The Evaluation of Critique Methods in Architecture Education: A Case Study of Critiques Session in 2nd Year Design Studio of Architecture Department, National University of Malaysia (UKM)

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ABSTRACT

Evaluation is one of the important way to assess and control goal are achieved, whether successful or not. In the learning process there are various approaches and methods to achieve the intended results. One method of learning in architectural education is a critical method that is applied in architecture design studio. Critical method makes it possible to create active interaction and stimulate critical thinking and innovative on the students. This method has been tried to be applied in architecture design studio in the 2nd year in Department of Architecture, National University of Malaysia. And in this paper will evaluate these critical method, how the implementation of the design studio and for the students. This evaluation has the goal to determine the level of response and results of the relationship between criticism methods that has been applied with the development of student learning. With the results of this evaluation are expected to make an important contribution to the enrichment of learning methods in architecture education, especially in the architectural design studio. Then, it can produce a new generation of students are more intellectual, critical, creative and innovative.

Key words: Evaluation, methods of criticism, architectural design studio

Introduction

In today’s world which all concerning are about sustainable and all efforts are to troop all humans’ need with less destructive and negative effect on next generations’ portion, sustainable education as a first stage of attitude and effect on future can play an important role. Indeed if educating system be able to has a positive impact on its’ inputs, then it can import its influence to the whole society by its numerous outputs. Especially in art and architecture this influence would be multiple and multilateral, because students are the future designers and peoples’ life will be influenced by them.

Education is completely linked by spiritual and mental aspects and has direct effect on thoughts and ideas; even it can make patterns and line behaviors for humans’ life. So we ought to pay more attention to education phenomenon.

Derek Rowntree [1] stated that if we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must first look to its assessment procedures. Architecture is involved with every aspect of the design process from concept to completion, and because of the nature of its education, the architect is ideally suited to exercise and maintain overall management of the project. In architectural educating system, design studios as prevalent or even only way of teaching and learning are based on lectures and critique sessions. Critique sessions in contrast of usual lecture classes are new experience for students and face them to new situations that expect them to expose themselves to others critique and learn how to find creative solutions, and their success will assess in this way too. The expectation of facing to routine professional critique and this question that what happens within an individual’s mind and what happens between two people that lead to different results makes the critique sessions more important. On the other hand the locus of studies in this millennium is shifting towards skills acquisition, rather than knowledge accumulation, for autonomous self-directed and lifelong learning. In same condition once a technology is developed in a certain country, it’s know- how can be instantly spread out all over the world, neglecting the cultural aspects of countries to or from which it propagates. On the contrary the spiritual and cultural aspects of human life, namely, how to enrich men’s day by day life, cannot easily be communicated. The interchange of man’s cultural
aspects is not as easy as that of materialistic ones. So in this paper we investigate the implemented critique methods in architectural studios all around the world and investigating the utility of assessment by surveying the satisfaction and dissatisfaction points of UKM (University Kebangsaan Malaysia) students as a case study and in closing we will give some suggestions to upgrade the available system to try to reach the sustainable architectural education.

Background:

All of us can remember the first days we were standing in front of our classmates and teacher to present the project we had done as our assignment. The project which we had spent all last night awake to prepare something good from our opinion. But all feedbacks were consisting of disagreement of the teacher. This situation was predictable; all the past experiences were different from on goings. Lecture classes replaced by design studios and desks with drafting table and the answer of the questions were not tough before, so there was no expected outcome to the assignments. In current academic courses, design studio education is reflected in homework revision practice. Students and teachers collaboratively develop a design theme, share objectives, ideas, issues and solutions [2]. The studio instructor suggests some revisions in the design that he/she feels will be better in solving a particular aspect of the problem. Following the desk crit, the student is expected to more fully explore and test these options and suggestions by revisiting his or her solution. The studio instructor will then review the outcome of the student’s revised solution suggesting further changes.

Concurrent with the formal studio desk critique, students will informally critique each other’s work throughout the semester, and learn various design skills and drawing and model construction techniques from each other. The solution will present in various evolving forms from sketches to fully developed drawings and models, dimensions and scales of the design problem.

