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SCHOOL LIBRARY LEARNING SPACES AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS IN PORT-HARCOURT METROPOLIS

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Abstract
This study investigated school library learning spaces and collaborative learning among senior secondary students in Port-Harcourt Metropolis. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised Senior Secondary III students in selected private secondary schools with functional libraries in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Multistage sampling technique was used, involving purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled School Library Learning Spaces and Collaborative Learning Questionnaire (SLLSCLQ). 150 copies of the questionnaire were found valid for analyses. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, with a criterion mean of 2.50. The findings revealed that school library learning spaces for collaborative learning were generally utilized by students. The study further found that school library learning spaces exerted a positive influence on collaborative learning. However, inadequate library space, insufficient digital facilities, poor internet connectivity, inadequate furniture, and restrictive library policies were identified as major challenges affecting their effective utilization. The study concluded that well-equipped and effectively utilized school library learning spaces significantly enhance collaborative learning among senior secondary students. It was recommended that teacher-librarians and school administrators should promote the effective utilization of school library learning spaces by organizing library orientation programmes, integrating library-based collaborative activities into classroom instruction, encouraging group research and project work, and creating awareness of the facilities and services available to students.

Keywords: School library, learning spaces, collaborative learning, library utilization, secondary school students, Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Introduction

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The rapid transformation of education in the twenty-first century has shifted emphasis from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered pedagogies that encourage active participation, communication, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. Among these pedagogical approaches, collaborative learning has emerged as an effective strategy for improving students' academic performance and developing essential lifelong skills. Collaborative learning enables students to work together in small groups to exchange ideas, solve problems, and construct knowledge through shared experiences. Consequently, educational institutions are expected to provide learning environments that facilitate interaction, teamwork, and independent inquiry. One of such environments is the school library, which has evolved beyond its traditional role as a repository of books into a dynamic learning hub that supports teaching, learning, innovation, and collaboration (American Association of School Librarians [AASL], 2023; International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA], 2021).

School library learning spaces refer to the physical and virtual environments within a school library that are intentionally designed to support diverse learning activities, including individual study, group discussions, collaborative projects, digital learning, and creative engagement. Modern library learning spaces typically comprise flexible seating arrangements, discussion rooms, multimedia facilities, makerspaces, computer workstations, internet connectivity, and access to digital information resources. These spaces encourage students to communicate effectively, share knowledge, and engage in collaborative problem-solving while promoting creativity and innovation (Cui et al., 2025).

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The availability of school library learning spaces for collaborative learning determines the extent to which students can engage in interactive academic activities within the library. Where these facilities are readily available and accessible, students are more likely to participate in collaborative learning activities, complete group assignments, conduct research collectively, and develop interpersonal competencies. Conversely, inadequate or poorly equipped learning spaces may discourage students from utilizing the library for collaborative purposes and reduce the effectiveness of group learning experiences (Fakoyede et al., 2026), thus utilisation of school library learning spaces is important in determining their educational value. Utilisation refers to the extent to which students actively use available library learning spaces to support collaborative academic activities such as group discussions, peer tutoring, project work, information sharing, and joint research (Sangkaew & Leeniva, 2025). School library learning spaces may exert influence on collaborative learning by creating environments that encourage communication, teamwork, critical thinking, creativity, and shared knowledge construction

Statement of the Problem

The growing emphasis on collaborative learning in contemporary education has increased the need for school libraries to provide learning spaces that promote interaction, teamwork, critical thinking, and knowledge sharing among students. While school libraries have traditionally served as centers for independent reading and information access, they are now expected to function as flexible learning environments that support group discussions, project-based learning, peer tutoring, and other collaborative academic

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activities. However, the extent to which secondary school libraries in Port Harcourt Metropolis provide such learning spaces and the degree to which students utilize them remain largely undocumented. Although previous studies have examined school library resources, library utilization, and students' academic achievement, limited attention has been given to the role of school library learning spaces in fostering collaborative learning among senior secondary school students, particularly within the Nigerian context. This creates a knowledge gap regarding the availability of collaborative learning spaces, their utilization by students, their influence on collaborative learning, and the challenges limiting their effective use. Therefore, this study is necessary to provide empirical evidence that will inform school administrators, teacher-librarians, educational planners, and policymakers on strategies for designing, equipping, and managing school library learning spaces that support collaborative learning and improve students' educational outcomes in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study

1. To what extent do senior secondary students utilize school library learning spaces for collaborative learning?
2. How do school library learning spaces influence collaborative learning among senior secondary students?

