

Measuring of Quality Services in the Libraries

P. Ramanjaneya Reddy

Lecturer in Library Science
S.S.&N.College,
Narasaraopet, Guntur (District).

ABSTRACT

Libraries have always been committed to provide a high quality of services to its users. The quality of the services in library is essential satisfy the library users. It is an important factor in determining the performances of any library, measured in terms of highest return and user satisfaction. This superiority of the service can be achieved by a good quality management. Quality services means resources and services, which satisfy users' expectations and perceptions. It is very clear that librarians use measuring tools to run the library services. These tools such as Total Quality Management (TQM), SERVQUAL, LibQUAL+ help them to assess services, to make decisions, to improve services and to achieve a better quality. This paper deals with the concepts of quality, measuring quality services in the libraries, TQM, Benchmarking, SERVQUAL and LibQUAL+.

Keywords: Quality, Total Quality Management, SERVQUAL and LibQUAL+.

I. Introduction

The success of library or any information center largely depends on the quality of services it renders to its users. Managing a library as a social institution involves a specialized and complicated tasks. The primary purpose of an academic library is to support the teaching, research, and other academic programs of its parent organization. An academic library is part of a service organization which delivers products personally to the customer. Libraries are service organizations dedicated to their users. The libraries are formulating a strategic plan and focus on providing the best services possible and reaching a state of continuous improvement. The purpose of measuring the quality is to determine the effectiveness, efficiency and value of what have been achieved. This process reveals the strength as well as the weakness of any library or information system. Measuring quality services is a comprehensive and structured approach to organizational management that seeks to improve the quality of products and services through ongoing refinements in response to continuous feedback.

The quality management provides a powerful framework for effective services in the library. Libraries are service organizations whose service quality has important role in development and distribution of knowledge. They are service organizations dedicated to their customers, the patrons by formulating a strategic plan, and following it with a commitment to continuous quality improvement, library managers can transform and improve their organizations. There are various methods, tools and techniques to measure, control and improve the quality of library services. Quality measurement and evaluation assumes great importance in modern libraries, as it brings immense benefits to the library as well as user community. Different methods such as collection of data for measuring the performance and quality of libraries; the SERVQUAL method, a multiple item scale to measure service quality; the LibQUAL+, a tool developed on SERVQUAL for measuring the quality of library products and services

II. Concepts of Quality

The concept of quality is now defined not from produce or supplier point of view but is defined on the customer or user requirement. ISO 8402, 1986 defined as “Quality is the totality of characteristics of an entity that bear on its ability to satisfy stated and implied needs.” Any product or service must be possessed those quality that which makes a thing what it is. On the other hand, it is a combination of elements / components to make a product or service perfect in all respect.

Quality is the basic philosophy and requirement of library service and all libraries strive to deliver the highest quality of service. A quality service is one that fully meets the expectations and requirements of the users. If a library provides appropriate information to the right user at the right time and in the required form, then it could be argued to be maintaining quality. Quality library services mean satisfying the query of each and every user accurately, exhaustively and expeditiously.

Quality management strategies should integrate various approaches for achieving improved quality information services. Performance of the information system mainly relates to (1) accuracy of the services (2) adequacy of and need-based services (3) timeliness of the services. The information products in LIS sector can be Information Abstracts, Bibliographies, indexes, Current Awareness Bulletins, etc.

Improving the Quality in Library Services

In this information age it is very easy to make a quality based library if the parent body or concerned authority assists financially as well as collectively. It is very necessary for the librarian and its parent body to look forward for the present and future generation to cope up with international phenomena. A user must be educated with proper technology to use the library effectively. Users should have knowledge of what facilities and services are available in the library and information centre and how to access those efficiently and effectively. To improve the service quality the user satisfaction survey is a tool that provides both quantitative and qualitative data. It is an important part of libraries for process and performance measurement.

