

REALITY VERSUS DESIRE: THE CASE OF GIJ LIBRARY USERS' EXPECTATIONS

By

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Abstract

The paper looks at users' expectations and their view of library services at the Ghana Institute of Journalism library. The study identifies the GIJ library users' expectations by adopting the LibQUAL model propositions to collect data from 20% of the Bachelors degree students. The objective of the paper is to find out how service delivery is currently experienced by users. The paper also offers the evidence to managers of the Institute the need to improve services to meet increasing demands of users' expectations. Findings indicate that the dimensions in which users expressed the highest expectations were 'access to information' and 'affect of services': materials that are relevant to their study at GIJ, easy access to electronic information, and staff who are courteous. Findings suggest that the library is well perceived regarding 'staff services': staff who are willing to help users. However, it emerged that the library did not meet the users' expectations in some of the propositions in all the three dimensions. Recommendations are made to guide the library strategically and operationally to better meet users' expectations.

Introduction

To borrow the words of Thakuria (2007), “libraries have transformed drastically from storehouses of books and journals to power houses of knowledge”. In this 21st century, library users too, having become increasingly tech-savvy, have also developed higher expectations for quality services. Users get satisfied when the library is able to rise to their expectations or meet their actual needs. Expectation for quality library services has become so important that, in some instances, it acts as a determinant factor in selecting tertiary institutions. Syed and Simmonds (1998) state that, “It is quite likely that when selecting a college, some students are influenced particularly by the college’s academic library and the quality of service the library provides”. It presupposes that before our users start experiencing the library’s services, they have their own perception of an acceptable level of service performance that they desire.

Hence, the librarian and staff of an academic library need to better understand their users – both students and faculty, taking into consideration their unique characteristics, needs and expectations. Services can no longer be delivered according to what the library staff considers acceptable, but rather services must be geared towards satisfying the expectations of the users, because users are the ultimate judges of quality. Thakuria (2007) mentioned that “quality service is said to be one which satisfies the users’ expectations resulting in a good experience”.

However, in today’s competitive environment, access to electronic information, multimedia products and growing expectation of users and demand for accountability, academic libraries face a difficult task in providing the most satisfying ways of delivering content and service to their patrons. To what extent should libraries recognize users’ expectations? Is it possible for libraries to fulfill users’ growing expectations? One way to address this challenge is to first, measure actual library service performance alongside users’ expectations by adopting a more user-centered approach to improve services. Such an assessment would reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the library so that improvement could be made.

According to Asemi, Kazempour and Rizi (2010), historically, the quality of an academic library has been described in terms of its collection, the size of holdings and various counts of its uses. However, it is important to note that measurement of libraries based solely on these input/output

measures have become obsolete. Librarians must now assess the effectiveness of their services with a new approach that takes into consideration users' needs, because the ultimate purpose of the library is to meet users' expectations. This paper therefore adopts the LibQUAL model — a user-centered approach to respond to the Ghana Institute of Journalism Library users' expectations and also to find out how service delivery is currently experienced by the users. The paper also aims to offer managers of the Institute the evidence for the need to improve library services and to foster a culture of excellence in providing library services.

What is LibQUAL?

LibQUAL is a web-administered library service quality assessment protocol developed by the Association of Research Libraries (Thompson, Cook & Kyrillidou, 2006). It is a library service measurement tool based on the SERVQUAL models. SERVQUAL is a multi-item scale developed to assess customers' perceptions and expectation of service quality (Badri, Abdulla & Al-Madani, 2005). LibQUAL uses 22 questions to measure library users' perceptions and expectations about library services under three dimensions:

- affect of service
- access to information
- the library environment as a place of learning

Library administrators have successfully used LibQUAL survey data to identify best practices, analyze deficits, and effectively allocate resources. Since LibQUAL was developed, it has been widely used all over the world including the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom and other European countries such as Switzerland, Germany and Denmark. It has also been used in the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and South Africa. Institutional data and reports generated from LibQUAL surveys enable administrators to assess whether library services are meeting users' expectations—and develop services that better meet those expectations. It gives the academic library users the chance to say where services need improvement, so the library can respond to and better manage users' expectations. (Association of Research Libraries-Statistics and Assessment Program, 2012).

