CrossMark

Surveying Users' Perception of Academic Library Services Quality: A Case Study in Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) Library

Suziyana Mat Dahan [a,*], Mohd Yusof Taib [b,1], Nurhaizan Mohd Zainudin [a,2], Fadzida Ismail [a,3]

[a] Faculty of Industrial Management, Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP), Lebuhraya Tun Razak, Gambang, 26300, Kuantan, Pahang, Malaysia
[b] Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP), 26600 Pekan, Pahang, Malaysia

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Global competition among academic institutions has compelled university libraries to transform their conventional services and traditional roles to a more sophisticated, all-round service provider that can deliver their best services to their users. University libraries must cater the expansion of information sources, the high demand of users and information application as well as high student enrolments and competition among service sectors. The ability of an academic library to fulfill its user expectations will yield user satisfaction for its services. Primarily, research on assessing users' perception on the level of service quality focuses on finding ways to meet or exceed users' expectations. This study nevertheless aimed to measure students' perception and their satisfaction level of services provided by the UMP library and customized a new measuring tool on service quality and perspectives of library users based on the LibQUAL Model. A customized survey instrument was developed based on the model, consisting of 30 items measuring the level of four service dimensions and user satisfaction with an additional five items examining user satisfaction on general services. The Cronbach's alpha range is from 0.813 to 0.942, which was adequately greater than the recommended value of 0.7, thus exhibiting good internal reliability of the constructs. The result of the study reported positive values for both gap analyses in all service quality dimensions. Based on 382 respondent feedbacks, results showed that the perceived service quality level exceeded users' acceptable level on minimum service and desired service. Specifically, the users are satisfied with the services provided. Results from this study serveas a guide for effective decision making by the library in its administration and resource allocation to ensure accomplishment of the library's vision and mission.

INTRODUCTION

Customer satisfaction is an essential component of any organization including academic institutions like Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) and is crucial in determining its continuation in today's global competition. Academic libraries are libraries attached to academic institutions of learning to serve the teaching and research needs of students and staff (Adeniran, 2011). Since the core business of an academic institution is to provide knowledge and a well-updated practice, its library plays an important role in aiding students' advancement in the academic discipline. 'User expectation', 'service quality' and 'satisfaction' are often used interchangeably since the three concepts are interrelated. Academic institutions which provide library services that could at least fulfill users' expectations will result in users' satisfaction. Pedramnia, Modiramani and Ghanbarabadi (2012) reported that Ranganathan,

who is a widely known philosopher in Library and Information Science (LIS), always looked at the user as the core of all library activities and stressed that librarians have to serve "Right information, to the Right user at the Right time". Obviously, the library user (i.e. student) satisfaction depends on the quality of services and is a significant measure of service quality provided by the library.

Viewing students as customers, their educational experience can be used as a predictor of satisfaction (Nadiri and Mayboudi, 2010). The satisfaction of existing students towards the university's services would transfer a positive impact to the public and this will make the university acquire a competitive advantage (Didomenico and Bonnici, 1996). In traditional research methods, factors such as "rich collection", "material variations" and "number of users" were seen as effective measures for quality control. Now, libraries have to measure users' perceptions and expectations since they form the basis for defining the quality of service (Pedramnia, Modiramani and Ghanbarabadi, 2012). It has also been mentioned by Shoeb (2011) that it is important to understand what library users expect in terms of service quality for better management. Therefore, universities' library service quality, as one of the most important factors that has a significant influence on students' overall satisfaction from their universities needs to be analyzed (Nadiri and Mayboudi, 2010). Without assessing its performance, an academic library cannot

* Corresponding author. Tel.:+09 549 2474; fax: +09 549 2167.
  E-mail addresses: suziyana@ump.edu.my (S.M. Dahan), myusof@ump.edu.my
(M.Y. Taib), nurhaizan@ump.edu.my (N.M. Zainudin), fadzida@ump.edu.my (F. Ismail).
  [1] Tel.: +09 424 6257; fax: +09 424 6222.
  [2] Tel.: +09 549 2275; fax: +09 549 2167.
  [3] Tel.: +09 549 2335; fax: +09 549 2167.

ensure maximum utilization of its resources towards meeting the needs of their users. It is through performance measurement that appropriate performance indicators could be formulated to ascertain how well the service is performing in meeting its objectives (Roslah and Zainab, 2007). In fact, the sensitivity on the changes of users' expectations provides a basis for continuous service improvements.

Rehman (2012) noted that conventional services and the traditional role of university libraries have changed due to multiple sources of information, high demand of users and application of information technology, competition among service sectors and high student enrolments. Other researchers (Cullen, 2001; Song, 2009; King, 2005 and Hiller, 2001) have recognized the need to reach out to users with new services since their needs change continuously especially in the rapidly advanced information scenario. Hence, it is the duty of the library administrator to identify these needs and correspond to them closely. The users gain satisfaction when their expectations of the services are fulfilled. In other words, measuring service quality is a must in delivering satisfaction to users in today's competitive environment (Jayasundara, 2008; Simmonds and Andaleeb, 2001 and Adeniran, 2011). User perception and expectation studies have become one of the most popular studies in the area of service quality in many academic libraries. The studies emphasized provision of good library service as more important to the users than the library building itself. 'User expectation' and 'satisfaction' have been used to determine the service quality to help service organizations position themselves these days.

