Users' perspectives of library space: An analysis of user satisfaction survey at the University of Malaya, Malaysia

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Abstract: The new millennium with rapid advancement of information and communications technology globally and the appearance of the post millennial net generation library users have created a demanding and competitive environment for academic libraries. On one hand, libraries are competing with virtual google-driven information arena while trying hard to attract users to physically visit the library. Academic libraries are moving towards electronic collection to match the needs of the Net generation. Activities, facilities, and services offered are also revamped as significant library measures to remain relevant. One of the interesting observation of the young library users are their multitasking abilities and their need for a more relaxed atmosphere in contrary to the serious, scholarly milieu of academic libraries in the past. This paper summarizes the open comments on space by library users while answering the User Satisfaction Survey at the University of Malaya, Malaysia. From the open comments, the users' perspectives of library space can be categorized into five areas; library as a place via extended opening hours, increase in the number of plug points and sockets, high speed wireless and internet services, the need for food and café for relaxation, and aesthetic value and comfort while in the library. Although the University of Malaya library had been taking actions within financial constraints and policy restrictions, to meet the users' needs, the comments and suggestions over the years nonetheless continue to be along the same lines of the categories mentioned. It can be concluded that the users' perspectives of the academic library is moving away from the scholarly view to that of library as a third place perhaps due to the availability of electronic books, journals, databases, and resources online.

Keywords: Library Space, Library as a Place, Library Services, Library Facilities, User Surveys, User Needs

1. Introduction

At least two centuries have elapsed since the set-up of academic libraries. The growth and development of academic libraries then was dependent on student enrolment, funding, and support from the parent organizations. Advancement in technology has brought forth rapid changes in the library scenario. Along with this, a new generation of students had evolved. The 'Net Generation' or the 'Born Digital' have been introduced to digital technology even as they were learning to crawl thus making them the most technology savvy than any other generation before. Gibbons (2007) observed that the Net generation students' academic tool kit essentially comprise cell phones, ipods, wikis, instant messengers, and online games.

Eigenbrodt (2013) outlined Ray Oldenburg's study* on the concepts and theories of library space as follows: Great good library with public-private dichotomy; meeting place; sacred space; communal space; societal space; learning space; and physical & digital spaces. Generally, decisions on user-space arrangements made during previous eras are often not applicable to present needs. Most often space reorganizations are made without adequate information, or time, and as a reaction to pressure to do something about a situation that has become untenable (Fraley and Anderson, 1990)..

The objective of this study is to analyze library users' perspectives of library space extracted from their open comments during user satisfaction surveys. The study was undertaken at the University of Malaya, Malaysia and the open comments were gathered for period of five years, from 2008 until 2012 (Koh, 2012).

2. Literature Review

Trends in university library space are aptly described by Child, Matthews, and Walton (2013). In their report, the lack of space in the 70's and 80's was solved by converting print format to microfiche and CD-Roms. With the increased student numbers and changing pedagogy, group work entailed using the library as social space. Thus, group discussion space, social space, and learning commons appeared as upcoming trends in the new millennium. Feather (2013) reiterated that the web utterly transformed university libraries and how they were used. "The rigidly enforced silence of the mid twentieth century library became a thing of the past as large areas of library buildings were set aside for communal and often shared modes of study" (p 11).

* Oldenburg, R. The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community. Cambridge, MA: Du Capo, 1997

The University of New South Wales examined students' viewpoints pertaining to particular library spaces and found that collaborative study was a popular activity among students (Bailin, 2011) and as a result, incorporated these design concepts during their refurbishment from 2009-2011. Students preferred multipurpose facilities which allow them to meet, study, as well as a social gathering area. Fraley and Anderson (1990) identified four key situations in library operations which will precipitate space reorganization. The situations include lack of collection-growth space, lack of space for people, lack of change in direction or mission of the organization or community served by the library, and introduction of new services. The driving forces for change in library space can be based on any of the four situations.

The Killam Memorial Library at Dalhousie University carried out participant observation, an ethnographic research method, to explore how students use space in academic libraries (Bedwell and Banks, 2013). It was observed that the heaviest student traffic occurred in areas with plug points, high speed wireless, and big rectangular tables which allow discussion. This study also reported that students seem more interested in space for socializing than for study or work activity. Students seem to be observed to want 'personal space' and yet need to be around other people rather than in a quiet, enclosed space. The River Campus Libraries of the University of Rochester study (Gibbons, 2007) reported that the Net generation students were awash in different technologies and able to 'juggle many tasks at once effortlessly, such as writing a paper, have one or more conversations via instant messages, listening to music, and watching a television program' (p. 17). There is a convergence of the academic and social activities of a Net generation student's life and libraries must be alert to their needs.

