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Performance Evaluation of School Environs: Evolving an Appropriate Methodology Building

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Abstract

Environ-behavior studies have proved the power of the environmental container to impact inhabitants in a significant way. This paper is part of an ongoing doctoral research on evaluating building performance of urban Indian schools using Post Occupancy Evaluation as a major tool through its primary users- the students.

An appropriate methodology was evolved in response to the outcomes of a pilot survey that identified unique ground situation. It assisted in understanding the status of urban learning environs from point of view of child centricity & in conclusion enabled the research enquiry to recommend parameters for a user-friendly & inclusive school design.

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1. Introduction

The designing of an urban facility in a developing country like India, is a challenging proposition due to the cost of land & infrastructure. Urban Indian schools are a typical example of this situation. Schools exemplify the learning environs. Basic education is more than a decade long process & engages the most impressionable years of childhood. The impact of the school environs on the students is thus prolonged & intensive. Like other urban facilities, schools take physical form in adherence to the building

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regulations. The architect & owner conceive the architectural expression of the school with an eye on its marketability. The actual process of teaching learning occurs within the spatial environs of the school building. There is an urgent need to examine whether our school environs are conducive to the teaching-learning process while being sensitive to the needs of the students.

The study aims to investigate the school environs for their user friendliness, students being considered as the major users of the school. This paper is based on the ongoing doctoral research on urban learning environs.

School spaces support the nurture of users who are in a constant state of maturation; from the tender age of 6 years at 1st standard to the oncoming adulthood of 18 years at the 12th standard. The psychological & emotional needs of the child in the various stages of growth has been classified by Piaget on the basis of development of spatial imaging abilities in a child into 4 major stages (Piaget, n.d.). The impact of the surrounding built envelope on the growth of spatial cognition in the young humans needs recognition & greater acknowledgment by the designers of school environs.

‘Much of architecture affects people from beyond the focus of awareness. People are not sure what it is about a building or room that affects them, nor are they able to express how they feel in different surroundings’ (Sommer, 2007, pg. 212). The influence exerted by the school environs on the tender young minds is understated.

Research on the impact of space on behavior has identified intrinsic spatial tendencies in humans such as territoriality, personal & social space, defensible space, privacy, scale, hierarchy & physical comfort etc. All these in tandem make for emotional comfort within given spatial settings and are powerful environmental factors according to La Gory & Pipkin (1981).

In addition, school environs need to be inclusive & child centric. Spaces designed for the growing years, are major shaping influences since children use environment to improve themselves as against adults who use themselves to improve the environments Lillard (1972). Research findings emphasize the deep relationship between the learner & their educative surroundings.

2. The aim of research

The research aims at evaluating the performance of the school buildings through Post Occupancy Evaluation. ‘POE findings typically describe, interpret & explain the performance of a school building’ explains Sanoff (2001, pg.7). Typically a POE seeks to investigate the level of satisfaction of users with respect to the facility.

An appropriate methodology is the spine of any in-depth research work. Although literature study makes for a sound understanding of the generic issues, it was imperative to get acquainted with the ground situation & address the unique concerns that were identified, for a holistic evaluation.

This paper focuses on evolving of an appropriate methodology for the stated research.

3. Literature review

The literature review revolves around three aspects that are an integral part of this research enquiry:

3.1. School education in India

An important stage in the methodology is the understanding of the system of education, for it gave further insight into the controls that regulate the basic education in India. This is done through an intensive literature study of the government policies on school education (“National Curriculum Framework 2005”, n.d.).

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