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UNDERGRADUATES' SATISFACTION ON SERVICE QUALITY OF LIBRARY SERVICES OF SOUTH EASTERN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

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Abstract

The main objective of this study is to examine the Undergraduates' satisfaction with library services of the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (SEUSL), using a customized LibQUAL tool. The study further explores how patrons engage in the SEUSL libraries as part of their learning and determines the level of user satisfaction. Data were collected from undergraduate students of the Faculty of Technology and the Faculty of Applied Sciences of SEUSL from March to October 2020 using the stratified random sampling technique. sample of 285 was drawn out of 1100 undergraduates. A customized version of a LibQUAL model was used. Quantitative data were obtained using an online questionnaire and the descriptive analysis techniques adopted. Four independent variables such as "effect of service", "library as a place", "access to information" and "information control" were evaluated adopting criteria of the LibQUAL tool. The findings revealed that effect of service dimension shows the major impact on service quality and users are satisfied with the ten measures of the four constructs rendered by the SEUSL libraries. It is recommended to enhance the leisure reading facilities and 24 hours open section, article delivery and literature support service, non-printed documents, e-journals and full text databases. Furthermore Inter library loan facilities, orientation programs and plagiarism support services also need to be strategized into an innovative manner.

Keywords: *Modified LibQUAL tool, Service Quality, User Satisfaction, University library Usage, User requirements*

Introduction

One of the fundamental goals of any library or information center is to meet the information demands of its users. Libraries must be arranged effectively and efficiently to provide quality services to their users in order to satisfy their academic and research information requirements. South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (SEUSL) libraries are always striving to provide quality service to their patrons. Even though library provides many services for uplift users information needs, Libraries continuously need to evaluate their services to ensure they meet the needs of all patrons. Measuring library service quality is important for continuous improvement of quality services to meet ever-increasing diversified needs of library users.

Traditionally, library evaluations centered on tracking circulation history, counting library visitors, and assessing physical resources like the number of books, periodicals, and other reading materials. Gradually, this method of study has evolved to evaluating library service quality.

There are arguments regarding this concept of evaluating library services. Ambrozic (2002) indicated that statistical data can be used to measure library activities, workload, collection, users, income and outcome) but not the library's performance or the impact of library services. In 1978 Lancaster described library evaluation should be done to assess the effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis. Even in this method of evaluation, the perspectives of librarians as well as the library staff members were considered. After all, it was widely accepted to consider the perceptions of customers in assessing the quality of any services or organizations. Customers' viewpoints are very essential to evaluate library services, too. Dervin Nilan (1986) emphasized including the perceptions of users in library evaluation.

Becker et al. (2017), in their paper stated that the importance of quality assessment in libraries as "Academic libraries are constantly evaluating the level of user satisfaction with library services, including both the services provided by specialist staff and general access to library facilities and materials (within the library and online). In support of this constant demand for feedback, a variety of tools has been developed to assist libraries to determine service quality. One of these tools is LibQUAL+, a web-based survey that contains twenty-two predetermined questions and focuses on service provision, information control and the library as a place. The use of the survey allows libraries to benchmark themselves against other similar libraries. Such comparative data enables libraries to identify areas for improvement, best practice and resource allocation"

SEUSL has six faculties and the library of SEUSL is catering to the information needs of students of all the faculties and therefore it is crucial to understand the quality of the services and the satisfactory level of users, especially of the undergraduates. SEUSL libraries have a little recorded information on this aspect. Therefore, it is timely needed to identify the user

satisfactory level so that the library can provide a better quality service in the future. Based on this problem the following objectives were formulated.

The main objective of this study is to examine the undergraduates' user satisfaction through the customized LibQUAL tool at the libraries of the South Eastern university of Sri Lanka.

Research Questions

The research seeks to answer the following research questions:
1. What is the undergraduates' satisfaction on the library facilities of the SEUSL libraries?
2. What are the factors that contribute to the user satisfaction of the SEUSL libraries?

