SERVICE QUALITY FOR SUSTAINABLE USER SATISFACTION BY ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract

The central focus of academic libraries in institutions of higher learning is provision of required information resources and services to members of the institution's community. Utilization of academic library is measured by the amount of library information resources and services that are used in teaching, learning, pleasure, relaxation and research activities. Hussaini, Vashistha & Jimah (2018) stated that university library faces a critical challenge in responding to the new demand of the 21st century with growing demographic growth linked with a lack of appropriate usage of library resources. To ensure users satisfaction and optimum utilization of the libraries, adherence to provision of service quality is the sure answer. Service quality has been identified as an important factor which should contribute to an organization's ability to retain loyal customers and thus contribute to improved organisational performance. The paper is an expository one to sensitize the academic librarians to the need to for quality service delivery to its users who unlike in the past, now have many information providers to choose from.
Keywords: Service quality, User Satisfaction, Academic Library

INTRODUCTION

Quality is adherence to specified standard that meet or exceed customer expectations (Ajayi, 2019).Service quality is a global attitude or judgment about the superiority of a service, although the true scope of this attitude is disagreeable. Service quality is often conceptualized as a comparison of expectations with actual performance perceptions of services. Quality must begin from customer needs and end in customer perception (Unidha, 2017). The concept of service quality has been extended to a higher education context. Higher education plays an important role in the development of a country, as it promotes social, cultural and economic development and promotes active citizenship while instilling ethical values for citizens. The quality of services will affect student satisfaction. Student satisfaction as the favorability of the students' subjective evaluation on the various outcomes they experience associated with education. Student satisfaction is being shaped continually by repeated experiences in campus life (Theresia & Bangun, 2017). Yusuph (2015) explains quality service as multi-attribute concept that describes how well the factors or

elements applied to generate the service(s) have performed. He further explained that quality or effective service is deemed to have been delivered only when the end is seen to have justified the means for attaining it.

Salubi, Ondari-Okemwa & Nekhwevha, (2018) maintained that the library generally referred to as the knowledge hub of higher education institutions, is saddled with the responsibility of supporting the teaching, research and community engagement functions especially in the university. They explained that the changing demographics of library users and advancement in technological development have also called for a modification in information services provision by libraries and information centres.

Service Quality and Library Use

For the library to attract and retain users in this 21st century, it encompasses provision of service quality in terms of creating enabling environment, provision of required infrastructure, competent personnel and acquiring quality and relevant collection resources. Service quality is not only a continuous interaction between customers and organizations but it also provides better solutions to customer problems. Thus, companies can only have a competitive advantage if they provide high quality services. Besides the quality of actual service, consumer perception on the service quality is also important. If there is a gap between the two, companies may be required to revisit their strategy (Yousuf, 2017). The serene, quiet and conducive environment offered by the library is an additional strength the library possesses in the world of research, teaching and learning. Scholars needed to be engulfed in an environment devoid of distractions to be able to exercise their creative power and energy looking for outlets of expression. With this scenario, one would expect to see the libraries, especially academic libraries, as a beehive of activities by researchers and other users of the library (Odu, 2016). The implication of the above to polytechnic libraries is to create an enabling environment that is attractive, inviting and conducive for learning and distinct from other buildings on the institution's campuses.

Service quality plays a significant role in conventional and service industries. Customer satisfaction in the service industry depends on the quality of service and overall experience. Firms with a satisfied customer base have a competitive edge over others (Arokiasamy & Huam, 2014) cited in (Yousuf, 2017). The library is a service industry which must produce quality service to retain existing users and encouraging the new ones to access its resources. Service quality brings about customer satisfaction and persistent patronage. Paul, Mittal, & Srivastav, (2016) aver that customer satisfaction is a psychological state and are highly satisfied when service quality exceeds their expectations. When a particular customer is satisfied with services received, such will be a harbinger of good news about the service provider to others. Buttressing the view above, Keller & Berry (2006) ; Angelova and Zekiri (2011) cited in Cristobal (2018) state that in marketing, the channel with the greatest influence is neither the traditional media of television, radio, or print advertising, nor the new medium of World Wide Web but the "human channel" of individual, person-to-person, word-of-mouth communication because "happy customers tell 4 to 5 others of their positive experience; dissatisfied customers tell 9 to 12 how bad it was".

