User Perceptions of Library Service Quality in Private Universities in Tanzania: A Case of University of Iringa

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ABSTRACT

The study was based on the premise that the culture of library assessment from the users' perspective is of vital importance to determine what users' needs are and whether these needs are being met. Consequently, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the existing library services and using the assessment results to improve service delivery. The study examined the quality of library services at the University of Iringa Library from the users' perspective. The users' expectations and perceptions of service quality were investigated to determine the extent to which the library met users' expectations. A sample of 294 undergraduate students, 31 postgraduate students, and 50 academic staff were surveyed. The adapted LibQUAL+™ questionnaire was self-administered to respondents. A total of 213 (72.4%) undergraduate students, 20 (64.5%) postgraduate students, and 31 (68%) academic staff responded. The descriptive statistics was used for analysis. The insights gained from this study indicate that there was a gap between user's expectations and perceptions of service quality. The magnitude of the gap varied depending on individual services.

Keywords: Library Assessment, LibQUAL+™, Library Services, User Perception of Library Services, and User expectation, University of Iringa, Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

The importance of academic libraries cannot be underestimated. In a highly competitive academic environment where students are becoming more selective of the university which fulfil their educational dreams, an academic library has an important role to play in the educational process to meet the needs of its users. Libraries are central to the educational purpose of universities in supporting the missions of effective teaching, research and consultancy; and add value to the educational process in the development and distribution of knowledge (Lane, et al, 2012; Bahrainzadeh, 2013). For academic libraries to positively contribute to the educational process and succeed in the competitive educational and information environment they have to be efficient, effective, organized and managed well, and be more user focused in delivering their services. In order to do that, libraries have to take the responsibility of incorporating into their work environment a culture of ongoing assessment, and a willingness to make decisions based on facts and sound analysis.

The culture of ongoing assessment will help academic libraries base their services on the expressed needs and requirements of their clientele and therefore ensure the delivery of a high quality service and continue improvement and introduction of new services to strategically meet parent institutions' objectives and users' expectations of library service quality (de Jager, 2002). Service quality has been considered as strategic tools for positioning and means of attaining operational efficiency, improving performance, as well as a key factor for the success of service providers. The improvement of service quality will result in the satisfaction of customers and lead to customer retention and repeat use of services (Rasyida, 2016). Library can gauge the quality of service offered by adopting different approaches to assessment. The traditional approach to library assessment based on quantifiable aspects (Griffiths, 2003) which the University of Iringa Library uses, is not the only way to measure service quality. Other measures such as assessing users' perceptions of the quality of service through user based surveys are also needed. Surveys provide the library with an understanding of users' expectations of the quality of service and evidence of the need to improve the quality of service in order to justify their support to parent organisations by demonstrating that they contribute to meeting the institutional goals of teaching and research (Kavulya, 2004). Numerous and extensive studies on user perceptions of the quality of service in academic libraries have been done

internationally (Khaola & Mabilikoane, 2015; Majid, Anwar, 2001; Oluwunmi, Durodola, & Ajayi, 2016; Snoi & Petermanec, 2001.). There is no indication that studies on user perceptions of the quality of service in the academic library have been conducted at Iringa, Tanzania. It is against this background of the importance of service quality assessment from the user's perspective and in the absence of such research in the Tanzanian context and the University of Iringa in particular, that the research needs to be seen. Thus, the problem which the study sought to investigate centres on determining the quality of library services at the University of Iringa library from the users' perspective. The objective of this study was to determine the users' expectation and perceptions of library service quality and to find out how far the library had succeeded in delivering such services.

Theoretical and Empirical Literature Review
Theoretical Review
Theories or models on service quality assessment have been developed with the aim of improving services delivered and satisfying the customers. Some of these theories or models are briefly highlighted here under.

SERVQUAL Model
The ground breaking research of A. Parasuraman, Leonard Berry, and Valerie Zeithalm developed the SERVQUAL instrument in 1988 (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988). The SERVQUAL model, based on the idea of user-centred assessment, identified five potential gaps between expectations and perceptions, both internal and external, of service delivery. The gaps summarised by Nitecki (1996) are the discrepancy between customers' expectations and managements' perceptions of these expectations; discrepancy between managements' perceptions of customers' expectations and service quality specifications; discrepancy between service quality specifications and actual service delivery; discrepancy between actual service delivery and what is communicated to customers about it; and discrepancy between customers' expected services and perceived service delivered. Gap five is the most user-focused, customer-oriented definition of service quality, and the conceptual basis for the SERVQUAL instrument (Nitecki, 1996). According to Fedoroff (2006) the SERVQUAL model was originally based around five key dimensions of service: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. Fedoroff (2006) and Nagata et al (2004) pointed out that these

