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## CONCEPT OF QUALITY IN LIBRARY SERVICES: AN OVERVIEW

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### Abstract

*The library services have changed very fast in the last twenty years. Nowadays, electronic resources, networks and the World Wide Web represent a large portion of the library services. The librarians must manage staff, information in several supports, and technical activities to produce quality services. Quality services means resources and services, which satisfy users' expectations and perceptions. It is very clear that librarians must use management tools to run the library services. These tools such as TQM, SERVQUAL, LibQUAL help them to assess services, to make decisions, to improve services and to achieve a better quality. The networked environment offers libraries' challenges and opportunities in a number of areas including management, services, and collection development. The main objective of this paper is to describe and identify the issues meriting attention by the library professionals to gear up the library product and services so that user communities get satisfied coming to library.*

**Keywords :** Information Services, Library Services, Total Quality Management

### 1. Introduction

The libraries have transformed drastically from storehouses for books and journals to the powerhouses of knowledge and information since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The information and communication technology is responsible for this revolution. The very existences of libraries are dependable on users' satisfaction. Users are getting satisfied when the library is able to rise to his or her expectation or meet the actual needs. A quality service is said to be one, which satisfy the users' expectation resulting a good experience. Throughout the history, libraries were mainly concerned with collection development and processing. The library professionals gave less concern to quality in product and services, never checked whether the users were satisfied or not.

Gradually the social and economic changes have prompted the libraries to develop services. The staff has a vital role in the satisfaction of users. The library being a service organization, its prime objective is to provide the right documents, information and services to its users. Only the users' satisfaction survey will facilitate the assessment of their satisfaction with products and services offered.

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,

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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.

## 2. What is Quality?

The word 'quality' has several definitions. The conventional definition is "One that wears well, is well constructed will last for long time" and the strategic definition is "meeting customers' requirements."

\*According to Juuran 'The quality is fitness for purpose'

\*According to Robinson, "Quality is meeting the requirements of customer- now and in the future."

\*According to Sarkar "Quality of a product or service is the ability of the product or service to meet the customers' requirements [1].

## 3. Quality Concept in Library Services

The library is an organization to offer reference and information services to its users. Library service is the combination of the services- process and its delivery. In a library, the service offered from acquisition section, technical section, maintenance section etc. are the processes carried out there and thereafter delivered to the users. The quality should start from the acquisition section, which should be carried uniformly to circulation section. A user who had an unpleasant experience from the library will tell it to many people, but a good experience will be told to very few. Therefore it is very necessary for librarian to understand the users, what they want, how they want, and when they want the documents and information.

## 4. How to Improve 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 assist 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. He or she 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. Main steps to measure users' satisfaction are [2] :

- I Conducting sample survey.
- II Data collection.
- III Process and analysis of data.
- IV Interpret and present the data.
- V Finding out result.

With the help of the result the librarian can take new steps for development of library. The regular survey will enable the library to understand the changes in users satisfaction and to plan the services accordingly.

#### **4.1 The users' satisfaction is based on many factors like**

- a) A source of up- to-date information, knowledge, accessing facilities and assistance.
- b) The library should organize its facilities visible to the users; otherwise they may not have it and get dissatisfied.
- c) Accessibility: The library resources and services should be easily accessible. Books should be arranged in shelves in proper classified order, so that the users can locate books quickly. In case of electronic library the electronic database like OPAC will help the users to find out the books in stacks.
- d) Tangibles: The tangibles of libraries, namely the building, furniture and other physical facilities, collection, staff, machines etc. should be sufficient and appropriate and useful for the users.
- e) Courtesy / Friendliness: The library staff should be very courteous and friendly with the users.
- f) Physical appearance / Atmosphere/ Cleanliness/ Comfort: The appearance of library, its facilities, collection, staff and services should be attractive and pleasant. A Welcoming atmosphere should be must .Furniture, floor, racks, documents etc. should be neat and clean, [2,4] .
- g) Process- Reliability / Communications: The processing part of the library should be dependable and efficient that suffices the expectations of the users. The way of communication, assistance and guidance also greatly affect the satisfaction of the users.
- h) Some useful criteria to measure users' experience in a library are:
  - i) Speed of services delivery (Access time, location, processing, etc.)
  - ii) Value added services such as Xerox service, CAS, SDI etc.
  - iii) Technology used.

