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Users' Perception of the Quality of Public Library Services in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana: An Application of the LibQUAL+ Model.

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Abstract

This study seeks to assess user perception of the quality of public library services in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana using the LibQUAL+ model. Based on a quantitative approach, the study surveyed 180 patrons of public libraries in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana using convenience sampling technique. Data was analyzed using interpretative techniques. The results showed that patrons were dissatisfied with the quality and depth of equipment and facilities (conducive environment for learning, internet connectivity and computers) and current library materials (print and electronic). A major concern was the absence of internet connectivity and digital collections. Among other things, the study recommends that public librarians would need to vigorously market their services to the general public and relevant stakeholders since the success of marketing the importance and role of public libraries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is likely to increase return on investments and also justify subsequent funding and support.

Keywords: *public libraries; user perception; libQUAL+; greater accra region; ghana.*

Introduction

The world over, public sector organizations are responsible for providing essential goods and services for the benefit of the citizenry. The provision of such essential services is most often

than not plagued with unsatisfactory quality most especially in developing countries like Ghana. Public libraries which are a component of public-sector organizations are information systems which are intended to contribute to the socio-economic and cultural development of individuals in society (Alemna, 2006).

There are so many definitions of a public library but IFLA (2017) renders a more comprehensive conceptual definition of a public library as:

“An organization established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government, or through some other form of community organization. It provides access to knowledge, information and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services and is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status and educational attainment” (p. 2).

Quality delivery of public library services is not a privilege in a civilized and democratic society - it is a legitimate expectation. Therefore, to satisfy the need of patrons in accessing information, and carrying out research work in a public library will require the provision of quality reading materials, facilities and services (Kim-Soon, Nurulhanira & Abd Rahman, 2013). Despite this, Chigwamba (2008) posits that, “...many public services negotiate a tight rope between effective service delivery vis-à-vis limited resources” (p. 2).

Service quality has become an emerging trend in libraries. Wang and Shieh, (2006) define service quality as, “the difference in terms of meeting or exceeding customer expectation” (p. 195). Hinson (2006) adds that, “service quality compares perceptions to what consumers should expect from an organization and how well the firm performs in delivering the service” (p. 117). Since this study is focused on examining the perception of patrons who are major users of public libraries and their services, the library service quality in this regard could be defined as the overall excellence of library facilities, resources and services that satisfy patrons’ expectations.

Historically, in the public sector, the concept of competition was more difficult to appreciate because government utilities have most frequently been the sole supplier of unique services, which are viewed as a “public good” (Chigwamba, 2008, p. 4). However, changes in technology have made it possible for private libraries to compete in significant ways with publicly funded libraries, by providing easily accessible information resources and services.

Public libraries must therefore evaluate their effectiveness to remain competitive and retain public support and funding. Rapid changes in technology have also been accompanied by an environment of very limited public funding for many competing public services, such as security, health care and education. Public libraries can no longer rely on stable funding for their services from governments and other donor agencies and therefore will need to demonstrate added value to the community and to potential donors if they are to retain a reasonable share of available funds (Coffman, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

User satisfaction within the context of public libraries is a concept derived from service quality which seeks to determine whether patrons are satisfied with the services and information resources offered them. Service quality has frequently been viewed as a set of evaluation techniques and strategies that belong to the business world and had nothing to do with libraries. Therefore, the earliest challenge to performance measurement in libraries was the absence of a benchmark for directly quantifying service quality. In the 21st century however, the global rivalry among libraries to deliver quality services to satisfy the desire of patrons has necessitated the evaluation of library services. Service quality has therefore, become increasingly important in developing countries today, including Ghana.

Despite the numerous studies on service quality in several libraries in developed countries, as early as the year 2012, there have been very few references in the application of the LibQUAL+ model in public libraries in developing countries. A greater percentage of the application of the LibQUAL+ model have mostly focused on academic libraries (e.g. Bea, Asogwa, Ezema, & Ugwuanyi 2014; Poll & Payne, 2006; Sahu, 2007; Snoj & Petermanec, 2001). This assertion is corroborated by Dzandza (2017) when she intimates that in recent years, research carried out by most information professionals and scholars in Ghana have mostly focused on academic and special libraries to the neglect of public libraries. A cursory look at the extant literature available revealed that no study on service quality in the Ghanaian public libraries space employed the use of the LibQUAL+ model.

The Ghana Library Authority (GhLA) which has been mandated by law to establish, equip, manage, and maintain public libraries in Ghana declared the year 2019, as a year of reading. This is an initiative put in place to promote reading among Ghanaians (Ghana Library Authority [GhLA], 2018). In order to achieve this goal, it is imperative that the necessary measures are put in place in order to achieve this goal. It is for these reasons that this paper

seeks to explore user perception of the present quality of reading materials, facilities and services of public libraries in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana with the aim of making recommendations on how service quality in public libraries could be improved in the face of dwindling resources. This study is even more imperative since public libraries have been earmarked to help developing countries like Ghana in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (U.N, 2015). The findings from this study would reveal strategies by which public libraries could be empowered and adequately resourced to improve the quality of their services in line with achieving the United Nations SDGs.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study was to determine users' perception of the quality of public library services in the Greater Accra Region. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. Determine patrons' perception of the availability and quality of information resources in public libraries in the Greater Accra Region.
- ii. Determine patrons' perception of the availability and quality of equipment and facilities in public libraries in the Greater Accra Region.
- iii. Determine patrons' perception of the quality of services provided by library staff in public libraries in the Greater Accra Region.

Theoretical Insights into Service Quality in Libraries using the Library Quality Model (LibQUAL+)

A library only differs from other businesses in the products and services it delivers. Its success or failure is largely measured by its ability to spot, follow and shape the market (Li, 2006). Public services are currently engaging in activities to try to define new metrics that better describe their service activities as compared to the archaic method of relying on "...simple metrics such as counting book issues and footfall as a way of quantifying and justifying services" (Halpin, Rankin, Chapman & Walker, 2015, p. 5). Increased pressure from funding authorities, accreditation agencies and demands from the users of services has compelled libraries, to move towards more outcome-based assessment instead of relying merely on input, output or resource metrics (Blixrud, 2012).

Outcome measures depict how well an organization serves its patrons. One approach being employed in libraries in the United States and Canada is the LibQUAL+ model. The LibQUAL+ model is an emerging standardized measure of library service quality across

libraries. Green and Kyrillidou (2011), define LibQUAL+ short form of (Library Quality) as a suite of services that libraries use to solicit, track, understand, and act upon users' opinions of service quality.

LibQUAL+ evolved from the SERVQUAL instrument, which is grounded in the "Gap Theory of Service Quality" formulated by the marketing research team comprising of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry for assessing service quality in the profit-making sector (Blixrud, 2012). The LibQUAL+ study instrument measures library users' minimum, perceived, and desired levels of service quality across three dimensions namely: Effect of Service, Information Control, and Library as a Place (Mikitish, 2011).