dimensions had been adopted later to cover the following: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Competence – possession of required skill and knowledge to perform service, Courtesy – politeness, respect, consideration and friendliness of contact personnel, Credibility – trustworthiness, believability, honesty of the service provider, Security – freedom from danger, risk, or doubt, Access – employees who are approachable and easy to contact, Communication – listening to customers and acknowledging their comments; keeping customers informed; and using a language they can understand, and Understanding the customer – making the effort to know customers and their needs. The SERVQUAL questionnaire integrates all these dimensions to measure user expectations and perceptions of service delivered. The evaluation of service quality is done by measuring the gaps between expectation and perception scores. The comparison between the expectations and the perceptions determines whether the service is good or problematic. The service is considered to be good if the perceptions meet or exceed the expectations and problematic if perceptions fall below expectations. This tool has also been used in library context to improve service quality thereby satisfying library customers.

SERVPERF Instrument

According to Cronin & Taylor, (1992) SERVPERF is purely a performance based approach to the measurement of service quality. The SERVPERF measures quality as an attitude, not satisfaction. However, it uses an idea of perceived service quality leading to satisfaction. But it goes further, and connects satisfaction with further purchase intentions. The SERVPERF is a modification of SERVQUAL, and thus uses the same categories to assess service quality: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. In each of the categories, there are statements that are evaluated on 7 step Likert scale. The SERVQUAL proposed 44 statements (expectations and performance related), while SERVPERF only 22 (performance related). Adil., *et al*, (2013) supports the contention that SERVQUAL and SERVPERF are the two most prominent scales forming the genesis for service quality assessment in different service sectors. Given that SERVPERF uses the dimensions of service quality adopted from SERVQUAL it can also be used in library context to measure service quality.

LibQUAL+™ Instrument

The LibQUAL+™ survey evolved from a conceptual model based on the

SERVQUAL instrument, a popular tool for assessing service quality in the private sector (Brophy, 2005). The Texas A&M University research team launched a pilot project that had its origins in the gap theory of service quality to develop a new measure to assess service quality in research libraries. The American Research Libraries (ARL) considered and endorsed this pilot project. The research team through qualitative study re-examined the SERVQUAL instrument and come up with the LibQUAL+™ instrument (ARL, 2000). The instrument was developed, tested and refined by Texas A&M University in partnership with ARL (ARL, 2004). The LibQUAL+™ instrument adopted some of the SERVQUAL model dimensions of service which are: accountability, assurance, reliability, responsiveness, and tangibles.

In addition to these SERVQUAL dimensions, two dimensions with the focus on the library context such as access to collections and the library as place are used in the questionnaire to assess library service quality (Hiller, 2001). The goals of LibQUAL+™ are to foster the culture of excellence in providing library service; helps libraries better understand user perceptions of library service quality; collect and interpret library user feedback systematically over time; provide libraries with comparable assessment information from peer institutions; identify best practices in library service; and enhance library staff members' analytical skills for interpreting and acting on data (Crawford, 2006). Studies indicate that the use of the instrument has been instrumental in helping libraries better serve their main user groups and to improve library services (McNeil & Giesecke, 2002). It is this instrument that the current study used with the anticipation that it would yield good results. The use of this model or tool was critical for library context because all other tools specified above are general and do not seriously focus on the library collection and library as a place. This study used the five dimensions that reflect library context. These dimensions are summarized and interpreted into comprehensive collection, access to information, library equipment, library staff, and library as a place. Specific constructs or aspects for each dimension are shown in Table 3.

Empirical Literature Review

Wide arrays of studies have been conducted on user perception of service quality. Some of these studies focussed on library service quality. For the purpose of this study a few studies are reviewed to situate the current study into the context of previous studies on the same and estimate the knowledge gap that it bridges. Oluwunmi, Durodola, and Ajayi (2016) did a study on

"Students' perceived quality of library facilities and services in Nigerian private universities". A sample of 744 students from four private universities in Ogun State was surveyed. A modified SERVPERF questionnaire that measures five dimensions: tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and reliability were used to gather data. A descriptive analysis was used to analyse data and summarize the results. The findings indicated that overall students' perception of library services and facilities was above average. Specifically, students' average service quality perception on tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy were 3.54, 3.66, 3.60, 3.60, and 3.67 respectively. Services that were rated low include inadequate parking space (2.60) and escape routes (2.45) in their university libraries.

