

Annals of Library and Information Studies  
Vol. 63, March 2016, pp. 7-15

## Performance assessment model for academic libraries: the Covenant University Library example

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*Received 08 February 2015; revised 05 October 2015; accepted 01 December 2015*

The study explores performance assessment models in academic libraries and show-cases the practical experiences at the Covenant University Library. The paper which is based on an observational study of the researchers' daily work experiences and review of literature identified constraints to performance assessment in academic libraries and has attempted to give solutions. The paper concludes that academic libraries should overcome constraints and imbibe the culture of performance assessment that involves a continuous and periodic process of fine-tuning critical management and functional processes, either reactively or proactively through deliberately designed parameters (indicators). It extrapolated from the unique experiences of the Centre for Learning Resources, Covenant University to construct a model (Lib-PERFQUAL) for libraries around the world. This is a model that comprises all indicators necessary to maintain continuous relevance and achieve utmost efficiency.

**Keywords:** Performance assessment; Monitoring; Evaluation; Relevance; Efficiency; Academic libraries; Library goals

### Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century academic library is faced with a major challenge of being perceived as not relevant due to wrong impressions in some quarters that a library is not needed in the age of information as it is erroneously assumed that all information that could ever be required is available on the Internet and can be accessed on a computer with the click of a button. Consequently, libraries must prove that they are still relevant in the Internet era. In order to achieve this, high goals, great policies, plans and programmes must be put in place to supersede the provision of information on the net alone. Also considering the fact that sustaining and maintaining an academic library is capital and resource intensive, it behooves all library leadership and managers to engage in a continuous process of performance assessment (input and output) to ensure effectiveness and efficiency of all its activities. More so, leaders of libraries must always engage in assessment of their library's operations thereby justifying the investment on same.

Nkiko<sup>1</sup> posited that library investment have tremendous impact on student retention, and university ranking as well as accreditation. Thus libraries must constantly articulate their concrete contributions to the overall mission and objectives of the parent institution in order to justify or warrant continued investment.

Performance assessment of an academic library is a systematic and objective internal and (or) external evaluation of its design, goals, implementation and results of ongoing or completed activities, project, program, or policy with the aim of determining the extent of fulfillment of outlined objectives, relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the library's programs<sup>2</sup>. In essence, performance assessment focuses on critical resources; expertise, equipment and supplies needed to implement the planned activities (inputs), what actually is being or was done with the available resources to produce the intended outputs (activities), products and services that need to be delivered to achieve the expected outcomes (outputs), effect or behaviour changes resulting from a strategic programme (outcomes) and long-term improvement within and outside the institution (impacts)<sup>3</sup>. To realize the foregoing, libraries require good leadership that will properly articulate major goals that will be driven to actualization by benchmarking what other reputed libraries are doing. The leader must also communicate the assessment indicators to all staff members.

### Rationale of the study

Performance assessment is a valuable management tool for ascertaining the relevance, effectiveness and

efficiency of an organization and its sub-units. Its peculiar function of guiding an organization in the direction towards achieving its goals and maintaining standards cannot be gainsaid. Thus in this age of knowledge economy when scholars and even the ordinary man have come to increasingly appreciate the unfathomable worth of information and as academic institutions are investing enormous resources such as financial, material and human into their libraries, it becomes inevitable for libraries to assess its own performance. This is with a view to ensuring that the libraries are actually supporting learning, teaching, research and community services of their parent institutions.

There is a dearth of literature that properly situates and addresses the issues that pertain to performance assessment in academic libraries.

It is against the above background that this paper seeks to explore performance assessment models for academic libraries, showcasing the Covenant University Library experience in order to extrapolate from its unique experiences, to construct a model for the modern academic libraries.

### Objectives of the study

The study is underpinned on the following specific objectives:

- To emphasize the importance of performance assessment in academic libraries;
- To describe the Covenant University experience of performance assessment;
- To identify the hindrances to performance assessment in academic libraries; and
- To recommend a model of performance assessment for libraries around the world.