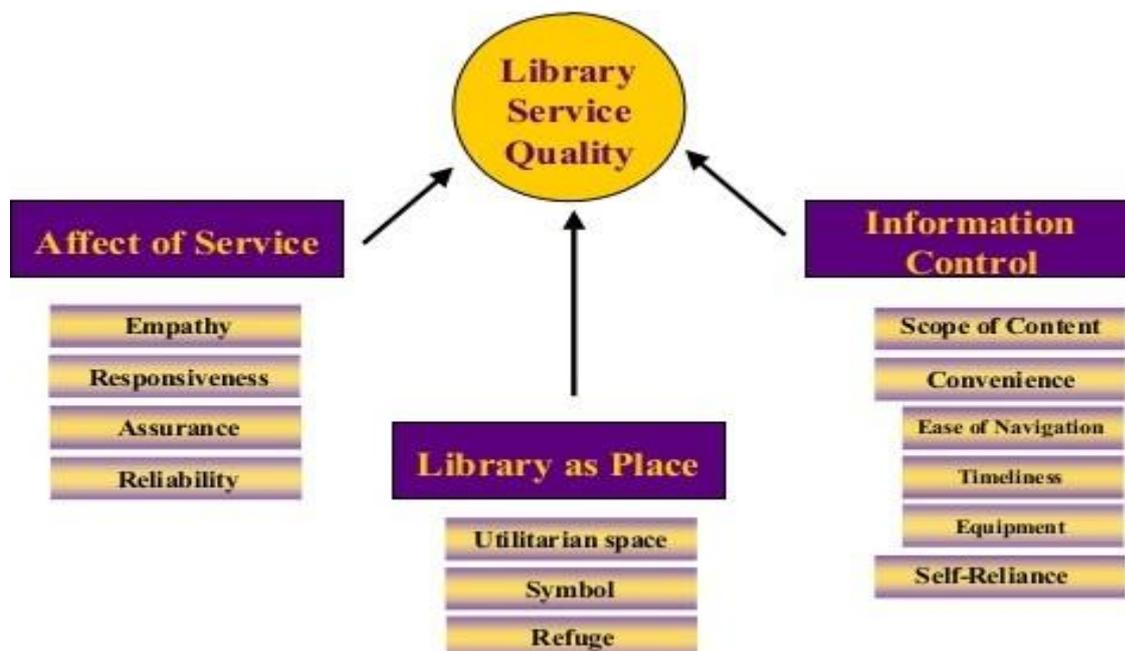


Figure 1: LibQUAL+ Model (Source: Association of Research Libraries. "General Information." LibQUAL+ (2000). LibQUAL+.org)

This study draws on the LibQUAL+ model which is found useful in:

- Fostering a culture of excellence in providing quality library service
- Helping libraries to better understand user perceptions of library service quality
- Collecting and interpreting library user feedback systematically over time
- Providing libraries with comparable assessment information from peer institutions
- Identifying best practices in library service and

- Enhancing library staff with analytical skills for interpreting and acting on data. (Libqual+.org, 2017).

In adopting this model, the article explores three key themes, namely information control (collection and materials), Library as a place (Space and Facilities) and Effect of services (Services delivered by Staff).

Green and Kyrillidou (2011) estimate that, since the year 2000, more than 1, 200 libraries have employed the LibQUAL+ instrument in their libraries. They include colleges and university libraries, health sciences libraries, academic law libraries, and very few public libraries – some through various consortia and others as independent participants. Using the LibQUAL+ model allows for a better understanding of users’ expectations, desires, and perceptions of library services (Libqual+.org, 2017). Libraries use these assessment data to identify their strengths and to determine areas that require improvement. The information gained from analysis of survey results is used in strategic planning processes to ensure that library services are in tune with the expectations of patrons.

Related Literature

The review ascertains what is already known about “user perception” of the quality of services delivery in public libraries and to describe the current understanding of research objectives by examining similar studies. The research thus reviewed literature that pertains to the topic in question and categorized the review under the following sub-topics.

Resources for the Provision of Quality Public Library Services.

Several researches have been conducted on the availability of resources with regards to personnel, equipment, facilities and library materials. Extant literature have reported the decline or non-availability of library resources.

Information Resources

Information resources within the context of this study encompasses reading materials; both print and electronic. To worsen the plight of public libraries is the issue of their depleting stock, most of which are either outdated or worn out. Due to inadequate funds, most public libraries are unable to replenish their dusty idle shelves with new books.

Troll (2011) is of the view that the decline in acquisitions may be due to the heightened cost of materials. Muir and Douglas (2001) corroborate Troll (2011) finding when they recount how within the period of 1990 to 1995, spending on books by public libraries rose slightly from £103 million to £113 million. This 10 percent rise in spending on reading materials brought about a significant decline in the number of books purchased because the average price of a book increased by 25 percent.

A study conducted by Agyen-Gyasi and Atta-Obeng (2010) at the Ashanti Regional Library revealed, the total book stock of the library is 15,353 as compared to 21,000 volumes at the inception of the library in 1954. This represents a 26.9% decline of book stock in the Ashanti Regional Library.

Needless to say, the ad-hoc means of public library collection seems to deprive the blind and partially visually impaired of most printed material accessible to sighted people. Bigdeli (2009) reports that none of the public libraries in India acquires braille materials for the visually impaired patrons. They therefore depend on people who can see to read for them. Bigdeli (2009) estimates that, the percentages for different audio-visual, electronic, and printed finding aids in libraries starts 37 from 0.98 per cent and increases gradually, up to 33.3 per cent in one item only. He describes it as being so low that they almost seem ‘non-existent’.

Muir and Douglas (2001, p. 267) suggest that “...the failure to increase book stocks would ultimately lead to a reduction in choice of reading materials for readers”. Likewise, the reduction in library space. In view of this, libraries are operating with fewer volumes of all collections per users than in the past.

Equipment and Facilities

Equipment and facilities are essential in the provision of public library services. The library service quality (LibQUAL+.org, 2017) identifies equipment and facilities as a determinant of satisfaction and delight of library users. These include the library space, amenities, facilities and equipment such as photocopiers, scanners and computers.

Public libraries need funds and articulated substitute cycles for all these equipment. Troll (2011) is of the view that, “the capital budget is often insufficient to replace equipment before they become obsolete. Public libraries must therefore find the financial resources to replace equipment purchased with one-time funding from grants” (p. 107).

Similarly, following years of reducing or eliminating user and staff spaces to accommodate growing physical collections, more and more libraries are resorting to virtual storage to resolve their problem of space (Troll, 2011). The issue, however, has to do with funding offsite storage from an already depleted public library budget.