Application of marketing Strategies is another means of raising the service quality of the library because the universal language today is customer – centricity, that is, customer is the centre of the universe; customer is the pivot of business; without customer there is no business; everything revolves around the customer. To align with market currency is to create a customer-centric organization. However, everyone says the customer is important, but in most businesses, actions and reality are opposites (Azees, 2015) cited in (Ajayi, 2018). The library must create a customer-centric environment where users' satisfaction is very paramount if true repositioning to sustain the relevance of the library must be guaranteed. In Pakistan, the banking sector after privatization and liberalization of the economy has become highly competitive. It has become difficult for banks to retain existing customers and attract new ones. By providing a quality service, banks can have a satisfied consumer base (Yousuf, 2017). As pointed out above that the banking industry has become highly competitive, information related industries like the library is also facing keen competition from avalanche of competitors. Therefore, the library must provide improved and quality service to attract users.

For libraries and information services to stay viable in the current climate, it is important that they adopt marketing strategies to help meet organizational mission, goals and objectives. Marketing has long been associated with the selling of a product in order to make a profit, but was extended to the non-profit sector including libraries in the 1960s (Enache, 2008) cited in (Yi 2016). The marketing mix is traditionally referred to as the 4 Ps: price, product, promotion and place; however the fifth P, people, is now commonly included. Although the marketing mix was developed for imparting the advantages of a tangible product, with the focus on product marketing, the literature agrees on the importance of applying this focus to service promotion. As the need for promotion of services has grown and is now more widely recognised, the marketing mix has been refined and adapted to include services, not just products (Mollel, 2013) cited in (Yi 2016).

Libraries and Emerging Technologies
The essence of ICT utilization for service delivery in libraries is to improve the quality of services rendered by staff to the library users in order to improve research. ICT in libraries enhance the conduct of research since library staff and users conduct research (Mommoh, & Emmanuel, 2019). Information Communication Technology has brought a new dimension into library operations in terms of acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination of information. It has offered librarians and information users' different options in carrying out library routine operations and accessing information with ease respectively. Odu & Omini (2017) avers that the traditional practice in the then known library, where services could only be performed within the four walls of the library is fast becoming a thing of the past. They explained that library services in the contemporary world can be rendered without the user visiting the library physically. The implications of the above submission is that rather than sitting down idly in the library expecting users, librarians should avail themselves of ICT facilities to reach the users through social media platforms and mobile applications. The users have discovered technology apparatus as more convenient medium through which they can access their needed information; it is now left to Polytechnic Libraries to device means of making their products and services relevant to the users in the midst of growing competitors in the information industry. Libraries are experiencing a lot of changes as technology keep advancing. The traditional method of information provision is no more relevant in the current digital world. The ICT has affected the mode of providing information services. As inculcation of ICT in library operations has significantly improved and facilitated information acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination of information; so also has ICT put the librarians on their toes to meet the ever growing information needs of their customers. Information services provided by a library should correspond with the need of its users because the sole aim of establishing libraries is to cater for users information needs.
The use of technology for library and information service delivery has undergone various levels of development. An automated cataloguing, circulation and acquisition systems has led to better management of library operations and improved services. Today, ICT is providing libraries with powerful new tools to meet their patrons' information needs beyond their traditional printed materials. With internet connectivity, university libraries can reach beyond their walls to provide patrons with resources available in their libraries (Omosor, 2014). For academic libraries to effectively carry out their tasks in this 21st century, librarians must adopt emerging technologies. Libraries desiring to connect constantly with their clients increase users' satisfaction and this is done through the promotion and presence of social media platforms like YouTube, Blog, etc. for service delivery (Omini & Osuolale, 2019). Omoniwa (2001) cited in Aiyebelehin, Ikenwe & Okpetu (2017) posits that in the twenty-first century, globalization of information and the adoption of information technology will be the hallmark of great libraries. The size of libraries or their collections may not be the benchmark but rather accessibility to the major thrust of the library automation. For any library to derive maximum benefit in this information age, it has to be online. Nnamdi & Udem (2014) maintain that the popularity of social networking application, blogs and sharing of media have changed the way an behavior of users of library all over the world. They cited Mcmanns (2009) who avers that many academic libraries in the United States are beginning to leverage the power of social media to provide better and more relevant services to their patrons. Availability of quality and needed information, timely accessibility of required information and connectivity to the Internet attracts users to the library as well as enhances effective

