An Albanian Case Study On Measuring the Service Quality in An Academic Library

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this study is to measure the perceptions of the Faculty of Economics of Tirana library users as they relate to quality service and to determine how far this library has succeeded in delivering such service to its users. Design/methodology/approach – The research was carried out among the students of the Faculty of Economics of Tirana. A questionnaire was used as the data gathering instrument. The instruments for data collection consisted of structured questions. All the closed ended questions were designed to elicit responses on a five point Likert scale to measure both respondent satisfaction and perception of service quality. Analysis of the collected data made use of the chi-square method. Findings – The results would appear to indicate that Faculty of Economics of Tirana library is not lacking in quality of service. However, we need to note that quality information service is about helping users to define and satisfy their information needs, building their confidence in using information retrieval systems, and making the whole activity of working with library staff a pleasurable experience. To achieve total quality in information service the Faculty of Economics of Tirana library should provide a comprehensive information programme that is predicated on the needs and activities of the users. Originality/value – This article may help those libraries, who are seriously interested to develop user satisfaction and provide better service to the user. This article also suggests some recommendations about increasing the user satisfaction in the library service.

Keywords: Library, Albania, Service Quaulity

Introduction

Generally, the quality of an academic library has been described in terms of its collection and measured by the size of the library holdings and statistics on its use. This traditional method no longer fulfills the goals for successfully measuring the user's demands for information. It seems that it is time to evaluate the quality and significance of library service using alternative methods. To this end, the SERVQUAL method has evolved as a quality management instrument to measure service quality. Quality is the basic philosophy and requirement of library service and all libraries strive to deliver the highest quality of service. A quality service is one that fully meets the expectations and requirements of the users. If a library provides appropriate information to the right user at the right time and in the required form, then it could be argued to be maintaining quality. Quality library services mean satisfying the query of each and every user accurately, exhaustively and expeditiously. The rapid development of information technology, tremendous speed of sociotechnical development and the changed needs of users have all added to the expectations of a service organization. It is evident that management skills must match these demands on and threats to library and information services. The application of quality management in libraries should establish a culture of never ending improvement of quality of products and services. Its implementation in libraries improves the image of the library staff and helps in public relations and marketing.

The concept of quality in library services

The concept of service quality in the context of a library can be defined as the difference between users' expectations and perceptions of service performance and the reality of the service. Service quality means being able to view services from the customer's point of view and then meeting the customer expectation for service. The concept of service quality was defined as the difference between a library user's expectations and perceptions of service performance to the mid 1970s. Quality becomes a big issue when libraries try to expand their scope and improve their service. Identifying new ways to

conceive of quality and to monitor its attainment are current challenges for libraries. In the library, quality may be recognized by the customers in terms of prompt delivery or error free services.

Recently, some librarians have shifted their perspective of library services to represent a user driven view. The assessment of how well a library succeeds depends on the user as judge of quality. The primary goal of any library therefore should be to maximize user satisfaction and to potentially exceed the expectations of their users. Quality can also be seen as relating to the fitness of a service or product to its intended purpose or use, subject to the expectations of the customer or user. Quality, therefore, must be in conformity with the customer's requirements or needs. This means that the quality of a service can be a definition of the customer's perception of what is good or bad, acceptable or not acceptable service. There are identified five dimensions with which consumers judge services:

Reliability: the ability to perform the promised service both dependably and accurately.

Responsiveness: the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service.

Assurance: the knowledge and courtesy of employees as well as their ability to convey trust and confidence.

Empathy: the provision of caring, individualized attention to customers.

Tangibles: the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials.

SERVQUAL instrument

The SERVQUAL instrument easily identifies service quality from the customer perspective. To measure potential gaps, Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry developed a 22 item questionnaire called SERVQUAL. The gaps model and its SERVQUAL instrument is probably the most frequently used approach to discuss and measure service quality. The first four gaps are the major contributors to the service quality gap that customers may perceive. The fifth gap is the basis of a customer oriented definition of service quality; it is discrepancy between customer's expectations for excellence and their perceptions of actual service delivered. This discrepancy is the conceptual basis for the SERVQUAL instrument (Nitecki and Hernon, 2000).

Thapisa and Gamini (1999) determined the perceptions of the clients of the University of Botswana library as they relate to quality service, and how far the university library has succeeded in delivering quality services. According to Nitecki and Hernon (2000), SERVQUAL is a new approach to measuring service quality, one that produces findings useful for local planning and decision-making. It also differentiates between service quality and satisfaction and points the direction for further research. A study by Dadzie (2004) indicated the important role of top management in an organization and examined the possibilities, challenges and constraints posed to librarians in the provision of quality service to the university community in Ghana. SERVQUAL is a diagnostic tool to measure service quality, defined as the difference between customer perceptions and expectations of service. This study discusses implications for library management and future explorations of a tool applicable to academic libraries (Nitecki, 1996).

Rajan and Ravi (2001) have discussed some of the limitations and possibilities of the service quality model for academic libraries. The model was originally developed in a commercial environment and may require some adaptation to the non-commercial environment of the academic library. Various ways in which the model might be adapted are suggested. Walmiki (2001) discussed in his study how to take effective steps towards the larger goal of total readers' satisfaction. The study defines the meaning of quality control and its evolution, and depicts the relation between quality and user's. It describes the implementation of total quality management (TQM) in library and information services. It also examines the benefits of quality management such as efficiency, and continual and systematic improvement in the activities of the library as a whole. Finally, it elaborates on the modern concept of TQM.