### Literature review

There are two main approaches to achieving effective implementation of assessment; Reactive

performance monitoring and evaluation, and Proactive performance monitoring and evaluation<sup>4</sup>. He further opined that reactive performance monitoring and evaluation is a process that identifies past or existing nonconformities in the people, functions and systems management as well as any asset-related management and operational deterioration, failures or incidents. It happens when past or existing nonconformities are discovered and actions are taken. Proactive performance monitoring and evaluation seeks assurance that the people, functions and systems are operating as intended. In reality, this requirement is the same as reactive monitoring; the only difference between them is timing.

The important thing is to build monitoring and evaluation into the standard work processes and procedures that are used to perform all library tasks or activities that directly or indirectly affect performance and reliability. This is done through key performance indicators designed to measure activities through leading and lagging indicators of performance including procedures used to plan, schedule, operate, manage and maintain people, functions and systems. The leading indicators as the name implies are those that can predict non-conformance or deficiencies that can be expected at some point in the future. The lagging indicators are reactive. Nevertheless, the leading and lagging indicators must include all of the performance indicators that define the operational effectiveness and efficiency of people, functions and systems for example, man-hours (workload), maintenance cost of physical and human assets, user flow, effectiveness of new technology etc. are effective leading and lagging indicators. An overview of when to use monitoring and evaluation is given in Table 1.

### Why performance assessment in academic libraries?

Academic libraries are established specifically to support learning, teaching, research and community

Table 1—An overview of when to use monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring	Evaluation
Routinely collects data on indicators, compares actual results with targets	Analyses why intended results were or were not achieved
Links activities and resources to their objectives	Assesses specific causal contributions of activities to results
Translates objectives into performance indicators and set targets	Examines implementation process
Clarifies program objectives	Explores unintended results
Reports progress to managers and alerts them to problems	Provides lessons, highlights significant accomplishment or program potential, and offers recommendations for improvement

development initiatives. It becomes necessary therefore, for them to undergo consistent assessment in order to ensure that they are performing their envisaged roles. Advantages of such evaluation cannot be overemphasized, some of which inter alia include the following:

- It can be used to determine the extent to which the library meets its objectives and the objectives of the programmes thereby providing a justification for sustenance of the library service<sup>6</sup>.
- It serves the purpose of assuring the parent institutions that the library needs the same relative share of institutional budget, even if the budget itself is shrinking<sup>7</sup>. Nkiko<sup>1</sup> noted that library investment have tremendous impact on student retention, and university ranking as well as accreditation. Thus libraries must constantly articulate their concrete contributions to the overall mission and objectives of the parent institution in order to justify or warrant continued investment.
- It avails the leader, the opportunity to identify what part of the system is down or challenged per time and makes room for prompt intervention to fix the problems, thereby maintaining high level of efficiency of the library operations. Stroobants and Bouckaert<sup>8</sup> aptly supported this view by opining that being faced with significant budget cuts and continual pressure to do more with less, issues of efficiency and effectiveness became a priority in libraries of most countries.
- It shows the extent of usage of the library which invariably confirms the relevance of the library to its immediate and extended communities. According to Galluzzi<sup>9</sup>, it may be used to assess how well the library and information system contribute to achieving the goals of parent constituents.
- It can be used to measure the status of the library by monitoring its progress through a comparative analysis of past and current performance correlation with desired level of performance. Esharenana<sup>10</sup> affirmed that it is useful for monitoring the progress towards specification or even compare past, current and desired level of performance. Also, the standard or class of the library can be determined via its comparison with other libraries of the world. It

may allow a librarian to demonstrate how one's library stands in relation to others<sup>8</sup>.

- Performance assessment helps the library to identify and consolidate on its strength, improve upon the weak areas and bring on board any viable innovation.
- It enables the leader to make informed decisions regarding operations management and service delivery.

### **Problems of conducting performance assessment in academic libraries**

Although performance assessment is highly pertinent and beneficial to academic libraries, it is faced with various challenges especially that of having a dogged leader who is ready to drive excellence and accountability in operations and service delivery. Kingory & Otike<sup>11</sup> opined that it is the least management tool practised globally with a higher prevalence in the developing countries. Some observed limitations include the following:

- Lack of awareness and weak leadership
- Lack of finance
- Shortage of skills and experience
- Lack of evaluation tools
- Lack of assessment culture
- Misappropriation of funds

### **Methodology**

The paper is an observational study of the researchers' daily work experiences and extensive review of literature. It harnessed all Centre for Learning Resources' (Covenant University Library) performance assessment activities, and show-cased its practical experiences to draw conclusions and extrapolated from the unique experiences of the Centre to construct a model (Lib-PERFQUAL) that comprises every indicator necessary to maintain continuous relevance and achieve utmost efficiency for libraries around the world.