In a longtuditional study of undergraduates' academic library experiences (Whitmire, 2001), using computers was reported to be one of the primary reasons while invariably using the library as place to study. Libraries are moving towards becoming multiuse spaces where members can access information and unlock their creativity on their own or as a group (Chart, 2014). Woodward (2009), alert librarians to remember that the students in the library who can be observed by librarians actually represent the dwindling number of students who

actually enter the library physically to use the space. In another study (Nasaruddin, Janaki, and Zanaria 2012), it was reported that a conducive place to study seem to be the topmost reason for physically walking into and using the library. This observation was also supported by other studies (Ludwig & Starr, 2005; Antell & Engel, 2006).

3. Background of the University of Malaya Library

The University of Malaya has its roots in Singapore since 1948. The rapid growth of the University then, resulted in the setting up of two autonomous Divisions in 1959; one located in Singapore and the other in Kuala Lumpur. On 1st January 1962, the two divisions became separate Universities - the National University of Singapore and the University of Malaya. The Central Library was the second building set up in the Kuala Lumpur division in 1959. Since then, the entire book collection comprising of four floor levels is housed here. With a collection of nearly 1.5 million books, it was a formidable task to relocate the book shelves. The air-conditioning system is also central. This means that the temperature set for the preservation of books had to be endured by the library users. Despite numerous complaints from users about the cold temperature, the library until now had not been able to address the issue successfully.

The University of Malaya adhere to the MS-ISO 9001:2000, Malaysian Quality Mangament System. The Library contributes mainly through three major core processes; collection development, service provision, and user education. The major areas of concern include sustainability and stability of the entire library system through documentation and user satisfaction. User satisfaction is measured through an annual User Satisfaction Survey. Major complaints and issues are brought forth as continual improvement projects and processes.

4. Data Collection

The annual User Satisfaction Survey is administered online to students from all levels, undergraduates, masters, and doctoral levels. Both local and international students are allowed to participate on a voluntary basis. The survey is sent to the students' individual email address. Results of the survey are then transferred to the Statistical Products Services and Solutions software package (SPSS). Generally, the annual online survey attempts to determine the satisfaction role of students in four areas; comprehensive collection, adequate facilities, excellent services, and responsive, helpful attitude of staff. In addition, an open-ended comment section is provided to comment on any issue considered important for the users. This report summarises the results of the open comments of the library survey for five years, from 2008 until 2012. For the purpose of this report, only comments on library space were extracted. A stark similarity of the suggestions and comments pertaining to space prompted a detailed study and analysis of all the comments. The comments on library space are categorised into five areas of concern: (i) Opening hours, (ii) Plugpoints and sockets, (iii) Wireless and Internet speed, (iv) Food and cafe, and (v) Aesthetic and comfort. Table 1 displays the existing situation in the library pertaining to these concerns. Table 2 on the hand, displays the extracted comments representing the 'wish list' of users

Table 1: Comments from users on library space

	Areas of concern	Existing situation
i	Opening Hours	The library opens from 8.00 am until 10.00 pm during weekdays and until 4.00 pm during weekdays. During

		examination preparation month, the opening hours will be extended until 12.00 midnight throughout.
ii	Plugpoints and sockets	The Central Library has four floors. The walls where the computer labs and workstations are placed have intermittent plugpoints and sockets affixed on the walls.
iii	Wireless and Internet Speed	The Information Technology Centre of the university is responsible for fixing datapoints and increasing the bandwidth for internet use. The library do not have a role to play in this matter.
iv	Food and Cafe	There is a vending machine on the ground floor of the Central Library. Hot drinks and lightly packed food are available. Just beside the library are two food kiosks. There is also a canteen across the road.
v	Aesthetic and comfort	The library building was built in 1959 with an extension wing in 1998. While the new wing is brightly lit with new shelves and furniture, the old wing is packed with book shelves. Reading hall is spacious but crowded with many tables and chairs. This is necessary to cater during the examination preparation week when students are turned away due to lack of seats while some students sit on the floors among the book shelves.

