Elkadi Hisham

Abbasi Neda**,**

School of Architecture and Building, Deakin University, Australia

Development of a Tool for Evaluation of Academic Library Spaces (TEALS) (0242)

Abstract

The paper provides a brief description of the tool for evaluating the quality and utilisation of academic library spaces (TEALS). Supported by Deakin University Library, TEALS has been developed out of a research project in the School of Architecture and Building, Deakin University, Geelong Waterfront Campus. The tool is intended to establish the setting for evaluation of physical spaces at different phases of development of new academic library spaces and refurbishment of existing ones as well as throughout the life of buildings. The methodological framework of the tool consists of four key elements; establishing Criteria of Quality (CoQ), determining Quality Indicators, evaluating library spaces against QIs and interpreting results for future improvements. The characteristics that distinguish TEALS from existing evaluation models include adopting an approach that focus on people (students, faculty and library staff), acting as a "reflective" and "empowering" tool and being user-friendly, quick and easy to use.

Research Domain: Management, leadership, governance and quality

Introduction

This paper presents an overview of the Research Phase to develop a tool for evaluating the quality and utilisation of academic library spaces (TEALS). Supported by Deakin University Library, TEALS has been developed out of a research project in the School of Architecture, Deakin University, Geelong Waterfront Campus. The tool is intended to establish the setting for and guide evaluation of physical spaces at different phases of development of new academic libraries and refurbishment of existing ones. In addition, TEALS can be used at different stages of a library's life.

TEALS is built upon a multi-dimensional framework and adopts a holistic approach to evaluating physical environments of libraries by addressing a wide range of functional, social and affective issues relating to library users' and staff's experiences, learning, social and emotional outcomes. Some of these issues such as size of spaces, appropriate facilities, quality of lighting, heating and ventilation, safety, security and ease of access are functional. Other issues such as inspiring quality of spaces, aesthetic aspects e.g. attractive and stimulating forms and colours and a sense of place relate more to social and emotional impacts of library physical environments on their users. It is intended that the framework be flexible enough to adapt to academic libraries of different sizes, with different educational philosophies and emphases. TEALS does not merely focus on evaluation of design issues e.g. "Is the building fit for purpose?", "Is the quality of lighting appropriate?", "Are necessary amenities provided?" and etc. but it also addresses issues such as users' positive experiences, sense of belonging and community, effective interaction with physical spaces as well as satisfaction with library facilities. The tool is aimed to be user-friendly, relatively quick and easy to use and does not place unnecessary burdens on library authorities and librarian who might be using it.

The Aims & Purpose Statements

In the essence, the basic purpose of evaluation of academic libraries is determining if their spaces function as they were expected and designed for. This brings along such questions as "Have the students' and faculties' needs been met?", "Do library spaces support students' learning styles and faculties' teaching requirements?", "Are students, faculties and library staff satisfied with the library spaces?" and "If the spaces are not working well and do not accommodate the demand of the users and staff, what are the reasons that account for that/where do the problems lay?". TEALS adopt a number of **Key Purposes** and some sub-purposes and objectives linked to them. The key purposes and sub-purposes are listed in Table 1.

Key Purposes	Sub-purpose
To determine if a library is working effectively and able to meet library users' needs	assessing "users' satisfaction with space, service and collection identifying the significant use of certain spaces or services
To identify areas of weakness and strength and outline strategies for improvements	Carrying out an analysis of users' needs, preferences and aspiration Identifying the source of dissatisfaction, if users are dissatisfied with the library

Table 1. A summary of key purposes and sub-purposes of TEALS – Authors

The significance

Development of a tool to evaluate academic libraries is a timely topic and much needed area of inquiry. A significant investment has been made on libraries in the past few years and new academic library spaces have been developed. There is a need to assess how the new library spaces are working, what their impacts are and how university students and faculties are responding to these substantial transformations.

One aspect of the significant of this research has to do with the importance of Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) and evaluation of spaces in general. A review of existing literature points to some of the benefits of POE studies which fall within some broad categories including "Benefits for the library building under study", "Benefits for users and staff", "Benefits in relation to management and expenses" and "Benefits for future design".

Currently, there are some tools for evaluation of the design quality and building performances. The majority of these tools have been developed for the use by a wide range of building types. There are also a few self-assessment methods developed for libraries. Nevertheless, these methods or framework only briefly address a number of factors related to physical spaces of academic libraries and overlook many important issues in this regard. There is a need for a tool which has been specifically developed for academic libraries taking into consideration a great deal of relevant influential trends, qualities and impacts.

The Methodology

Four key elements of the methodological framework in developing TEALS include:

1. Establishing and clearly defining Criteria of Quality (CoQ)

2. Determining Measures/Quality Indicators (QIs) as they are linked to CoQ

3. Evaluating the spaces in a library under study against CoQ and QIs using surveys, interviews, records analyses and other available data collection methods.