User Expectations and Perceptions

According to Hernon and Altman (as cited in Arshad & Ameen, 2011), “Perceptions are the impressions formed when an individual encounters with the library”. The users’ perceptions on library services are subject to change depending on users encounter with library personnel, facilities and existing systems. There is a positive experience when services meet users’ expectation and negative experience when services fall below expectation. A study conducted by Lilley and Usherwood (2000) cited in Halif & Rowley, (2011), revealed that perceptions are formed based on users’ library experience in addition to internal and external factors ranging from family influence to the media. The Encarta World English Dictionary (1999) defines expectation as “the mental image of something expected, often compared to the reality”. Expectations are assumptions about the likelihood of something occurring and they reflect anticipated performance. Users’ expectations are based on previous encounter with the library services and their personal needs.

Users expect quality service provided in a friendly and courteous manner, staff who convey a high degree of trust and confidence based on knowledge and courtesy, demonstrated willingness to help customers and provide prompt service, giving an individual user the attention needed, the appearance of physical facilities that are conducive for learning, and good communication that exists between the service provider and users (Cooper, Dempsey, Menon & Millson-Martula, 1998).

Since expectations are the standards against which a service provider's performance is judged (Arshad & Ameen, 2011), libraries must seek to offer services that meet the users’ expectations. Though satisfying users’ expectation is difficult or may not even be possible, today, libraries (especially academic libraries) have a keen interest in assessing their users’ perceptions and expectations in order to better manage their services to measure up to users’ expectations.

Why User Focus in Academic Libraries?

According to Carr (2006), until the 1980s, academic library users were not always at the centre of the practitioners’ professional attention. Until then the emphasis was placed more on collection rather than services to users, on administrative procedures rather than on ease of use,

and on rules and regulations rather than what users want or expect. The librarian and his staff provide services that to their best ability meet users' needs without their involvement of the user. Gradually, things are changing. Calvert (2001) also confirms this by indicating that emphasis on customer care seen in the 1980s and 1990s has also affected university libraries around the world, and as a result, the need to understand what library users expect in terms of service quality is now necessary for good management. Now, strategic planning in academic libraries reflects a more user-focused approach, and the principal assumption behind this is to meet users' expectations.

The forces that have made the academic library user a force to reckon with in the library services delivery include advancement in technology and competition among libraries (Carr, 2006). With the evolving technological innovations and variety and abundance of information that is becoming available to academic library users, their information-seeking behavior and their expectations have changed. Prakash (2011) states that "technology has shifted the users' expectation from a mere ease of access to information to empowering users to become an integral part of a library design".

Methodology

The study used a structured questionnaire to collect data, specifically adopting 18 of the 22 LibQUAL propositions that suit the library. Though LibQUAL is administered electronically, the researchers printed the propositions and administered them manually. The 18 propositions fall under the following dimensions:

1. **Affect of Service**—questions that determine how well our staff serve patrons in terms of responsiveness, courtesy and knowledgeability.
2. **Access to Information**— questions that address accessibility to electronic and print materials and general collections.
3. **Library as Place**—questions that seek input about the conduciveness of the library for studying.

Table 1: What Do the Questions Look Like?

PROPOSITIONS	MINIMUM EXPECTATION							MAXIMUM EXPECTATION							PERCEPTION						
	LOW				HIGH			LOW				HIGH			LOW				HIGH		
Affect of Services - Dimension	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Staff who give users individual attention																					
Staff who are courteous																					
Staff who are ready to respond to users' questions																					
Staff who are knowledgeable to answer users' questions																					
Staff who understand the needs of the users																					
Staff who are willing to help users																					
Staff who are dependable, e.g. in handling users' service problems																					
Access to Information - Dimension																					
Printed library materials I need for my studies (e.g. books)																					
Adequate journals (electronic/print)																					
Easy access to electronic information																					
Materials that are relevant to my study at GIJ																					
Easy access to materials in the library																					
Electronic catalogue that lets me easily locate information on my own																					
Computers that work well																					
Enough time to use the computer																					
Library as Place - Dimension																					
Library space that inspires study and learning																					
Quiet space for individual learning/studying																					
A comfortable and inviting location																					

For each proposition, users indicated their minimum expectation of service level, maximum service level, and the perceived service level on a 1-7 point scale with 1 being the lowest and 7 being the highest. Two additional questions were added to enable them furnish the researchers with information that the model questions did not address. Proportional sampling was used to select a sample size of 82 from a population of 402. Twenty percent (20%) was selected from each year group.

Table 2: Who Responded to the Questionnaire?

Levels	Total	Sample Size 20%	Respondents%
Level 100	102	21	100%
Level 200	44	9	100%
Level 300	162	33	100%
Level 400	94	19	100%
TOTAL	402	82	

Results of Analysis

Biographic Information of Respondents

More female students were sampled for the study, 60%, female and 40% male. Most of the respondents fell within the ages of 21-30 years. Out of the respondents surveyed, 52% pursued public relations and 48% read journalism program.

