Volume and Issues Obtainable at Center for Sustainability Research and Consultancy

Journal of Business and Social Review in Emerging Economies

ISSN: 2519-089X & ISSN (E): 2519-0326

Volume 7: Issue 2 June 2021

Journal homepage: www.publishing.globalcsrc.org/jbsee

Student's Perception and Expectation Regarding Library Services Quality: A Case Study of a Public Multi Campus University of Punjab, Pakistan

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Service quality,
SERVQUAL University
library

JEL Classification*I00, I29***ABSTRACT**

Purpose: The disparity between students' perceptions and expectations is measured in this study to determine the perceived service quality (SQ) of sample university's academic library units.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Under the typology of quantitative approach survey method was used. The SERVQUAL instrument consisting of 22 items was adopted for assessing student's expectations and perceptions. The students enrolled in regular programmes of the academic year 2013-2014 were taken as population. Using stratified random sampling through proportional allocation, a sample of 372 respondents was designed. Data were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics and qualitatively using NVIVO software for content of open-ended questions. **Findings:** The results revealed that student's expectations were higher than their perception. **Implications/Originality/Value:** Based on the findings, it was concluded that the concerned authorities may take initiatives to improve the library services provided by the library staff. In this way the students' expectations can be met.

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Recommended citation: Shah, S., Siddiqui, G. K. & Pasha, S. (2021). Student's Perception and Expectation Regarding Library Services Quality: A Case Study of a Public Multi Campus University of Punjab, Pakistan. *Journal of Business and Social Review in Emerging Economies*, 7 (2), 319-327.

Introduction

Over a few decades, the function of libraries has simply been revolutionized from the warehouse of books and other physical objects to information centers of access to databases in the advanced countries. Now, the main purpose of libraries and information centers is to provide a service to its

users.

According to Ameen (2005) "increasing the size of the collection has been aim of libraries and considered a sign of greatness" (p.113). Until 19th century the aim of the libraries was to build and maintain big collection of books, manuscripts, pamphlets and magazines, etc. but their use was not considered important.

During the late 19th century librarians began to understand that the collection should be used for the personal help of users. Green (1876) was the first to present this notion. The Classical Five Laws of Ranganathan (1931) provided the user-centred philosophy that 'books are for use, every reader his or her book, every book its reader.

The role of a librarian is the mediator between user and library material. So, the Librarian should serve the good of humanity by using library material (Cooke, 2004). Thus, the libraries have changed from the collection-centred to user-centred. Now the central purpose of libraries is to provide services to its users rather than simply the warehouse.

Rubin (2017) emphasized that the main change on the part of libraries began from 1980s after the invention of digital media like CD-ROM, OPACs, issue return and acquisition systems (p.64). The uprising of information was activated with the growth of computers and internet.

Meanwhile the cultural and financial changes around the libraries have a direct influence on the function of libraries. During the past forty years the function of the libraries has changed due to change in cultural environment. The programme of user care and satisfaction, reduction in public expenses was combined with financial decline in the 1980s (Crawford, 2006).

Due to fast advancement in technology, user's needs of information and expectations concerning the quality of library services has been multiplied. Now librarians and other library staff must have a proper classification and collection of books and provide required services to the users. Cultural and financial changes put multiple pressures on libraries to evaluate analytically SQ and show their value in relation to funds spent on them.

Service Quality is a 1990's phenomenon originated in the business and industry. The concept of SQ has been used in the service-oriented organizations including health, higher education institutions and libraries. The word "quality" has no single definition due to its numerous dimensions.

According to Evans and Lindsay (2004), the most common definition of SQ accepted by service marketing researchers is "Meeting or exceeding customer standards. The two important dimensions are objective quality and perceived quality. The perceived quality is user's judgement about the total quality of a service. The opinion of user is ranked significant for the evaluation of SQ.

According to Parasuraman et al. (1985), SQ perceptions came from contrast of user's expectations against perceptions. Mathematically this relationship can be best explained as;

$$Q = P - E$$

Where Q = service quality, P = users' perception about service quality, and E = users' expectations about service quality.