4. Interpreting results as a tool for future improvement and identifying specific objectives and considerations for future decision-making.

Basically, the criteria for measuring if spaces are working well and accommodating users' needs are the functional requirements of the spaces and users' needs initially agreed upon in the stage of developing brief and through the process of design consultation and occupancy. For the purpose of developing TEALS, It is necessary to establish a set of general criteria which can more or less be applied to academic libraries in different contexts. It should be noted that the "Criteria of Quality" are evidenced-based criteria developed as a result of close examination of a number of policy documents, research and reports. Among the CoQ of TEALS are "**Inviting & Welcoming Interface**", "**Positive Identity & Image**", "**Functional & Effective Facilities**", "**Flexible & Adaptable Spaces**", "**A Variety of Space Responsive to a Wide Range of Users**", "**Environmental Comfort & Sustainability**", "**Reaching Out & Connections to Community**", "**A Sense of Place & Inspiring Spatial Quality**" and "**Access, Safety & Security**".
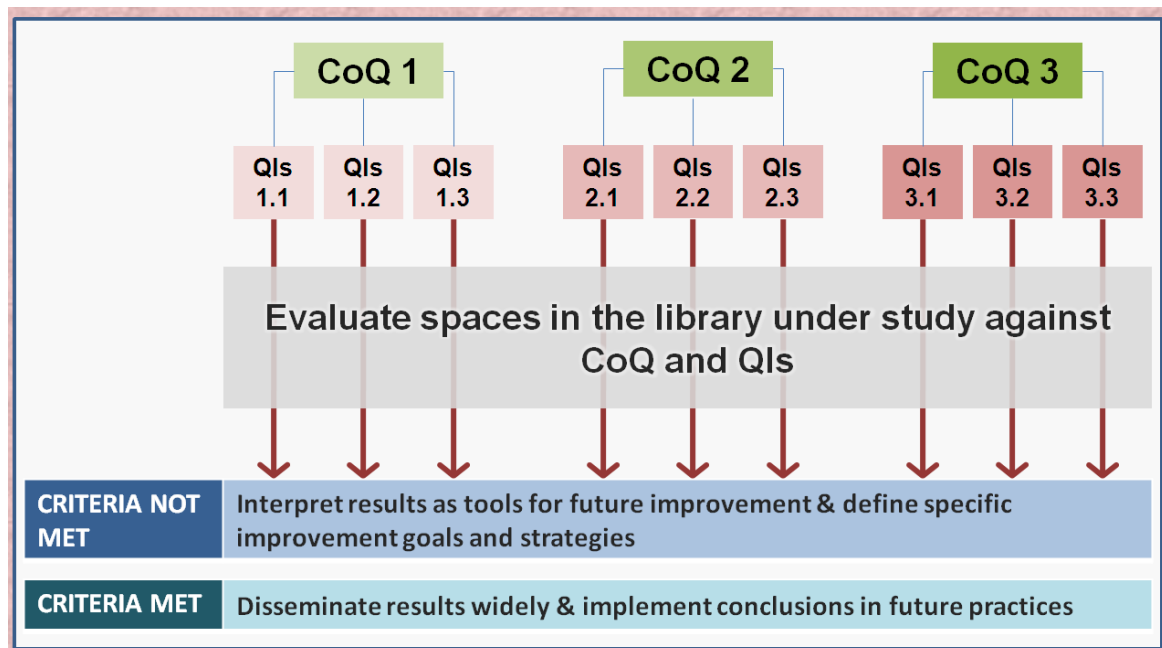

Figure 1. an overview of the conceptual framework of TEALS

Expected Outcomes

Among the features that should distinguish this tool from the tools currently available are ***being user-friendly and easy-to-use*** as well as ***acting as a reflective and empowering tool***. Another distinctive feature of TEALS is that it will be developed in a way to act as an "Empowering Tool"; a

tool that can be used to evaluate library spaces and improve them. Three levels of POE as identified by Preiser and Ostroff (2001) are "Indicative", "Investigative" and "Diagnostic". TEALS is expected to act not only as a *Diagnostic Tool* but also as a *Prescriptive Tool/Empowering Tool* outlining some intervention and improvement strategies to be considered. While the tool is aimed to establish the setting for and guide evaluation of physical environments at different phases of development of new libraries and refurbishment of existing ones, it is expected that it can be used at different stages of a library's life. In other words, the evaluation tool is framed in a way to act as a "reflective" tool assisting libraries to perform ongoing evaluation and reflect upon implementation of changes and their impacts, review the effectiveness of the programs run and compare utilisation of library spaces across years. The TEALS is aimed to be user-friendly, give relatively quick results and be easy to use and does not place unnecessary burdens on library authorities and librarian who might be using it.

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