9-1-2011

Reality versus Expectations: A Survey of University of the Punjab's Libraries Using SERVQUAL

Alia Arshad
University of the Punjab, aliast2002@yahoo.co.in

Kanwal Ameen
University of the Punjab

Reality versus Expectations: A Survey of University of the Punjab's Libraries Using SERVQUAL

Alia Arshad
Punjab University Library
University of the Punjab
Lahore, Pakistan

Dr. Kanwal Ameen
Chairperson
Department of Library and Information Science
University of the Punjab
Lahore Pakistan

Introduction

Cullen (2001) pointed out that "Modern libraries face crises of survival and development due to advanced modern information management systems and competition from vendors, publishers, mass media, online services and internet". User's expectations have increased as a result of rapid development of advanced information technology, increasing generation of new knowledge and information availability from both printed as well online media. DeSaez (2002) mentioned that there is greater need to satisfy customer's wants and expectations. Customer care particularly got importance in business and retailing organizations due to social and economic changes in the last 40 years. Efforts should be made to know-what are customer's wants, when they want services, and how they want services.

Assessment of libraries service quality is a first step for exploring customer's perceptions and expectations of a total quality management programme. Improvement of services and application of quality principles is a next step. However, customer is paramount in defining quality of services. Parasuraman, Zeithmal & Berry (1985) also asserted the fact that "quality is based solely on user's perceptions and all other judgments are irrelevant". Sey et, al. (1996), found that "quality comes from the people who have used the service and not the service provider; hence the information about quality of services in libraries is of subjective nature" (p. 467). Parasuraman, Zeithmal and Berry (1985) mentioned that service quality perceptions result from comparison of customer's expectations against perceptions

Perceptions are reality which presents actual situation of organization's services but may be influenced due to internal and external factors. Hernon and Altman

(1998) found that" 'Perceptions' are the impressions formed when an individual encounters with the library" (p. 9). Perceptions are not static, they may change depending on user's experience moving up with positive experience and down with negative experience. The factors that form user's perceptions were investigated by Lilly & Usherwood (2000), they found that "user's experience, past experience, language and present motivational state or goals for the future influence our perception of the present. Past learning has a significant influence on our perception".

On the other hand literature on service quality shows that 'expectations' are pre-trial beliefs before experiencing a particular service. Quinn (1997) stated that "customer's expectations are based on such factors such as personal service philosophy, customer's personal needs, implicit service promises, word- of- mouth communication and customer's past experience" (p. 360).

Today libraries particularly university libraries have a dire need to assess user's perceptions and expectations of quality library services in order to redesign their services and reorient their collection. Libraries need to ensure that their services both meet customer's needs and expectations to the highest degree. Practical tools have also been developed for the assessment of customer's expectations and perceptions of service quality.

SERVQUAL

Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithmal (1988) first developed the SERVQUAL instrument to measure customer's expectations and perceptions of service quality. It is a 22 item instrument based on five dimensions possessing different service quality attributes. Users perceived and expected service levels are asked along seven point likert scale. In the beginning, it was widely used in business and retailing organizations for their service quality assessment, but its applications were also known to be found in public sector organizations-higher education institutions, health organizations, libraries, etc. Nitecki (1996) first adapted SERVQUAL instrument for three library services-reference, interlibrary loan and reserve service of an academic library. The five dimensions of service quality as defined by Parasuraman, et al. (1988) are given below:

- Reliability - The ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
- Responsiveness - The willingness to help customers and provide prompt Service
- Assurance - The knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence
- Empathy - The caring individualized attention given to customers
- Tangibles - The appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication material.

The 22 statements of questionnaire indicating different service attributes and their relevant dimensions also have been mentioned in Table 1.