Staffing and Services

Adequate staff with the requisite knowledge, skills, competence and efficiency constitute the core and critical resource of any public library. According to Bohlander *et al.* (2001), human capital includes the individual's level of capability, their skills and knowledge that leads to effectiveness in an organization.

Qualified staff are thus needed in this knowledge-based economy where the needs of patrons keeps on changing (Asante & Alemna, 2015). Certainly, the knowledge acquired and its application form the basis for quality library services delivery. Hence, for public libraries to ensure quality service delivery to patrons depends on having qualified, effective, and highly performing staff (Kont & Jantson, 2013).

The case is, however, different with public libraries. Staffing has been one big issue public libraries continue to face. This view is held by Troll (2011, p. 106) when she asserts that, "the overall staff capacity is slowly declining, but many libraries are hiring more people to maintain the increasing array of library information technologies".

Issak (2000) opines that the low salaries offered in the public sector as compared to those in the private sector is a source of worry which probably accounts for the poor quality and limited number of staff in public libraries. Alemna (2000) concludes that, this could possibly explain why most of the qualified staff in public libraries will leave for greener pastures.

Troll (2011) cites a contrary view when he asserts that "...the need to retrain staff to keep pace with technological change adds to the burden of finding increased funding for training public library staff in an already strained budget" (p. 106). Public libraries are operating with fewer staff per users than in the past, but again there is no context in which to determine if this is good or bad unless we can establish a relation between low level of staffing and the quality of public library services delivery (Troll, 2011).

According to Michnik (2014), when the public library staff cannot rise up to expectations due to a lack of resources, the situation is different and this is could be attributed to financial constraints. IFLA (2017) opines that, libraries can only fulfil their roles satisfactorily to the

general public when they are adequately resourced. This should not just be done when the library is established but also on a continuing basis.

In summary, public libraries require the right quantum of resources continuously in order to deliver quality library services to its clientele. This implies providing current materials in all formats to conform to the ever-changing needs of the diverse user groups and individuals of public libraries. This includes newly-published and replacement of materials. It should also provide adequate levels of staff with appropriate educational and professional qualifications.

Furthermore, sufficient funds will be required to support, expand, and sustain existing services while introducing new services. Whatever methods of service delivery that are required for public libraries to meet its vital role in the community and enable it to sustain and develop services that meet the demands of the local community, public libraries would require an adequate and appropriate mix of resources in a very timely manner.

User Perception of the Quality of Public Library Services.

As initially mentioned, service quality as a tool for assessing the quality of services was limited to profit making organizations. However, several authors (e.g. Bea *et al.*, 2016; Blixrud, 2012; Chunzhi, 2009; Pendramnia, Modiramani & Ghavami Ghanbarabadi, 2012) have similarly tried applying the concept of service quality in non-profit organizations such as libraries. According to Sohail and Raza (2012), the concept of service quality in the library setting can be defined as the “difference between library users’ expectations and perceptions of service performance as against the reality of the service” (p. 2).

Service quality means being able to view services from the user’s point of view and then meeting the customers’ expectation for services. Quality becomes a big issue when public libraries try to expand their scope and improve their services. Therefore, identifying new ways to conceptualize quality and achieving them are current challenges for most public libraries. In a public library, quality may be recognized by the patrons in terms of prompt delivery or error free services.

According to Bhatti and Khan (2015) users’ perception of the quality of library services is an appropriate instrument to examine the role of libraries in providing effective information services to its users. Adding that “...It provides feedback for library administrators to evaluate library services and bring the necessary improvements required” (p.3).

Asogwa *et al.* (2014) posit that, in most developing countries, public libraries input and output statistics have for centuries served as a recognized form of performance measurement. Librarians have been relying on accumulation and analysis of user statistics as a way of evaluating their contributions. This approach was convenient in achieving their mission of evaluating the quality of library services by measuring the size of collections, number of visitors, issuing and returning statistics or interlibrary loan, size of budget and staff strength.

Contrary to this view, Mathews (2004) states that “it is no longer enough to accept the ‘goodness’ of a library without offering justification based upon empirical evidence (p. 13). In confirmation of the above, Sarkar asserts that “the customer is the real authority who can clearly dictate the quality of a product of service provided” (as cited in Raza and Sohail, 2012, p. 2). They conclude that, an assessment of how well a library succeeds in today’s public library space is largely dependent on the user as a judge of quality.

Numerous researches have been carried out about service quality in the library environment. For example, Martensen and Gronholdt (2003) in their study on how to improve library users’ perceived quality, satisfaction and loyalty in Danish libraries reviewed literature and surveyed focus groups. Their study revealed that the key determinants for quality library services include the library environment, collections of printed publications, electronic resource, technical facilities and effective library services.

Wang and Shieh (2006) in their attempt to identify the “relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction” recount a series of factor analysis on over 100 variables and discovered that the dimensions of library service quality include; waiting time, electronic services guidance, staff (including obtainment courtesy, accessibility of services, and friendliness), normal operations of equipments, handling time of data delivery, library buildings and environment, library facilities (such as drinking fountains) and information that met users’ needs.

Similarly, an exploratory study conducted by Chang and Hseih (1996) on the perception of library service quality which focus on key clienteles that included staff and students from 21 universities in Taiwan indicate that competence, moderation, convenience, tangibles, communications and sufficiency of staff were key determinants in the level of service quality in libraries.

Additionally, general findings on a study conducted by Iwhiwhu and Okorodudu (2012) on user satisfaction with public library information resources, facilities, and services at the Edo

State Central Library, Benin-City, Nigeria revealed that library users were satisfied with some facilities but not pleased with the information resources and services of the Edo state central library. This is as result of the poor state of information resources and insufficient services rendered by the library staff, tied with their poor attitude to work.

In the same vein, studies by Nzivo (2012) indicates that low confidence level in retrieval skills and abilities, unfamiliarity with electronic resources, outdated books and user education challenges are the perceived key impediments to access to library services and information resources in the Kenya National Library Services (KNLS).

Majid *et al.* (2001) employed a questionnaire in their study which sought to investigate all the possible factors that contribute greatly to library performances. The results revealed that collections, equipments and physical facilities were considered the most significant issues.

Contrary to the above findings on measuring service quality in libraries, Kaunda (2013) asserts that some literature endorse library user needs and user satisfaction indicators based on the perception of the author instead of seeking the users' views of the facility after his study of users' perception of the Malawian National Library Services. Kaunda posits that useful as these indicators may be, they may not sufficiently cover the areas that are key to users. He further adds that, the literature contains some user need and satisfaction indicators that are undefined and thus open to dissenting interpretations. Kaunda (2013) citing an example seeks to find out "what exactly constitutes a 'welcoming environment' for a library?" (p. 33).

