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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page.....	i
Information of Subscription.....	ii
Editorial Information.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Editorial.....	v
Notes on Contributors.....	vi
Best Practices In Series Management: A Kenneth Dike Library Model - Adewumi, Cecilia O. Bolajoko	1-10
Personal Factors and Occupational Stress as determinants of Job Satisfaction among Records Management Personal in State Civil Services in South-West, Nigeria. - Dr. S. O. Popoola	11-24
Evaluating the Effectiveness of University of Lagos Library Information Services using Servqual Model - Dr. Ayotunde Adebayo & Olakunle Adebayo	25-32
Environmental and Institutional Factors Influence on Internet use by the undergraduates in selected Federal Universities in South West, Nigeria. - Ayoola Johnson Ajayi & Kolawole Akinjide Aramide	33-40
Extent of Awareness and Level of Use of Web 2.0 Tools among the Students in Nigerian Universities - Kazeem Adesina & Adebayo Akadri	41-51
Continuing Education For Professional Development: The Role of the Nigerian Library Association the Library, Kogi State University Ayingba, Kogi State. - V. F. Adeoti	52-56
Health Information Needs and Sources Utilisation by Undergraduates of University of Abuja - Omotoso, A. O, Bello T. O. & Akadiri A. A.	57-68
Ensuring Effective School Library Service Deliveery in Elementary selected Schools: Intervention of Oyo State Government in Local Government Areas in Oyo State - Mr. L. A. Fawale - Olukola & Ladipo, Sunday Olusola	69-75
Significance of School Library in Efficient and Effective Teaching in Primary and Secondary Schools - Adepoju Tolulope O. (Mrs) & Joseph, Oye M. Olukayode	76-85

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS LIBRARY INFORMATION SERVICES USING SERVQUAL MODEL

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Abstract

This study measures users' perceptions of service quality in the University of Lagos library using SERVQUAL instrument. All five dimensions of service quality, being tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, were used. The questionnaire survey was conducted within one-week period. All users who came to the library during the research period were asked to complete copies of the questionnaire. The data were analysed using simple percentages and chart. The result of this study revealed that there were serious service gaps, lack of empathy when dealing with users of the library, lack of good understanding of users' needs that the library administrations will need to resolve. It is hoped that the findings will also help the management establish a total quality management (TQM) programme to improve overall service quality to its users.

Introduction

The quest for improved services aimed at enhancing performance requires reliable methods of measurement, assessment, and improvement (Reimer & Reichel, 2000). The accurate and reliable instruments that assess service quality are of interest to establishments whose performance and or revenues come in whole or part from service delivery. Currently the most popular and ubiquitous service quality instrument is SERVQUAL.

SERVQUAL is based on the proposition that service quality can be measured as the gap between the service that customers expect and the performance they perceive to have received. Respondents rate their expectations of service from an excellent organization, and then rate the performance they perceive they received from a specific organization. Service quality is calculated as the difference in the two scores where better service quality results in a smaller gap (Landrum & Prybutok, 2004). Although service quality can be evaluated and measured using SERVQUAL, which measures seven service quality dimensions, it also can be measured by its SERVPERF subset, which employs a performance only approach with five dimensions of customers' perceptions of service provider performance. This study attempts to measure customers' perceptions of service quality in a university library using SERVQUAL instrument. Arising from the purpose of study the main research objective was to ascertain the quality of service delivered by the University of Lagos library.

University of Lagos Library at a Glance

The University of Lagos Library opened its doors to readers in 1965. It has total floor area of 63,360sq. ft. with capacity to hold 250,000 volumes and seat 800 readers. It has a stock of over 350,000 volumes and it subscribes to about 5,000 journal titles, most of which are received regularly. The books are arranged on the shelves according to the Library of Congress Classification Scheme.

Moreover, under the Publications Law, (Cap. 107 of the Laws of the Lagos State of Nigeria, 1973), the library became a legal depository for two copies of all books published in Lagos State. Also, the library is a depository for the publications of United Nations; Economic Commission for Africa; General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade; International Court of

Justice and orders for selected publications of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), World Health Organisation (W.H.O.) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (F.A.O.) (University of Lagos Prospectus, 2011).

Literature Review

Many researchers have conducted studies in measuring service quality in the past twenty three years. McCleary & Weaver (1982) indicated that good service is defined on the basis of identification of measurement behaviours that are important to customers. Zemke & Albrecht (1985) suggested that service plays an important role in defining a restaurant's competitive strategies and identified systems and strategies for managing service. Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1988) developed a multiple-item scale for measuring service quality called SERVQUAL. SERVQUAL is a generic instrument for measuring perceived service quality that is viewed as the degree and direction of discrepancy between consumers' perceptions and expectations. Thus, service quality, as perceived by consumers, stems from a comparison of what they feel service providers should offer with their perceptions of the performance of service provided by service providers (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988). The researchers also identified that there are five dimensions to service quality. The following is a list of the five dimensions and a brief description of each:

- ◆ **Tangibles:** (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).