Thus, the objectives of this study are to measure the users' perception of library service quality and their satisfaction level on services provided by the library. A customized instrument which was developed based on the LibQUAL Model was used to meet the objectives. It is a customer-oriented tool and its technique measures the quality of library services and gives detailed information and application for library administrators to understand the strengths and weaknesses to make decisions to improve the quality of services (Pedramnia, Modiramani and Ghanbarabadi, 2012). Nadiri and Mayboudi (2010) reported that the LibQUAL Model turns out to be an instrument intended to help librarians understand users' perceptions and it contributes to improve library service quality and better meet users' needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SERVICE QUALITY MEASUREMENT OF ACADEMIC LIBRARY

There are various methods of studying service quality and user satisfaction that has emerged in LIS. One such method is SERVQUAL, used widely in the field of marketing and later applied in other fields (Roslah and Zainab, 2007). It is a five-dimensional construct in the 22-item Likert Scale survey. The model focused on reducing the gap between customer expectations and the actual service provided. The survey instrument was based on the Gaps Model of Service Quality. By applying this instrument, the libraries gain insights into customer's conceptualization of what a service should deliver and how well that service meets idealized expectations (Calvert and Hernon, 1996; Nitecki and Hernon, 2000 and Miller, 2008). However, Cook and Thompson (Edgar, 2006) stated that SERVQUAL may work in industrial settings, but not libraries. Various studies have proved that the five SERVQUAL dimensions are not recoverable in the library context, and additional dimensions of quality not measured by SERVQUAL are necessary (Nadiri and Mayboudi, 2010).

Later, another tool, called SERVPERF, a modification of SERVQUAL, was developed to measure the service quality solely based on current performance. However, SERVPERF has been rarely used in libraries (Shoeb, 2011). Due to the limited application of SERVQUAL and SERVPERF models in assessing service quality of academic libraries, the LibQUAL Model was the preferred model for the library assessment in this study. Nadiri and Mayboudi (2010) asserted that the LibQUAL Model is an instrument to measure the service quality of libraries and

to help the librarians determine whether they have met the expectations of their users or not.

MEASURE OF LIBRARY SERVICE QUALITY USING THE LIBQUAL MODEL

LibQUAL, also known as a 'total market survey' of library's users, established by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) with the co-operation of the Texas A&M University (TAMU) in 2000, provides an alternative means of measuring the quality of academic library services (Edgar, 2006). The LibQUAL survey evolved from a conceptual model based on the SERVQUAL instrument, which defines the service quality as "the difference between customers' perceptions and expectations". This instrument was re-grounded to better reflect the library context (Empey and Murphy, 2004 and Rehman, 2012). The LibQUAL + scale was developed to measure the user perception of library service quality consisting of 22 core items under three dimensions: (a) service effect, (b) library as place and (c) information control. It has been used in different countries (USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, UK, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, and South Africa), and adopted in twelve different languages (Thompson et al., 2007). LibQUAL + results are interpreted as scores on perceptions that compares against scores of what is reported to be minimally acceptable service, and what is reported to be desired service, which is called the zones of tolerance interpretation framework (Nadiri and Mayboudi, 2010). However, for the purpose of this study, the LibQUAL + survey tool was altered to address local conditions and preferences without challenging the designer's assertion that the statements fully reflect the dimensions. The modification of LibQUAL + instrument is discussed further in the survey design part of this paper.

LIBQUAL MODEL GAP ANALYSIS AND MEASURE OF SATISFACTION

The LibQUAL tool measures the service quality based on three dimensions: effect of service, information control and library as place. The instrument was built on the theoretical foundations of the gap theory of service quality (Cook and Thompson, 2000). The main characteristic of the gap analysis is that each item assessing services used by users is rated separately whereby scores based on similar scales are granted for minimum, desired and perceived levels of service. The minimum expectations are the level of service that users consider as adequate and this score represents their minimum level of service that users will tolerate or are willing to accept. The desired service level represents the level of service that customers hope to receive and the perceived service level describes the level of service that the library currently provides (Mohd Nazrul, 2009).

The difference between the mean perceived score and the mean minimum score is known as the *service adequacy gap*, while the difference between the mean perceived score and the mean desired score is known as the *service superiority gap* (Bower and Dennis, 2007). Empey and Murphy (2004) described that results are interpreted as a *positive adequacy gap* when they show that users' perceptions are higher than their minimum expectations, but lower than their desired expectations. A *negative adequacy gap* occurs when perceptions fall below the minimum expectations. Finally, a *positive superiority gap* occurs when perception exceeds desire and vice versa.

According to Nadiri and Mayboudi (2010), customers have a range of expectations and referred to the range as the *zone of tolerance* with the desired service level at the top and minimum service level at the bottom of the scale. It is a range of service performance that the customers will tolerate and accept variations in service delivery. If the service delivered falls within the zone (i.e. above the minimum tolerable level), customers will be satisfied. If the service is better than their desired service level, customers will perceive the service as exceptionally good and be delighted. This strengthens their loyalty which makes them satisfied customers. However, if the service falls below the zone