### **Overview of Covenant University Library**

The Covenant University Library also known as the Centre for Learning Resources (CLR) is a leading academic library that has created a niche for itself as a foremost reference Centre for other libraries in Nigeria and Africa to follow. The library is automated and all routine activities are computerized. CLR has a functional virtual library service, which gives staff and students' access to the Web-based Public Access

Catalogue (WebPAC), and other electronic resources from offices, departments and wherever there is Internet browser Covenant University Library Handbook 2014<sup>12</sup>. In a bid to meet the present day shift from traditional setting to modern dissemination of information to library users through new information technology, CLR acquired a Library software package named ALICE. ALICE as a product was not without limitations thus in the quest for a better and more functional software, the Library went ahead to acquire MILLENIUM library management software. The Library has a state of the art teleconferencing unit and functional Close Circuit Television (CCTV) to monitor sundry activities. The library's staff strength is 54 including the University Librarian (Director). The library is one of the best among libraries in Nigeria and Africa at large.

### **Main goals of CLR**

- Pioneering excellence in library and information services delivery
- Achieving cutting edge practices
- Producing quality students and prolific researchers
- Achieving staff engagement in the vision implementation
- Community impact
- The acquisition, organization and dissemination of first rate library materials
- Preservation and conservation of the collection for future generations.
- Developing highly motivated, knowledgeable and skilled professionals.
- Ensuring cost effective management of library resources

### **The Covenant University Library Example**

In a bid to maintain and sustain the library's position as a pace setter, its leadership engages various performance indicators which are subsumed in monitoring and evaluation as instruments for performance assessment of staff and the Centre. This is with the aim of ensuring that people are at their duty post doing what is required of them and the system and functions are working well to achieve maximum productivity and excellent service delivery. These include; Leadership by wandering, Daily user statistics in all service Unit, Weekly report of work done during the week by all staff in the various sections of the library, Regular meetings to discuss library operations, Daily checks on the catalogue to

ascertain volume and quality of content, Unified system of classification, End of session survey on user expectation and satisfaction, Spontaneous random interview of clients about service delivery, Staff assessment among equals, Self-assessment (ratings), Administration of performance checklist at the end of each semester and Involvement of faculty in information resource selection for acquisition and subscription.

### **Leadership by wandering**

The leadership practices what is referred to as leadership by wandering. This is not to say that the leaders do not sit to do their jobs but occasionally, the time for ergonomics is spent moving from one section to another for unannounced and on the spot inspection of the workforce. At such hours, important discoveries unfold and people are seen in their natural disposition to work. This indicator is very necessary because it can be handy in validating results of other indicators. It also avails the leader the opportunity to know what system is down or challenged per time thereby intervening promptly to fix the situation.

### **Daily user statistics in all service units**

A daily user statistics is taken in all the service units and analysed at the end of each week to ascertain user flow into the library and patronage of same. This is further broken down to ascertain the number of clients that patronised each unit. On the long run, it becomes possible to know the unit that is less patronised and to find out the reason it is so and address such appropriately. One very great importance of this activity in addition to some other indicators is that it shows the usage of the library which invariably confirms the relevance of the library. The electronic collections are measured via usage logs and vendors report. A sample of the final report is given in Table 2.