In conclusion, user needs appraisals and user satisfaction measurement outputs aid library management to "set strategic objectives that help meet users' needs; earmark priority areas; pre-empt problems; justify present funding or increased financing from administrators, policy makers, donors etc. and allocate resources in such a way as to ensure that the library concentrates, on 'what makes a difference' to users" (McClure as cited in Steward, 1997).

Study Setting

The Greater Accra Region has one central library and six (6) branch libraries namely: Osu, Dansoman, Laterbiokorshie, Tema, Dodowa and Teshie branch libraries. Being public libraries, they offer similar services and facilities to residents of the Region of Accra; national and international visitors, tourists, people of varied age groups, occupation and education. All these categories of people can attain membership of, or simply frequent, the library.

These libraries are situated around the headquarters and for that matter are most likely to have greater access to more resources than the remaining regional, metropolitan, municipal and district libraries in Ghana. Like all other public libraries in Ghana, they also depend on government subvention to provide free public library services and are open to larger populations than most public libraries in the other regions and districts of Ghana.

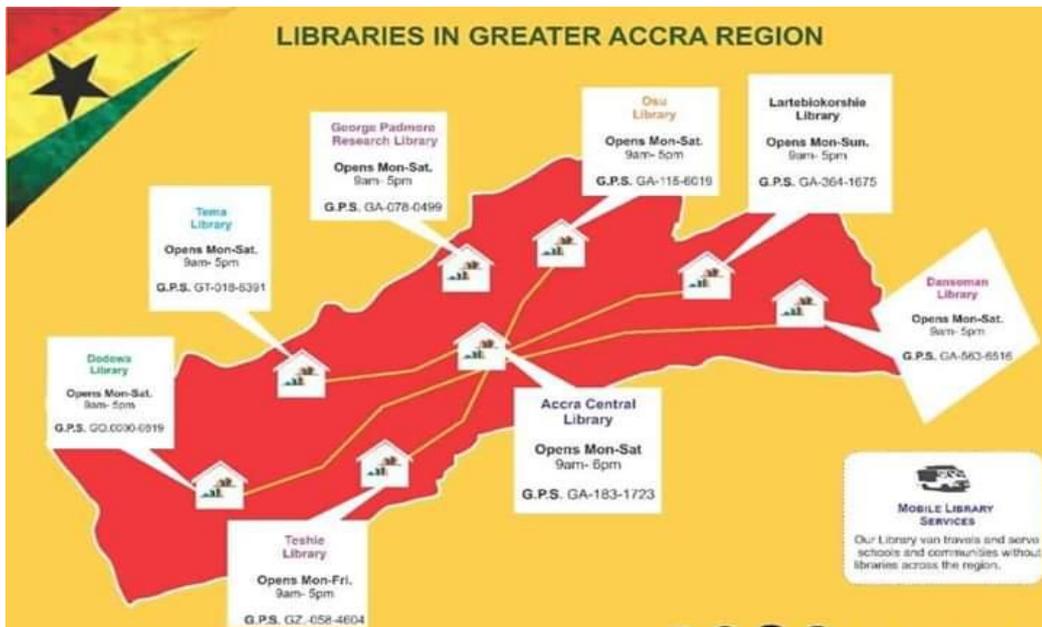


Figure 2: Map depicting the Location of Public Libraries in the Greater Accra Region (Source: Ghana Library Authority, 2017)

Methodology

The study adopted a survey method. The instrument used for the survey is a questionnaire which was adopted and modified from the LibQUAL+ survey tool from which respondents were asked to indicate by ticking the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with some statements regarding the quality of public library service in the Greater Accra Region based on a 5-point Likert type scale (1= strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = neutral/not certain; 4 = disagree; and 5 = strongly disagree). The statements were divided into four main sections. Using the Likert scale enabled the researchers to measure the intensity of views from respondents. The survey was carried out in the Accra Central Library and its branches namely; Osu, Dansoman, Laterbiokorshie, Tema, Dodowa and Teshie. The study was precisely limited to only patrons from the adults' section of the seven (7) libraries under study who used the library for research and borrowing of materials. As adults who were direct users and beneficiaries of public library services, they were in a better position to determine the quality or otherwise of the resources, facilities and services rendered by public libraries in the Region. The total number of public

library users is 1, 980. The researcher arrived at this figure by striking an average of the monthly user statistics from the seven libraries understudy based on the daily patronage statistics kept by the Ghana Library Authority (GhLA). The sampling method adopted for this study was the convenience sampling technique. 10% of the user population who were readily available and willing to discuss their perception of public library services were purposively sampled which therefore makes a total of 190 respondents as the sample size. All questionnaires were administered in the premises of the public libraries understudy. Out of 190 questionnaires that were administered, 180 were successfully completed giving a response rate of 94.7%. Analysis was therefore based on the 180 questionnaires that were retrieved. The questionnaires were collated and analyze using frequency counts, percentage and appropriate statistics to test and analyze the result. SPSS version 25 was used to perform descriptive statistics. Tables were used in the data analysis processes to depict the results of the study.

Findings and Discussions

This section presents the analysis of data gathered from patrons through administered copies of the questionnaire.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Out of the one hundred and eighty (180) valid questionnaires obtained, 99 were male signifying 55.0 percent and 81 were females signifying 44.0%. This suggests that the majority of users of the Accra Central Library were male.

Table 1 also depicts the ages of respondents who took part in the study. The results show that, the majority of respondents 45.0% were within the age brackets of 36-45. This was closely followed by respondents who were 56 years and above representing 20.6%. This finding confirms the assertions of Joy and Idowu (2014) who argue that “elderly people” are heavy users of local community libraries and that they use it for pleasure. Meanwhile persons within the age brackets of 46-55 represent 15.0% of total respondents. The least number of respondents were those within the age brackets of 26-35 who represent 7.2% of total respondents.

With respect to the educational levels of respondents who took part in the survey, the majority of were Higher National Diploma (HND) or Diploma holders (56.6 percent), followed by those with a West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination and the least are those with a PhD as presented in Table 1. In general, it can be concluded that, the diversity of user age

ranges and level of education per the findings in Table 1 points to the fact that all caliber of persons irrespective of their age and educational background make use of public libraries.

Extent and Purpose of use

The study also sought to find out the duration, frequency and purpose for which respondents used public libraries. As can be seen from Table 2, the results suggest that with regards duration of use, the results indicate that, the majority of respondents had been patronizing their respective public libraries between 6-10 years as intimated by 45.0% of respondents who took part in the survey. However, 7.2% of respondents indicated they had been patronizing their respective branch libraries between 1-5 years. Generally, the findings imply that the majority of respondents had patronized their respective libraries for between 6-10 years and were therefore in a position to provide credible information for the study.