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3. What challenges affect the use of school library learning spaces for collaborative learning?

Literature Review

The concept of school library learning spaces has received increasing attention in educational research due to the shift toward learner-centered and collaborative pedagogies. Modern school libraries are no longer viewed solely as repositories of books but as flexible learning environments that facilitate interaction, creativity, information literacy, and collaborative knowledge construction. According to Adetayo et al., (2023), effective school library learning spaces should provide flexible seating arrangements, access to digital technologies, discussion areas, and information resources that accommodate both independent and group learning.

The availability of school library learning spaces for collaborative learning is a critical factor in achieving meaningful educational outcomes. Availability refers to the presence of physical and technological facilities that enable students to engage in collaborative academic activities. Such facilities include group discussion rooms, movable furniture, internet-enabled computer systems, multimedia resources, makerspaces, and adequate reading areas. UNESCO (2021) asserts that well-equipped learning environments encourage student participation, enhance communication, and promote active engagement in the learning process. Where these facilities are insufficient or poorly maintained, opportunities for collaborative learning become limited, thereby reducing the educational

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value of the school library. Consequently, schools that invest in modern library learning spaces are more likely to foster collaborative learning and improve students' academic experiences.

Beyond availability, the utilisation of school library learning spaces determines whether the available facilities contribute meaningfully to students' learning. Utilisation refers to the extent to which students make effective use of library spaces for group discussions, project work, peer tutoring, collaborative research, and information sharing. According to Kuhlthau et al., (2021), school libraries become effective safe spaces where students actively engage with the available resources. Asuata and Emasealu (2022) noted that utilisation could be influenced by several factors, including accessibility, awareness of available facilities, librarian support, school policies, students' attitudes, and the integration of library activities into classroom instruction. OECD (2023) observes that learning environments characterized by active student participation and collaborative engagement contribute positively to academic achievement, critical thinking, and lifelong learning skills. Therefore, merely providing learning spaces without encouraging their effective use may not produce the desired educational outcomes.

School library learning spaces exert significant influence on collaborative learning by providing environments that facilitate communication, cooperation, problem-solving, and shared knowledge construction. Collaborative learning enables students to exchange ideas, appreciate diverse perspectives, develop interpersonal relationships, and jointly solve academic problems. Flexible library environments support these activities by

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allowing students to interact freely while accessing both print and electronic information resources. The Ojobor et al., (2021) emphasizes that collaborative learning environments improve students' information literacy, communication skills, creativity, and confidence. Likewise, UNESCO (2021) notes that educational spaces designed for collaboration foster learner engagement, innovation, and academic success. Consequently, school libraries that provide conducive learning environments contribute substantially to the holistic development of students beyond conventional classroom instruction.

Despite the recognized benefits of school library learning spaces, numerous challenges continue to hinder their effective use for collaborative learning. School libraries experience shortage of qualified teacher-librarians, inadequate funding, insufficient technological infrastructure, unreliable internet connectivity, inadequate furniture, overcrowding, poor maintenance of facilities, and restrictive library policies (Mojapelo, 2025; Okwu, 2021) These challenges reduce students' access to collaborative learning opportunities and discourage active participation in group academic activities. Onunka et al., (2023) stresses that sustained investment in library infrastructure, staff development, and technological resources is essential for transforming libraries into effective learning hubs. Similarly, Chinedu and Egolum (2025) recommends that governments and educational institutions prioritize the modernization of school library facilities to support contemporary teaching and learning practices.