Khaola and Mabilikoane (2015) assessed students' perception of library service quality, satisfaction and frequency of use of library resources. A sample of 400 students at the National University of Lesotho was drawn for the study. A survey research design using LibQUAL+™ instrument was used to collect data. The data gathered were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that the respondents perceived low service quality from the library staff and extent to which they could easily access and control the information. The findings further demonstrate that there were strong relationships among overall service quality and satisfaction ($r=0.72$, $p \leq 0.001$); effect of service and satisfaction ($r=0.55$, $p \leq 0.001$); library as a place and satisfaction ($r=0.59$, $p \leq 0.001$); and information control and satisfaction ($r=0.54$, $p \leq 0.001$). However, frequency of use of library resources did not correlate with either perception of service quality nor with any of its dimensions. The findings also indicate that frequency of use of website correlated slightly with information control ($r=0.14$, $p \leq 0.001$), effect of service ($r=0.11$, $p \leq 0.05$), and overall service quality ($r=0.13$, $p \leq 0.05$), but not with library as a place ($r=0.06$, $p \leq 0.05$).

Bahrainizadeh (2013) identified service quality dimensions and measured service quality of university library from users' point of view in Persian Gulf University (PGU). A sample of 400 students and faculty members of PGU was surveyed. A modified SERVIQUAL and LibQUAL+™ questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The four dimensions of service quality were identified and measured. These dimensions or factors included: electronic access to resources and sets, personal service, library as a place, specific attention and user understanding and recognition, and conditions, and internal access to

resources. The paired-samples T test was used to analyse data using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The findings show that the absence of gap (zero gap) is placed in 95% confidence interval for any of the dimensions, which imply that means differences are significance in all factors. The significance of gap between perceptions mean and expectation mean shows that the library is not at a satisfactory level in any of the dimensions and has not been able to satisfy users' expectations. Hsu, Cummings, and Wang (2014) examined the business students' perception of library service quality and satisfaction. Sample of 161 students was drawn for the study. Both the undergraduate business students and MBA students were surveyed. The 21 SERPERF questions and a few additional questions were used to measure library service quality. The study adopted the PLS (a statistical tool for multiple regression and correlation) techniques for assessing the relationship between service quality and user satisfaction in academic library. The findings of this survey depicted that the coefficient alpha value for the dimensions of responsiveness and assurance was .93, adequacy of library collection was .90, the reliability dimension of library service quality was .90 and the tangibility dimension was .78, while the satisfaction level was .85. All service quality dimensions show significant and positive impact on the user satisfaction level at the .10 significance level.

Lodesso, et al (2018) assessed the student satisfaction regarding service quality at Ethiopian public higher education institutions. Although this study was not focusing on library service quality; it was worthy reviewing due to the model or tool used for data collection. A total of 1500 final year students from 6 selected universities were studied. Of 1500 respondents, 1425 responses were captured and analysed using an EXCEL spreadsheet. A 22 SERVIQUAL based questionnaire were asked to the respondents focusing on dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy of services. The result of the survey revealed that students' satisfaction with service quality was low. While most aspects of the service quality dimensions of reliability and tangibles were perceived by students as very poor, the two other dimensions of responsiveness-assurance and empathy were somewhat lesser important. These studies used SERVIQUAL, SERVPERF, LIBQUAL+ ™ and a combination of a modified SERVQUAL and LIBQUAL+™ respectively for gathering data and used different analysis tools to assess service quality. The apparent gap is that these models or tools do not involve all library aspects of service quality which the current study involves.

Methodology

A positivism paradigm with a quantitative approach was used in this study. The quantitative approach was preferred because the type of data sought, the measurements used and the method of data analysis employed required this approach. Since this study sought to describe users' perceptions of the quality of library service, a cross-sectional, descriptive survey design was used (Bryman, 2008; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The survey design was considered suitable for this study for most of the studies on users' perceptions of service quality reviewed (Bahrainizadeh, 2013; Hsu, Cummings, & Wang, 2014; Khaola and Mabilikoane, 2015; Lodesso, et al 2018; Oluwunmi, Durodola, & Ajayi, 2016) used the survey design. A sample of 294 undergraduate students, 31 postgraduate students, and 50 academic staff were surveyed. The adapted LibQUAL+™ questionnaire was self-administered for data gathering from these respondents. A total of 213 (72.4%) undergraduate students, 20 (64.5%) postgraduate students, and 31 (68%) academic staff responded. A descriptive analysis was used for data analysis. The SPSS was used to aid in the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Demographic information of respondents