With regards to frequency of use, 42.2% of respondents indicated that, they visited the library weekly, 48 percent daily and 12.8% every fortnight. This is further elaborated on Table 2. This finding suggest that the majority of patrons placed a lot of premium on public libraries and thus used it quite regularly.

The purpose for which respondents patronized public libraries in the Greater Accra Region was also of importance to the study. Results from Table 2 suggest that, the majority 68 (19.0%) of patrons used the library for research followed by 48 (13.4%) who come to the library to complete their assignments. The least purpose for which patrons patronized their respective libraries was for internet services which was affirmed by 5 patrons representing 1.4% of total respondents. From the above, it can be concluded that among the majority of respondents who patronized public library services in the Greater Accra Region, their common purpose for using the library were for research, studying and completing assignments. Table 2 throws more light on these findings. These findings are consistent with the assertions made by Ikenwe and Adegbilero-Iwari (2014) that, most patrons only visit libraries to study and access resources that may not be readily available in their schools.

Patrons of public libraries judge and compare quality of services based on experience from other types of libraries. A patron may therefore have certain expectations which may be based on experience from visits to other libraries. In view of this, the researcher further sought to find out if respondents used any other libraries aside the public libraries under study. From Table 2, it can be seen that, the majority of respondents 98 (54.4%) used other libraries aside public libraries in the Greater Accra Region. 62 (34.4%) indicated they did not use any other library

aside the public libraries in their respective communities. Meanwhile 20 (11.1%) of respondents stated that, they sometimes used other libraries aside the public libraries in their respective communities. The findings suggest that, majority of respondents used other libraries aside public libraries in the Region. This could be attributed to the diversity of users comprising of workers and students in tertiary, secondary and basic schools in the Greater Accra Region who patronize special, academic and school libraries. Patrons are better judges when they have compared services rendered by two different libraries. They were therefore in a position to compare the services and quality of collections in other libraries to that of the public libraries in their respective communities.

User Perception of the Availability and Quality of Information Resources (Print and Electronic).

Information resources are basically sources of information. They come in print and electronic formats and include books, journals, encyclopedias, newspapers, research publications among others. Fuegi, Elbert and Lipeikaite (2012), however, indicate that most people hold the misconception that public libraries only deal with traditional book lending and reference services rather than innovation and technology. The success of any public library is nonetheless largely dependent on the availability of current and quality information resources in diverse formats, and the ability of patrons to readily access and utilize these resources. In view of this, the research sought to investigate the quality and depth of information resources in public libraries in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana from the point of view of patrons.

The research delved into the availability of online resources. This investigation is important because libraries are gradually drifting from print books to electronic resources due to the numerous advantages of electronic resources over print. Against this background, the researcher sought to find out the availability of internet connections, electronic resources, computers and other technological tools that are being imbibed into the public library services delivery in the Greater Accra Region. Table 3 depicts a summary of responses for all the eight statements relating to user perception of the availability and quality of book stock and online resources.

Firstly, respondents were asked about the availability of resources such as books, journals, encyclopedias, newspapers, research publications among others. The majority 46 (25.6%) were uncertain, 43 (23.9%) disagreed that most of these print resources were readily available, 21 (11.7) strongly disagreed while 9 (5.0%) and 25 (13.9%) strongly agreed and agreed

respectively. Interestingly 36 (20%) did not indicate any response. It could be concluded that the category of respondents who did not give any response were the ones who only used the library space but did not borrow these materials as indicated earlier.

Similarly, respondents were asked if available materials were relevant to their course and research needs. The majority 57 (31.7%) disagreed with this statement while 35 (19.4%) did not indicate any response. Findings for the first two statements are corroborated by Dadzie and Kavi (2015) assessment of the quality of book stock at the Dunkwan-On-Offin branch library which revealed that the library's collection were either outdated or lacked quality.

Ugah (2008) posits that readers tend to use library resources that require the least effort to access. The results of the third statement; which sought to determine if information resources were easy and convenient to access in public libraries in the Greater Accra Region. The results were as follows, 20 (11.1%) strongly agreed, 52 (28.9%) agreed, 34 (18.9%) were uncertain, 27 (15.0%) disagreed and 9 (5.0%) strongly disagreed. However, 38 (21.1%) of respondents did not answer this question.

Relevance of information resources is largely dependent on how current they are to the needs of users. Currency of library collections is therefore a hallmark of quality. Table 3 indicates that for the statement "library collections such as books and newspapers are current", a significant percentage 41 (22.8%) of public library users disagreed with the statement. Others, constituting 32 (17.8%) remained neutral while 29 (16.1%) agreed their respective branch library's collection were current. Similarly, 34 (18.9%) did not indicate any responses. To corroborate this, the researchers requested for that particular day's newspaper in one of the libraries but were told it would be received the next day.

A follow-up statement sought to investigate the physical condition of books available in all seven public library service points. The results from Table 3 reveals that, majority of respondents in terms of aggregate 78 (38.4%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the physical condition of resources and collection of their respective branch libraries were in good condition with 36 (20.0%) indicating no response. This was affirmed by the researchers as a cursory observation of books on the shelves of one of the branch libraries were either worn out or defaced.

The study also sought to find out, if computers in the library are adequate. The findings as depicted in Table 3 reveals that the majority of library patrons in terms of aggregate 101 (56.1%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed computers in the library were adequate. One

respondent intimated in the comments section that their branch library did not even have a single computer.

Furthermore, results from statement 7 in Table 3 shows the general perception of most patrons with regards to library equipment such as computers. For the majority 70 (39.9%) of patrons, they were of the view that the few computers that were available in their branch libraries do not conform to modern day standards as they overwhelmingly disagreed with statement 7. In a similar vein, Table 3 depicts that, a majority of users 69 (38.3) also strongly disagreed with the statement “library equipment such as computers, audio-visuals were visually appealing”. The overall findings in this section reaffirm Joy and Idowu’s (2014) study which revealed that the major challenge affecting satisfaction of users of public libraries was the lack of internet/ICT service. Failure of public libraries to adopt Information and Communication Technology (ICT) will result in low patronage.

User Perception of the Availability and Quality of Equipment and Facilities in Public Libraries.

The requests of clients for library space are typically controlled. “Libraries above the minimum threshold need to be “comfortably functional” (Cook and Heath, 2001, p.29).Cook and Heath further add that, disconfirmation amongst patrons may likely happen when library facilities such as lighting, comfortable chairs and tables, serene environment for studying, pleasant ambience and safety fall noticeably beneath standards set by other facilities such as lecture halls, halls of residences or cafeterias. In line with this assertion, the study sought to find out if the facilities and equipment in public libraries in the Greater Accra Region were conducive and provided a serene environment for learning. The details of responses are shown in Table 4 in the appendix below.