Gaps in Organisational Service Quality

Recent studies, Negi (2009) indicated that in the past few decades, service quality has become a major area of attention to practitioners, managers, and researchers owing to its strong impact on business performance, lowering costs, improving customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and profitability. Among many concepts of service quality, the service quality gaps model plays a significant role in the service management literature. The gaps approach proposes valuable propositions on how service quality might be understood and how the service quality emerges across a service organisation (Urban, 2009). This assertion agrees with the research findings of Negi (2009) that the gap analysis is accurate in identifying service shortfalls in an operation. Also, addressing the identified shortfalls is the foundation for planning strategies to ensure customer experiences that are consistent with their expectations. In most services, quality is measured by customers during service delivery, usually in an interaction between the customer and customer-facing employee of the service firm. For this reason, service quality is highly dependent on the performance of employees, an organisational resource that cannot be controlled to the degree that components of tangible goods can be engineered (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988). The authors further argued that consumers' quality perceptions are influenced by a series of four distinct gaps occurring in organisations. These gaps on the service provider's side can potentially impede delivery of services that consumers perceive to be of high quality. They are enumerated below:

Gap1: Difference between consumer expectations and management perceptions of consumer expectations

Gap2: Difference between management perceptions of consumer expectations and service quality specifications

Gap 3: Difference between service quality specifications and the service actually delivered.

Gap4: Difference between service delivery and what is communicated about the service to consumers.

Delivering consistently good service quality is difficult, as organisations have discovered. Some of the reasons for this difficulty can be traced to communication and control processes implemented in organisations to manage employees (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988). Other factors involve consequences of these processes for instance role ambiguity and role conflict which affect the delivery of service quality.

Reasons for Organisational Service Quality Gaps

In their studies, Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1988) proposed the main theoretical constructs and specific variables associated with the four organisational service quality gaps. These constructs are summarised below.

Gap 1: Difference between consumer expectations and management perceptions of consumer expectations

Service firm executives may not always understand what features constitute high quality to consumers. They also may not understand what attributes a service must have in order to meet consumer needs, and what levels of performance on those features are necessary to deliver high quality service. Since there are few clearly defined and tangible cues for services, the gap between what consumers expect and what managers think they expect may be considerably larger than it is in firms that produce tangible goods. The size of gap 1 in any service marketing firm is proposed to be a function of marketing research, orientation, upward communication, and layers of management.

Gap 2: Difference between management perceptions of consumer expectations and service quality specifications

Managers of service firms often experience difficulty in attempting to match or exceed customer expectations. A variety of factors—resource constraints, short term profit orientation, market conditions, management indifference—may account for the discrepancy between managers' perceptions of consumer expectations and the actual specifications established by management for a service. The size of gap 2 in any service firm is proposed to be a function of management commitment to service quality, goal setting, task standardisation, and perception of feasibility. An explanation for gap 2 is the absence of total management commitment to service quality. Emphasis on other objectives such as cost reduction and short-term profit has outcomes that are more easily measured and tracked and may supersede emphasis on service quality.

Gap 3: Difference between service quality specifications and the service actually delivered

Gap 3 is the discrepancy between the specifications for the service and the actual delivery of the service. It can be referred to as the "service performance gap," that is, the extent to which service providers do not perform at the level expected by management. The service performance gap occurs when employees are unable or unwilling to perform the service at the desired level. Some of the main theoretical constructs proposed to account for the size of gap 3 are lack of teamwork, employee-job fit, perceived control, supervisory control systems, role conflicts and role ambiguity. In high performing groups, people function as a team to accomplish their goals by allowing group members to participate in decisions. Critical to the success of organisational team work is the extent to which employees view other employees as customers, the extent to which employees feel management cares about them, the extent to which employees feel they are cooperating rather than competing with each other, and the extent to which employees feel personally involved and committed.