Table 1. *Service Quality Dimensions and Service Attributes*

Sr. No	Dimensions	Statements
1.	Responsiveness	Providing prompt service to users
2.	Responsiveness	Willingness to help users
3.	Responsiveness	Keeping users informed when services will be informed
4.	Responsiveness	Readiness to respond to user's questions

No.	Dimension	Statement
5.	Assurance	Library staff who are consistently courteous
6.	Assurance	Library staff who have the knowledge to answer customer's questions
7.	Assurance	Assuring customers of the accuracy and confidentiality of their transactions
8.	Assurance	Library staff who instill confidence in customers
9.	Empathy	Library staff who deal with users in caring fashion
10.	Empathy	Library staff who understands the needs of their users
11.	Empathy	Convenient library hours
12.	Empathy	Library staff have the user's best interests at heart
13.	Empathy	Giving customers individual attention
14.	Reliability	Providing services at the promised time
15.	Reliability	Maintaining error-free user and catalog records
16.	Reliability	Providing services as promised
17.	Reliability	Performing services right the first time
18.	Reliability	Dependability in handling customers' service problems
19.	Tangibles	Attractive appearance of library materials and equipment
20.	Tangibles	Visually appealing facilities
21.	Tangibles	Library staff who have a neat, professional appearance
22.	Tangibles	Modern looking equipment

Research Methodology

This section presents the research methods employed to get the objectives of the study. The procedures used for determination of sample size, selection of sample; research design of questionnaire and data collection are discussed. Depending upon the size of population and the time available, the researcher decided to choose 'User Surveys' as method of investigation. There are many advantages of using 'Surveys' as a research method as Sea et al (1996) pointed out that "the surveys can easily be distributed to a large number of people and thus enable the researcher to make valid judgments about whole population".

Determination of Sample Size

University of the Punjab has 12 faculties comprising 30,592 students. The targeted population of this study consists of 16,050 students. The researcher used the following formula to determine sample size for the students.

n =

n =

n=390

Where 'N' is the population size of the research study and 'n' is the sample size to be taken and 'e' is the degree of the precision in the above mentioned formula. Hence the desired sample size obtained was 390 of the population consisting of

16,050 students.

Sampling Procedure

The type of sampling design used in this study was Stratified Random Sampling. Babbie (2002) defines Stratified sampling as:

> The grouping of the units composing a population into homogenous groups (or strata) before sampling. The procedure which may be used in conjunction with simple random, systematic, or cluster sampling, improves the representativeness of a sample at least in terms of the stratification variables (p.52).

The targeted population was stratified into 12 strata of different faculties in the University. The stratifying variable used in this study was 'Type of Faculty'. Respondents were first classified into homogeneous groups of 'Faculty of Arts and Humanities', 'Faculty of Behavioral & Social Sciences', 'Faculty of Economics & Management Sciences' and so on. After stratification of population into 12 strata each strata was further divided into corresponding departments, institutes, colleges and centers. There are total 66 departments in 12 strata of faculties. There were eight departments in first stratum, four in second stratums and so on.

The required sample size of respondents was proportionally allocated to 12 strata of faculties. Iarossi (2006) provided formula for the proportional allocation of respondents to each stratum has been given as follows:

$ni \ n=$

Where Ni is the population size of the *ith* stratum, n is the desired sample size of the population, N is the population size and 'ni' is the ith stratum sample size. The sample size of the first stratum 'Faculty of Arts & Humanities' was determined by using formula given above:

Ni = 390

Ni = 18

As a result, 18 respondents were chosen from the first stratum and selected randomly from the combined list of all 8 Departments of 'Faculty of Arts & Humanities'. The respondents were proportionally allocated to each stratum of 12 faculties and selected randomly by using random numbers table from each stratum separately. The sampling procedure for the stratification of faculties, selection of respondents through proportional allocation and random selection has been mentioned in detail in Table 2.