Although previous studies have extensively examined school library services, information literacy, and library utilization, relatively few have specifically investigated

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school library learning spaces as facilitators of collaborative learning among senior secondary school students in Nigeria. Existing literature has largely focused on library resources, reading culture, and academic performance with limited attention to the availability, utilisation, influence, and challenges of library learning spaces in promoting collaborative learning. This gap underscores the need for empirical investigation within the context of secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, where evolving educational practices require libraries to function as dynamic learning environments that support collaboration, innovation, and student-centered learning.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate school library learning spaces and collaborative learning among senior secondary students in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The population of the study consisted of Senior Secondary III (SS III) students in selected private secondary schools with functional libraries in Port Harcourt Metropolis. SS III students were considered appropriate because they possess adequate experience in the use of school library facilities and regularly participate in collaborative academic activities. Multistage sampling techniques were used. First, purposive sampling was employed to select private secondary schools with functional school libraries. Thereafter, simple random sampling was used to select the participating students from the selected schools. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled School Library Learning Spaces and Collaborative Learning Questionnaire (SLLSCLQ) structured on a four-point Likert rating scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2),

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and Strongly Disagree (1). The items were organized according to the specific objectives of the study. The researcher, with the assistance of two research assistants who were briefed on the modalities, administered the questionnaire directly to the respondents in their respective schools. 150 Copies of the questionnaire found valid for analyses. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. A criterion mean of 2.50 served as the benchmark for decision-making, where mean scores of 2.50 and above were regarded as agreed, while mean scores below 2.50 were regarded as Disagreed.

Results and Discussion

Research Question One: To what extent do students utilize school library learning spaces for collaborative learning?

Table 1: Utilisation of School Library Learning Spaces for Collaborative Learning

Items	Mean	SD	Decision
I use the library for group discussions with my classmates.	3.33	0.69	Agreed
I use the library to complete collaborative assignments.	3.12	0.77	Agreed
My classmates and I regularly use the library for project work.	2.96	0.83	Agreed
I utilize the library's digital facilities when working in groups.	2.78	0.91	Agreed
I frequently visit the library for collaborative academic activities.	3.06	0.74	Agreed
Grand Mean	**3.05**	**0.79**	**Agreed**

Table 1 indicates that respondents agreed that they utilize school library learning spaces for collaborative learning. They agreed that they use the library for group discussions ($\bar{X}$ = 3.33, SD = 0.69), collaborative assignments ($\bar{X}$ = 3.12, SD = 0.77), project work ($\bar{X}$ = 2.96, SD = 0.83), digital facilities during group work ($\bar{X}$ = 2.78, SD = 0.91), and

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collaborative academic activities ($\bar{X}$ = 3.06, SD = 0.74). The grand mean of 3.05 shows that the utilization of school library learning spaces among senior secondary students is high. This finding is consistent with DeFrain and Hong (2020) who discovered that students use learning spaces and resources for collaborative academic activities. The finding also supports the assertion that active engagement with library facilities contributes to meaningful learning experiences.

Research Question Two: What influence do school library learning spaces have on collaborative learning?

Table 2: Influence of School Library Learning Spaces on Collaborative Learning

Items	Mean	SD	Decision
School library learning spaces improve teamwork among students.	3.56	0.58	Agreed
Library learning spaces enhance knowledge sharing during group study.	3.42	0.65	Agreed
The library promotes effective communication among students during collaborative learning.	3.36	0.71	Agreed
Library learning spaces improve students' problem-solving abilities through group activities.	3.27	0.73	Agreed
Using library learning spaces enhances my academic performance during collaborative learning.	3.48	0.62	Agreed
Grand Mean	**3.42**	**0.66**	**Agreed**

Table 2 shows that respondents agreed that school library learning spaces positively influence collaborative learning. Respondents agreed that library learning spaces improve teamwork ($\bar{X}$ = 3.56, SD = 0.58), enhance knowledge sharing ($\bar{X}$ = 3.42, SD = 0.65), promote effective communication ($\bar{X}$ = 3.36, SD = 0.71), improve problem-solving abilities ($\bar{X}$ = 3.27, SD = 0.73), and enhance academic performance ($\bar{X}$ = 3.48, SD = 0.62). The grand

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mean of **3.42** indicates that school library learning spaces exert a strong positive influence on collaborative learning among senior secondary students. This indicates that conducive library learning environments play a significant role in fostering collaborative learning and enhancing students' educational outcomes. The finding agrees with the Sharma et al., (2024) which maintained that collaborative library environments strengthen students' communication skills, creativity, critical thinking.

