

Towards the Attainment of User Centred Quality Services at the Libraries of The University of Nairobi.

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Abstract: Modern library users are becoming conscious of the quality of services they expect from their libraries due to influences of globalization and advent of technology. The users are exerting pressure on libraries to deliver the kind of quality services they crave for. The library customers are open to multiple sources of information and expect quality material within shortest possible time irrespective of the format of information. The library being the centre of the university is expected to deliver user-centred quality services in line with the universities objectives and must strive to improve quality of their services to remain competitive. This study was aimed at assessing user-centred services quality at the libraries of the University of Nairobi. The specific objectives were to establish the perception the users regarding the provision of user-centred services; establish the features considered by users as indicators of quality services; and investigate the obstacles to provision of user-centred quality services in the University of Nairobi Libraries. The study adopted a case study of the university of Nairobi libraries. Data collection was done using questionnaires administered to students, library staff and lecturers of the University of Nairobi using purposive sampling. The study findings revealed that perception of quality services by users was not satisfactory. The key aspects necessary in the provision of quality services to users such as, consultative decision, performance measurement were inadequate or lacking. The study concluded that features of quality needed to be captured by conducting user studies that would allow the library to obtain adequate information necessary to provide user-centric quality services. The study recommended documenting and communicating quality services to users; involving staff and users in the decision making; computerizing library operations and introducing performance measurements to help check how the library was performing.

Keywords: User-centred Services, User-centric Services, Quality Services, University Library; User Services.

INTRODUCTION

University libraries, like other organizations, are becoming customer-focused in service delivery in order to survive in this modern world. As more and more library users become conscious of the quality of the services they want from their libraries, the University libraries are becoming keener on the quality of the services they provide and the needs of their customers. User-centred quality services are about creating a user-focused services emphasis on quality service delivery to and satisfaction from the customers and all stake holders. It emphasises on an increased attention to the needs of users of the services and using the same to gauge and provide the right services [7]. That means that information systems should be designed according to what users need not only according to universal rules. It also means that different kinds of users may require different types of information systems [3].

Creating a user-centred culture means that the university library management command a higher standard of making sure that user can access,

understand, and use the information provided. It also means that users can accomplish their tasks, give input, and know that their feedback is taken into consideration and acted upon. This means that the library judges the quality of services that they provide from the users perspective and service satisfaction.

User-centric quality services strive to identify and respond to user needs by providing information that is easily understood and acted upon. It also involves creating systems that better facilitate transactions, internally and externally, [3]. In addition, user-centric quality services encourage participation by making it easy to connect with customers and strive to improve service delivery based upon feedback [7]. Moreover, user involvement is paramount in the designing of the systems. This is to enable the systems deliver information that is suitable to the customers thus achieving high level of user satisfaction. Proper understanding of customers' perceptions along service quality dimensions is essential for LIS professionals to recognize the customer expectations and aligning the

products/services to meet customer expectations and thus resulting in reduced gaps in perceptions of service quality [6].

Quality is a term that is not easily defined, especially since different individuals view quality from different perspectives of the service. Quality does not lend itself to easy or precise definition, but there is a general agreement that the quality of any activity should be assessed in relation to its purpose [2]. Quality is viewed as relating to how good a service is, and not necessarily how large or extensive [9]. Quality library services mean satisfying the query of each and every user accurately, exhaustively and expeditiously [11]. Other authors view quality as defined from: excellence, value, conformity to specifications, and ability to meet or exceed customer expectations in a sphere where the standards of stringency and excellence are crucial to knowledge production and knowledge innovation, such as [11,10, 4].

My interpretation of user-centred quality services is the degree of how good or bad the services are as measured from the perspective of the customer and as seen to satisfy user's information needs. Quality is about the ability of a library service to meet the user's needs and expectations. Quality is assessed by customers based on the multi-faceted features of the service considered as appealing to them. Assessing performance is of great importance for all libraries striving to offer the highest possible service quality. In the modern competitive world where university education has mushroomed, the libraries need to go beyond the traditional styles of service provision and apply performances by making the user their focus by understanding customers' needs and expectations and requirements. Quality of service is focused on customer's satisfaction [1]. Customer focus in service delivery is essential for satisfying the customers' perceptions. Its key underlying principles are satisfying users' needs as well as continuous improvement, teamwork and good leadership [12].