Table 2. *Proportionally Stratified Random Sampling of Respondents*

Faculties	No. of Departments	No. of Students in Departments	Sample of Students Selected
1. Arts & Humanities	8	758	18
2. Behavioral & Social Sciences	4	843	20
3. Economics. and	5	1325	32

Management Sci.			
4. Education	2	1564	38
5. Law	1	650	16
6. Science	14	3651	89
7. Life Sciences	11	1345	33
8. Engineering & Technology	4	1097	27
9. Commerce	2	2983	72
10. Islamic Studies	2	477	12
11.Oriental Learning	11	520	13
12.Pharmacy	2	837	20
Total	66	16,050	390

Questionnaire Design and Data Collection

The researcher used the SERVQUAL instrument' revised version developed by Parasuraman, Zeithmal and Berry (1991) for assessment of user's perceptions and expectations of libraries quality services. The questionnaire contained needed biographic data and a set of 22 statements enquiring the expected and perceived level of services on a scale. The seven point semantic differential scale was used for measuring user's expectations and perceptions ranging from low of 1 to high of 7. An open ended question was also asked to list their expectations of an ideal library.

Questionnaires were pre tested before their distribution. After respondent's satisfaction, these were distributed personally amongst students by visiting the departments and libraries. Students were contacted with the assistance of faculty members and library staff. Total 390 questionnaires were distributed and the respondents who returned questionnaires were 338 out of 390. The response rate was quite positive for the study.

Strata Sample Size and Response Rate

The sample of the study comprises 390 students from the 12 faculties of the University of the Punjab. Sample size and response rate is given in Table 3.

The overall response rate was 87%, which is quite good for such a survey. Four incomplete questionnaires were not included for analysis and interpretation. Total 334 questionnaires were included for data analysis, while one of the respondents among 334 did not mention faculty status.

Table 3. *Strata Sample Size and Percentage of Response Rate by type of Faculties*

Sr. No.	Faculties	Sample of Students	No. of students responded	Response Rate (%)
1.	Arts & Humanities	18	12	67
2.	Behavioral & Social Sciences	20	14	70
3.	Eco. & Management Sciences	32	26	81.25
4.	Education	38	28	74
5.	Law	16	14	87
6.	Science	89	80	90
7.	Life Sciences	33	29	88
8.	Engineering & Technology	27	22	81
9.	Commerce	72	68	94
10.	Islamic Studies	12	10	83
11.	Oriental Learning	13	12	92
12.	Pharmacy	20	18	90
	Incomplete Forms		4	
	Missing		1	
	Total	390	338	87 %

Research Questions

1. Which service expectations users consider more significant and want to meet?

2. How were quality library services perceived by university students?

Data Analysis and Results

Biographic Information

A total number of 334 students participated in the survey. Females were in a majority 61.4 %, while males were 38 %. Students from different academic programs were included in the sample study and data revealed that a vast majority comprises of bachelors (45.5 %), masters (42.5 %), while MPhil & Ph.D were (9.9 %) and (1.2 %) respectively.

User's expectations of libraries service quality

Parasuraman et al. (1988) defined expectations as "Expectations are desires or wants of consumers, i.e., what they feel a service provider should offer rather than would offer" (p.17). The overall expectations mean (5.9) on a seven point semantic differential scale shows that the users have very high expectations of service quality of the university's libraries. The expectations of respondents fall in the range of (5.30 to 5.98). The mean and standard deviation of user expectations of all 22 items has been mentioned in Table 4.

Table 4. *Quantitative Analysis of Service Quality Expectations: Rank Wise Analysis*

Rank	Service Quality Attributes	Mean	SD
1.	Library staff who have the knowledge to answer customer's questions.	5.98	3.589
2.	Library staff who instill confidence in their users	5.93	1.631
3.	Convenient library hours	5.87	1.612
4.	Attractive appearance of library materials associated with the service.	5.85	1.535
5.	Library staff who have the user's best interest at heart	5.84	1.743
6.	Library staff who have a neat, professional appearance.	5.80	1.693
7.	Modern equipment	5.75	1.798
8.	Assuring customers of the accuracy and confidentiality of their transactions	5.74	1.714
9.	Library staff who understands the needs of their users	5.72	1.593
10.	Providing service at the promised time Willingness to help users Maintaining error-free user and catalog records	5.68	1.825
11.	Readiness to respond to user's questions Providing prompt service to users Providing services as promised	5.65	1.833
12	Giving customers individual attention	5.63	1.935
13.	Library staff who deal with users in caring fashion	5.61	1.823
14.	Library staff who are consistently courteous Performing service right the first time	5.60	1.729
15.	Keeping users informed when services will be performed	5.59	1.783
16.	Dependability in handling user's service problems	5.57	1.832
17.	Visually appealing facilities	5.55	1.799
18.		5.53	1.829
19.		5.51	1.801
20.		5.49	1.849
21.		5.30	1.948
22.		5.37	1.880