Gap 4: Difference between service delivery and what is communicated about the service to consumers

Media advertising and other communications by a firm can affect consumer expectations. Discrepancies between service delivery and external communications in the form of exaggerated promises or the absence of information about service delivery aspects intended to serve consumers well can affect consumer perceptions of service quality. Horizontal communication and the propensity to overpromise within an organisation can affect the size of this construct. An important aspect of horizontal communication is the coordination or integration of departments in an organisation to achieve strategic objectives. An obvious form of coordination necessary in providing service quality is consistency in policies and procedures across departments and branches. Companies need to install an ongoing service research process that provides timely and relevant current data that managers must rely on for better decision making (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml, 1994). Therefore, building a service quality information system which provides a deeper insight and a sense for the pattern of future changes should be embedded into an organisation's service culture.

Research Methodology and Data Collection

A modified version of SERVQUAL was used in this study (Hebert, (1993); Landrum and Prybutok, (2004). Surveys have been used as a tool to assess service quality and users satisfaction. The questionnaire was made up of twenty nine items. The questionnaire was designed to assess users expectations and quality of library environment, quality of library service; information quality and system quality. It used a seven- point Likert scale with "1" being "strongly disagree" and "7" being "strongly agree". Data were collected through questionnaire administration by the researcher alone spanning a week from users of the library. The respondents were not notified before the administration of the research instrument.

Data Analysis

In resolving the main objective of the study which was to ascertain the quality of service delivered by the library, the 5 SERVQUAL dimensions (Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy) were rated in a 29-item questionnaire by the users of the library. The responses are presented in Tables 1-5.

Table 1: Tangibles: (physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel).

N=385

Questionnaire items	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Visually appealing facilities	65	55	4	190	16	20	35
2. Neat, professionally appearing staff	63	27	190	35	20	24	26
3. Visually appealing documentation	65	55	4	190	16	20	35
4. An online catalogue that is easy to use	65	55	4	20	201	18	22
5. An online catalogue that is easy to learn	65	55	4	20	201	18	22
6. An online catalogue that you can interact with in a clear and understandable way	65	55	4	20	201	18	22
7. An online catalogue that is easy to become skilful at using	65	55	4	20	201	18	22
Total	453	357	214	495	856	136	184

In rating service quality offerings with regards to tangibles, the results in the Table 1 showed that one third of the respondents totally disagreed while only about one tenth strongly agreed, about a third of the respondents are in between. The results obtained indicated that customer

service issues are still prevalent in the library. Therefore, an improvement in the level of customer service rendered currently is necessary to bridge the service performance gap. According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1988), the discrepancy between the services promised and the actual service delivered is referred to as the "service performance gap." That is, the extent to which service providers do not perform at the level expected by customers. The service performance gap occurs when employees are unable or unwilling to perform the service at the desired level. Some of the main theoretical constructs proposed to account for the size of gap are lack of teamwork, employee-job fit, perceived control, supervisory control systems, role conflicts and role ambiguity.

Table 2A: Reliability: (ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately). N=385

Questionnaire items	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.Providing service as promised	65	55	4	190	16	20	35
9. Dependability in handing users' problems	63	27	190	35	20	24	26
10.Performing service right the first time	65	55	4	190	16	20	35
11.Providing service at the promised time	65	55	185	20	20	18	22
12 Accuracy of information received	65	55	185	20	20	18	22
Total	323	247	568	455	92	100	140

Table 2B: Reliability

Questionnaire items	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13.Precision of information received	65	55	4	190	16	20	35
14.Reliability of information received	63	27	190	35	20	24	26
15.Completeness of information received	65	55	4	190	16	20	35
16.Relevance of information received	65	55	185	20	20	18	22
17.Currency of information received	65	55	185	20	20	18	22
Total	323	267	568	455	92	100	140

In rating service quality offerings with regards to reliability, the results in the Table 2 showed that more than half of the respondents totally disagreed while only about one eighth strongly agreed about a third of the respondents are in between. The results obtained indicated that there are serious customer service issues on reliability in the library. The service gap here is a function of management commitment to service quality, goal setting, task standardisation and perception of feasibility. An explanation for this gap is the absence of total management commitment to service quality.

Table 3: Responsiveness (willingness to help users and provide prompt service). N=385

Questionnaire items	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18.Keeping users informed	65	55	4	190	16	20	35
19.Prompt service to users	63	27	190	35	20	24	26
20.Willingness to help users	65	55	180	14	16	20	35
21.Readiness to respond to users' requests	65	55	185	20	20	18	22
Total	258	192	559	259	72	82	118