For the analysis of perceived service quality performance, Durden (2000) divided the findings of this discrepancy into four groups i.e. 0 to -1; -1 to -2; -2 to -3; and -3 to -4.

As per up-to-date information library management systems and the struggle from stake holders

i.e. publishers, digital and Internet media, libraries are facing crises of existence and growth. A big variety of the studies in this field has revealed that the libraries face following contests under present day scenario:

Ever increasing user's expectations
 Increasing usage of information technologies
 Advancement of information technology
 Explosion of knowledge
 Struggle among suppliers and industries

The libraries have to evaluate their SQ, if they want to encounter the above-mentioned contests. In this way, the libraries will be able to understand whether they are meeting user's demands and expectations or not. The librarians are exercising marketing strategies to understand user's demands and desires, plan quality services, fulfil expectations and distribute the user- oriented services,

Assessing SQ is the first step in keeping customers in today's competitive environment, according to Cullen (2001). Evaluation of SQ contributes towards discovering SWOT regarding delivering quality library services. If the libraries want to provide quality library services, the evaluation of user's perceptions and expectations has a major part. Librarians have to take measures to improve their services and meet the expectations of the users.

Seay et al. (1996) stressed that users are only the stakeholders to evaluate the SQ. Users are better evaluators of SQ rather than the librarians, library patrons etc. Library holds duty which may confirm that it not only provides better services but also it fulfils the need of users. So a good library should be updated keeping in view the SQ and user satisfaction. Under the present circumstances the libraries especially the university libraries should evaluate their services to recheck their strengths and weaknesses.

Libraries are regarded as the 'Heart of Universities. The foremost objectives of a university are to provide education and produce research scholars. Therefore, the university libraries are bound to provide relevant information needed to their users involved in research activities.

It has become the prime responsibility of librarians to understand student's ever-changing needs and to offer correct and ready delivery of information to facilitate the process of education and research.

Pritchard (1996) stated that developing countries are moving ahead from the evaluation of SQ of libraries towards delivering quality services and ultimately incorporating principles of TQM into library management. So, the understanding regarding evaluation of library SQ in developing countries is rising gradually. In Pakistan an attempt was made by the researchers in the field of TQM to assess the quality of university library services by using SERVQUAL (Awan et al., 2007).

According to Naz (2006); Saeed & Ramzan (2003); Samina (1991); and Samreen (2006), the following surveys on user satisfaction and studies on evaluation of total library SQ as well as specific library SQ have been organized in Pakistani Universities:

Reference Services
 Reader's services
 Availability of library material
 Usability of OPAC

The present study was conducted to evaluate SQ of the sample university Libraries. According to Higher Education Commission (2015) statistics, there are 153 universities in Pakistan. Majority of these Universities have modern library material. University of Education was established in the year 2002. It currently offers 25 degree programs ranging from B.Ed. to Ph.D. in its three Divisions and ten Campuses, and plans to offer additional programs as part of its continual expansion (University of Education, 2015).

The sample university produces dynamic leaders and practitioners in the field of teaching, research, and management. There are total 17,700 Students enrolled in academic programmes offered by the University.

The sample university has no main library. However, its campuses and divisions have their own libraries. The University has started numerous new programmes during the last 5 years, the number of students has increased, but the setup of libraries of the university remained the same. Students are not satisfied with the facilities provided and allocation of the library staff. So the importance of knowing the perceptions and expectations of students regarding the SQ of libraries.

Under the changing environment it is not enough to evaluate quality of traditional indicators such as size of collection of library material, number of library staff, and library budget only. New techniques of evaluation have been developed to better determine SQ of libraries. The past researches has indicated that there are number of techniques for evaluating the SQ of libraries such as user surveys, interviews, observational techniques, check lists and suggestion box. Some tools for evaluation have been developed mainly in business and trade area such as SERVQUAL and SERVPERF.

SERVQUAL has been used both in profiteering and non-profiteering organizations. This study has been organized to judge the student's perceived SQ of university libraries using SERVQUAL. Although SERVQUAL can be modified to evaluate SQ of specific library services; however, SERVQUAL has been adapted for the evaluation of overall SQ of libraries.