Note. Seven point Likert scale ranging from 1 of 'Strongly disagree' to 7 of 'Strongly agree'. Standard Deviation (SD) < 1 depicts that the variation among respondent's expectations is greater.

Analysis of respondent's most significant expectations of service quality

Data from Table 3 showed that user's top six expectations of quality university libraries services are: Library staff who have the knowledge to answer customer's questions (5.98), Library staff who instill confidence in their users (5.93), Convenient library hours (5.87), Attractive appearance of library materials (5.85), Library staff who have the user's best interest at heart (5.84), Library staff that have a neat and professional appearance (5.80).

The above mentioned respondent's expectations revealed that their priority expectations are related to library staff's knowledge to answer their queries effectively and their ability to develop confidence in users to get better use of library's resources. They also give preference to attractive appearance of both library materials as well as library staff. Respondents also want that library staff should keep their interests as their foremost priority and opening and closing of libraries according to their desires. The respondent's high ranked expectations regarding library staff's different traits show that library should meet these expectations because they mostly encounter with front desk staff. Library staff's academic knowledge and personality play a vital role in developing an impact on their users.

User's perceptions of libraries service quality

User perception is viewed (Hernon & Altman, 1998) as the impressions formed from library experiences about the library services provided to them. The overall mean (4.64) on a seven point scale shows that user's perceptions are not high about the service quality of University's libraries and perceptions mean range from 4.19 to 5.02. The mean and standard deviation of user's perceptions of 22 items are given in Table 4.

Analysis of respondent's perceptions of 22 statements of SERVQUAL instrument shows that perceptions are low as compared to their expectations. Although perceptions about service quality can not be said high, but library features which were perceived high from respondent's opinion in this study are given as follows:

Respondent's high perceived items of service quality

Table 5 shows among 22 statements of questionnaire, only one service quality attribute which was perceived high from respondent's opinion is 'Convenient library hours' (5.02). It depicts the fact that respondents are satisfied with the opening and closing timings of the libraries.

Other service quality attributes which were perceived somewhat high are: Library staff who have the user's best interest at heart (4.92), Library staff who understands the need of their users (4.89), Library staff who are consistently courteous (4.83), Library staff who have neat and professional appearance (4.83).

Somewhat high perceptions of respondents indicate that library performance of these service aspects is good from respondent's opinion. It is important to remember that expectations are in one's imagination and formed before experience that particular library service, while perceptions are reality and depicts the real performance of library services. Slightly high mean score of these service quality aspects shows that university library's timings are according to user's demands.

Respondents have positive perceptions about library staff's taking care of their interests, courteous attitude, their neat dressing, professional look and ability to understand their needs.

Table 5. *Quantitative Analysis of Service Quality Perceptions: Rank wise Analysis*

Rank	Service Quality Attributes	Mean	SD
1.	Convenient library hours Library staff who have the user's best interest at heart	5.02	1.768
2.	Providing service at the promised time	4.92	1.873
3.	Library staff who understands the needs of their users	4.90	2.125
4.	Library staff who are consistently courteous	4.89	1.682
5.	Library staff who have a neat, professional appearance	4.83	2.362
6.	Library staff who deal with users in caring fashion	4.83	1.839
7.	Attractive appearance of library materials associated with the service	4.79	2.046
8.	Performing service right the first time Library staff who instill confidence in their users	4.78	1.713
9.	Library staff who have the knowledge to answer customer's questions	4.72	2.360
10.	Providing prompt service to users	4.72	1.780
11	Willingness to help users	4.70	1.860
12	Maintaining error-free user and catalog records	4.67	1.720
13	Providing services as promised	4.64	1.819
14	Readiness to respond to user's question Keeping users informed when services will be performed	4.55	1.942
15	Giving customer's individual attention Assuring customers of the accuracy and confidentiality of their transactions Dependability in handling user's service problems	4.54	1.871
16	Modern looking equipment	4.48	1.982
17	Visually appealing facilities	4.47	1.872
18		4.47	2.006
19		4.45	1.834
20		4.43	1.869
21		4.25	1.796
22		4.19	1.857

