



## Service Quality Expectations of Academic Library Users

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### Abstract

The library services have changed very fast in the digital era. The library customers have access to multiple sources of information and expect quality material within the shortest possible time irrespective of the format of information. Hence, library must provide quality service in order to retain and increase its importance for its users and succeed in enhancing the role of the library in teaching, learning and research. Quality services mean those which satisfy users' expectations and perceptions. Proper understanding of customers' perceptions along service quality dimensions is essential for LIS professionals to recognize the customer expectations. This paper briefly explains the concept of service quality; trace its development and highlight some results of service quality studies using various models, with an objective to describe and identify the issues meriting attention by the library professionals to gear up the library products and services so that user communities get satisfied coming to library.

**Keywords:** Service Quality, SERVQUAL, LIBQUAL+, Customer Services Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Library Service Quality, User Expectations, User Perception, Quality Management – Library

### Introduction

The libraries have transformed drastically from storehouses of books and journals to the powerhouses of knowledge and information. In the age of information communication technology, the very existences of libraries depend on users' satisfaction. Users are satisfied when the library is able to rise to their expectations or meet their actual needs.

DeSaez (2002) mentioned that there is greater need to satisfy customer's wants and expectations. A quality service is said to be one, which satisfy the users' expectation resulting into a good experience.

The concept of quality is not a new concept for library and information science professionals as it is rooted in library principles, practices, and activities. Ranganathan's five laws of library



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science, particularly the fourth law (save the time of reader) implies the importance of quality in library services. This law is a short sentence to explain that efficient management and knowledge of user's expectations are essentials for library services which in turn the quality attributes.

### **Models of Service Quality**

The ISO definition explain that, "quality is the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs". In the ISO 9000 standard quality is described as "the consistent conformance of a product or service to a given set of standards or expectations".

In case of library, measurement of quality, evaluation of library activities and services are considered to be an essential factor. There are various methods, tools procedures and studies to evaluate components of efficient library environment.

### ***SERVQUAL Studies***

From 1995-1998 Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry evolved and developed the SERVQUAL, a service quality model. Their unique contribution is efforts of measuring and comparing both perceived performance and customer expectations. The authors originally identified ten elements of service quality, but in later work, these were collapsed into five factors - reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness which include 22 item instruments. On the basis of these dimensions this Gap Theory of Service Quality measures customers' expectations and perceptions of service they received. This theory is very much relevant and useful to measure the quality of library and improve the quality of its elements.

Several studies are carried out to measure the quality of libraries and expectations of its users by using the SERVQUAL technique.

The originators of SERVQUAL model expressed that: "... we are confident that the number one concern of the customers today regardless of type of service is reliability, and the facet that matters the least to current customers in assessing quality of service is tangibles". The first part of the statement is proved by a survey of academic library which is undertaken by Manjunatha and Shivalingaiah (2004), in Indian academic institutes, where they found that reliability was consistently ranked as the most important criterion by customers while evaluating service quality.

On similar lines with the purpose to examine the perception of academic staff on the quality of academic library services Kiran (2010), used the survey method to administer SERVQUAL theory. The outcome of the study states that, overall user's satisfaction with the library services is satisfactory, their perception of the quality of library services is "average". However, the analysis found that 'Responsiveness' of library staff is the highest rated attribute by the respondents.

Though authors of SERVQUAL thought that tangibility least concern to users, Arshad & Ameen (2010), while comparing users' expectations to their perceptions found discrepancy between them and marked 'tangibles' as most preferred dimension over others.



### *LibQual + Studies*

The LibQUAL+ is a tool initially based on SERVQUAL and has developed special service quality dimensions on which library users judge the service quality of any library. SERVQUAL was developed for use in the for-profit business sector, and (a) included items not considered relevant by some library users (e.g., the attire of service staff), and (b) did not include some items very important to library users. Hence, Texas A&M University Libraries and other libraries used modified SERVQUAL instruments to serve the particular requirements of libraries. ARL, representing the largest research libraries in North America, partnered with Texas A&M University Libraries to develop, test, and refine LibQUAL+.