Many Senior Managers and directors lack the understanding of what needs to be done to become committed to quality and implement it. Management commitment, or lack of it, is often cited as the reason why quality programs fail in organizations [8]. Quality management is far more than shifting the responsibilities of detection of problems from customer to producer. It requires a comprehensive approach that must first be recognized and then implemented if rewards are to be realized [8]. For example, if the library has to be managed according to quality criteria, the indicators of quality must be defined and made measurable. Quality library services signify satisfying the query of each and every user accurately, exhaustively and expeditiously. The indicators of quality must be found and captured in a measurement

system.[10] Among the indicators of quality that can be used as measurement of quality include, relevance of service and performance, customer satisfaction, staff satisfaction and facilities.

Creating a user-centred environment is important since it enables the library to design an atmosphere of transparency, recognition, improving delivery of content, and saving money. A university library being the epicentre of the university must facilitate the university to attain its mission and objectives. To provide quality library services, librarians must understand and respect their clients' needs, attitudes, and concerns, then act on those needs by providing services that best mitigate those concerns and requirements.

Clients, express different needs and at different times. Their perceptions in turn is affected by personal, professional, as well as other factors interacting with them as they seek information from libraries. The major challenge for librarians is therefore the overall assessment of the library users' satisfaction to the quality of the services provided since each user perceives the quality of the service differently. More over the effect of rising consumer expectations when it comes to performance of the services they use, and making sure the services are user-centred and of quality is a major challenge for librarians.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

University libraries are set up to support the objectives of the University. They operate routinely with known customers. University Libraries are the heart of the University. They play significant role of ensuring that the university is achieving its objectives of providing quality education and research to its users.

The University of Nairobi is the oldest and largest public University in Kenya and it offers a variety of courses. [11]. The University of Nairobi has eleven libraries servicing its constituent's colleges and centres. The University of Nairobi library systems comprises of the Main University Campus namely Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library (JKLM) and ten branch libraries in the six colleges of the university.

This study therefore sought to assess the quality of the user services provided by University of Nairobi library systems and investigate the challenges the libraries are encountering in regards to providing user-centred quality services.

The specific objectives of the study are

- To examine user perception of the quality of the user-centric services provided by the libraries
- To establish the features considered by users as indicating quality services.

- To investigate the obstacles hindering the attainment of user-centric quality services in the libraries.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a case study methodology. The choice of a case study was to enable the researcher understand the complex factors operating within University library as an integrated unit. It also sought to understand fully the behaviour pattern of the social unit by deepening the understanding of the perception of users regarding user-centred services that the library provides.

Nairobi University Library has a wide staff and large user population, which allowed the study to conduct an in-depth investigation. University of Nairobi has six libraries distributed among the six constituent colleges and five others libraries attached to centres and research institutes, making a total of (11) eleven libraries. The target population comprised three categories namely; librarians, students and staff from the six college libraries.

Selection of respondents was based on purposive sampling. From each of the eleven libraries, 3 librarians consisting of one senior librarian, one assistant librarian and one library assistant were selected to adding 33 respondents, 10 students served by each library summing up to 110 , 5 lecturers served by each library totaling 55 were selected. A total of 198 respondents gave feedback; 165 users and 33 librarians.

Data collection instruments used was closed ended questionnaires for the librarians and the library users. To analyse data Qualitative analysis SSSP tool was used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings and discusses the results of the study. The aim of the study was to assess the user-centred services quality in the University of Nairobi libraries. The presentation, analysis and discussion of the findings are as per the research objectives.

Library Users' Perception of Quality services provided

Until very recently, the most popular measure of quality for library, was size and coverage of their library collection. With recent import of industrial and commercial quality measures into library principles, the

concept of quality has taken on a wider meaning and perception.

The current techno-savvy users' expectations of a library are more than just how many books or the size of the library. Users view the quality of the library services differently. The study sought to understand the perception users had on the quality of the services that the library provided since the perception of the users regarding the services can make or break the profitability of the library or its contribution towards achieving its mission.

Out of the study population, (198), 57.4% responded that they were not satisfied with the quality of services the library was giving the users, while 42.6% were satisfied with the services.