The pin-up involves a form of peer review in which the student formally presents his or her work to the studio class and the instructor. The student will restate the problem, outline the issues being addressed to solve the problem, present their solution or alternative solutions, and describe the process by which they arrived at a tentative solution. Once the student has completed his or her presentation, the work is open for discussion and critique by the instructor and the class.

The Evaluation of Implemented Methods in Design Studios:

To investigate in architecture design studios and find the success and satisfaction of these implemented universal method models on students, we chose Malaysia as a case study and UKM (University Kebangsaan Malaysia) to distribute questionnaire among students.

The questionnaire used for this research covered topics including: the purpose, educational goals, effectiveness, and students’ reactions to both desk crits and juries. Also asked were questions relating directly towards the design jury including: a framework for criticism, past successful and unsuccessful experiences, explanation of the Purpose of a jury to the class, whom the jury is directed towards, student’s participation in juries and changes for improvement. This was achieved in the student questionnaire by asking questions posed a scale of point between the end points of a positive/negative continuum and by asking open-ended questions, which allowed the students the respond in their own words.

![Fig. 1: Student responses to the Question: During your past and current design studios at UKM did your instructor(S) explain the purpose of a design jury.](image)

Students were asked how frequently the purpose of a design jury is discussed in architecture studios, and the results are illustrated in Figure 1. More than sixty percent responded by stating that only sometimes in design studios the instructors discusses with the class the purpose of a design jury. Thirty-one percent of all students responded that, in architecture studio they have taken at UKM the instructor has discussed the purpose of a design jury.

The result shows that there is not enough communication between instructors and students in studios about the purpose of design juries. This may
affect what type of learning experience both the teachers and students think they are owed in a jury situation. This lack of communication may result in juries that are not effective as they could be, if a misunderstanding is occurring between what students and instructors would like to gain from the experience.

The view of students surveyed as to whether their design instructors use a structure for giving criticism during design juries is illustrated in Figure 2. Thirty-four percent of the students feel that jurors do use a structure for giving criticism to students. Sixty percent of students responded that jurors only sometimes do they feel jurors utilize a structure for the criticism they receive during juries.

Fig. 2: Student responses to the Question: jurors follow a certain structure for giving students criticism during a jury?

While four percent of all students responded that they did not think jurors follow a certain structure for giving criticism. Some instructors in architecture design studios use an evaluation sheet to grade a project after a jury. These evaluation sheets often include a list of objectives the student should have completed while working on a project. The evaluation sheet which is using by some instructors is the named structure by students. these evaluation sheets includes the objectives, the students have completed while working on project while instructors usually give spontaneous verbal criticism during a jury situation that differs for each project, based upon what issues each project may present to be discussed. Students were asked, who should benefit from a jury and who do you think benefits from the juries in current system.

Fig. 3: Student responses to the Question: jurors follow a certain structure for giving students criticism during a jury?

The responses for who should benefit from a jury are concentrated to the students. In comparison, the responses to whom students think benefits from the way juries are currently conducted were widely distributed among all of the choices. Again, this inconsistency may imply that juries, as a learning experience, may not be as effective as they have the potential to be.

The inconsistency of who think should and does benefit from the way juries are currently conducted may occur because there is a lack of consistency in
the way juries are conducted in different studios. Students surveyed were given thirteen choices listed as goals of desk crits and eighteen choices as goals of juries. The given choices were acquired from responses given during instructor interviews. Students were asked to agree or disagree if they thought the given choices are goals of desk crits. The students responded on a scale of one to five. One on the scale represented the student strongly disagreed with the option as a goal of a desk crit. Five on the scale represented the students strongly agreed that the option was a goal of a desk crit. For each option, the responses of four and five were calculated because they were interpreted. Fig 4 and figure 5.

Fig. 4: Percentages of who agree the following items are goals of desk crits.