The background information of the respondents was sought. Demographic information was essential for comparison of the response sets between different groups of library users. This information was necessary to explore whether the responses were consistent across groups. Thus, questions to determined respondents' gender, age, position, and faculty were asked. The biographical data of the respondents is reflected in Table 1:

Table 1: Demographic Data of Respondents (N=267)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	165	61.8
Female	102	38.2
Age		
Under 20 years of age	5	1.9
21 – 30 years of age	152	56.9
31 – 40 years of age	75	28.1
41 – 50 years of age	24	9.0
Above 50 years of age	11	4.1
Position		
Academic staff	34	12.7
Postgraduate students	20	7.5
Undergraduate students	213	79.8

There were substantially more male respondents, 165 (61.8%) than female respondents, 102 (38.2%). The majority of respondents, 152 (56.9%), were within the age range of 21 – 30. A small minority of respondents, five (1.9%), were under the age of 20. The demographics showed that the undergraduate students, 213 (79.8%), were in the majority. With regards to the year of study of undergraduate students, the result showed that a large number 144 (67.6%), were first year students. The implication is that all categories of respondents were included in the study. The inclusion of all categories guaranteed better assessment.

Library usage Pattern

A question to probe how frequently the users used the library and its services was asked. This was done to determine the impact of frequency of use of library facilities on users' perceptions and expectations of service quality. The question also aimed at examining the usage patterns between different groups in order to weigh the importance of the library between these groups in terms of usage patterns.

Table 2: Frequency of use of Library and its Resources by Groups (N=267)

Characteristic	Daily		Weekly		Monthly		Quarterly		Never	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Gender										
Male	103	62.4	48	29.1	12	7.3	2	1.2	-	-
Female	69	67.6	21	20.6	9	8.8	1	1	2	2
Position										
Academic staff	16	47.1	14	41.2	3	8.8	1	2.9	-	-
Postgraduate	14	70	5	25	1	5	-	-	-	-
students	142	66.7	50	23.5	17	8	2	0.9	2	0.9
Undergraduate										
students										
Faculty										
Theology	19	70.4	6	22.2	2	7.4	-	-	-	-
Business and	45	63.3	18	24.4	7	9.9	1	1.4	-	-
Economics	57	78.1	15	20.5	1	1.4	-	-	-	-
Arts and Social	51	53.1	30	31.2	11	11.5	2	2.1	2	2.1
Sciences										
Law										

The comparison of usage pattern within category of respondents indicated that female respondents, 69 (67.6%), postgraduate respondents, 14 (70%), and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences respondents, 57 (78.1%), had the highest percentage of weekly usage of the library and its resources. Remarkably, 4 (11.7%) academic staff used the library monthly or quarterly, and two (2%) female undergraduate respondents from the Faculty of Law had never used the library and its resources. The findings indicated that generally the University of Iringa Library is well utilized by its users. This is consistent with the study done by Idiegbeyan-Ose and Esse (2013) on satisfaction with library resources and services.

The Gap between users' Expectations and Perceptions of Library Services Quality

The study sought to establish the gap between users' expectations and perceptions of service quality delivered to them by the University of Iringa Library and thereby identify the strengths and weaknesses of the existing library services. The users' expectations and perceptions of service quality were numerically reported and compared. The positive and negative responses,

namely, strongly agree and agree, disagree and strongly disagree, were combined together respectively to form one positive (agree) and negative (disagree) response. The reason for this was to enable easier tabulation, comparison and ensure clarity. In Table 3 users' expectations and perceptions and the gap between them are shown. In the *agree* column, the *difference* column, the larger the number the bigger the gap. In the *neutral* and *disagree* column in the *difference* column, the smaller the number the bigger the gap.