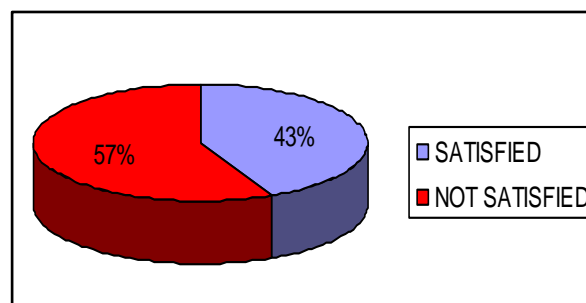


Fig-1: Perception of quality of services provided.

Of those who responded that they were satisfied with the services, when asked to rate the level of satisfaction on the scale of five: 1-extremely satisfied 2-satisfied, 3- fairly satisfied, 4-satisfied and 5- not satisfied, only 8.0% respondents were extremely satisfied. More than 47% rated the services as fairly satisfied, 33.7% as satisfied while 10.4% were not satisfied as illustrated in Figure 2.

Features considered by Users as Indicators of Quality

The users were asked to indicate the features or aspects that they considered as valuable to gauging the quality of services. The respondents indicated that access to documents as the highest feature at 24.40%, followed by space at 20.10%, courtesy of staff with 19.30%, relevance of service with 17.20%, promptness of service 10.90% and speed in service delivery as lowest with 7.10%. (See figure 3). The library staff rated collection as the most important service quality since library is about providing information to supplement and facilitate research and therefore access to that collection was important to the users.