The results from Table 4 suggests that, for the first statement- “the library is in a comfortable and inviting location”, a significant percentage 68 (37.8%) of library users disagreed with this statement. 68 (37.8%) disagreed. Others, constituting 42 (23.3%) remained neutral while 30 (16.7%) agreed the library’s location was suitable. To corroborate this, the researchers observed that one of the libraries was in a busy part of town. The noise from traders therefore distracted patrons of the library.

For the second statement- “The library is a safe space for individual activities”, the responses show an overwhelming support for this statement as 61 (33.9%) of library patrons strongly agreed and 59 (32.8%) of them agreed. This suggests that even though patrons were generally

dissatisfied with the location of the library, they were however content with their respective libraries as safe places for individual activities.

Similarly, the study sought to find out if the library was attractive and conducive for learning. From the responses gathered, it was identified that 60 (37.2%) of library users agreed that their library space were attractive. This was closely followed 42 (22.8%) of respondents who were uncertain.

Directional signs, brochures and guides provide all the relevant information to assist first time and potential users of an organization's facilities (Hinson, 2009). The fourth statement which probed the availability of directional signs and brochures to guide first time users revealed that signage and brochures were not available as a sizeable number of library patrons, 78 (43.3%) disagreed with this statement.

With regards to users' perception of the library as learning hub for group studies, the majority 62 (34.4%) disagreed with this statement. This seems to suggest that most public libraries in the Greater Accra Region did not provide study carrels for group studies. Consistent with other findings from other statements, another 47 (26.1%) were not certain.

“Lighting and ventilation are two important variables that promote a congenial environment for reading in any library” (Agyen-Gyasi & Atta-Obeng, 2014). Stemming from the above, patrons were asked to indicate whether ventilation and lighting of their respective libraries were conducive for studies. As indicated in Table 4 the majority of patrons in terms of aggregate 114 (63.3%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed that lighting and ventilation in their libraries were conducive for learning. It could therefore be concluded from Table 4 that, the majority of users were dissatisfied with the lighting and ventilation system in their library.

The penultimate statement sought to find out the adequacy of chairs and tables at the library. The data analyzed above indicates that most patrons constituting 60 (30.5%) did not think the chairs and tables were adequate. This was followed by 47 (26.1%) who were neutral. For the last statement, - “Chairs and tables are comfortable”, the responses indicate the majority of patrons 67 (37.2%) of the Accra Central Library disagreed chairs and table at the library were comfortable while 46 (25.6%) were not certain.

Hinson (2009) intimates that, a service organization building, environment and facilities can inform a client's moment of truth during their first visit. This invariably applies to public

libraries as lasting experiences are created after users' first visit to the library. For instance, Suphar, Talib and Hambali (2012), assert that library building concepts should be evolutionary with new inspiring designs and features to meet the changing needs of patrons. Specific elements of tangibles such as nature of library holdings, type of facilities, building space and ease of access might moderate customer perception of quality in public libraries (Manjunatha and Shivalingaiah, 2004). This was however not the case as the perception of most patrons suggested that the availability and quality of equipment and facilities of public libraries in the Greater Accra Region were beneath the minimum threshold of quality.

User Perception of the Knowledge and Competency of Library Staff

Customers attach top priority to reliability of the service and responsiveness from service personnel (Manjunatha & Shivalingaiah, 2004). The first point of contact is therefore critical to superior service delivery (Hinson, 2009). This applies to library staff and personnel who are the direct point of call when patrons visit the library. Against this backdrop, the study sought to find out users' perception of the quality and competency of public library staff. Table 5 depicts the responses of patrons.

All statements in this category of the study received fairly high ratings with the majority of respondents mostly agreeing with statements posed which suggests that patrons were satisfied with the knowledge and competency of staff in all branch libraries under study. For example, an overwhelming 83 (46.1%) of respondents agreed that library staff were often willing to help users while 46 (25.6%) were neutral. Similarly, 39 (21.7%) strongly agreed that library staff are often willing to help users, whereas (3.9%) and 5 (2.8%) disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively.

The results of the second statement which also probed if - "library staff are courteous" were consistent with those of the first statement. In total, 72.5% of respondents in terms of aggregate either agreed or strongly agreed that public library staff were courteous.

Respondents were further asked to indicate the extent to which they agree if - "library staff pay attention to every user" based on their personal encounter with these staff. The responses as indicated in Table 5 are as follows: 38 (21.1%) strongly agreed, 75 (41.7%) agreed, 49 (27.2%) were neutral and 20 (11.1%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. The finding therefore is that the majority of respondents in terms of aggregate agree with the statement that patrons received the attention they required anytime they visited the library.

The researcher further probed if library staff provided services accurately and without interruption to which 69 (38.3%) agreed while 61 (33.9%) were neutral. As well, 30 (16.7%) strongly agreed, 16 (8.9%) disagreed and 7 (3.1%) strongly disagreed.

As to whether library staff serve users promptly, the majority of respondents 70 (38.9%) indicated they agreed staff served users promptly, 65 (36.1%) indicated they were neutral while 22 (12.2%) strongly agreed.

A majority of respondents 74 (41.4%) were neutral with regards to the statement which sought to find out if- “library staff provide services as promised”. This was closely followed by 59 (32.8%) of respondent who agreed with this statement.

Again, respondents were asked to indicate if library staff keep users informed about when services will be performed. Out of the 180 respondents, 65 (36.1%) indicated they agreed with the statement, 60 (33.3%) indicated they were not certain, 25 (13.9%) disagreed which was slightly higher than the category of respondents who strongly agreed who represent 24 (13.3%) of library patrons. More than one-third (77.2%) of patrons agreed with the statement- “library staff understand your needs as a user”.

The statement- “library staff are assuring of users of the accuracy and confidentiality of (their) personal information” was agreed to by 65 (36.1%) of patrons in general followed by 58 (32.2%) who were neutral and 23 (12.8%) who strongly agreed with this statement.

The result of the tenth statement which also probed if library staff are always ready to respond to user’s questions revealed that the majority of patrons, precisely 74 (41.4%), agreed that library staff were always willing to respond with 55 (35.6%) being neutral and 30 (16.7%) strongly agreeing with the statement.

Finally, with the last statement on users’ perceptions of the competency of library staff, respondents were asked if staff dealt with users in a concerned or considerate manner. More than two-thirds (65%) of respondents in general agreed or remained neutral with this statement.

Generally, these findings are in line with Agyen-Gyasi and Atta-Obeng (2014) assessment of the attitude of staff towards users at the Ashanti Regional Library, where the majority of the users in the library were satisfied with the attitude of staff and services rendered by the Library.