Table 2: Wish lists of users related to library space

	Areas of concern	Wishlist of users and suggestions for improvement
i	Extended Opening Hours	Students have expressed a need to have the library particularly the Central Library opened for 24 hours. There seem to be a dire need during weekends. The postgraduates who are mainly young working adults are only free to use the library to borrow books and do research late night and during weekends. The library closing at 11.00 pm during weekdays and 4.00 pm during weekends do not seem to meet their need. The international students on the other hand, seem to require a safe and quiet place to study in campus during late nights. They do not have a place to go during weekends and term break and prefer to be in the library instead. Both local and international students reiterated that a 24 x 7 library opening hours would attract more students to come to the library.
ii	Increase number of Plugpoints and Sockets	The postgraduates had expressed a need to have more electricity outlets installed to enable them to use their personal computers to access the electronic databases. They are not keen to use the computers available in the library because they suspect the library computers have viruses. The shortage of plugpoints and sockets resulted in students bringing their own extension cords as a result of which wires go criss-cross across the reading halls. This problem was predominantly reported in the 2008 and 2009 surveys. The Central Library added more plugpoints and sockets as an improvement

		project. The reading halls became more presentable with no criss-cross wires. However, the later surveys from years 2010 until 2012 have users requesting for more plugpoints in the branch and special libraries.
iii	Increase internet speed	Students want to download videos from YouTube, watch movies, listen to songs. With the datapoints supplied by the Information Technology Centre of the university, the internet speed is sufficient to access the scholarly materials such as electronic books, journals, and databases.
iv	Food and cafe	Students who are hard pressed for time really feel a cafe would save their time and refresh their mind simultaneously. Although a vending machine has been installed on the ground floor of the library, students have expressed a wish to have more choices of food which are filling to their stomach instead of merely hot drinks.
v	Aesthetic and comfort	Users have expressed a wish to have the library look more lively with vibrant, bright colours instead of the dull, sober shade of colour. They also requested for interesting lighting. Some students wished the old tables and chairs could be replaced with modern ones.

5. Library as a Place

It is realized from the open comments that the academic library is seen as a multifaceted place rather than merely a library. There maybe a mismatch between the library and the users' viewpoints with libraries adopting a conservative, traditional approach while users' are expecting more flexibility and multifunctional library spaces. The University of Malaya managed to modify and convert services and facilities related to opening hours and comfort to suit users' needs and wishes.

(i) The library managed to identify an area at the back entrance of the library to metamorphose it to a 24 hour study area. It was a difficult decision because the office space and computer laboratory are also located there. This service was opened to the users in August 2014 and was well received. The adjoining door from the library to this study area is cordoned off and the back entrance opened once the library closes.

(ii) The library has now set up different areas from open spaces to quiet private spaces for individual study. The building levels are also divided into quiet zone, moderate noise level, and free zone where users are allowed to discuss and use their phones if necessary.

(iii) A Gadget corner to support mobile e learning was initiated early year 2014. A few ipads were bought and applications suitable for learning and researach were downloaded in the gadgets such as Mobile OPACs, Google drive, Book Myne, and other applications. E books from kindle were also downloaded. This area is an open space with comfortable cushions, chairs and tables. Students are free to use these gadgets.

(iv) The library had also adopted a modernistic approach to academic libraries in the country by designating a children's corner. This is a new addition to the library for those who come in with their children occasionally. The corner has specially designed furniture for children and book shelves with some toys scattered on the tables and floors to keep the children safely engrossed while their parent quickly retrieve books from the shelves for borrowing. If the parent intends to stay longer, they must be with their children. For such purposes, plug points are available to enable the parent to use their laptops.

6. Conclusion

The rapid advancement in technology gadgets and global open source initiatives are indirectly posing tremendous pressure on academic libraries. "If people are no longer using libraries to access the physical books, journals, and other resources, the perception of libraries as places of knowledge and learning, where students and staff can go to think and learn becomes even more important" (Childs, Matthews, & Walton, 2013, p 10). If space is reckoned to be crucially important for the present and future generation, then libraries have to consider weeding and maintaining off site storage spaces as important activities for the future. For these are the main methods of clearing the space to pave way for services, facilities, and activities that support the Library as a Place.

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