### **End of session survey on user expectation and satisfaction**

Another way of determining the relevance of the library to its immediate and extended community is by conducting an end of session user satisfaction and expectation survey. A well-structured questionnaire is administered to clients randomly very close to the end of a session. Another vital instrument employed in the survey is the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Copies of the questionnaire are collated and data gathered are analysed including response from the FGD and

Table 2—Library statistics for the month of September

Description	Number	Remarks/breakdown
Books on loan	736	
E-library Usage	1,224	
Newspapers/Magazines Usage	1,017	
Reprography Usage	990	
Newspaper Archives Usage	32	
Project/theses Usage	199	
Project/theses indexing	427	
Escapist Reading Usage	1,328	
Bindery Usage	8	
Single Study Rooms Usage	52	
Number of books Consulted within the Library	75,075	CDS Wing — 21,977 CST Wing — 49,592 Ref. Mat. — 1,367 Journals — 641 PG Library — 1,245 SLD — 253
Number of users in the Library	18,969	CDS Wing — 4,854 CST Wing — 11,831 Ref./ Journal Area — 1,302 PG Library — 775 SLD — 207

conclusions are drawn leading to decisions that are integrated into operations in order to achieve the goals and programmes of the subsequent session. This helps the library to consolidate on its strength, improve upon the weak areas and bring on board any viable suggestion.

### Regular meetings

The library holds monthly meetings to review the operations of the previous month. At the meetings, discussions are predominantly on service delivery, functionality of equipment, functionality of the library software, staff activities, scholarly requirements of staff (publications) and other issues of concern such as promotion, new university policy etcetera if any. The meetings are beneficial in the sense that they serve as reminders of the goals and programmes of the library as well as that of parent institution while guiding the people towards achieving same.

### Staff weekly report

Targets are set and all staff of the library are under obligation to submit a report of job done during the week to the heads of their sections to ascertain the extent to which such targets have been met. Such report consists of both quantitative and non-quantitative details of what represented work in ramification during the week under consideration. The heads of the section integrates all reports received into

his/her own and submits to the Director. The monthly report serves the purpose of measuring work done, the extent of involvement of individual staff and is a handy reference material for annual staff appraisals.

### Daily checks on the catalogue/shelves

The library catalogue (WebPAC) is checked on a daily bases to ascertain that information resources are being catalogued at a reasonable volume cum set target and to ensure that the quality of content meets the acceptable standard. Where there are mistakes, the attention of the cataloguer is drawn to it and correction made appropriately.

Also, every academic librarian is attached to a number of shelves over which he/she has a duty to supervise on a daily basis, in order to ensure that books and other resources are where they ought to be for easy access. This activity contributes to the aesthetics of the library and allows for hitch-free access when conducting accreditation bodies round the shelves. Suffices to say that as a result of the foregoing, the library has consistently topped the scores during accreditations of professional bodies and National Universities Commission on programmes.

### Unified classification system

Classification of library resources in CLR is done in unity. All classifiers agree to reassign a material not

Table 3—Occasional random interview guide

Sl. no.	Questions	yes	No	Comment
1	Is the library environment conducive enough for learning?			
2	Are you satisfied with our services compared to what is obtainable elsewhere?			
3	Were you able to meet your information needs all the times you came to use the library's information resources?			
4	Do you think the dispositions of our staff at the circulation unit are pleasant enough?			
5	Do you think the dispositions of our staff at the serials unit are pleasant enough?			
6	Do you think the dispositions of our staff at the surveillance unit are pleasant enough?			
7	Do you think the dispositions of our staff at the reprographic unit are pleasant enough?			
8	Was our library catalogue always accessible each time you came to library?			
9	Would you say it made it easy for you to pull out a book from the shelf?			
10	What aspect of our services are you not satisfied with?			
11	What do expect to have in this library that is not available presently?			

necessarily outside its CIP class but where it will be most accessible by those to whom it is more relevant (Authority file). This exercise of literary warrant is to actualise Ranganathan's law number 4 (save the time of the reader) as access and usage is paramount after acquisition of resources in librarianship<sup>13</sup>. The same is in line with the RDA standards for access to information resources in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### Occasional random interview

The readers' services librarian or the Director engages in an occasional random chat with clients about the service delivery of the library. This exercise brings to fore so much about the expectation of users because it happens at their unguarded hour. Information gathered from a discourse such as this is noted and treated with every sense of responsibility because it is straight from the heart and makes for effectiveness. A sample of questions asked during this exercise in Table 3.