To judge students' expectations regarding ideal library services and perceptions of actual library performance, a seven-point, semantic differential scale has been used to get the response for 22 statements regarding different aspects of quality library services.

Statement of the Problem

The discussion mentioned above revealed that it is need of the hour to evaluate the library SQ due to emerging information communication technology and rising expectations of library users. The evaluation of SQ in libraries does not have much research work in its credit. Therefore, there is need to evaluate the SQ of libraries.

Objective of the Study

To study the SQ by calculating the gap between the students' perceptions and expectations and hence giving recommendations for the improvement of the services of the university libraries.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

This research work will explore the perceptions and expectations of students regarding library facilities and services. This will also expose the SWOT analysis of library services and offered valuable data for librarians for further improvement of SQ. It will be important for librarians to change and set the focus and direction of library services to meet student's demand.

It is expected that university libraries may benefit from the findings of this research work in discovering user's expectations, analysing service policies, and reconsidering resource allocations.

Delimitations

The present study included all 10 campuses and 3 divisions of the sample university offering different programmes. The study delimited to bachelor and master level students because of time and financial constraints.

Methodology

Population and Sampling

Morning students of bachelor's and master's programs of session 2013-14 were used as population ($N = 5163$) of the study. Stratified proportionate random sampling technique was applied to determine the sample size ($n = 372$). Four different programmes offered by the university were taken as strata.

Table 1

Sample distribution by program category

Program Categories	No. of Total Students	Selection of students as sample
BBA	700	50
Education& Special Education	2539	182
Fine arts and social sciences	821	60
Natural Sciences	1103	80
Total	5163	373

Note. Yamane (1967) Sample Size $= n = \frac{N}{1+(e)^2}$

Where N = size of Population e = margin of error = $1 - \text{confidence interval} = .05$ Confidence Interval = 95%

Data Collection

A self-completion questionnaire based on the SERVQUAL pattern was used to collect data for evaluating students' preferences and perceptions. As per the suggestion of Babbie (2002) for proper survey research design, both structured and unstructured questions should be included. Closed-ended questions rated using seven points scale with (1 = extremely good) to (7 = extremely poor). Questionnaires were distributed directly to the target students. The response rate was almost 80% (296 out of 372).

Analysis of Data

The questionnaire was consisting of three sections: demographic questions, closed-ended questions consist of 22 items, and open-ended questions. The researcher used SPSS version 20 for analysis of data. Whereas for open-ended questions, content analysis was performed using N-Vivo 10 for windows.

Demographic Analysis

According to results of demographic data, the females dominated (72.3%), age group 18- 27 years (99.7%), students of bachelor's level (53.4%), in education/special education program (46.3%), and who do visit library once in a week (35.8%).

Expectations and Perceptions of students regarding SQ of Libraries

Expectations are the demands of users regarding library services while perceptions are the beliefs of users regarding library services (Parasuraman et. al., 1988). The data reflect students'

expectations of library services lingered on higher side within a range of 5.02 to 5.46 (mean value = 5.28) with standard deviations from 1.52 to 1.92.

Students' perceptions were described by Hernon and Altman (1988) as impressions created from library interactions about the library services given to them. Students' perceptions about library services were on lower side within a range of 3.35 to 4.03 (mean value = 3.68) with standard deviations from 1.61 to 1.93. Item ranks with respect to mean values of expectations and perceptions are also given in descending order.

Last column in table 5 conveys gap between perceptions and expectations. Values of these gaps are between -1.33 and -1.88 (mean gap = -1.60).

