be an important indicator of how relevant is the school library to the overall development of the pupils. In this study, the foremost purpose for using the library is to ‘find leisure material’ (125 responses). This is closely followed by ‘complete class assignments’ (111 responses), examination preparation (100 responses) and to supplement class notes (94 responses). In addition, half of those students surveyed indicate that they use the library as a place to meet friends and relax, highlighting the diverse role that the school library plays in the lives of students.

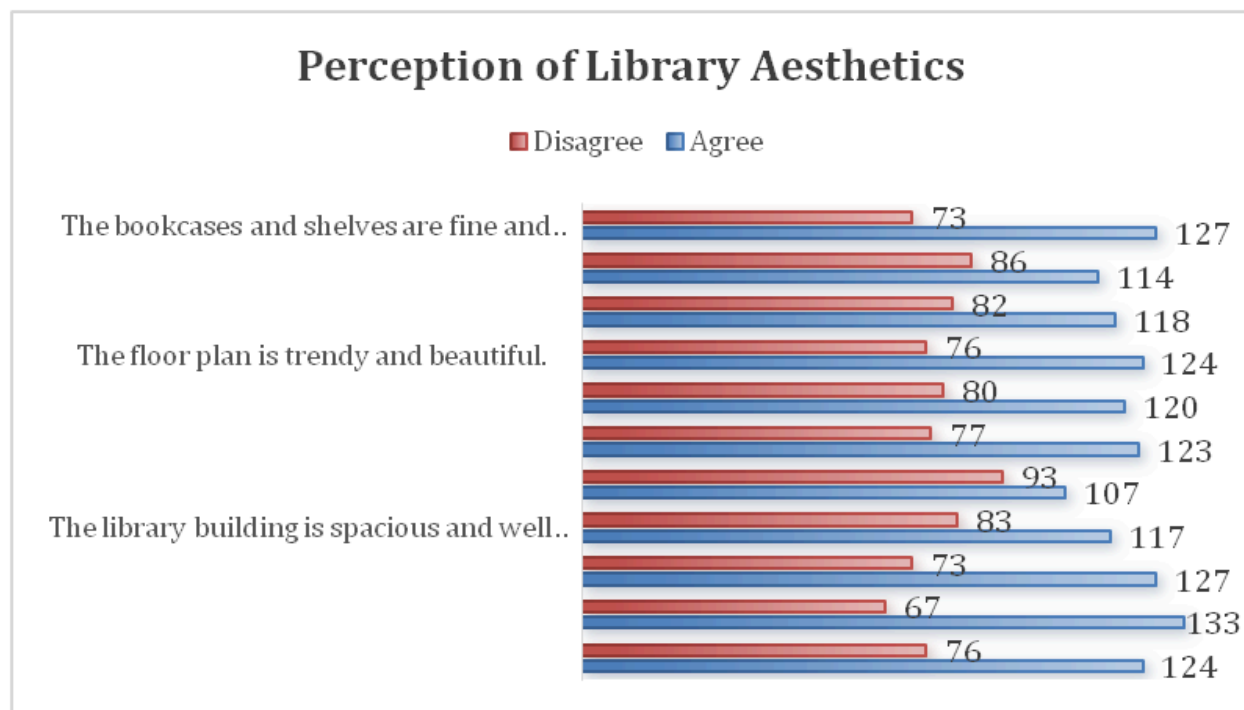
### Figure 3: Purpose of Library Use

Perception of Library Aesthetics among students.



Figures 4 and 5 provides the analysis on the perception of the students regarding the aesthetics of their school libraries.