Frequency of Library Use

Many of the students (45%) used the library twice or more in a week and 25% used the library daily.

Users' Expectations and Perceptions — Affect of Service (Reality versus Desire)

There were 7 propositions under the Affect of Service dimension and for each proposition, respondents were to choose a number that reflects their minimum and maximum expectation and perception of staff services. It can be seen from Table 3 that the average of users' maximum expectation was 6.26. Interestingly, the average of their minimum expectation (4.46) was equal

to the average of their perception (4.46). In several propositions, the perception exceeded the minimum expectation: *staff who are willing to help users*, *staff who are knowledgeable to answer users' questions*, and *staff who are ready to respond to users' questions*.

Table 3: Users' Expectations and Perceptions – Affect of Service (Reality versus Desire)

Affect of Service	Minimum Expectation	Maximum Expectation	Perception
Averages of Propositions	4.46	6.26	4.46
Propositions			
Staff who give users individual attention	4.40	6.30	4.43
Staff who are courteous	4.52	6.53	4.09
Staff who are ready to respond to users' questions	4.37	6.13	4.51
Staff who are knowledgeable to answer users' questions	4.49	6.10	4.68
Staff who understand the needs of the users	4.66	6.34	4.30
Staff who are willing to help users	4.65	6.19	4.78
Staff who are dependable, e.g. in handling users' service problems	4.39	6.23	4.42

Users' Expectation and Perception – Access to Information (Reality versus Desire)

In Table 4 depicting the Access to Information dimension, the average of all the 8 propositions of users' minimum expectation was 4.37, and the average of their perception was 3.99. So the library could not meet users' minimum expectation. However, propositions like *printed library materials I need for my studies* (4.57) and *easy access to materials in the library* (4.56) exceeded the minimum expectation of users. The propositions that were most poorly perceived were *adequate journals (electronic/print)* (3.10) and *enough time to use the computer* (2.73).

Table 4: Users' Expectation and Perception -Access to Information

Access to Information	Minimum Expectation	Maximum Expectation	Perception
Averages of Propositions	4.37	6.28	3.99
Propositions			
Printed library materials I need for my studies (e.g. books)	4.62	6.25	4.57
Adequate journals (electronic/print)	4.55	6.34	3.10
Easy access to electronic information	4.35	6.44	4.30
Materials that are relevant to my study at GIJ	4.41	6.61	4.46
Easy access to materials in the library	4.53	6.22	4.56
Electronic catalogue that lets me easily locate information on my own	4.26	6.05	4.23
Computers that work well	4.34	6.27	4.00
Enough time to use the computer	4.09	6.05	2.73

Users' Expectation and Perception – Library as Place (Reality versus Desire)

Table 5 shows that in the Library as a Place dimension, the average of all the 3 propositions of users' minimum expectation was 4.42, and the average of their perception was 4.01. Overall, the library did not meet users' minimum expectation except the proposition *Library space that inspires study and learning* (4.63) where it barely exceeded the minimum expectation (4.62).

Table 5 Users' Expectation and Perception –Library as a Place

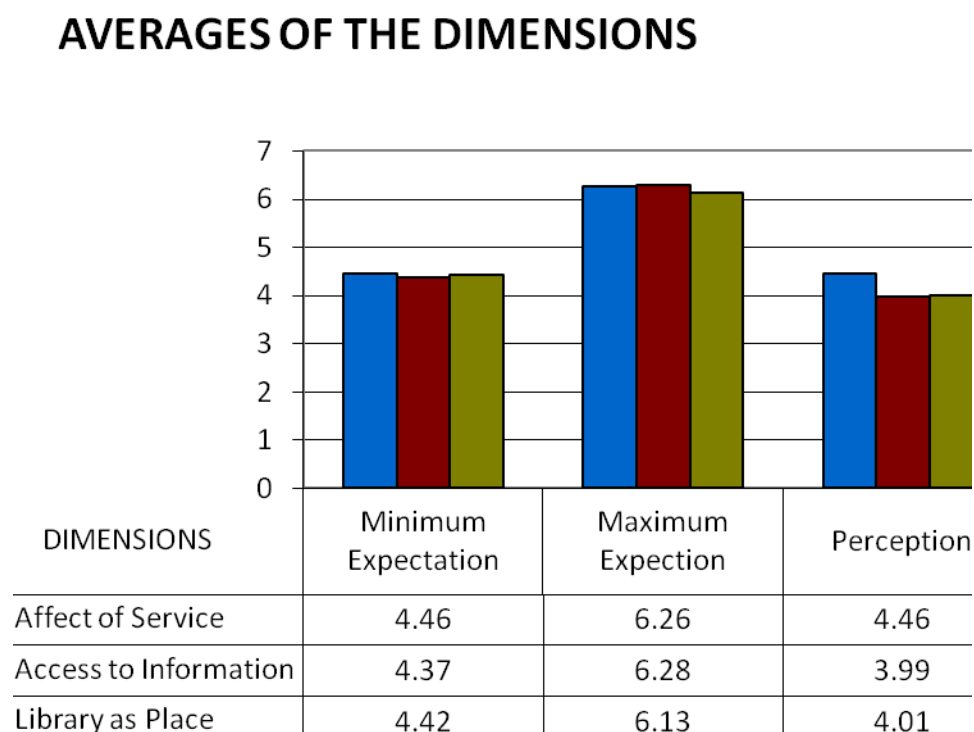
Library as a Place	Minimum Expectation	Maximum Expectation	Perception
Averages of Propositions	4.42	6.13	4.01
Propositions			
Library space that inspires study and learning	4.62	6.20	4.63
Quiet space for individual learning/studying	4.26	6.05	3.95
A comfortable and inviting location	4.42	6.13	4.01