Table 3: The Gap between Users' Expectations and Perceptions (N=267)

Service	Expectations			Perceptions			Difference		
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Comprehensive collection									
Print collection	220	28	19	138	47	82	82	-19	-63
Print journals	187	56	24	67	67	133	**120**	-11	-109
Electronic journals	203	36	28	60	71	136	**143**	-35	-108
Access to information									
Electronic databases	197	25	45	70	80	117	**127**	-55	-72
Interlibrary Loan	163	38	66	34	75	158	**129**	-37	-92
Short loan	198	28	41	127	52	88	71	-24	-47
Re-shelving of books	210	17	40	157	53	57	53	-36	-17
Re-shelving of journals	205	20	42	141	68	58	64	-48	-16
Library catalogue	216	23	28	124	66	77	92	-43	-49
Library opening hours	218	15	34	173	38	56	45	-23	-22
Corrective action	185	19	63	62	97	108	**123**	-78	-45
Library webpage	214	20	33	69	92	106	**145**	-72	-73
Library equipment									
Computer workstations	200	37	30	97	54	116	**103**	-17	-86
Computers that work well	207	35	25	120	48	99	87	-13	-74
Photocopying facilities	200	36	31	38	64	164	**162**	-28	-133
Printing facilities	215	23	29	117	54	96	98	-31	-67
Library staff									
Friendly staff	217	30	20	170	52	45	47	-22	-25

Readily available	220	32	15	181	43	43	39	-11	-28
Willingness to help users	231	24	11	178	50	39	53	-26	-28
Understand user needs	213	40	14	122	59	86	91	-19	-72
Knowledgeable staff	214	31	22	108	60	99	**106**	-29	-77
Library as a place									
Quiet environment	218	24	25	67	56	144	**151**	-32	-119
Space that inspires users	214	36	17	132	64	71	82	-28	-54
Space for group study	178	48	41	61	77	129	**117**	-29	-88
Sufficient lighting	234	27	6	188	40	39	46	-13	-33
Safe and secure space	224	24	19	130	72	65	94	-48	-46

Services that have a relatively big gap (difference between agree for expectations and perceptions) were electronic journals, difference 143 (47.6%); interlibrary loan, 129 (48.3%), clear library webpage with useful information, 145 (54.2%), photocopying facilities, 162 (60.6%), and quiet library environment, 151 (56.5%). Services that had a smaller gap include: prompt re-shelving of books, difference 53 (28.9%), library opening hours that meet user needs, 45 (16.8%), staff who were readily available to respond to user queries, 39 (14.6%), staff who were willing to help users, 53 (28.7%) and library environment that had sufficient lighting, 46 (17.2%). The findings imply that there was a gap between expectations and perceptions of library service quality. The magnitude of the gap varies depending on individual services.

Library Users' Satisfaction with Services and Support Provided

The respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the library services provided. The responses are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Respondents' Satisfaction with Library Services and Support by Groups (N=267)

Position	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Academic staff	2	5.9	9	26.5	10	29.4	12	35.3	1	2.9
Postgraduate	2	10	4	20	9	45	4	20	1	5
Undergraduate	21	9.9	76	35.7	73	34.3	38	17.8	5	2.3
Total	**25**	**9.4**	**89**	**33.3**	**92**	**34.5**	**54**	**20.2**	**7**	**2.6**

The findings show that overall 114 (42.7%) respondents were satisfied with library services and support. However, 153 (57.3%) respondents were either neutral or dissatisfied with the services and support they received from the library. This implies that the services and support the library offers were not reflective of all user needs.

Overall Library Service Quality Provided

The respondents' rating of the overall library service quality provided is reflected in Table 5.

Table 5: The Overall Library Service Quality by Groups (N=267)

Position	Extremely good		Good		Undecided		Poor		Extremely poor	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Academic staff			17	50	7	20.6	10	29.4		
Postgraduate	1	5	5	25	5	25	8	40	1	5
Undergraduate	12	5.6	113	53.1	42	19.7	37	17.4	9	4.2
Total	**13**	**4.9**	**135**	**50.7**	**54**	**20.2**	**55**	**20.6**	**10**	**3.7**

A small majority of 55.5% (148) rated the overall quality of service provided by the library as either good or extremely good. Interestingly, 20.2% (54) were undecided in their rating. The findings imply that satisfaction and service quality may be perceived differently by users (see table 4).

Conclusion

Given the findings of this survey, it follows that the users of University of Iringa library had higher expectations of comprehensive and adequate electronic and print collection; readily available and accessible information; adequate and usable library equipment; library staff who were readily available and well-versed in library management; and feasible library environment. However, their expectations were not fully equated with their experience with the library services provided to them. The library had not succeeded in delivering service quality to its users. The library should use these findings to improve the services that were lowly rated and capitalize on services that were highly rated by respondents.

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