Literature Review

According to Hernon and Nitecki (2001), there are many reasons why libraries are interested in service quality. Most libraries are attached to a certain parent institution such as universities, government agencies, schools, etc. Customer feedback is also important to provide better service since it identifies the gap between service provided and expectations. This identification helps the libraries to provide a better service to their patrons.

Service quality was defined as "the overall evaluation of a specific service firm that results from comparing that firm's performance with the customer's general expectations of how firms in that industry should perform" (Parasuraman et al., 1988). This definition applies to academic libraries as academic libraries provide specific services to their patrons. This particular study is also following the second definition as the main objective of this study is to evaluate the service quality of the SEUSL libraries based on the users' satisfactory level.

Service quality was evaluated by using several criteria. As per Lancaster (1978), the evaluation criteria consist of three tiers. They are; Effectiveness, Cost-effectiveness and Cost-benefit. In his study, Lancaster (1978) defines 'effectiveness' as "how well the system is satisfying its objectives". After measuring the effectiveness the cost incurred for offering the particular service is considered to examine the cost-effectiveness. Then cost-benefit is done as effectively and benefits are not the same. In this case, he defines cost-benefit as "evaluating a service based upon the cost compared to the benefits provided through that service". In this method, customers' perceptions or expectations were not given attention.

Armstrong (1991), introduced some other criteria such as accessibility, responsiveness or timeliness, reliability or accuracy and relevance, non-threatening behavior/friendliness and helpfulness, communication or easy to use, assurance or reliability and consistency, affordability, tangibility. Though this study consists of customer attributes, a few more essential criteria were missing, especially user satisfaction level related to collections, services and physical facilities. Hayden et al. (2005), has utilized library usage and collections, library access, working environment, ICT and computer facilities, services and customer

satisfaction and priorities while evaluating the service delivery of their libraries. Several other authors have used various criteria depending on their needs. However, librarians and researchers required a standard tool to evaluate the service quality of libraries. The rest of this section describes the evaluation tool.

Parasuraman et al. (1998) identified five dimensions, each of which has included several antecedents to evaluate the service quality of any institution. These dimensions are given below with their definitions.

Table 1. Dimensions to evaluate service quality

Variables	Definition
Reliability	The ability to perform the promised service both dependably and accurately
Responsiveness	The willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service
Assurance	The knowledge and courtesy of employees as well as their ability to convey trust and confidence
Empathy	The provision of caring, individualized attention to customers
Tangibles	The appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials

Based on the five dimensions Parasuraman et al. (1998) developed a tool known as SERVQUAL. SERVQUAL protocol is widely used to evaluate service quality across the world. However, to make this tool well fit with evaluating library service quality, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) adapted SERVQUAL and named the derivative tool LIBQUAL which contains 22 items under four dimensions. Those are, affect of service, information control, library as a place and access to information. LibQUAL+™ is adapted from LIBQUAL with a few additional attributes to examine the link between service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty of university libraries. Evaluating service quality of Web content was developed by Kiran and Diljit (2012) known as LibWebSQ. A few Sri Lankan universities have evidence of publications for evaluating service quality (Jayasundara, 2010; Somaratna and Peiris, 2011; Gunawardhana, 2016) by using different approaches. SEUSL libraries followed the LibQUAL tool and customized it according to the needs of the parent entity to evaluate user satisfaction.

Methodology

This study used quantitative research approach and distributed online questionnaires for the data collection. Stratified random sampling method was adopted to select the sample. Two faculties were purposively chosen at Oluvil and Sammanthurei premises. The population of

the research consisted of all undergraduate students (1100) of the Faculty of Technology and Faculty of Applied Sciences of SEUSL. Using the Krejcie and Morgan table identified the minimum sample size of 285 for the study. Received responses are given in the following table. All the responses were considered for the analysis.

<div align="center">Table 2. Sample Distribution</div>

Faculty	Population	Minimum Sample size	Received Responses
Faculty of Applied Sciences	620	198	222
Faculty of Technology	480	152	183

A pretested self-administered questionnaire that included quantitative data were analyzed based on the research questions by using descriptive analysis methods. Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction level (Table 3) on a five-point Likert Scale; from 1 –"Strongly Disagree (SDA)" to 5 –"Strongly Agree (SA)".