**Figure 4: Perception of Library Aesthetics among students.**



**Figure 5: Perception of Library Aesthetics among students (by countries)**

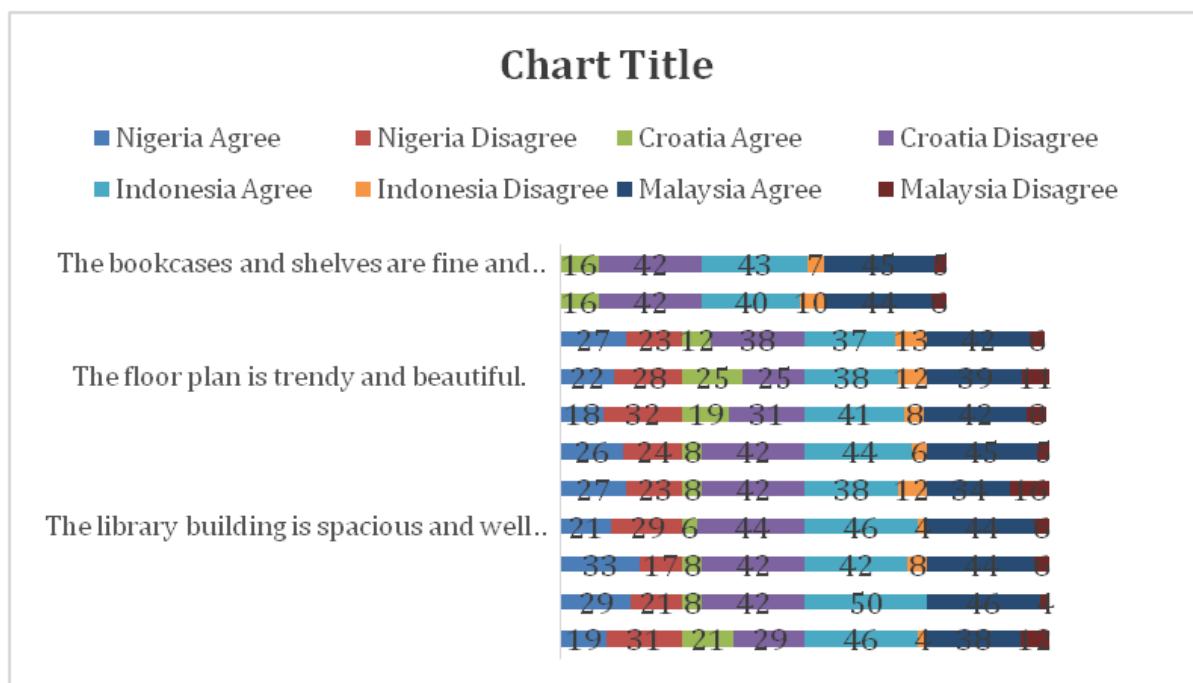




Figure 4 clearly shows an overall positive perception of Library Aesthetics among students. Majority of the responses were in agreement with issues such as the pleasing arrangement of library shelves and resources (127 responses), library architectural design (114 responses), floor plan (124 responses), artistic designs (123 responses). Students are also pleased with the library facades, with 133 respondents agreeing that their school libraries have well-laid out entrances and 124 respondents approving the signage and way finders in the library.

The breakdown of the responses by countries shows that students from Croatia and Nigeria mostly disagree with some of the aspect of library aesthetics (Figure 5). For instance, 84% of the respondents disagreed that the bookcases are well arranged. In the same vein, only 36% of respondents from Nigeria agreed that their school libraries have adequate space for social activities. In addition, only 38% agreed on signage and way finders in the libraries. On the other hand, respondents from Malaysia and Indonesia are mostly positive about the library aesthetics.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The findings of this provide insights into the current state of library aesthetics in the selected schools and its impact on students' library utilization patterns. The study findings clearly show that students pay attention to library aesthetics and can easily determine whether a library is pleasing to the eyes or it leaves some things to be desired (Cuong, 2024). In addition, the finding of this study indicates a significant level of dissatisfaction among some of the students regarding the functional aesthetics of their school libraries. While studies such as Fasola (2024), Bakrin and Bakare-Fatungase (2024) focused on academic libraries, they emphasised the importance of functional aesthetics. This is shown in this study where students have taken issue with library space for social activities and the availability of modern technologies that they would love to have for both recreational and educational purposes. Cuong (2024) revealed that this is a new trend around the world as they reported that Vietnamese school libraries have started the transition from traditional print-centered library into technology-driven space which emphasise the integration of digital innovations in education.

## **Implications and Conclusions**

The study highlights the importance of prioritizing library aesthetics in educational planning and resource allocation. By investing in the enhancement of library environments, educational institutions can optimize student experiences, promote academic achievement, and cultivate a culture of lifelong learning. Moreover, the findings underscore the need for tailored interventions to address disparities in access to quality library spaces, particularly among marginalized communities.

In conclusion, this research has contributed to the existing body of knowledge on library design and management by emphasizing the importance of aesthetics in facilitating meaningful learning experiences in school libraries. This is even more important as the majority of existing studies have focused on academic libraries. This study has therefore expanded the frontier of existing knowledge by taking a global view of library aesthetics and how it affects the use of libraries among students across the world. By understanding the role of aesthetics in library utilization among students in Nigeria, Croatia, Indonesia and Malaysia, educators and policymakers can make informed decisions to improve library environments and promote student engagement and academic success.

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Adeyeye et al.

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*Adeyeye et al.*

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