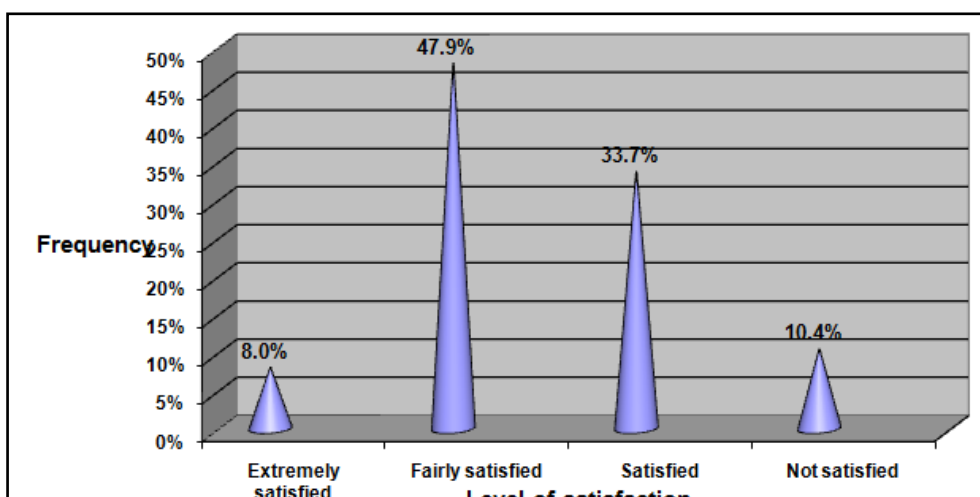


Fig- 2: level of satisfaction among users

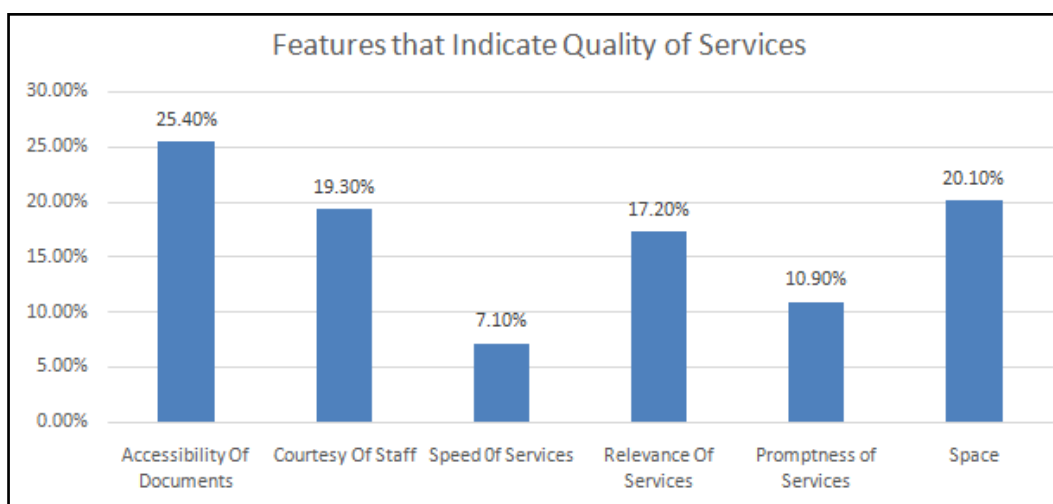


Fig- 3: Features indicating quality of library services

The respondents were asked to rank the following eleven aspects of quality (listed in Table 1) in relation to how they perceived them as critical in

judging or enabling the quality of services. The responses were as presented below.

Table-1: Factors indicating quality

Factors	Very Important	Important	Not Important	Ranking	Total %
Staff	86.6%	13.4%	0%	2	100
Staff Training	83.4%	16.6%	0%	3	100
Support Of C.E.	20%	40%	40%	7	100
Performance Measurement	46.6%	40%	13.4%	6	100
Funds	83.3%	17.7%	0	3	100
Leadership	66.6%	30%	3.6%	4	100
Feedback	46.6%	50%	3.4%	6	100
Continuous Improvement	50%	40%	10%	5	100
Error Free System	30%	40%	30%	7	100
Collection	100%	0%	0%	1	100

All the respondents ranked collection as most crucial and a good quality indicating criteria as evidenced in Table 1.

Collection was reported as very crucial feature that influence quality of library services. This can be explained by the fact that libraries are about collection, and as such, collection is still viewed as a major indicator of good services. Staff were reported as equally important and were ranked as the second important feature that influenced the quality of library services.

Funding enables a library acquire adequate collection and would explain why it was ranked among the top features.

Leadership was reported as the fourth most important. Leadership is a feature of quality services. It influences libraries performance. Where a library has a good leadership, the staff is more motivated to perform better and therefore provide quality user-centred services.

Continuous improvement was ranked fifth and viewed as important factor influencing quality of service. There is need for a library staff to continuously improve the services. The study found that the library was ISO certified.

Feedback and performance measurement were ranked sixth. The two factors were both rated among the important features that were necessary in provision

of quality services. Libraries quality service provision is dependent of the feedback that they receive. By setting standards of measurement the library is able to know how it is performing.

Error free system and support of chief executive were ranked very low. This can be attributed to the fact that errors or mistakes may occur, and sometimes be dispelled through knowledge and good communication skills. To error is human. However if mistakes are not corrected then they will trigger dissatisfaction from the users.

Quality service is about continuous improvement, with the right knowledge, failed products can be rectified and individuals may learn to avoid repeating the mistakes. On the other hand as much as the chief executive may be the overall manager not only for heading company operations but also for knowing what's going on in it, he has to rely on others in areas like operations. His good leadership which was ranked high and feedback from quality staff excellent quality services may be possible. For this reasons the respondents did not rate them high enough but were still considered as aspects that affect quality of services.

Obstacles to Quality

The respondents were asked to indicate the factors existing in the library that hindered delivery of quality services or influenced negatively the way the library provided the services. The results are indicated in Table 2.

Table-2: Obstacle to Quality of Services in the Library

Factors	Percentage. Yes	Percentage. No	Rating	Total No.
Low Consideration of Users needs	90%	10%	3	100%
Automation/ICT	93.3%	6.7%	2	100%
Low Consultative Decision-Making	96.6%	3.4%	1	100%
Staff Motivation	86.6%	13.3%	4	100%
Low adoption of new Technology	73.3%	26.7%	5	100%

Among the factors cited by staff that contributed to low quality of the services as perceived by users were; lack of consultative decision-making which was viewed as a major hindrance. The users felt that they were not always consulted by staff for certain aspects of services that interested them. For instance in matters of collection development they were not consulted on their information needs. Consultations were also low among the management and subordinates thus being ranked highest feature affecting quality services with 96.6%.