A few more situational attributes were evaluated such as Internet/ Wi-Fi connectivity, opening hours, etc. This is a longitudinal study at the first survey, we did not go for a gap analysis of the user's expectations and the perceived level.

Results and Discussion

The majority of the respondents were 2nd-year students (43%) followed by 1st year (25%), 3rd year (29%) and 4th-year students respectively. Out of this, 69% were female students. 72% of the total respondents have been obtained library membership and others were not members at the time of conducting the survey. Therefore while screening the data responses of non members were not taken into analyse the satisfaction level. Respondents' frequency of visiting the library is at least once a week (31%). 91% of the respondents received the library orientation program where the rest of the respondents were not able to attend the program. The Library of SEUSL conducts the library orientation along with the common orientation program of the University, but 42% of the respondents stressed that the best time to conduct an orientation program is at beginning of the academic session. 41% agreed to have the library orientation program along with the common orientation program.

According to Owusu-Manu (2017), Moohammad (2014) and Alston and Miller (2002) have applied the mean value to evaluate the satisfactory level of services. We've used Alston and Miller (2002), benchmark to determine the satisfactory level of the services of SEUSL libraries.

Therefore, the following table 3 depicts how the value allocation of Alston and Miller (2002), aligns with the likert description of the tool used for this study. Based on this, 3.5 to 4.49 and 4.5 to 5.0 were interpreted as satisfied and highly satisfied.

Table 3. Likert Scale Interpretation

Likert Scale	Likert Description	Value Allocation	Likert Scale	Likert Description	Value Allocation
1	Not at all	1.00-1.49	1	Strongly Disagree	Highly Dissatisfied
2	Slightly true	1.50-2.49	2	Disagree	Dissatisfied
3	Moderately true	2.50-3.49	3	Not Aware/ Neutral	Neutral
4	Mostly true	3.50-4.49	4	Agree	Satisfied
5	Completely true	4.50-5.00	5	Strongly agree	Highly Satisfied

Table 4 shows that the five constructs used in the tool have included 34 measures. Among the 34 measures, there are 10 measures which have reached a mean value of 3.50 and more. This result indicates that undergraduate users are satisfied with these 10 measures. Among the five constructs, no construct has reached the benchmark of satisfactory. Almost all the variables were able to reach satisfactory level because the average mean values for the variables fall between 3.321 and 3.449 which are approaching the bench mark. However, the overall satisfaction of the undergraduate users (3.51) have reached the benchmark for satisfactory.

Table 4. Factors evaluated for service quality

	SA	A	NA/ N	DA	SDA	Mean
Library as a place (LP)						**3.42 3**
The physical facilities of the library are visually appealing	**26 %**	**44 %**	11%	10 %	9%	3.67*
Usage of leisure reading area	**10 %**	**47 %**	22%	10 %	10 %	3.37
Usage of 24 hours area for my studies	**11 %**	**38 %**	27%	12 %	12 %	3.23
Access to information (AI)						**3.42 8**
Convenient library working hours	**18 %**	**45 %**	12%	12 %	13 %	3.42
Properly arranged printed materials	**23 %**	**42 %**	16%	9%	10 %	3.6*
Proper maintenance and automated library functions and services	**15 %**	**45 %**	21%	9%	9%	3.47
Article delivery and literature support	**7%**	**40**	32%	9%	12	3.22