A case study

The aim of this study is to examine the perceptions of the library users as they relate to quality service and to determine how far the library has succeeded in delivering such service to its users. The following objectives of the study are:

. Determine how the students of the Faculty of Economy perceive quality service at the library.

. Establish whether the library is meeting the quality expectations of the users.

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. Make recommendations on how to improve the level of quality service.

Methodology

The research was carried out among the students of the Faculty of Economy of Tirana. This research study is to determine the perception of the users as they relate to quality service provided by the Faculty of Eonomy library.

The study has a total sample of 70 from 111 questionnaires issued. The samples were randomly selected from out of the regular users of library. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. The instrument for data collection consisted of structured (open/closed-ended) questions. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of students. The questionnaire covered three main section of the library, i.e. the aspects relating to the physical facilities, technical facilities such as computer facilities, and the attitude and competence of staff.

Questionnaire design

It consisted of open-ended and closed questions. The questionnaire reflected seven determinants of the quality services. Each section is summed up by an open-ended question, which allowed the respondents to assess the overall impression of given criteria of quality service. All the closed ended questions were designed to be responded to on a five point Likert scale to measure both respondent satisfaction and perception of service quality. Respondents were replying indicating:

1 representing ''strongly agree'', 2 ''agree'', 3 ''disagree'', 4 ''strongly disagree'' and 5 ''not sure''. In addition, two independent questions were given in questionnaire to aid respondents in giving their views on their overall impression of the services and physical facility at library.

Measuring service quality

Reliability

This refers to the delivery of the service as it relates to dependability and accuracy. It includes:

. Giving correct answers to reference questions;

. Making relevant information available;

. Keeping records consistent with actual holdings/status;

. Making sure that overdue notices and fine notices are accurate.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness measures the readiness of library staff in providing the service.

It includes:

. Timeliness in delivering needed information;

. Making new information available;

. Checking in new journals and newspapers promptly;

. Calling back a patron who has telephoned with a reference question immediately;

. Minimizing computer response time;

. Re-shelving books quickly;

. Minimizing turnaround time for interlibrary loans.

Assurance

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Assurance measures the knowledge and courtesy of the library staff and their ability to convey confidence. This includes:

. Valuing all requests for information equally and conveying the importance of an inquiry to the client;

. Clean and neat appearance of staff;

. Thorough understanding of the collection;

. Familiarity with the workings of equipment and technology;

. Learning the customer's specific requirements;

. Providing individual attention;

. Recognizing the regular customer.

Access

Access measures the ability to reach out for something and finding or getting it as and when it is needed. It includes:

. Waiting time at circulation desk;

. Availability of computer terminals, online public access catalogue (OPAC), etc. without excessive waiting;

. Library hours meeting expectations;

. Location and convenience of the library.

Communications

Communications measures the ability to keep clients informed in a language they understand, and the ability to listen to them:

. Avoiding library jargon;

. Determining the needs of the client through gentle follow-up questions;

. Developing precise, clear instructions at the point of use;

. Teaching the customer library skills;

. Assuring the customer that her/his problem will be handled.

Empathy

Empathy measures the behavior, attitude and approach of the library staffs towards users. It includes:

. Determine the attitude of the staff;

. Giving equal importance to all user's request

Discussion of results

The results takenfrom the survey suggested that the users of library are largely satisfied with various aspects of services quality except responsiveness and communication. Communication is brought in here because some students suggested that they did not know about the existence of some of the available services. Proper and effective communication systems should be put in place, so that users can be informed about the availability of the services they may require. Information seeking therefore is a function not only of awareness of the possible existence of documents but also their availability and accessibility. In responsiveness, some students have given negative responses. The largest number of students suggested that the library should provide the latest publications.

Conclusion

The results have indicated that the Faculty of Economy Library is not lacking a quality service. However, we need to note that a quality information service is about helping users to define and satisfy their information needs, building their confidence in using information retrieval systems, and making the whole activity of working with library staff a pleasurable experience. To achieve total quality in information service the library should provide a comprehensive information programme that is predicated on the needs and activities of the users.

Service providers, no matter their profession, need to know that the definition of quality is a subjective matter. It is a fact that the users will always dictate what he/she wants, when and how. The service provider, though certainly not a bystander in this transactional relationship, is always influenced to a large extent by the demands of the users.

The user can always change the direction, form and character of any service depending on his/her needs. The provider's responsibility to the user is to adapt to such needs. The service therefore should always be tailor-made to accommodate the needs and wants of the customer. Quality means conforming first to customer requirements, and then to standards or specifications. Users have a tendency of voting with their feet if things do not work out their way. Quality service therefore is a symbiotic relationship where the user prescribes the needs and the service provider capitulates to them within available capabilities and resources.

Recommendation

By providing quality services and satisfaction to users, they can distinguish their services through friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable advice and the best technological resources available. Because academic library users have varying needs and expectations, it is the responsibility of the library staff to know these needs and expectations and strive to meet them.

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