Evaluation of Quality Services in Zahedan Public Libraries

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Abstract

The present study evaluates the quality of services in public libraries of Zahedan, using the SERVQUAL software. This study is a practical survey. The studied group includes all clients of two public libraries of Zahedan, Kafami and Imam Hussein, with 17000 active and semi-active clients. The sample size was 250 randomly selected. SERVQUAL questionnaire was used to collect the data. As the findings show, the studied libraries provided reasonable services in terms of empathy, responsiveness and appropriate environment. However, the quality of services was not reasonable. Measuring the quality of services by customer-focused software SERVQUAL plays an important role in understanding of the quality of services provided by users. A quantitative measure of quality is a rare way to measure services of public institutions, including public libraries. The above software measures the expectations of clients from different aspects of quality services. Improvements in line with expectations will lead to the dynamism and vitality of libraries.

Keywords: quality service, public libraries, Zahedan, SERVQUAL

Introduction

Libraries as social institutions will be forgotten if they cannot be useful in the social field and satisfaction of their users; thus, libraries need to improve their quality services for their social survival (Cullen, 2001). As studies show, improved quality of services is associated with valuable results for the organization which finally result in customer satisfaction and higher profitability for the organizations (Bell & Elsingercich, 2007).

Traditionally, the terms such as a rich series, a variety of materials, number of users, and user satisfaction were considered when speaking of the quality of service in libraries. In 1995, experts in the science of marketing developed SERVQUAL designed to assess the quality of services in organizations and institutions from the perspective of the customer. SERVQUAL as a valid and important instrument to measure quality of customer service is used in different areas of health care, public and academic libraries (Hernon, 2002).

According to the 2011 census, over 700,000 inhabitants lived in Zahedan which is one of ten most populous cities in Iran, with about one third of the city's population estimated as students. Due to insufficient space at universities, high schools, public libraries are havens of refuge for potential and actual users. By increasing attraction, promoting quality services and providing information resources proportional to information requirements of users, public libraries can satisfy relative satisfaction of their users. Libraries can fill the gap in generations and avoid social problems such as addiction. Ways to enhance the quality of services in order to attract more users can be effective in dynamics of these social institutions. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the quality of services provided by two active libraries of Zahedan with highest number of student clients. This study also finds solutions to increase quality services in these libraries and attract the population which seek a proper place for their studies. Kafami and Imam Hussein libraries are the oldest and most dynamic libraries of Zahedan which can provide services for 17000 clients. The main problem of this

research is to evaluate the quality of services provided by the library and aspects which are able to meet the minimum expectations of users.

Objectives

The main objective of this study was to assess the quality of services provided by the libraries using the software SERVQUAL. Identifying obstacles and problems that users encounter when using the library is the specific objective of the study.

Hypotheses and Problem

The studied group have empathy toward users.

The studied group are responsiveness toward users.

The studied libraries are appropriate in terms of space and place as well as creativity.

The studied libraries are appropriate in terms of tangibility.

The library and access to information contained in it can meet the expectations of users.

In studied group, the services are reliably provided.

Scientific capabilities and skills of employees guarantee the responsiveness to users.

Problem: What problems users encounter when using the library?

Literature Review

In 1985, Professor Zeithaml et al studied the components which can evaluate the quality of services provided for customers. By publishing results, other groups of researchers also realized the quality of services as a new field of study (Moghbel & Mohamadi, 2003).

Parasuramam (1995) specialized in the field of marketing, identified five factors by which the service quality can be measured. These factors are service reliability, responsibility, assurance, empathy and tangibility.

The scale (SERVQUAL), components and operational definitions, as Zeithaml and Peter (1996) noted, are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Components	Operational definitions
Tangibility	Equipment is new and up to date. Physical facilities are attractive. Appearance of staff is nice and clean. The environment is clean and neat.
Reliability	They are committed.They show interest in solving customer problems. At the first attempt, they do the job correctly. At the time promised, they provide the service. Their records are accurately maintained.
Responsiveness	Customer is told when the service will be done.Services are provided fast.The staff are always eager to assist customers.They are ever so busy that they cannot respond to customers.
Assurance	Employees can be trusted. Customers are comfortable in contact with employees. The staff are polite and humble. Employees have the necessary knowledge to answer questions.
Empathy	Each person gets special attention. Office hours are appropriate for the client. Staff pay special attention to client. They are heartily and truly interested in customers. Employees understand the specific needs of customers.

The factors include 22 pairs of comments. The first pair measures the expectations of respondents and the second pair measure the perceived level of services provided by an organization. The service quality is the difference between scores of perceived and expected service levels. This questionnaire is a seven-level Likert scale from (strongly disagree) to (strongly agree).

This material is known as SERVQUAL in literature relating to quality of service (Parasuraman and et al, 1995).

SERVQUAL scale is continuously used in public and academic libraries. Its validity has been evaluated for qualitative measurement of library services (Cullen, 2001).

In 1999, the Library Association of America added two components (environment of libraries, complex and access to information) to the SERVQUAL scale (Nimsomboon & Nagata, 2003).