#### Faculty involvement in selection of information resource

For every phase of acquisition of information resources, faculty and staff are involved by giving them the opportunity to recommend titles or preferred databases that are relevant to their courses. Thus at the beginning of an acquisition phase the acquisition librarian sends out catalogues to the various departments soliciting recommendations and input from faculty. This way they have their information needs appropriately met.

#### Staff assessment among equals/self-assessment (ratings)

At the end of every semester, each academic librarian is made to appraise fellow librarian in the order of 1-20 1 representing the most valuable staff and up the ladder. This system of appraisal is very beneficial in the sense that the judgement is usually objective to a great extent. Most times a particular person or persons top everybody's list and for such it is not just favouritism but the truth. Also during this same exercise, individual staff is given the privilege of assessing self. This is compared with colleague's judgement and decision taken. Finally the names are compiled in the order of their frequencies and ranking after which it is made available for all to see and know where they belong and make amends where necessary. On the long run, it helps people to sit up and the outcome of the exercise serves as a reference material for annual staff appraisal.

#### Best staff of the month award

The best staff of the month award is an initiative targeted at motivating people in the junior cadre (library Assistants and Officers) in the library to give the best to their duties. At the end of every month the committee that was set up for this purpose meets to decide who the best staff should be based on a set of criteria. After selection, whoever emerges first in the ranking is considered the best and on a general meeting day a short citation of the person is read in his or her honour before announcing him or her as the best staff of the month and given an award to that effect. In addition to the award, a portrait of the individual is

Table 4—Best staff of the month selection criteria

Name of the nominees .....		Section .....	
Sl. no.	Quality	Scores Obtainable	Scores Obtained
1	Regularity to work	10%	
2	Commitment to duty	10%	
3	Ability to work without close supervision	10%	
4	Punctuality	10%	
5	Regularity in location/duty post	10%	
6	Readiness to accept corrections	10%	
7	Respect for superior Officers and peers	10%	
8	Ability to achieve during team work	10%	
9	Outstanding and Motivation skills	10%	
10	Neatness	10%	
11	Total	100%	

posted on the notice board all through the month for further publicity. It has been realised that everybody desires this award therefore it instigates a subtle competition to outdo each other thereby enhancing work effectiveness without stress. It should be noted that this has not taken the place of open commendations when it is observed that someone is doing very well. A sample of the criteria for selecting the best staff of the month in our context is given in Table 4.

#### Administration of performance checklist

The Covenant University library compares favourably with many other libraries of the world because of its leadership's consistent engagement in benchmarking trends in all aspects of the profession and follows same on the internet and around the globe to update the library. Also, he has had to visit some of the best libraries in the U.K. and USA including Library of Congress. Thus in order to maintain a world class standard, an in-house designed checklist is administered occasionally to faculty who have been to libraries outside the continent of Africa, visiting faculty on sabbatical international staff and contact staff from outside the country with the aim of eliciting information on how our library competes with what obtains else where. The exercise helps the leadership to ascertain the standard and appraise the library especially in the area of service delivery, information resources and prioritisation of any innovation into the existing standards based on the most desired within the context. A sample of the performance checklist is as follows:

- Which library have you been to outside Nigeria?
- Does the Library (CLR) infrastructure compare favourably with the one you patronised?
- Does the Library (CLR) learning environment compare favourably with the one you patronised?
- Does the information resources in CLR adequately support learning, teaching and research compared to what is obtainable in the one you patronised?
- Does the Library (CLR) services environment compare favourably with the one you patronised?
- Does the reading space in CLR compare favourably with what is obtainable in the one you patronised?
- Does the Library (CLR) seating facilities compare favourably with the one you patronised?
- Does the Library (CLR) work environment compare favourably with that of the library you patronised?
- Do the electronic facilities in CLR compare favourably with what is obtainable in the one you patronised?
- Does the deployment of the library software in CLR compare favourably with what is obtainable in the one you patronised?
- Can you say CLR has attained a world class status?
- Give suggestions

#### Audit of acquisitions and the library resources

The acquisitions unit of the library is saddled with the responsibility of acquiring all information resources for the library and as an added way of assessing its performance, the institution's audit unit works with it. Before any material is bought for the library institutional auditors must verify the prices with the use of book data software. After confirmation and the books have ordered and purchased, the auditors also are the people who receive same from the vendors checking the supplies against requisition list. By these exercises, they ensure best practices that are void of unscrupulous behaviours. Apart from auditing acquisitions, the entire information resources of the library are audited at an interval of eight years to ascertain its size as against the investments on it. This activity can be very tasking, time consuming and operation disrupting however it assures all stakeholders of the growth of the library and where the outcome is positive, subsequent investments are guaranteed. This indicator gives room for proper accountability.