Research Question Three: What challenges affect the use of school library learning spaces for collaborative learning?

Table 3: Challenges Affecting the Use of School Library Learning Spaces for Collaborative Learning

Items	Mean	SD	Decision
Inadequate library space limits collaborative learning.	3.29	0.74	Agreed
Insufficient digital facilities hinder group learning in the library.	3.37	0.69	Agreed
Poor internet connectivity discourages collaborative learning.	3.44	0.63	Agreed
Inadequate library furniture affects group learning activities.	3.16	0.81	Agreed
Restrictive library rules discourage collaborative learning.	2.87	0.89	Agreed
Grand Mean	**3.23**	**0.75**	**Agreed**

Table 3 indicates that respondents agreed that several challenges affect the use of school library learning spaces for collaborative learning. They agreed that inadequate library space ($\bar{X}$ = 3.29, SD = 0.74), insufficient digital facilities ($\bar{X}$ = 3.37, SD = 0.69), poor internet connectivity ($\bar{X}$ = 3.44, SD = 0.63), inadequate library furniture ($\bar{X}$ = 3.16, SD = 0.81), and restrictive library rules ($\bar{X}$ = 2.87, SD = 0.89) hinder collaborative learning. The grand mean of **3.23** indicates that these challenges substantially affect the effective use of

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school library learning spaces for collaborative learning among senior secondary students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

These constraints limit students' opportunities to maximize the benefits of collaborative learning within the school library. This finding aligns with Onunka et al., (2023) which observed that inadequate infrastructure and limited technological resources remain significant barriers to effective teaching and learning in many educational institutions. It further reinforces the need for sustained investment in modern library facilities and supportive policies to enhance collaborative learning among secondary school students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Teacher-librarians and school administrators should promote the effective utilization of school library learning spaces by organizing library orientation programmes, integrating library-based collaborative activities into classroom instruction, encouraging group research and project work, and creating awareness of the facilities and services available to students.
2. Schools should maximize the positive influence of school library learning spaces on collaborative learning by adopting learner-centered library programmes that encourage teamwork, peer learning, information sharing, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Teachers should also collaborate with teacher-librarians in

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designing learning activities that require students to make regular use of the library's collaborative learning spaces.

3. Government, school proprietors, and other stakeholders should address the challenges affecting the use of school library learning spaces by increasing funding for library development, providing reliable internet connectivity and modern technological facilities, expanding existing library spaces, supplying ergonomic furniture, reviewing restrictive library policies, and ensuring the continuous training of teacher-librarians to effectively manage collaborative learning environments.

Conclusion

The study concludes that school library learning spaces play a significant role in promoting collaborative learning among senior secondary students in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The findings revealed that school libraries generally provide learning spaces and facilities that support collaborative academic activities and that students utilize these spaces for group discussions, project work, and other shared learning experiences. The study further established that school library learning spaces positively influence teamwork, communication, knowledge sharing, problem-solving skills, and academic performance among students. However, the study also identified several challenges, including inadequate library space, insufficient digital facilities, poor internet connectivity, inadequate furniture, and restrictive library policies, which limit the effective use of library learning spaces for collaborative learning. Therefore, while school libraries have the

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potential to enhance collaborative learning, there is a need for continuous improvement in library infrastructure, technological facilities, and management practices. Addressing these challenges will enable school libraries to function as dynamic learning environments that foster collaboration, innovation, and improved educational outcomes among senior secondary students.

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