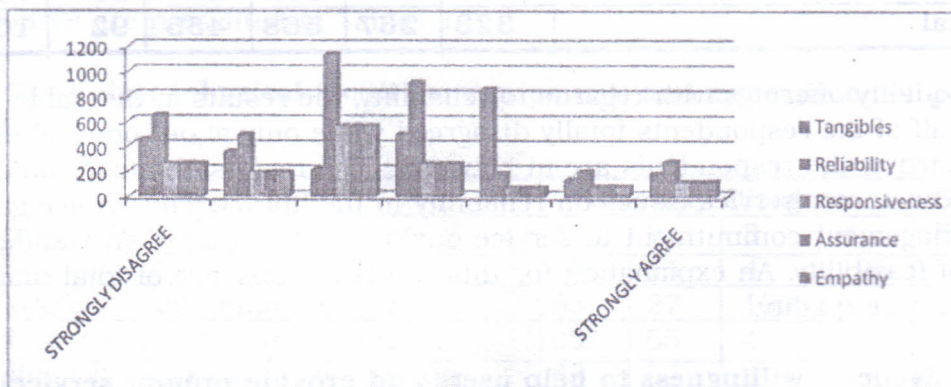
Table 4: Assurance (knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence). N=385

Questionnaire items	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. Courteous staff	65	55	4	190	16	20	35
23. Staff who instill confidence in users	63	27	190	35	20	24	26
24. Making users feel secure about transactions	65	55	180	14	16	20	35
25. Staff who are knowledgeable about questions	65	55	185	20	20	18	22
Total	258	192	559	259	72	82	118

Table 5: Empathy (caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers). N=385

Questionnaire items	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. Giving users individual attention	65	55	4	190	16	20	35
27. Having the users' best interests at heart	63	27	190	35	20	24	26
28. Dealing with users in a caring fashion	65	55	180	14	16	20	35
29. Understanding the needs of users	65	55	185	20	20	18	22
Total	258	192	559	259	72	82	118

In rating service quality offerings on responsiveness, assurance and empathy, the data yielded similar results as shown above. More than half of the respondents disagreed with the service quality offered in these three service dimensions. Only about one tenth strongly agreed, very negligible numbers are in between. The results obtained indicated that there are serious customer service issues on responsiveness, assurance and empathy in the library.

Figure 6: All the 5 SERVQUAL Dimensions rated together

Conclusion

The data analysis presented some interesting facts concerning the challenges faced in delivering good service quality in the University of Lagos main library. For instance, the feedbacks from questionnaire items (QI) 26-29 revealed a significant lack of empathy when dealing with users of the library. It also showed that there was need for regular pulse checks in the form of user evaluations in order to proactively identify service gaps before their negative impacts begin to discourage user from using the library and its facilities. Furthermore, (QI) 18-21 revealed

that library staff lacked good understanding of users' needs and handled users complaints poorly. The implications are far-reaching because when users are less than satisfied, a decision leading to a reduction in the percentage of repeat usage occurs. According to Negi (2009), service quality has a strong impact on organisational performance, improving customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and profitability. Also, (QI) 8-17 showed that the library significantly lacked good customer service culture in terms of reliability because good service behaviours like customer-friendliness did not exist at the core of the library management culture. Senior management therefore should endeavour to create and sustain organisational culture that is user-focused in order to improve service quality. The development of a problem resolution system to expedite the handling and resolution of all kinds of user issues is desirable.

Recommendations

According to Kotler and Keller (2006), the following 10 lessons below are essential for improving service quality across service industries. They are equally recommended as a framework upon which a whole new service-quality management culture can be effectively built in the researcher's organisation.

Listening – Understand what customers really want through continuous learning about the expectations and perceptions of customers and non-customers (e.g. by means of a service-quality information system).

Reliability – Reliability is the single most important dimension of service quality and must be a service priority.

Basic service – Service companies must deliver the basics and do what they are supposed to do- keep promises, use common sense, listen to customers, keep customers informed, and be determined to deliver value to customers.

Service design – Develop a holistic view of the service while managing its many details

Recovery – To satisfy customers who encounter a service problem, service companies should encourage customers to complain (and make it easy for them to do so), respond quickly and personally, and develop a problem resolution system.

Surprising customers – Although reliability is the most important dimension in meeting customers' service expectations, process dimensions(e.g. assurance, responsiveness, and empathy) are most important in exceeding customer expectations, for example, by surprising them with uncommon swiftness, grace, courtesy, competence commitment, and understanding.

Fair play – Service companies must make special efforts to be fair and to demonstrate fairness to customers and employees.

Teamwork – Teamwork is what enables large organisations to deliver service with care and attentiveness by improving employee motivation and capabilities.

Employee research -Conduct research with employees to reveal why service problems occur and what companies must do to solve problems.

Servant leadership – Quality service comes from inspired leadership throughout the organisation; from excellent service-system design; from the effective use of information and technology; and from a slow-to-change, invisible, all-powerful, internal force called corporate culture.

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