service delivery in the library. Supporting this view, Akpan-Atata et al (2015) explain that accomplishing effective service delivery in academic libraries in Nigeria is all about availability and accessibility of ICTs and availability of useful information, and connectivity of individuals, libraries and social networking.

The Relationship between Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality
Customer satisfaction is a principal element in achieving the goals in an organization and is a basic standard of excellence performance by the service organization. Customer satisfaction is a person's feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a products perceived performance in relation to his or her expectations. The satisfaction of customers is a collective response about the delivery of the service by the organization. Customers will be more satisfied with the high service quality. So the satisfaction of customers depends on the expectation of the customer about the service quality and perception of the customers about the service quality(Theresia & Bangun, 2017). Service quality is a critical component of customer perceptions about the service. Customers perceive services in terms of its quality and how satisfied they are overall with their experiences. As thus, service quality is defined as customers perception of how well a service meets or exceeds their expectations (Zeithaml, 1988 & Czepiel, 1990) cited in Hisam, Sanyal & Ahmad, 2016). Customers are satisfied when the perceived service meets or exceeds their expectations and vice versa

Service quality plays a significant role in conventional and service industries. Customer satisfaction in the service industry depends on the quality of service and overall experience. users' perception, which is a way a user form impression of and make references about library resources, services and personnel in terms of how far they meet their expectation should be used to measure library performance (Eiriemiokhale & Ibeun, 2017). Firms with a satisfied customer base have a competitive edge over others (Arokiasamy & Huam, 2014) cited in (Yousuf, 2017). Service quality is a global attitude or judgment about the superiority of a service, although the true scope of this attitude is disagreeable. Service quality is often conceptualized as a comparison of expectations with actual performance perceptions of services. Quality must begin from customer needs and end in customer perception (Unidha, 2017). The concept of service quality has been extended to a higher education context. Higher education plays an important role in the development of a country, as it promotes social, cultural and economic development and promotes active citizenship while instilling ethical values for citizens. The quality of services will affect student satisfaction. Student satisfaction as the favorability of the students' subjective evaluation on the various outcomes they experience associated with education. Student satisfaction is being shaped continually by repeated experiences in campus life (Theresia & Bangun, 2017).

Customer satisfaction is achieved by not merely providing the needed facilities, equipment and collections of a library. It also entails good programs carefully planned and executed by people who man them. Thus, the human sides who deliver these services are also a point to consider in evaluating customer satisfaction (Christobal, 2018). Understanding the relationship between customer (library users) satisfaction and service quality if very germane in user studies to appreciate the feelings of the users and how best to provide satisfactory services. According to Arokiasamy & Huam, 2014) cited in (Yousuf, 2017).Service quality plays a significant role in conventional and service industries. Customer satisfaction in the service industry depends on the quality of service and overall experience. Firms with a satisfied customer base have a competitive edge over others. Customer satisfaction is a principal element in achieving the goals in an organization and is a basic standard of excellence performance by the service organization. Customer satisfaction is a person's feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a products perceived performance in relation to his or her expectations. The satisfaction of customers is a collective response about the delivery of the service by the organization. Customers will be more satisfied with the high service quality. So the satisfaction of customers depends on the expectation of the customer about the service quality and perception of the customers about the service quality (Theresia & Bangun, 2017). Service quality is a critical component of customer perceptions about the service. Customers perceive services in terms of its quality and how satisfied they are overall with their experiences. As thus, service quality is