Averages of the Dimensions

At the dimension level, “access to information” registered the highest expectation (6.28), “affect of service” and “library as place” dimensions had mean of (6.26) and (6.13) respectively. On perception, ‘affect of service’ dimension had the highest mean (4.46), followed by library as place dimension (4.0) and “access to information dimension” (3.99), being the lowest mean. (See Figure 1).

The poor perception for “access to information dimension” is due to propositions 9 and 15—*adequate journals (electronic/print)* (3.10) and *enough time to use the computer* (2.73). (See Table 4). The reason could be that the library discontinued subscribing to the communication journals it used to and the inadequate number of computers for user population.

Figure 1: Averages of the Dimensions



What Do Users Desire Most? (Their Highest Expectations)

The library is about service and it must be rendered to suit users' needs and expectations. From the survey, the areas that users desire most are:

Materials that are relevant to their studies at GIJ (6.61)

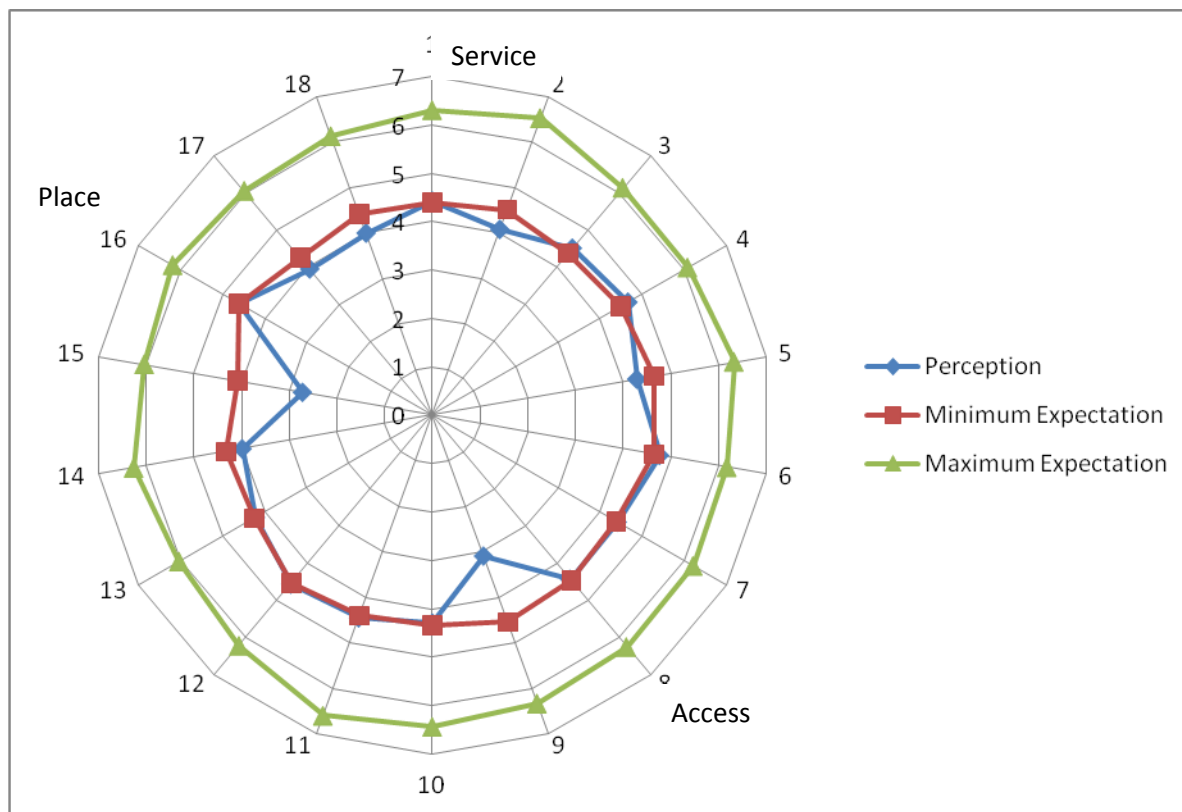
Staff who are courteous (6.53)