### **Quality assurance committee**

The library management team established a Quality Assurance Committee that is responsible for ensuring quality management in her operations and systems via a Library Self-Audit initiative. This is with the aim of engaging in constant assessment of the library to ascertain her current status, identify areas of need and recommend appropriately to the Library management team. The terms of reference of the Committee are:

- Alignment of the library with the university's vision, mission and strategic direction
- Integration with the University's structure, financial planning and systems
- Adequacy of physical infrastructure to support learning teaching and research
- Provision of information resources and services to support learning, teaching and research
- Management of human resources
- Ensure cordial relationship with other institutions

The Committee, with the supervision of the library Director developed the indicators and are ardently driving same to ensure quality results.

### **Recommended model for academic libraries**

It is common knowledge and generally accepted that performance assessment is extremely vital for improvement of any academic library's operations and systems in order to successfully support learning, teaching and research activities of the parent institution. More so, the pace at which development in information technology occurs can only be termed as erratic, thus only constant assessment will create room for appropriate changes while serving as a justification for the investment on the library.

Performance assessment of an academic library is a complex task that does not require assessment measures or models that are imported or adapted from other fields. This is due to the fact that aspects of those fields to be assessed differ from aspects of library operations that must be considered. For example the two models (SERVQUAL and LibQUAL) that are widely accepted and adapted to LIS are used to measure service quality which is just an aspect of library operations<sup>14,15</sup>. These models are not adequate for measuring the totality of operations and systems of the library. According to Shi and Levy<sup>16</sup> the application of SERVQUAL in library assessment and the theoretical issues and practical concerns of LibQUAL merit serious examination.

Consequently, a fundamental requirement for assessment of library operations and systems is a model that is all encompassing and based on the perception of both librarians and users. A model that meets these requirements will better capture current status and identify areas of deficiencies. It is based on this viewpoint that this paper recommends "Lib-PERFQUAL" derived from "Library performance quality", a model that comprises all indicators necessary to draw reasonable conclusion on where the goal, policy or programmes of the library is, at a given time and make appropriate recommendations for improvement as is the case in CLR for library performance assessment. Lib-PERFQUAL will not only measure library services, but people, functions and the systems of the library with proper employment of the indicators above that are presently utilized in CLR. Assessing functions refers to internal operations relating to information materials, cataloguing and classification, indexing and library and information services to users (readers' services) etcetera. Not precluding user satisfaction, market penetration, ease and extent of access, library impact on teaching, learning and research, Cost effectiveness of library operations and services, library facilities, space and capacity. Also it will assess the library system which includes how the Library's physical assets are procured, commissioned, operated, maintained and disposed of. As a result, the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the library can be determined.

### **Conclusion**

The library of the information age is a resource intensive one in all ramifications that must prove its relevance by satisfying its patrons maximally. Thus there is a critical need to engage in activities that will show returns on investments by way of constantly assessing its performance in its entirety.

Performance assessment through appropriate monitoring and evaluation in library management is a vital tool for sustaining quality, efficiency and effectiveness of library services. It involves a continuous and periodic process of fine-tuning critical management and functional processes, either reactively or proactively; through deliberately designed measures (indicators)

A major mistake often made is restricting performance monitoring and evaluation to systems and functional inputs without due consideration of the people who perform the tasks and manage systems. Thus all stakeholders must be well knowledgeable about



the indicators thereby consolidating the agreement between staff and supervisor ratings of work performance.

Key challenges include shortage of appropriate skills, knowledge and experience, determined and proactive leadership to drive organisational performance assessment culture.

Performance assessment is not judgmental but developmental in focus; thus it does not seek to criticize the systems but to develop them to proactively respond to the dynamics of user needs and demands.

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