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Service Quality Expectations of Academic Library Users
Service quality and customers degree of satisfaction undoubtedly has influence on future behaviours of customers negatively or positively. SERVQUAL scale is a commonly used tool for measuring the quality of services. Factors including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibility tend to be highly correlated. Although other models for measuring service quality are available, researchers tend to prefer the SERVQUAL model because of its simplicity in measuring service quality (Paul et al., 2016).As information is now an important commodity with many competitors trying to have competitive edge over the others, academic libraries are also beaming lights in the emerging digital environment to take its rightful place. Service quality depends on the gap between performance and expectation. This study has adopted five constructs for measuring service quality: Reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibility.

(1) Tangibility: The appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials Tangibles entail the physical evidence of the service. Specifically, the concept explores the physical facilities of the service provider, the appearance of personnel, the tools and equipment used to provide the service including other customers in the service facility. Tangibles are used by firms to convey image and signal quality (Zeithamal et al, 2006) cited in (Iddrisua, Noonib , Fiankoc & Mensahd, 2015).
(2) Reliability: Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately and timely. According to Zeithaml et al. (2006) cited in Iddrisua, Noonib , Fiankoc & Mensahd, (2015), reliability is "the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. The following questions could prove how reliable an organization or service provider is: Does the firm perform the service right at the first time? Does the firm honours it promises? These are some of the questions which need to be answered by service providers if they are to achieve reliability.
(3) Responsiveness: Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. Responsiveness focuses on service provider's promptness in addressing customer complaints.
(4) Assurance: The following are the elements of assurance: competence, courtesy, credibility and security. It also includes Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence in customers that is users as the library is concerned.
(5) Empathy: This is about the level of care and individualized attention that the firm provides to its customers.
To offer quality service means to meet the needs and expectations of a user in an effective manner. Acquisition of the right knowledge is the most important resource for the success and survival of any business. Though academic library is not a profit making venture, yet there is need for its operators to be business conscious so that they do not lose their patrons to other well-articulated competitors and thereby become irrelevant and go into extinction. Hence, the information professionals are compelled to use new skills and strategies in order to change, survive and continue to compete in the world of virtual information. Radical change is necessary to restructure traditional libraries into knowledge centres, which will be recognized for supporting competitive advantage and strategic decision making (Anafo 2014) cited in (Ajayi, Ashiru&Abifarin, 2018). This goal of delivering quality service and attracting users to make effective use of the library is achievable with right approach and attitude of librarians and other library staff to library patrons. (Khan & Mariam, 2014) cited in (Yousuf, 2017) avers that banks aim to build a competitive advantage through high quality services and by developing a loyal customer base because a satisfied customer base helps in increasing market share.

Azeez (2015) cited in Ajayi, Ashiru &Abifarin, (2018) outlines some expectations from customers- library patrons by implication:
- Recognition by name and even identify with key events
- Respect at all times on rights, on issue of choice, on opinion, etc

- Prompt service
- Assistance whether or not asked for
- Politeness and courtesy
- Making them feel and happy
- Showing customers are valued
- Move from bonus, incentives to offerings

He also outlined some killer statements made as reply to customers or users complaints:

- 'Can't they see I'm busy?'
- 'If they'd just read the instructions before calling to complain'
- 'Can't they ever say something positive?'

- 'All they do is complain- and about minor things'. We must avoid any statement that could in any way disrespect any library patron, irrespective of age or class. For effective and efficient service delivery, librarians must be creative and innovative. Amabile (1996) and Kachru (2006) cited in Buhari(2016) explain creativity as the quality or ability to make or bring into existence something new and the production of new and useful ideas by an individual or a small group of individuals working together.

