An Assessment of Library Services: Assessing user's perceptions concerning priorities, effectiveness And satisfaction

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Abstract:

The present study investigated the quality of service provided by the Social Science Library at Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel. This library primarily serves the Faculty and students of the following departments: Geography, Political Science, Sociology, Social Work, Communications and Regional Authority.

Library services were chosen because of their importance in general as well as to the particular needs of our library. Library users evaluated and ranked the quality of services rendered according to their perceptions and expectations of library services To be conducted in Israel.

The study based on SERVQUAL instrument for assessing service quality.

Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml developed the SERVQUAL at 1988 to measure customer criteria for service quality. These authors identified five service quality categories and defined them as follows:

Tangibility – Physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel.

Reliability – Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.

Responsiveness – Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.

Assurance – Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.

Empathy – Caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers.

The sample included 121 library users who answered a written questionnaire. In the first section of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to rank five service categories (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance) by importance as represented by percentages. In

the second section of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to rank 33 statements relating to the above categories and reflective of the users' expectations and the services received. In the third section of the questionnaire, the respondents provided personal data.

The result for the first section of the questionnaire show that users ranked the categories in the following descending order of importance: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance. Differences in the rankings were found by different academic populations (undergraduates, graduate students and faculty members). There was no correlation between the category rankings and the demographic information (age, gender, or department affiliation). The results for the second section of the questionnaire show user expectation rankings in the following descending order: tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy. Users consider library maintenance as their foremost priority; responsiveness and reliability are their next priority, followed by the remaining categories. User rankings of the services received in descending order were reliability, tangibility, responsiveness, empathy and assurance. Users primarily consider the social science library staff as providing reliable and accurate information. Tangibility (library maintenance) was ranked second. Overall, the parity between the levels of expectation and that of actual services fell within a 2 level range in an ascending scale of seven. Analysis of the demographic data showed differential results for both gender and status. Male respondents had both lower expectations and gave higher service rankings than their female counterparts. Masters' students ranked the categories differently than undergraduates and faculty. Age and department affiliations showed no category ranking differences.

The findings confirmed each of the research hypotheses. Overall, library user expectations are relatively very high. The parity between their expectations and their perception of actual library services was minimal and fell within a one-two level difference. Since libraries constantly seek to improve their services to meet users' changing demands and increase user satisfactions, the results of the current study may be pertinent. Considerations such as appropriate physical conditions, temperature control, ample

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comfortable seating, and user-friendly access increase user satisfaction. Libraries should be equipped with up-to-date computers, applicable databases and printers to facilitate user searches for material. In addition, books, CD ROM and video materials needed for academic study and research must be readily available. Library staff must be professional, friendly, and reliable. Library administrators to be aware of user expectations must conduct periodic surveys of user satisfaction and their suggestions for improving library services, which the administration should consider. This pioneering study of library services will hopefully serve as a model for future library user studies considering the particular features of each library, to best serve its specific population and needs.

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