The most important goals of juries according to students directly relates to what they believe they can learn from the project they are presenting. Improving presentation skills and improving design knowledge and how to respond to the criticism are the proof of this claim. They think juries should teach them to defend their design ideas by responding to the given criticism, improve presentation skills, learning about specific parts of their project that worked and parts that didn’t, learning from other students’ projects, and learning more design knowledge and how they can apply it to future designs. These results are similar to Kathryn Anthony’s findings that imply, “Students stress that juries should provide an opportunity to learn how well they solved a design problem and how they can improve their design work in the future. Learning from the jury is a key goal”. (Anthony1991)

However, rating lower as goals for design juries than some other choices according to students shows that the communication, in juries as they are currently conducted revolve around evaluating how well a student solved the problem by producing a finished product. For instance the rated, improve critical thinking, listen to feedback given, times for jurors to convey their knowledge lower than giving marks.

Comparing the students result with instructors indicates that both faculty and students view desk crits as more effective learning tool than juries. And positive crits is more preferred way to students but most of the times the instructors just lay on negative comments and the remained problems which need to be solved in further steps of design process. If students be aware of their instructor’s opinions and know how they analyze their project and what they expect them, they can more easily handle the project and will never afraid of negative comments. Because students may react confused, disappointed or frustrated after receiving any type of crits especially negative comments.

Psychologically, all the outside factors will influence on students reactions and their design process. Getting disappointed or getting confident in personal design process, getting confused or inspired or even getting nervous are completely depend on the background and different cultures. Also these reactions may occur because students are struggling to solve a design problem and these can just be reduced by teacher’s good actions. Beside this the comparison of student’s feelings in desk crit and juries are shown in Figure 6. It illustrates that students feel better during juries and they will get more ready to try new things.

The attendance of more instructors in juries is a positive point for them to have variety type of ideas and comments and finally more inspired and this leads to get less confused and disappointed and more encourage during the juries.

The amount of being appreciative also is more than crit sessions. Juries more frequently than desk crits make students react nervous and defensive of ideas. Students may react in these ways because of the physical separation between the student presenting and the rest of the class. This physical geography of a student and his/her work being on display may cause a student to become nervous and defensive of his/her ideas.
According to students and teachers experience in design studios and their feelings and feedbacks here, we mention some specific aspect or characteristic that made the jury a good learning experience for students. (Meyer 2003)

1. Juries are good when the critique is both positive and negative and to the point. If it is all negative the student will get discouraged and zone out. It if all positive, the student will think their work needs no improvement.

2. The best jury would have to be in the situation of a small class. This is for two reasons: people do not get bored and stop paying attention, and you normally feel better about presenting to these people. With these in mind a jury normally works out much better.

3. The ones in which questions asked allow me to find errors or shortcomings in my design on my own.

4. Any critique that is full of constructive criticism balanced with encouragement. The balance and delivery is what is important.

5. Both positive and negatives highlighted plus future options for improvement.

These results may be interpreted as individual components that constitute what makes good jury experience. These components include: criticism that is balanced between discussing positive and negative aspects of the student’s work; a small class; specific comments on how the student can improve the project; and a variety of jurors to allow for differing viewpoints in the feedback given to a student.

Fig. 5: Percentages of who agree the following items are goals of juries.

Fig. 6: Comparison of student’s feelings desk crits and juries.
Conclusion:

Research among students indicates that the most successful design studios are those where traditional power relationships are broken down. These are studios where the students become actively involved in the process, and where they have the opportunity to discuss their work with jurors and with each other, all within an environment of mutual respect and interest.

Well designed assessment leads to clear expectations and provide opportunities for students to self-monitor and practice and receive feedbacks. If a structure and consistency were applied to the criticism they receive, students would be better prepared to give and receive criticism. If teachers have a focus just on the work, the students are disappointed because the discussion doesn’t seem to have much meat, and if you have a discussion just about the general societal issues or design theory, they feel their efforts have been neglected.

Comparison of results of this investigation with same done surveys in different countries shows that variation of the feelings and effects of these implemented methods are approximately same in different countries. This shows we can check the implemented methods with authentic criteria which could be satisfy students with different cultures and back grounds, different talent and even different learning style. Because in authentic assessment method we do not focus on the factual knowledge as end it. Rather, we focuson the ability to use relevant knowledge, skills, and process for solving open ended problems.

References