User Perception of the Quality of Services

Patrons were also asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the services rendered by public libraries in the Greater Accra Region regarding online databases, library websites and information literacy skills required by patrons to utilize public library's resources judiciously. More importantly, patrons of public libraries need the requisite skills to be able to know their exact information needs, where to find them, how to retrieve or store the information, the ability to analyze, verify and add value to the information and how to disseminate, communicate or apply the information, ethically and legally.

Effective library provision depends on user education. User education is an essential task of any library to make its resources visible and available to outreach (Dadzie & Kavi, 2015). Public libraries are therefore charged with the task of imbuing their patrons with these skills. Table 6 depicts responses regarding their perceptions of the quality of library services.

Presently e-resources have become the largest and fastest growing areas of digital collections for most libraries and it has many benefits (Madhusudhan, 2010). In view of this, the researcher sought to find out if public libraries in the Greater Accra Region had subscribed to electronic resources that can be accessed by patrons from any remote location. Predictably for the first statement, almost all respondents, 163 (90.6%), disagreed or strongly disagreed. This could be attributed to the fact that most of the public libraries understudy did not have computers or internet connectivity as observed by the researchers, thoughtless of subscribing for e-resources.

A library's website provides information about the history of the library, resources (such as books, e-books, journals, institutional repository and CD-ROMs), services (OPAC, reservations, inquiries and tutorials), contact information (various units and departments) and rules and regulations of the library (Dadzie & Van der Walt, 2015). As a result, the study sought to find out if public libraries in Accra had websites that enabled patrons locate information on their own. The findings as depicted in Table 6 reveals that 160 (81.3%) respondents in terms of aggregate disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. These findings are consistent with those of the first statement.

All seven service points operates within the hours of 9:00 am to 5:00 pm from Monday to Saturday. Patrons were asked if the library's opening and closing hours were convenient. More than a third, 63 (35.0%), of patrons agreed with the statement- "the library's opening and closing hours are convenient".

The study also sought to find out if the public libraries aid their patrons in staying abreast with new developments in their fields of interest as part of their information literacy skills. The results (Table 6) indicates that, a slight majority 56 (31.1%) of respondents agree with this assertion, 45 (25.0%) were neutral, while 34 (18.9%) of respondents disagreed.

The statement- “the library aids my advancement in my academic discipline or work” was agreed to by the majority 60 (33.3%) of respondents. Similarly, the majority, 57 (42.8%), of patrons agreed to the statement- “the library helps me distinguish between accurate and inaccurate information”.

The study also sought to find out if the public libraries in the region provided users with the information skills they needed to access information from the library. From Table 6, it can be observed that 60 (33.3%) of library patrons disagreed with this assertion, 43 (23.9%) agreed and 40 (22.2%) were uncertain.

According to Hinson (2009), expectations differ from one person to the other and as such it may not be possible for organizations to satisfy all customers (library patrons in this case). Invariably, every organization that offers services to the public is, therefore, likely to receive complaints. In view of this, the researcher sought to find out if there were avenues through which patrons could lodge complaints, compliment or make suggestions about conditions or services in the library. In total, 75 (41.7%) disagreed with this assertion, 42 (23.3%) strongly disagreed, while 31 (17.2%) were not certain. The findings suggest there were no mechanisms put in place where patrons could channel their grievances. To corroborate this finding, the researcher observed there was not a single suggestion box at any unit of the library.

Conclusion and Recommendation

We set out to determine users’ perception of the quality of public library services in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana by applying the LibQUAL+ model. The findings revealed that patrons of public libraries in the Greater Accra Region were generally dissatisfied with the quality of service provisions across all branch libraries because they were found to be inadequately resourced in terms of current print and electronic reading materials, state of the art infrastructure and reading spaces that meet current trends. This was worsened by the fact that existing materials in these libraries were mostly outdated. The biggest challenge was probably the lack of ICT equipment which served as a huge impediment to the automation of most of these public libraries which could be attributed to the issue of dwindling resources meant for the provision of quality public library services. Extant literature available suggest funding for

public libraries is a protracted global problem spanning a diverse set of challenges particular to different countries. From the ongoing, it can be concluded that, though there is a strong advocacy for continuous access to quality public library services, it however cannot be sustained without adequate, regular budgetary support, or reliable sources of revenue. Based on these conclusions, we are of the view that public libraries that will survive in these challenging times will have to be ingenious in order to generate additional revenue to improve the quality of their services to meet the changing needs of their clientele. In view of the above findings, we proffer the following recommendations to ameliorate the dwindling quality of public library services as espoused by patrons in the study.

1. Public library managers should be ingenious and proactive in leveraging alternative sources of income to support their already dwindling budget. Library staff should therefore introduce new initiatives that could market the library or rake in revenue to supplement the library's annual budgetary allocation.
2. Introducing new initiatives to generate additional income can be capital intensive. We therefore propose that the government of Ghana should provide a seed capital to enable public library managers leverage new sources of revenue since it is unlikely governments will be able to allocate adequate funds to meet the needs of public libraries.
3. In an era of dwindling funding for public libraries globally, the popular saying "In unity there is strength" could be a solution to addressing poor quality services in public libraries. The formation of a consortium or cooperative network amongst public libraries should be encouraged to serve as a mechanism to support what individual public libraries globally may be lacking as it is with the academic and special libraries.
4. Public librarians would need to vigorously market their services to the general public and relevant stakeholders since success of marketing the importance and role of public libraries is likely to increase return on investments and also justify subsequent funding and support for public libraries. Public libraries should therefore look beyond government subventions to fund their services. This could be achieved by sending proposals to government and non-governmental agencies/institutions for support. This is largely dependent on making a compelling story and further justifying the need to invest in public libraries in line with achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
5. Since the findings revealed that patrons had negative perceptions of the availability and quality of information resources, it is recommended provision of funds to public libraries

be increased to enable the libraries' authorities improve the quality, relevance and currency of information resources.