Table 2

Analysis regarding SQ Attributes

SQ Attributes	Expectations (E)			Perceptions (P)			P-E
	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Gap
Appearance and dressing of library staff	1	5.46	1.76	1	4.03	1.84	- 1.43
Provision of library services	2	5.46	1.62	2	3.95	1.75	- 1.51
Library staff is consistently polite	3	5.46	1.64	3	3.93	1.90	- 1.53
Convenient Library Timings	4	5.45	1.78	6	3.82	1.93	- 1.63
Performing of library services for students	5	5.41	1.53	10	3.70	1.76	- 1.71
Students are assured regarding accuracy and confidentiality of library services	6	5.39	1.56	4	3.88	1.75	- 1.51
First hand provision of library services	7	5.33	1.67	12	3.62	1.72	- 1.71
Reliability in solving students service problems	8	5.32	1.67	5	3.84	1.73	- 1.48
Providing service at the promised time	9	5.30	1.74	19	3.50	1.77	- 1.80
Willingness of library staff to help students	10	5.29	1.74	15	3.55	1.77	- 1.74
Library Staff who have the student's best interest at heart.	11	5.29	1.72	18	3.53	1.77	- 1.76
Students' queries are answered by the skilled and knowledgeable library staff	12	5.26	1.7	20	3.48	1.81	- 1.78
Giving students individual attention	13	5.25	1.65	17	3.53	1.78	- 1.72
Up to date equipment in the library	14	5.23	1.74	22	3.35	1.73	- 1.88
Dealing Students in caring fashion	15	5.23	1.63	13	3.6	1.61	- 1.63
Library maintains error free students and library material catalogue records	16	5.22	1.71	9	3.76	1.71	- 1.46
Respond to student's queries by the library staff	17	5.21	1.61	11	3.69	1.71	- 1.52
Library staff understands the needs of their students	18	5.15	1.81	21	3.43	1.78	- 1.72
Timely provision of library services for students	19	5.15	1.52	14	3.56	1.68	- 1.59
Students' problems regarding library services are solved sympathetically.	20	5.12	1.92	7	3.81	1.89	- 1.31

Physical facilities are aligned with the services provided by21 the libraries	5.09	1.68	8	3.76	1.62	- 1.33
Visually appealing physical facilities	22	5.02	1.75	16	3.54	1.71 - 1.48

Service Quality (SQ)

In terms of differences, all 22 elements may be classified as category B(-1 to-2), which denotes “a marginally positive or neutral overall consistency of the relationship and satisfaction with the service. A lot of work needs to be done on this relationship right now.

Academic Level (Cross-tabulation)

Cross-tabulation of two major categories show that bachelor’s students have higher expectations but similar perceptions about library services as compared to master’s degree students. Quality gap for bachelor’s students and master’s students remained -1.7 and -1.4 respectively.

Table 3

Response of students’ expectations and perceptions based on academic status

AS	M(E)	M (P)	G(P•E)
Undergraduate	4.4	2.7	-1.7
Masters	4.1	2.7	-1.4

Note. M (E)= Mean Expectation M(P)=Mean Perception G(P-E) = Gap (Perception-Expectation)

Overall SQ

Overall service quality of library was measured through seven-point scale (1 = extremely poor to 7 = extremely good). It was found that 37% students were dissatisfied, 42% are undecided, whereas only of 21% students are satisfied with the services provided by the university library.

Table 4

Overall Service Quality

7 Point Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Comments
Extremely Poor	38	12.8	Zone of dissatisfaction
Very Poor	32	10.8	
Poor	39	13.2	
Undecided	125	42.2	Neutral
Good	27	9.1	Zone of satisfaction
Very Good	26	8.8	
Extremely Good	9	3.0	
Total	296	100.0	

Examining the Expectations of Students

Students were asked to mention any other aspirations they had in an open-ended query. Only 123 people (out of a total of296) replied to the issue. Open ended questions have a lower answer rate (42%) than closed ended questions. NVivo software was used for qualitative data analysis. The data collected through interviews were transcribed and entered into software. Data were further classified into parent and child themes. Following were the parent themes of the data.

Physical facilities provided by the libraries
Collection development

Infrastructure maintained by library
 Appearance and dressing of library staff
 Timings and other miscellaneous expectations.

Conclusion

Based on the qualitative findings, it was concluded that the most important library SQ expectations for students were; Staff who are well-dressed and attractive, who provide facilities as expected, and who treat students with respect. Students have a positive impression of library hours that are convenient. The SQ attributes which were perceived somewhat well were that library staff was well dressed and appeared neat. The staff had been providing good services to the library users.

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