Easy access to electronic information (6.44)

Staff who understand the needs of users (6.34)

Library space that inspires studying and learning (6.20)

**Figure 2: Graphic Representation of the Reality and the Desire of Users
(All 18 Propositions)**



Key to Figure 2 Graphic Representation of the 18 Propositions

1	Staff who give individual attention to user	10	Easy access to electronic information
2	Staff who are courteous	11	Materials that are relevant to my study
3	Staff who are ready to respond to users' questions	12	Easy access to materials in the library
4	Staff who are knowledgeable	13	Electronic catalogue that lets me easily locate information on my own
5	Staff who understand the needs of the users	14	Computers that work well
6	Staff who are willing to help users	15	Enough time to use the computer
7	Staff who are dependable	16	Library space that inspires study and learning
8	Printed library materials I need for my studies	17	Quiet space for individual learning/studying
9	Adequate journals	18	A comfortable and inviting location

General Comments on Expectations

In addition to the 18 propositions, users were asked to give comments on their expectation on all the three dimensions. On the whole, there were 74 responses. Paramount among the issues that emerged were:

- Staff attitude - Users expect staff who are friendly and respectful.
- Access to current book - Users wanted current books
- Access to information - Though the library is small and materials are well organized, the study has helped reveal that many of our users do not know how to use the electronic catalogue to look for materials.
- Library Expansion - Many users commented that the library needs to be expanded.
- Computers and Internet connectivity - Users wanted more time on computers to browse, adequate number of computers, and effective and efficient Internet connectivity.

What Are We Doing Well?

The library seems to be doing well in some of the propositions as perception exceeded users' minimum expectation.

1. *Staff who are willing to help users*
2. *Staff who are knowledgeable to answer users' questions*
3. *Library space that inspires study and learning*
4. *Printed library materials I need for my studies.*

What Areas Need Attention?

1. The survey has revealed that the library's performance was below users' minimum expectations in 9 of the 18 propositions. Though users appreciate staff who are willing to help, they disapprove of staff who are not courteous.
2. Many of the users were not happy with the inadequacy of library journals, both print and electronic.
3. Enough time to use library computers registered a very low mean of 2.73.
4. Many users did not find the library a quiet space for individual learning/ studying

Recommendations

Due to the advancement in technology, the academic user has become sophisticated, and his/her desire for quality service has increased. The level of service users' demand at times seems unrealistic, nevertheless we cannot fail to take our users' expectations into account. The following recommendations are proposed to improve GIJ library services.

Library Staff

The library is about service and staff must deliver it in a courteous manner to enable users express their desires all the time. The staff must be retrained in the areas of customer service, especially those at the circulation desk. Staff who find it difficult to change should be reassigned.

Information Retrieval Skills

The delivery of information literacy skills is important to users to equip them to develop information retrieval skills. Information retrieval will also reduce time used on the computer for other users to also have access. In addition to the orientation period, users should be taught again how to use the electronic catalogue to search for information on their own.

Subscription to Journals

Though journals are expensive, they are the source of current information which augment other resources. The Institute should renew the subscription to communication journals and also join the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Ghana to gain access to a variety of journals that are affordable.

Conclusion

The study has illuminated the GIJ library users' expectations and revealed how service is currently experienced from users' point of view. Naturally, users mentioned the general constraints of the library such as inadequate space, limited number of computers and lack of subscription to communication journals. The findings suggest that the library is performing modestly despite the constraints. However, there is more room for improvement since users have very high expectations. Examining users' expectations vis-a-vis the service performance might not always lead to a very favorable response, but it is necessary to compare expectation with

actual library experience to discover any gap in service performance and strive to improve upon services of our users.

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