III. Measuring Quality Services in the Libraries

Nitecki defined as “A measure of library quality based solely on collections has become obsolete.” Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry defined as “Within a service-quality assessment model only customers judge quality; all other judgments are essentially irrelevant”.

The important measuring tools and techniques are:

- a) Total Quality Management (TQM)
- b) SERVQUAL
- c) LibQUAL+

IV. Total Quality Management (TQM)

The TQM is one of the techniques used for the improvement and maintenance of quality or performance of the library. It is to provide the right information to the right users at the right place and time and also at the right cost. Management approach that emphasizes that total quality management must be applied by all people in the organization for all processes in the

organization for the benefit of all stakeholders or any non-profit seeking organization itself. Total Quality Management is “a system of continuous improvement employing participative management and centered on the needs of customers”.

Total Quality Management – Definitions

O’Neil defined TQM as “a system that introduces and uses customer-driven concepts, processes and tools, and continuously seeks to measure its success at meeting customer needs and improve upon its process. It involves total organization participation and customer focus”. In the ISO (International Organization for Standardization) 8402 TQM is defined as ‘management approach of an organization centered on quality based on the participation of all its members and aiming at long term success through customer satisfaction and benefits to all members of the organization and to society’. The most important components of TQM in a library are Benchmarking, Performance Measurement and Staff Competencies

Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a process of comparing the operations, products and services of a library with a library doing quality processes and offering quality products and services to the users. Benchmarking is useful and appropriate tool for improving products, process and services despite past perceptions of it as a tool for libraries. A range of benchmarking methodologies has been used, the choice depending on institutional goals and objectives, size and structure and type of process identified for benchmarking. Examples of using common survey instruments to extract comparable data with the aim of process improvement include services, collections, materials availability costing core processes, users satisfaction, staff satisfaction, multi-dimensional profiling, information handling skills and management.

Performance Measurement

Performance measurement is necessary to identify the problems, if any and find out new ways for improving the products or services. It requires both qualitative and quantitative data. Performance measurement is universally practiced a part of the management process in libraries. The performance measurement activities should be a continuous process in the organisation, not only from the point of view of continuous change in the environment, the ongoing competition for authority of the organisation and the struggle for diminishing resources. Evaluation must always be connected with the goals of the organisation and the goals, again, must be viewed against the larger context of the social, economic, cultural and political reality.

Staff Competencies

Quality of service depends on quality and experience of staff. The TQM supports user education, sufficient and convenient technical infrastructures. The training and competencies required for staff to work effectively with the tools and techniques have not always been addressed to the same degree. Libraries with ongoing training programmes which address quality management techniques and related skills are rare, yet the presence of integrated in-house staff development programmes appear to be one pre-requisite for a really effective framework implementation in a large institution. It is recognised that a significant investment of resources is required for successful staff development. Training support is more likely to be in place where the institution has dedicated staff with some specific responsibility for quality, staff development and training.

Total Quality Management in Library and Information Services

In recent years, both the library profession and the large educational community have focused on a model of management commonly referred to as service quality. Service quality means being able to view services from customers' point of view, and then meeting the customer expectations for service. The application of TQM in libraries is to establish a culture of never ending improvement of quality of products and services. Its implementation in libraries improves the image of the library staff and helps in public relations marketing.

Most of the libraries are pursuing excellence in their services as well as products. TQM could be the catalyst that motivates librarians to examine issues such as librarianship, staff empowerment, incentive programs, work simplification, innovation and performance evaluation. The importance of TQM for libraries is not only centered around the user's needs but also in anticipating and exceeding the demands of the fast changing environment of service delivery in libraries. The quest for quality must be given meaning through actions. Implementing TQM as part of the future plans of a library consists not only in changing certain procedures, but a total rethink of all its operations, where the culture is quality-driven, customer-oriented and marked by teamwork and quality service to the users.

V. SERVQUAL

SERVQUAL is the most popular assessment tool of service quality. Service quality is determined by the difference between user's expectations of service provider's performance and their evaluation of the service they received (Parasuraman et al.). SERVQUAL evolve a set of five dimensions to assess the service quality.