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It is observed that if something goes wrong that can be very easily learned from the users, so the users' complaints can be taken as good measure of user satisfaction.

#### **4.2 Steps for staff to meet the users' needs**

- i) Being responsible for the total service quality to the users both the Technical staff and frontline staff in the library should serve the users
- ii) Services must be provided to the users in a most effective way.
- iii) Providing maximum benefits to the users from collection and facilities.
- iv) Stay close to users: Library can not understand users' needs, tastes, interests etc. without listening to them, and services without users' interest will be a mere wastage.
- v) Users must be treated well, informed well and acknowledged well about the services to the users.

#### **5. Impact of Ranganathan's Five Laws in Quality Service**

The five laws of Ranganathan help in quality improvement of service as those are concentrated to the users very seriously. The laws directly advocate towards libraries' collection development, speedy processing, maintenance and quick retrieval of information by users.

**5.1 The First Law** "Books are for Use" is a direction for measuring the quality of a library; quality in terms of contents, accessibility and availability as and when needed [1,3].

**5.2 The Second Law** "Every reader his/ her books" implies needs of users. In order to meet this law the library has to index all micro and macro documents so that every reader can find out his or her requirements [1, 3].

**5.3 The Third Law** "Every Book / Information its reader" implies the importance of book/ information selection in a library. The law advocates scientific document selection, subject based organization, advanced and in depth indexing, efficient and effective searching and locating tools, Staff assistance, open access, extension services, publicity programs etc [1,3].

**5.4 The Fourth Law** "Save the time of Reader" indicates the importance of fast and efficient services to the users with the advanced technologies, method, techniques and tools. Open access, digital services, classified arrangement of documents in shelves, location and directing guides, excellent searching tools, and techniques i.e. Online public Access Catalogue (OPAC) in an

automated library, Xerox facility, Online Information services, qualified and experienced staff will ensure fast service to the users [1,3].

**5.5 The Fifth Law** "The Library is a growing organism" implies collection development, changing of all components of a library. The flow of changing is like that [1,3]

**Traditional Library—à Computerized Library—à Networked Library—  
Electronic Library—à Digital Library—à Virtual Library—à Global Information Hub.**

Everyday the world of documents and information is changing tremendously. Now the information is recorded not in papers alone, to many media, the latest being the electronic and digital form. So in today's world the library may called as information and knowledge house of world as a whole if it is supported by advanced information and communication technologies.

## **6. Measuring Qualities of Library Services**

The important measuring tools and techniques are [1,5,6,7]:

- 5.a) **TQM** (Total Quality Management)
- 5.b) **SERVQUAL**
- 5.c) **LibQUAL**

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. The most important components of TQM in a library are:

- Benchmarking
- Performance Measuring and Monitoring
- Qualification and experience of staff.

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.

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.

The major performance indicators of the library functions are:

Acquisition: Efficiency, effectiveness, cost productivity.

Classification: Accuracy, Time factor, cost.

Cataloguing: efficiency, Time effectiveness.

Technical Processing: Efficiency, effectiveness, cost productivity.

Collection Management: efficiency, ease, accessibility, effectiveness.

Quality of service depends on quality and experience of staff.

The TQM supports user education, sufficient and convenient technical infrastructures.