Many research projects and research papers have come out which describe the results of using LibQUAL+. The service quality dimensions identified by the LibQUAL+ are: Affect of service (AS), Library as place (LP), Reliability, Self-reliance and Access to information (IC). Posey (2009), to explore students' perceptions of library services carried out a research which involved LibQUAL+TM, a nationally known academic library assessment instrument that measures three dimensions on a scale of approximately 22 aspects of service, divided into 6 groups, (Heath, Kyrillidou, & Askew, 2004).

These 3 dimensions are 1) *Affect of Service* 2) *Information Control and*, 3) *Library as a Place*.

His study revealed that the respondents were dissatisfied with the library services and desired better than they were receiving and ranked *place* as a highest expected dimension.

Rehman (2011), with the objective of measuring difference between minimum expectations and desired expectations of library users carried out a survey using LibQual model. The data showed that Pakistani users expect very high quality service. The analysis of collected data shows that highest minimum and desired expectations were found with LP dimension and least with AS dimension. The IC dimension was considered moderately important.

Miller (2008), explored and expanded on the understanding of the meaning of LibQUAL+TM scores and measured how they are related to characteristics that express institutional mission, institutional size, or level of investment in libraries, by carrying out a study in academic institutions. And it showed statistically significant relationships between the selected institutional characteristics and LibQUAL+TM scores.

In the ISO 9000 standard quality is described as "the consistent conformance of a product or service to a given set of standards or expectations". In most definitions quality is defined in relation to the customer or user: "...the key issue is that quality becomes a meaningful concept only when it is indissolubly linked to the aim of total customer satisfaction". Hence there are multiple studies conducted to measure satisfaction and to understand expectations of library users in order to make quality decisions.

### **Library's Service Quality:**

Sharma (2013), attempted to explore some aspects of quality aspects in relation to library science in India. The study is an interpretation of library quality literature which is produced by using various models of quality evaluation. The author expressed that it is very necessary for



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the librarian to understand the users, what they want, how they want, and when they want the documents and information. This understanding will help libraries to carry out their functions and responsibilities in leading the attempt to bring continual quality improvements (Sharma & Kadyan, 2016). This study of Engineering college libraries recommended the need for trained, qualified staff and adequate financial support for sufficient resources in library.

To know these wants of users, Kulkarni (2012), used Heron and Altman Model as a basis to frame statements to elicit the responses. His study was regarding the service quality expectations of library users from ATI (Administrative Training Institute) libraries. The attributes of library service quality were categorized into five groups which contain statements on- Resources, Staff, Services, Guidance and Environment. It was observed that the majority (75%) of the ATI faculty members give first priority to the physical 'Environment' which included tangible elements of service quality like availability of computers, OPAC terminals, cleanliness, adequate light, proper ventilation, functional furniture, suitable library hours etc. The second priority is given to the 'Services' and 'Resources' rank as a third dimension.

Dash & Padhi (2010), in their review paper discuss quality assessment process in library and information systems in modern age. A number of approaches including SERVQUAL, LIBQUAL+, ISO 11620, and ISO 2789 have been made to quantify the library service quality. They concluded that any of the models as per suitability can be employed by library for quality evaluation. However, by using it collection of quantitative data is not enough but library staff should discuss user perceptions and expectations, using their experience to interpret service quality data and suggested how perceived shortfalls could be addressed.

### Conclusion

This paper has discussed the literature review of quality management studies and its relevance to libraries. There are various methods to guide the library in this task of quality evaluation. However, it can be best described by those who use the services by measuring the difference between perceptions and expectations from libraries.

The studies included in this paper stated that it is very necessary for library to take opinions of those to whom they serve and meant for, while planning and providing services. And different users may have different preferences in their expectations depending upon their work and affected by the type, objective and culture of institution.

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