Patrons' Perceptions of North West University- Mafikeng Campus Library – Implications for Service Delivery

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ABSTRACT This paper investigated the perceptions of users towards library services of the North-West University Library at Mafikeng Campus. Data were collected by means of a questionnaire administered to students and staff in five faculties of the University. A sample of 150 students and 150 members of staff were used. The library services that were indicated in the questionnaire were those that impact on customer care such as circulations, information services, collection development, media and special collections and information access. The questionnaire was subjected to face validation and had a reliability coefficient of 0.88 using a split-half technique.The findings showed that the majority of students (males and females) were under the age of 30 years, engaged in undergraduate studies on full time basis in the various faculties. Members of staff were mostly adults with Masters and PhDs with work experience of one to forty years. The results also showed that both staff and students' perceptions of the library services were negative due to perceived lack of resources (books and journals), lack of training on library use, e-resources and incompetent staff. Significant difference existed in the constraints to information access (t= 2.344 p<0.05) between staff and students. This study, therefore, suggested the introduction of user friendly retrieval system and timely acquisition of materials for staff and students in order to change the mixed perceptions about library services.

INTRODUCTION

The North West University (NWU) was formerly known as the University of Bophuthatswana (UNIBO) established by the Bophuthatswana Government and like all universities, it also established its own library. After the democratization of South Africa in 1994, it changed its name to the University of North West (UNIWEST). It became the multi-campus North West University after merging with the former Potchefstroom University and the Vaal Campus of the Vista University in 2004. Each campus has its own library.

The university opened in 1980 and the first University Librarian assumed duty on May 1980. The library's beginnings were in the study, lounge and dining room of house B which was one of the three houses that served as the university accommodation. At this time, there was neither the library nor the bookshop to provide prescribed textbooks for students. Therefore, the University librarian spent the first two months ordering prescribed textbooks for the university bookshop. Lor (1990), Chen and Tsung-Yu (2011) stated that the functions of a librarian include book and resources acquisition.

This led to the library to be established on an ad hoc basis with little or no prior planning which robbed the library of "intensified effort, persistence, direction, and creation of task strategies" which are the benefits of planning (Kiran et al. 2006.). Crisis management then prevailed. Books were bought without recommendation and purchase forms and once received, were incompletely processed as there was no professional staff for cataloguing and classification. This meant that there was no catalogue produced to help users find the books that they needed. Books were arranged in alphabetical order by author's name on the shelves as a temporary measure to help users find books. However by 1981, five professional staff were employed, three of which were cataloguers, one a subject librarian and one in acquisitions. These members of staff worked to order, catalogue and classify the needed books as well as processing the incompletely processed ones. By the end of 1982, all books on the shel-ves were completely processed and a book catalogue had been created. Furthermore, it had grown into a multi-media library also serving the Taung campus (Lor 2009).

Conceptual Framework for Library Service Delivery

The concept of service quality defined as the difference between a library user's expectations and perceptions of service performance can be traced to the mid- 1970s (Oldman and Wills 1977; Cook and Heath 2001). A frequently reported view of quality in libraries overlaps with approaches focusing on customer satisfaction. User satisfaction with library services is viewed as a goal to be met and, by implication, becomes the means to deliver quality services. Childers and Van House (1989) equated quality and effectiveness and defined effectiveness as "the degree to which the needs and expectations of strategic constituencies are met" and acknowledge the diversity of library users with potentially varying expectations to be met.

Hernon and Nitecki (2001) noted that service quality has been defined from at least four perspectives, one of which focuses on meeting and/or exceeding expectations and reported the Gaps Model of Service Quality which includes that perspective, but presents four other gaps that may hinder an organization in providing high quality service. These five gaps reflect a discrepancy between: customers expectations of service and management's perspective on these expectations (Gap 1); service quality specifications and management's perspective of customer expectations (Gap 2); service quality specifications and service delivery (Gap 3); service delivery and external communication to customers about that delivery (Gap 4); and customers' expectation of service and perceived service delivery (Gap 5). Based on the Gaps Model, expectations are subjective and comprise desired wants, or the extent to which customers believe a particular attribute is essential for an excellent service provider, and perceptions are judgments about service performance. Furthermore, expectations are not static; they change and evolve over time.