**SERVQUAL** is the most popular assessment tool of service quality. It is designed by the marketing research team of Berry, Parasuraman, and Zeithaml. SERVQUAL evolve a set of five dimensions to assess the service quality [1,2] -

- i) **Tangibles**: Appearance of physical facilities, equipments, personnel, and communication materials.
- ii) **Reliability**: Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately; giving correct information asked.
- iii) **Responsiveness**: Willingness to help users and provide prompt service making new information available.
- iv) **Assurance and empathy**: Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey confidence to users. It involves politeness, friendliness, skill to provide information.
- v) **Access**: It means there are adequate staff and equipments as well as hours of operation. Location of library is central and convenient.
- vi) **Communications**: It involves understanding the users' needs precisely, provision of user education, teaching library skills to users, the use of language understandable to different categories of users.
- vii) **Security**: It involves physical safety within the library, and keeping library dealings secured.

**LibQUAL +** is a library service quality measurement tool based on the SERVQUAL models of assessing service quality. 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 +TM 2002 is the latest version to listening the users

#### 7. Users' Expectations: Quality of Services

1. Modern building and furniture are required for a good library.
2. A good library provides excellent facilities and services.
3. Required books and journals in adequate number will be available with attractively displayed in a good library.

4. In a good library, the staff will assist the users for locating a document.
5. Accurate information and proper records will always be available in a good library.
6. The staff of a good library will have sufficient knowledge to answer user's questions.
7. Easy accessing and convenient working hour should have in a good library.

#### **8. Users' Perception: Quality of Services**

1. My library has modern building and furniture.
2. My library provides me excellent facilities and services.
3. Necessary books and journals in adequate number are available displayed attractively in my library.
4. My library assists the users for locating the documents needed.
5. Accurate information and proper records are always kept in my library.
6. The staff of my library has proper knowledge to answer my question.
7. My library is easily accessible with convenient working hours.

#### **9. Facilities in a Quality Based Library**

##### **A) Physical Facilities:**

1. Good library is easily accessible.
2. Good layout for a good library.
3. Sufficient Space, lighting and ventilation.
4. Clean, tidy and hygienic.
5. Cozy and comfortable furniture.

##### **B) Library Collection:**

6. Good collection of textbooks, journals, reference books, online journals, e-books, etc. is needed in a good library.
7. Good library displays new arrival of books in separate shelves.
8. Good library offers open access to the collection.

##### **C) Library Staff:**

9. Staff in a good library should be experienced with knowledge of modern technology.
10. Staff should help the users to locate the documents needed and do their works in time.
11. Sufficient staff to run the library.

**D) Technical Processing:**

12. Good library acquire new documents in time.
13. Shelf arrangement and rectification is a never ending process in a good library.
14. Good library has proper catalogue or database for collection (OPAC etc.)
15. Good library has prompt processing, charging and discharging system.

**10. Services in Central Library, IIT Guwahati**

The Central Library, one of the important central facilities of the Institute, currently has about 85,000 volumes, including textbooks, reference books, conference proceedings, back volumes, standards, and non-book material such as CD-ROMs, audio tapes, video tapes, slides. The Library also subscribes to about 484 current periodicals. All operations of the Library are automated with the help of an integrated library software package (LIBSYS). The database for the entire collection has been created and available through On-Line Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) to the users via campus network. Now this facility is also available through Institute's Intranet as a Web enabled OPAC. The Library is a member of INDEST consortium (Indian National Digital Library in Science and Technology Consortium), under the aegis of the MHRD, provides online access to few important science & engineering abstracting database services, such as COMPENDEX & INSPEC, MathSciNet, SciFinder Scholar, Web of Science etc and several full-text journals and Indian Standards [9]. The Central Library Intranet Page provides the IP based online accesses to these resources. Opening hours is from Morning 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Average number of users in library is 200 per day.

**11. Conclusion**

Today library introduces many new services either converting existing services into e- services or by developing and implementing entirely new services for searching, delivery and use of information. Such new or converted services include e.g. online service, portals, digitized collection, etc to enhance the quality of library services. Quality will be mainly defined by the speed and accuracy of reference and information delivery services, open access to both physical collection and online retrieval systems. The comprehensiveness and good support from library staff is most important needs in a library. The efficiency of background processes, convention of workshop, seminar, in service training of new technology introduced, refreshment course organized by library professional community are most essential for library to cope with globalization.

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 are



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.

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