Nitechi used the scale to measure quality of library services. Nitechi introduced the component 'service reliability' as the least problematic aspect of the quality of customer service. As he notes, this scale is a good measure of library service quality (Nitechi, 1995).

Nimsomboon & Nagata (2003) considers service reliability as the most important and tangibility as an important component. According to Nimsomboon & Nagata (2003), this scale was used to measure quality of services in libraries of china and New Zealand; it was concluded that users of academic libraries had similar expectations. He asserts that three components of the scale, the library environment, responsibility and assurance are more important to customers (Nimsomboon & Nagata, 2003).

Other researchers in Japan used this scale to measure the quality of services provided by the Tamast University from three perspectives of graduates, students and researchers. The researchers found no significant difference between students and graduates in components of SERVQUAL. Students versus graduates evaluated the empathy of staff and clients weaker and considered the library environment, complex and accessibility were problematic (Nimsomboon & Nagata, 2003).

The most studied conducted in Iran using the software qualitatively measured the academic libraries. These studies include Mehdizade and Ghalejogh (2004), Hakimi and Samadzadeh (2005), Hariri and Fatani (2008). These studies, except for few cases, show that libraries were unable to meet minimum expectations and there was a notable gap in maximum expectations of users. Quality services were acceptable in terms of library environment and tangibility and problematic in terms of responsiveness and assurance. In terms of empathy, reliability and the complex and accessibility, there was a more or less gap in quality services. Using this scale, Shakerzadeh (2012) qualitatively measured the services of a public library, Sanaei in Kish. He found that highest level of satisfaction belonged to reliability and the quality services were not acceptable in other components.

Materials and Methods

The studied group included 17,000 users of the public library Kafami and Imam Hussain in Zahedan. Out of this, 250 users were selected. The librarians and a number of students cooperating in the study were asked to distribute questionnaire among frequent users. The present study was conducted during April 21, 2013 to July 22, 2013.

The data was collected by Nimsomboon inventory (Nimsomboon& Nagata, 2003) which was used to assess the quality of academic library services in Tamast University, Japan. This inventory which was actually the developed SERVQUAL, include two additional components, library environment and complex and accessibility. These 7 components are measured by 29 items.

Reliability and Validity

Although the reliability of the questionnaire was supported by Nimsomboon& Nagata (2003), validity of the translated scale was retested in 3 weeks on 30 persons of the studied group. The reliability of the translated scale was 0.82. Because the questionnaire was designed by experts, it seems appropriate to measure the variables of interest.

Methods

The questionnaire was scaled using Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree; the users were asked to scale their expectations from a high quality library. They were also asked to score the quality of services provided by the studied libraries. The subjects were asked to call the minimum expectations of the optimal services and the minimally acceptable services as the acceptable range. Let the mean perceived services be in the range of optimal service and minimum demanded services; thus, the library is less problematic. In contrast, let the perceived services not be within this range; this would be an alarm to managers and decision makers to raise the quality of services in those ranges (Nimsomiboon & Negata, 2003).

Results

The average dimensions of components were calculated from three aspects: 1) the maximum expected service, 2) the minimum acceptable service of a library from a user perspective, and 3) the services provided in the libraries studied. The difference between the expected service and the minimum acceptable service was the accepted rage. The results are shown in the table below.

Table 2: results of the study on quality of services provided for the studied group

Components	Dimensions	Expected services	Provided services	Minimum acceptable service	Acceptable range	Decision making
Complex and accessibility	1. access to digital collections vie a personal computer	5.30	3.20	4.10	5.20-3.10	Rejected
	2. user access to information needed	6	4.5	5	6-5	Rejected
	3. user expectations of the new data set	6.10	5	2.23	5.23-6.10	Rejected
	4. instructions when using the complex	6.20	4.5	5.12	6.20-5.12	Rejected
	5. timely delivery of documents	6.10	5	5.30	6.10-5.30	Rejected
	6. convenient access to library collections	6	4.5	5.15	6-5.15	Rejected
Library environment	7. creativity of library environment imposed on the user	5	5.16	4.75	5-4.75	Accepted
	8. suitability of the place for quiet study	5.10	4.75	4.65	5.10-4.65	Accepted
	9. attractiveness and convenience of the Library	6	5	4.85	6-4.85	Accepted
Responsiveness	10. quick service	6.10	5.20	5.52	6.10-5.52	Rejected
	11. permanent readiness to meet users' needs	6.10	5.12	5.45	6.10-5.45	Rejected
	12. maintenance of requests and user information	6.20	5.42	5.13	6.20-5.13	Rejected
	13. Enthusiasm to help the user	6	5.20	5.35	6-5.35	Rejected
Empathy	14. Understanding of the specific needs of users	6.32	5.45	5.30	6.32-5.30	Acceptable
	15. Special attention to users	6.10	5.20	5.10	6.10-5.20	Acceptable
	16. interest in solving problems by appropriate behavior	6.02	5.15	5	6.02-5	Acceptable
	17. Suitability of Working Time	6	5.02	5	6-5	Acceptable
	18. empathy with users	6.10	5.85	5.35	6.10-5.25	Acceptable