Note. Seven point Likert scale ranging from 1 of 'Strongly disagree' to 7 of 'Strongly agree'. Standard Deviation (SD) < 1 depicts that the variation among respondent's expectations is greater.

Respondent's Least Perceived Items of Library Service Quality

Respondents perceived 'Visually Appealing Facilities' (Mean Score 4.19) and 'Modern looking Equipment' (Mean Score 4.25) least. It shows that libraries have lack of modern equipment and visually attractive facilities. These aspects are related to modern technology i.e., computers, online databases and Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) and physically attractive facilities e.g. furniture, photocopier and printer etc. The least mean score indicates that these library items have low quality from respondent's perspectives and need to be improved

drastically.

Content Analysis of User's Expectations

The respondents were asked through an open-ended question to list their any other expectations, an ideal library should meet. Only 127 out of 334 responded to the question. Response rate (38%) shows that open-ended questions tend to get less response. The expectations of respondents were analyzed using qualitative data analysis software 'X Sight'.

'X Sight' was used for coding, sorting, categorization and reporting of data. The main themes emerged after the initial data analysis of coding, storing and categorization was: physical facilities, library books, modern equipment, library staff, library journals and serials, library timings.

Physical Facilities

The aspect of library services about which highest number of respondents expressed their expectations was 'Physical Facilities'. Besides air conditioned libraries, an important feature of physical facilities is 'Library Space' which is not up to expectations of respondent's departmental libraries. The expectations related to physical facilities of libraries have been mentioned in Table 6.

Table 6. *Physical Facilities*

Expectations	Responses = 48
Library should be spacious with more seating capacity.	14
There should be air-conditioned libraries.	11
Library should be attractive, airy, clean and properly furnished	9
Silence should be strictly observed.	5
There should be facility of combine study in the library.	3
Uninterrupted supply of electricity in the library	3
Separate wooden carrels for students are needed	2
Separate discussion rooms should be provided.	1

Seay et al (1996) in a study found that Tangibles has an important impact on user's perceptions of service quality. Therefore in order to attain high quality service, librarians need to make physical features of libraries up to user's expectations.

Library Books

Respondent's expectations as described in Table 7 regarding collection of books shows that they still feel need for increase in number of current books in the print form with easy access to them.

Table 7. *Library Books*

Expectations	Responses = 41

Expectations	
Book Collection should be enriched with latest editions of books and multiple number of copies	22
There should be more research and science books such as Biochemistry, Biotechnology and books related to Urdu and Pakistani Laws.	6
There should be books for entertainment i.e. English novels,	5
Islamic & Historical literature, Poetry etc.	4
All users should have easy access to all types of books	2
There should be open shelve system in libraries and books be shelved daily.	1
Display of books should be attractive	1
Student should have the right to select some books	

The respondent's expectations in the present study were also obvious in a research study of Nitecki and Hernon (2000), where they want more comprehensive book collection, remote access to collection and proper re shelving of material in a timely manner (p.263).

Modern Equipment

Respondent's comments regarding modern equipment in Table 8 shows that they expect good enough number of computers and fast internet quality services. They also desired that libraries should be automated and Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC)

Table 8. *Modern Equipment*

Expectations	Responses=27
Library should be equipped with modern material and I.T facilities	6
Sufficient number of computers and fast internet service in the library be provided	11
Automation of library and OPAC in the library	5
Free photocopy and economical printer facility	3
Internet facility should be available for the whole library hours	1
Library computers should be updated and CD's of various books should be accessible to students	1
"As a student of literature, the library should provide us with visuals i.e. Movies of related courses for better understanding"	1

should be available. It is because all libraries are not automated; hence do not fulfill the user's needs efficiently. CD's and audio visuals particularly related to English literature should be provided to students in the institutional library.