services	%			%		
Information control (IC)						**3.39 4**
Having good collection of printed documents	**21 %**	**46 %**	15%	7%	12 %	3.56*
Having good collection of non-printed documents	5%	28%	**39%**	18 %	10 %	3
User friendly online catalogue (OPAC)	**16 %**	**43 %**	22%	9%	10 %	3.46
Subscribed e-journals and full text databases	**9%**	**40 %**	33%	9%	9%	3.31
Stable internet connection	**23 %**	**38 %**	18%	10 %	11 %	3.53*
Availability of library resources on website	**16 %**	**43 %**	23%	9%	9%	3.49
Online reservations	**16 %**	**37 %**	28%	10 %	9%	3.41
Affect of service (AS)						**3.44 9**
Useful signage	**21 %**	**48 %**	14%	8%	9%	3.65*
Inter library loan facilities	7%	26%	**38%**	17 %	11 %	3
Error free library records	**9%**	**38 %**	36%	10 %	8%	3.3
Delivering promised services on time	**14 %**	**43 %**	26%	8%	9%	3.44
Willingness to help users	**19 %**	**46 %**	18%	6%	10 %	3.59*
Proper guidance to the resources	**11 %**	**49 %**	22%	10 %	8%	3.44
Library staff instill trust/confidence	**19 %**	**44 %**	20%	7%	9%	3.58*
Understandability on specific needs	**17 %**	**43 %**	19%	10 %	10 %	3.47
Library staff knowledge to answer user queries	**17 %**	**45 %**	20%	9%	10 %	3.5*
Cooperative library staff and always pay due attention to information needs and problems of users	**16 %**	**47 %**	19%	7%	10 %	3.52*
Library clearly gives instruction regarding the	**12**	**48**	23%	6%	10	3.47

	SA	A	NA/N	DA	SDA	Mean
use of its information products and services time to time	%	%			%	
Easy to reach senior staff whenever need to contact them for any information	13%	47%	22%	7%	12%	3.43
Other factors (OF)						**3.321**
Usage of the Institutional repository of SEUSL	9%	40%	31%	10%	10%	3.28
Usage of E-resources subscribed by UGC for research works	9%	33%	35%	14%	9%	3.19
Awareness on plagiarism detection support	7%	35%	35%	12%	10%	3.17
Obtain knowledge through Information Literacy course	12%	46%	24%	7%	10%	3.42
Staff allocation is satisfactory to support my requirements	13%	48%	22%	9%	8%	3.49
Orientation program helped to understand library system and resources	7%	34%	25%	20%	13%	3.02
Awareness of classification system using at the library	14%	48%	21%	8%	9%	3.49
Overall satisfaction on services provided	16%	48%	18%	9%	10%	3.51*

SA – Strongly Agree **| A** – Agree **| NA/N** - Not Aware/ Neutral **| DA** - Disagree **| SDA**– Strongly Disagree

If we consider **library as a place** construct, among the three measures, only 'physical facilities of the library are visually appealing' measure scored satisfactory benchmark. In the **Access to information** construct, respondents were satisfied only with the arrangement of printed materials whilst **information control** construct scored two measures namely good collection of printed documents and stable internet connection as satisfactory. **Affect of service** construct is the largest construct with 12 measures and among them 5 measures namely 'having useful signage', 'willingness to help users', 'library staff instill trust/confidence', 'library staff knowledge to answer user queries', 'cooperative library staff and always pay due attention to information needs and problems of users' were in the satisfactory level. However, the average mean value of this particular construct too did not reached the benchmark of 3.5 but with a value of 3.449 emphasizing that it is reaching towards the benchmark. **Other factors** construct with 8 measures and out of that only 'overall satisfaction on services' measure was scored satisfactory level.

Conclusion

Based on the responses given by the users, it is clear that SEUSL library has to improve many measures to uplift the user expectations and to provide a better service to its stakeholders. Affect of service dimension ranked as the most satisfied dimension. Where the information control dimension ranked as the least satisfied dimension. Further, it is recommended to conduct user education programs on the lacking areas such as inter library loan facility and non-printed materials available at the library and more attention to information controlling aspects in order to further maximize the quality of service offering to the users. Further, it is recommended to enhance the leisure reading facilities and 24 hours open section. Article delivery and literature support service, non-printed documents, e-journals and full text databases also need to be improved. Furthermore Inter library loan facilities orientation programs and plagiarism support services also need to be strategized into an innovative manner.

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