Five dimensions in measuring the service quality are as follows

Five dimensions help us to better visualize and analyze the services provided to users. They make the term "service" less ambiguous. The model proposed by these fine authors to measure service quality is called SERVQUAL. In this post we'll focus on the five dimensions of service, or the criteria used by users to assess the quality of services according to this model. Users' expectations and perceptions are measured across these five dimensions using questionnaires.

Dimension 1 - Reliability

The reliability Service Quality Dimension refers to how the company are performing and completing their promised service, quality and accuracy within the given set requirements between the company and the user. Reliability is important first hand impression, because every user want to know if their supplier is reliable and fulfill the set requirements with satisfaction.

Dimension 2 - Assurance

The assurance Service Quality Dimension refers to the company's employees. Are the employees skilled workers which are able to gain the trust and confidence of the users? If the users are not comfortable with the employees, there are a rather large chance that the users will not return to do further business with the company. Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.

Dimension 3 - Tangibles

The tangible Service Quality Dimension refers to the appearance of the physical surroundings and facilities, equipment, personnel and the way of communication. In other words, the tangible dimension is about creating first hand impressions. A company should want all their users to get a unique positive and never forgetting first hand impression, this would make them more likely to return in the future.

Dimension 4 - Empathy

The empathy Service Quality Dimension refers to how the company cares and gives individualized attention to their users, to make the users feeling extra valued and special. The fifth dimension are actually combining the second, third and fourth dimension to a higher level, even though the really cannot be compared as individuals. If the users feel they get individualized and quality attention there is a very big chance that they will return to the company and do business there again.

Dimension 5 - Responsiveness

The responsiveness Service Quality Dimension refers to the willingness of the company to help its users in providing them with a good, quality and fast service. This is also a very important dimension, because every user feels more valued if they get the best possible quality in the service. Willingness to help users and provide prompt service. It concerns the willingness or readiness of employees to provide service. It involves timeliness of service: mailing a transaction slip immediately, calling the user back quickly and giving prompt service e.g. setting up appointments quickly.

VI. LibQUAL+

LibQUAL+ is a library service quality measurement tool based on the SERVQUAL models of assessing service quality. LibQUAL+ is a tool for identifying areas for service improvement. It is standard survey instrument used in many libraries. It is a tool measuring users' perception of service quality and identifies gaps between desired, perceived and minimum expectation of services. LibQUAL+ is a widespread standardized tool for collecting user feedback on library service quality. LibQUAL+ is a suite of services that libraries use to solicit, track, understand, and act upon users' opinions of service quality. These services are to the library community by the Association of Research Libraries ([ARL](#)). The program's centerpiece is a rigorously tested Web-based survey bundled with training that helps libraries assess and improve library services, change organizational culture, and market the library. The goals of LibQUAL+ are to:

- Establish a library service quality assessment program at ARL
- Develop a web-based tool for assessing library service quality
- Develop mechanisms and protocols for evaluating libraries
- Identify best practices in providing library service quality

Benefits of LibQUAL+

- Customer focus
- Seen to be listening to all on campus
- Identify our strengths and areas for improvement

- Help set up benchmarks for performance measures over time
- Provides library with basis for systematic feedback

VII. Conclusion

Libraries and data centers are service establishments whose main task is linking the society with knowledge and information through their efficient services. Libraries are ideal places to implement of quality. The quality management serves as an effective tool to achieve quality in services of any library. Performance measurement and user survey can show whether a library is efficient and effective in delivering services. The Total Quality Management, data collection and analysis of data, SERVQUAL, a scale for measuring service quality, LibQUAL+, an instrument for measuring library quality is some methods and techniques to evaluate, control and improve the quality of a library. The greatest chance of success will come from affiliating the library with the unique goals of its parent organization. Quality measurement and evaluation assumes great importance in modern libraries, as it brings immense benefits to the library as well as user community.

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