Library Staff

Respondents mentioned their expectations regarding library staff. Most of the respondents indicated that"Staff should be humble, polite, courteous and friendly to

students". Some respondents also opinioned that there should be more educated, cooperative, well dressed and vigilant staff.

Library Journals and Serials

The respondents expected that latest research and science journals are needed in the library. Some expressed that access to certain journals and thesis should be online but they didn't specify journals. Some respondents indicated that foreign newspapers should be present in department libraries in spite of their presence in the central library of the University that shows the approach of people is so much convenience wanting regarding serials.

Library Hours

Eleven respondents expressed their expectations regarding better library hours. Respondents mentioned that library hours be increased, but did noy mention a specified time to open the library. Four respondents mentioned that the library should remain open until late in the evening, ranging from 6 p.m to 12 p.m.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the improvement of quality university's libraries services are given below. Library authorities and university administration must consider these suggestions in order to provide high quality library services.

Steps should be taken to recruit highly competent, educated and IT skilled staff to satisfy user's increasing needs and expectations. Sufficient budget should be allocated to make physical appearance of departmental library buildings and equipment (furniture) attractive. Libraries should be equipped with modern IT facilities.

Users want easy access to library materials i.e. books, journals, CDs etc. Most of departmental libraries have close shelved system. It must be converted to open shelved for convenient access and browsing of library collection.

Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that although University of the Punjab's libraries are not exceeding user's expectations as compared to their perceptions. However, respondents have good perceptions about library timings; library staff's taking care of their interests, courteous attitude, their neat dressing, professional look and ability to understand their needs. Respondents demanded spacious, air conditioned, attractive and neat libraries. They also want more computers with fast internet services, latest editions as well as multiple copies of textbooks and more research and science books.

User's perceptions and expectations of library service quality helps to know where we are, where we should be and what should be done for the improvement of library services. In view of user's perceptions and expectations librarians can review their service policies and take remedial actions to meet user's expectations.

References

Babbie, E. (2002). *The Practice of Social Research* (8th Ed). Belmont, CA: Cengage Wadsworth.

Cullen, R. (2001). Perspectives on user satisfaction surveys. *Library Trends*, 49(4),662-686.

Elliott, K. M. (1995). A comparison of alternative measures of service quality *Journal of Customer Service in Marketing and Management*, 1(1), 35.

Hernon, P., & Altman, E. (1998). *Assessing service quality: Satisfying the Expectation of library customers.* Chicago: American Library Association.

Iarossi, G. (2006). *The Power of survey design: A User's guide for managing surveys, interpreting results, and influencing respondents*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Lilley, E., & Usherwood, B. (2000). Wanting it all: The relationship between expectations and the public's perceptions of public library services. *Library Management*, 21(1), 13- 24. Retrieved December 5, 2007, from the Emerald databse.

Matthews, J. R. (2004). *Measuring for Results: The dimensions of public library effectiveness*. Westport: Libraries Unlimited.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithmal, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1985). A conceptual model of Service quality and its implications for future research. *Journal of Marketing, 49(4), 41-50. Retrieved December 8, 2007, from the JSTOR database.*

Parasuraman, A., Zeithmal, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). SERVQUAL: A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality. *Journal of Retailing,* 64(1), 12-40. Retrieved December 8, 2007, from the JSTOR database.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithmal, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1991). Refinement and Reassessment of the SERVQUAL scale. *Journal of Retailing*, 67(4), 420- 450. Retrieved December 8, 2007, from the JSTOR database.

Quinn, B. (1997). Adapting service quality concepts to academic libraries. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship,* 359-369. Retrieved January 5, 2008, fromthe ELIN Database.

Zeithmal, V. A., Bitner, M. J., & Gremler, D. D. (2006). *Services Marketing: Integrating Customer Focus across the firm* (4th ED.). Boston: McGraw Hill.