Competitive Advantage: Tool to Repositioning Academic Library for Optimum Service Delivery

In today's global competitive business environment, service quality has become an important concept in service research. It is virtually impossible for a business organization to survive without building customer satisfaction and brand loyalty (Panda, 2003) cited in (Iddrisua, Noonib, Fiankoc & Mensahd, 2015). In our contemporary world, companies and service providers try to gain a competitive advantage over others by providing premium services to their customers. The surviving secret of many leading firms in the world is that they focus on providing quality services so as to creating differentiation and competitive advantage. This makes their company gain ground and becomes household names. The impact and value of information to the user is dependent on attributes of relevance, timeliness, accuracy, origin and form. Enhancement in any of these attributes of information will increase the value of information. This is achievable if the stakeholders in the libraries are conscious of the existence of other competitors and holistically applying competitive intelligence strategies (Ajayi, Ashiru&Abifarin, 2018). Supporting this view, Jerome et al (2017) emphasize that competitive intelligence is a critical precondition for achieving value-added service delivery in library and information centres.

Service quality is not only a continuous interaction between customers and organizations but it also provides better solutions to customer problems. Thus, companies can only have a competitive advantage if they provide high quality services. Besides the quality of actual service, consumer perception on the service quality is also important. If there is a gap between the two, companies may be required to revisit their strategy (Yousuf, 2017). Quality is one of the most valued and expected by customers from all service products and services. Provision of high and unique quality is a way to win customers and make them loyal for a long time. Since academic libraries are majorly set up as an avenue for students, researchers and scholars generally to gain knowledge, the need for provision of high quality services to attract and retain users cannot be over emphasized. Lecturers require quality information resources or materials in order to teach effectively; undertake innovative research and use their acquired knowledge and experience to provide expert services to the university in order to turn out professionals and qualified students who will be leaders of tomorrow. Therefore, libraries are expected to provide such resources which when used effectively by lecturers, would translate into improved teaching and quality products. Inability to access information resources in the library can result in time waste and frustration (Anhwere, Paulina, Manu, 2018).

One of the means to repositioning the academic library is the use of corporate planning strategy. According to Yusuf (2015), corporate planning is a process in which an organization (ministry, parastatal or agency) analyses its objectives, priorities, development strategies and environment in the light of its mandate, and determines how to organize and apply its resources to achieve its objectives and meet its service delivery standards and targets. He explained that corporate planning is a review and reorganization process usually carried out in response to some change such as:

- A changing environment
- New technologies which radically affect the way work is done
- New mandates, priorities or services required
- Ageing workforce, redundant skills or other human resource(HR) constraint
- New social/cultural norms such as public expectation, gender, etc.

Ojeh (2015) cited in Ajayi (2019) puts forward the following questions whose answers will help library as an organization have a self-assessment of their service delivery:

1. What keep your clients/ users coming back and telling others to come to you?
2. How are you as an organization going the extra mile for customers?
3. What makes you stand out as the preferred amongst your competitors?

Ajayi (2019) opines that critical application of the above questions raised by Ojeh (2015) would be an outcome of a quality service rendered.

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Conclusion

Availability of quality and needed information, timely accessibility of required information and connectivity to the Internet, attracts users to the library as well as enhances effective service delivery in the library. Quality is one of the most valued and expected by customers from all service products and services. Provision of high and unique quality is a way to win customers and make them loyal for a long time. Since academic libraries are majorly set up as an avenue for students, researchers and scholars generally to gain knowledge, the need for provision of high quality services to attract and retain users cannot be over emphasized. Supporting this view, Akpan-Atata et al (2015) explain that accomplishing effective service delivery in academic libraries in Nigeria is all about availability and accessibility of ICTs and availability of useful information, and connectivity of individuals, libraries and social networking.

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