Assurance	19. Trust of users in Staff	6.20	5.10	5.75	6.20-5.75	Rejected
	20. The knowledge of the staff to answer questions	6.30	4.75	5.50	6.30-5.5	Rejected
	21. modesty and politeness of staff	6.25	5	5.52	6.25-5.52	Rejected
	22. sense of peace in contact with the staff	6.10	5	5.35	6.10-5.35	Rejected
Tangibility	23. modern library facilities	5.5	4.5	5.20	5.20-5.5	Rejected
	24. The apparent attractiveness of library materials	6.10	5.35	5.25	6.10-5.25	Rejected
	25. visual beauty of the physical facilities	6	5.12	5.10	6-5.10	Accepted
Assurance	26. servicing at the promised time	6.30	5.30	4.45	6.30-5.45	Rejected
	27. commitment	6.10	5.15	5	6.10-5	Accepted
	28. fast delivery and good service in the first time	6.25	4.35	5.10	6.25-5.10	Rejected
	29. showing full interest in meeting user needs	6.15	4.95	5.30	6.15-5.30	rejected

Table 3: test of hypotheses on quality of services provided for the studied group

Hypotheses	Means expecta-tions	Mean perceptions	Average minimum accep-table service	Acceptable range	Minimum distance to the desired service	Quality services	Decision
Empathy (hypothesis 1)	6.10	5.33	5.15	5.15-6.10	0.18	Acceptable	Supported
Responsiveness (hypothesis 2)	6.11	5.23	5.36		0.19	Acceptable	Supported
Library environment (hypothesis 3)	5.36	4.97	4.75	4.75-5.36	0.22	Acceptable	Supported
Physical facilities (hypothesis 4)	5.86	4.99	5.18	5.18-5.86	0.81	Non-acceptable	rejected
Complex and accessibility (hypothesis 5)	5.95	4.45	4.98	4.98-5.95	0.53	Non-acceptable	rejected
Reliability (hypothesis 6)	6.2	4.93	5.21	5.21-6.2	0.72	Non-acceptable	rejected
Assurance (hypothesis 7)	6.21	4.96	5.53	5.53-6.21	0.57	Non-acceptable	rejected

As the Table 3 shows, hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 were supported; in other words, the studied libraries provided acceptable quality services in terms of empathy, responsiveness and library environment. Other hypotheses were not confirmed, i.e., other components of the studied libraries as problematic components were in the acceptable range in terms of quality services. The components including assurance, reliability, the complex and accessibility, expectations of users and tangibility are in the interval from 0.57, 0.72, 0.53 and 0.81 to the minimum optimal service. Tangibility and

reliability of the libraries under study were in the interval from 0.81 and 0.72 to the minimum optimal minimum. In response to the question that what problems users face when using the library, the findings in Table 4 were obtained.

Table 4: problems of users when using the studied libraries

Problems	Distribution
Publications are not adequate and up to date	150
Study hall is full of noises,	40
Books are not updated	10
Books are not enough	120
Library loan systems are difficult and slow	95
More amenities such as drinking water and toilets are required	70
Library should inform clients of the types of services they provide	40
Working hours is insufficient	25
Employees do not have abilities to meet requirement of their clients	170
Some staff are not polite and do not know how to deal with customer	30

Discussion and Conclusions

As findings show, the studied libraries provided acceptable services in terms of empathy, responsiveness and library environment. These results are consistent with Nitecki (1995) who knows the library environment as the least problematic quality component and inconsistent with tangibility. The present study is consistent with Cohen (1996) who knows tangibility as a problematic component. Considering the fact that the studied libraries are old, the users are most students who compare the public libraries with their relatively modern academic libraries without taking the organizational realities and goals of public libraries into consideration, the results can be explained.

As the present study shows, the studied group do not provide acceptable services in other components. In terms of reliability, assurance, complex and accessibility were the most critical components of quality services (0.72, 0.57 and 0.53, respectively). The results of present study are inconsistent with Shakerzadeh (2012) who found the reliability as the most satisfactory component. In the studied libraries, librarians had high experience and low ability to identify needs of users; due to the lack of abilities for responsiveness, the librarians were not eager to communicate with users. The current study is inconsistent with Nimsomboon & Nagata (2003) who evaluated empathy in low levels and consistent with findings on reliability as a critical component. He also found library environment as a critical component, while this is inconsistent with the present study. Some problems which users face when using the studied libraries include lack of scientific abilities and skills for responsiveness (170 cases), lack of books (150 cases), lack of journals (120 cases), difficulties in loaning system (95 cases), unawareness of users about library activities (70 cases). Considering the problems which users face when using libraries (Table 4), one of the critical points is the lack of scientific abilities of staff to respond to information needs of users as well as the lack of publications proportional to needs of users. The main reason of these problems seems to be the non-specialized workers as well as the inconsistent resources.

Recommendations
- Recruitment of specialists in the library
- Continuous and adequate training to enhance the ability of librarians in the studied group
- Automation of library system
- Appropriate behaviours to staff in dealing with clients
- Measures to gain the trust and confidence of users

- Using interlibrary loan services due to lack of some information sources that users have mentioned
- Informing clients of the services that the library can do for them

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