This was followed by lack of computerization and automation of the services at 93.3%.Most of the

services was still provided manually for instance circulation. The library was using an integrated management system Vubis Smart that was being implemented in phases.

Other factors that the users felt were hindering quality of service were inadequate consideration of users with 90% respondents. User-centred services starts with the user. A study of a user's needs ought to be done comprehensively. User needs to satisfaction is what contributes to quality services.

Staff motivation is one aspect many managers overlook and this had 86.6% respondents. The ability to

motivate employees is one of the greatest skills a manager can possess since motivation is not just about money but much more than that. Keeping staff motivated is an important element of not only getting the most out of the employees, but also in retaining the best employees through a combination of factors such as consultative involvement, communication, recognition, good working conditions among a variation of factors.

Low adoption of new technology was also named as a contributing factor to poor service with 73.3% of the respondents citing it. For quality services provision to be effective, adoption of ICT is encouraged since many of the services operate on the ICT infrastructure.

The main obstacles to implementation of quality user services in the library had been identified by the respondents in order of priority as: low consultative decision making, inadequate automation, low consideration of user, low staff motivation, low adoption of new technology.

If the above issues were to be addressed, they would contribute significantly to quality services.

Ways of Improving Quality of the Services Provided by the Library

For the library to provide quality services, the respondent recommended the improvement of the following service aspects of quality;

- Increase library collection,
- Increase personnel,
- Improve library environment,
- Introduce variety of services,
- Increase internet speeds and coverage radius,
- Management/leadership should be involved,
- Automate the library services.

These aspects were also considered by respondents as crucial in ensuring quality library services [5]. Today's business and services environment is such that managers must plan strategically to maintain a hold in the market. Customers are placing more value on quality of services than the prices. The library needs to endeavour to provide quality user-centred services to ensure the users' needs are met. What works well for certain users may not necessarily be viewed as quality by another group. The Management of Nairobi University Library should start by carrying out a survey of the user services to determine the areas that require improvement.

Apart from the issues raised by users as determinants of client-centred satisfaction, there are other aspects such as; adequate finding aids, accuracy of

answers, improving accessibility and ease of the services that are a hindrance to quality services.

In addition to, increasing collection, the collection should be sufficient, relevant and current. The library should also have improved methods of information retrieval to facilitate ease of access to information. The speeds of Internet connections in the libraries are very low and this needs to be improved as well as increasing remote connectivity of online services and electronic resources.

Moreover, it is important to document and analyse customer feedback reports on the quality of services provided. This technique is necessary because what is quality to one user may not be evidently quality to another.

Therefore the University of Nairobi library management should encourage users to take a fresh look at the services provided as it is a useful approach in finding evidence for improving quality.

The above would enable the library to perform better and therefore lead to user satisfaction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A library has a crucial role in ensuring that the needs of the customers are met, by carefully analysing the customer's needs and determining whether it is satisfying those needs. The library needs to continuously assess its performance in service delivery and make improvements. For Nairobi university library to effectively provide user-centred quality services, the study makes the following recommendations:-

- Continuously update user needs and carry periodic user studies
- Continuously develop and train the staff.
- Continuously monitor changes occurring in the large environment to compete globally.
- Improve the collection by covering more areas.
- Automation of the library services
- Increase awareness of quality services.
- Performance measurement.
- Tracking complaints and responding to them,
- Publicize news or changed services,
- Develop user and staff training materials,
- Increase remote access hotspots.

The users are becoming conscious of the quality of services that they want the library to provide to them. The library should focus on providing the best services possible and be willing to change to serve its customers.

CONCLUSION

The study established that user perception of quality centred services was low with majority not satisfied with the services the library provided. The staff and users reported that factors such as collection, space, courtesy from staff, relevance, promptness of services and speed were crucial to ensuring quality of services. However, the absence of aspects such as computerization of the library, low staff motivation and poor adoption to technology were affecting the quality of the library services negatively. They recommended the improvement of such features to improve quality of the services.

It is important that a survey of user needs be carried out on regular basis to determine the current needs of the users and thus improve the quality of the services given. The results of user studies will provide features of quality services that should be captured and implemented. The library should strive to provide quality services by acting upon complaints from users and by regularly evaluating its performance. This will enable the library to provide quality services and thus be able to retain its customers and meet its obligations to the University.

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