6. Also, it is recommended that in addition to the provision of adequate funds to help provide improved resources and services, library authorities should device innovative ways to provide conducive learning environments, improved internet connectivity and current library materials (both print and electronic) be provided in public libraries within the Greater Accra Region.
7. Lastly, we advocate for further dialogue on fee-based services in public libraries. Income generation should be viewed as an important aspect of public library's enterprise. Income targets must be set for each public library and certain services must be managed like a business venture to help support their operations.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Characteristics	Respondents	
	F	%
Gender		
Male	99	55.0
Female	81	45.0
Total	180	100
Age		
18-25	22	12.2
26-35	13	7.2
36-45	81	45.0
46-55	27	15.0
56+	37	20.6
Total	180	100
Level of Education		
BECE/MSLC	5	2.8
SC/GCE O/A LEVEL	2	1.1
WASSCE/SSCE	42	23.3
HND/Diploma Degree	80	44.4
BA/BSC Degree	40	22.2
Master's Degree	10	5.6
PhD	1	.6
Total	180	100

Source: SPSS analysis output

Table 2: Extent and Purpose of Use

Question	Respondents	
	F	%
Duration of Usage		
Less than a year	22	22.2
1-5 years	13	7.2
6-10 years	81	45.0
11-15 years	27	15.0
16-20 years	37	20.6
Total	180	100
Frequency of Use		
Daily	48	26.6
Weekly	76	42.2
Fortnightly	23	12.8
Monthly	15	8.3
Quarterly	18	10.0
Total	180	100
Purpose of Use		
For research/Project work	68	19.0
For relaxation/entertainment	14	3.9
For answering assignment	48	13.4
To borrow books	21	5.9
For internet services	5	1.4
To read Newspapers	29	8.1
For quiet space/place suitable for studies/learning	29	8.1
For reference/search for information	27	10.3
To meet people and socialize	7	2.0
Total	358	100
Note: Respondents were allowed multiple answers.		
Usage of Other Libraries		
Yes	98	54.4
No	62	34.4
Sometimes	20	11.1
Total	180	100

Source: SPSS analysis output.

Table 3: Responses on User Perception of the Availability and Quality of Library Resources

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	No response
Resources are available	9(5.0%)	25(13.9%)	46(25.6%)	43(23.9%)	21(11.7%)	36(20%)
Available resources are relevant	7(3.9%)	13(7.2%)	47(26.1%)	57(31.7%)	21(11.7%)	35(19.4%)
Easy and convenient to access collections	20(11.1%)	52(28.9%)	34(18.9%)	27(15.0%)	9(5.0%)	38(21.1%)
Library collections such as books and newspapers are current	18(10.0%)	29(16.1%)	26(14.4%)	41(22.8%)	32(17.8%)	34(18.9%)
Physical condition of resources and collection is good	11(6.1%)	31(17.2%)	24(13.3%)	46(20.6%)	32(17.8%)	36(20.0%)
Computers in the library are adequate	0(0.0%)	16(8.9%)	29(16.1%)	56(31.1%)	45(25.0%)	34(18.9%)
Library equipment such as computers are modern and in good condition	0(0.0%)	17(9.4%)	20(11.1%)	40(22.2%)	70(39.9%)	33(18.3%)
Library equipment (such as computers, audio-visuals, etc.) are visually appealing	0(0.0%)	20(11.1%)	30(16.7%)	30(16.7%)	69(38.3%)	31(17.2%)

Note: n=180**Source: SPSS analysis output.**

Table 4: Responses on User Perception of the Library Space as a Conducive Place for Research and Learning

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
The library is in a comfortable and inviting location	17(9.4%)	30(16.7%)	42(23.3%)	68(37.8%)	23(12.8%)
The library is a safe space for individual activities	61(33.9%)	59(32.8%)	42(23.3%)	11(4.9%)	7(3.9%)
The library space is attractive, conducive and inspires study and learning	31(17.2%)	67(37.2%)	41(22.8%)	29(16.1%)	12(6.7%)
Directional signs, brochures and statements associated with services are available to guide users	7(3.9%)	24(13.3%)	44(24.4%)	78(43.3%)	27(15.0%)
The Library as a learning hub provides a community space for group learning and study	19(10.6%)	23(12.8%)	47(26.1%)	62(34.4%)	29(16.1%)
Lighting and ventilation are conducive for reading	18(4.4%)	14(7.8%)	39(21.7%)	51(28.3%)	63(35.0%)
Chairs and tables are adequate	13(7.2%)	36(20.0%)	47(26.1%)	68(30.5%)	16(8.9%)
Chairs and tables are comfortable	17(9.4%)	29(16.1%)	46(25.6%)	67(37.2%)	21(11.7%)

Note: n=180

Source: SPSS analysis output.

Table 5: Responses to statements on User Perception of the Knowledge and Competency of Library Staff

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
Library staff are often willing to help users	39(21.7%)	83(46.1%)	46(25.6%)	7(3.9%)	5(2.8%)
Library staff are always courteous	50(27.8%)	80(44.4%)	37(20.6%)	12(6.7%)	1(0.6%)
Library staff give attention to every user	38(21.1%)	75(41.7%)	49(27.2%)	13(7.2%)	5(2.8%)
Library staff provide services accurately with minimum interruption	30(16.7%)	69(38.3%)	61(33.9%)	16(8.9%)	4(2.2%)
Library staff serve users promptly by providing services at the appointed time	22(12.2%)	70(38.9%)	65(36.1%)	16(8.9%)	7(3.1%)
Library staff provide services as promised	25(13.9%)	59(32.8%)	74(41.1%)	18(10.2%)	4(2.2%)
Library staff keep users informed about when services will be performed	24(13.3%)	65(36.1%)	60(33.3%)	25(13.9%)	6(3.3%)
Library staff understand your needs as a user	22(12.2%)	66(36.7%)	55(30.6%)	27(15.0%)	10(5.6%)
Library staff are assuring of users of the accuracy and confidentiality of (their) personal information	23(12.8%)	65(36.1%)	58(32.2%)	21(11.7%)	13(7.2%)
Library staff are always ready to respond to user's questions	30(16.7%)	74(41.1%)	55(30.6%)	17(9.4%)	4(2.2%)
Library staff deal with users in a concerned or considerate manner	28(15.6%)	74(41.1%)	61(33.9%)	13(7.2%)	4(2.2%)

Note: n=180*Source: SPSS analysis output.*

Table 6: Responses to statements on user Perception of the Quality of Services

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
I can access the library's electronic resources from my home or office	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	17(9.4%)	88(48.9%)	75(41.7%)
The library has a website that enables me to locate information on my own	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	20(11.1%)	91(50.6%)	69(38.3%)
The library's opening and closing hours are convenient	49(27.2%)	63(35.0%)	30(16.7%)	25(13.9%)	13(7.2%)
The library helps me stay abreast of developments in my field (s) of interest.	16(8.9%)	34(18.9%)	56(31.1%)	45(25.0%)	29(16.1%)
The library aids my advancement in my academic discipline or work.	30(16.7%)	60(33.3%)	48(26.7%)	24(13.3%)	18(10.0%)
The library helps me distinguish between accurate and inaccurate information.	20(11.1%)	57(42.8%)	55(30.6%)	29(16.1%)	19(10.6%)
The library provides me with the information skills I need in my work or study.	17(9.4%)	43(23.9%)	40(22.2%)	60(33.3%)	20(11.1%)
It is easy to make a compliment, complaint or suggestion about any condition about the library	8(4.4%)	24(13.3%)	31(17.2%)	75(41.7%)	42(23.3%)

Note: n=180

Source: SPSS analysis output.