Kyrillidou (2002) reported three models of service delivery in the library as linear, cyclic and spiral swirl models. The linear model is based on input, output, quality and outcome continuum. There is an implicit simplistic assumption that inputs have a direct relation to outputs, which, in turn, relates to quality and to outcomes. However, input measures such as volumes held, serial subscriptions, expenditures, and staffing do not relate to output measures as currently measured in terms of reference transactions, circulation, interlibrary loan, and bibliographic instruction. The cyclic model states that in library, input, output, quality and outcome are related in a more complex fashion. Input measures such as books are clearly the output of users who as scholars and authors have created these resources that result into increased income, reputation, or recognition enhancing personal goals and outcomes. This inextricable and complex web of relations provides a richer context for the usefulness of inputs, outputs, quality issues, and the impact libraries are making. The spiral swirl model depicts a more dynamic and flexible model, moving users and information resources into a spiral swirl up and down into the depths of knowledge, exploration, and experience.

Whitson (1995) stated the traditional model of undifferentiated service and differentiated service model in the library. The traditional concept of reference service assumes that any client may approach the desk at any time, ask any question, and receive a competent response on the spot, within a few minutes. This model requires the highest level of knowledge on the part of the reference staff, since each person must be able to handle questions ranging from the most trivial to the most complex. The traditional model is based on any client - one librarian; any question - one service point; and any time - on-the-spot response. The advantages include convenience to client, efficiency and minimization of misunderstanding, while the disadvantages are high cost, lack of control, inflexibility in use of staff, lack of accountability, reinforces unrealistic client expectations, duplication of effort and reinforces image of librarian as clerk. The alternative model, or conceptual approach, discards the notion of reference service as a single activity, and views it instead as a composite of several different services, each of which needs to be structured, staffed, supported, and evaluated on its own terms. Services related to this model are defined directions and general information, technical assistance, "information lookup" for the client" and research consultation.

Chen and Chou (2011) explored the application of Function Deployment (QFD) and Grey Relational Analysis to improve library service quality. The Function Deployment (QFD)

is a planning methodology for product development and was developed in 1972 at Mitsubishi's Kobe shipyard. The QFD is also a systematic method of adapting technology to people, and it is used to help businesses understand the customers' needs and to meet these within their own current ability and resources. Technically, QFD belongs to the sphere of quality management methods, offering us a linear and structured guideline for converting the customer's needs into specifications for, and characteristics of new products and services. QFD can also facilitate continuous product impro-vement with emphasis on the impact of organization learning in innovation. In brief, QFD is not only a technical tool, but also a managerial philosophy that can help enhance the organizational and managing effects.

Grey Relational Analysis: Grey theory was presented by Deng in 1989. It is mainly aimed at uncertainty or incomplete information of systematic models, and fully utilizing the white information to solve problems within the grey system. Grey theory can handle uncertainties in small data samples with imprecise information. For example, traditional mathematical statistics requires a large amount of data for a basis of analysis. Normally, if there is insufficient data, functions cannot be estimated. But Grey theory requires only a small amount of data to be effective. It focuses on relational analysis, model construction, and prediction of indefinite and incomplete information. Grey Relational Analysis (GRA) is commonly used in Asia. It is an impact evaluation model that measures the degree of similarity or difference between two sequences based on the grade of relation. The aim of GRA is to examine factors affecting systems. It is based on finding relationships in both independent and interrelating data series. Using GRA, the GRC (grey relational coefficient) can be used to evaluate the relationships between reference series and the series themselves. The steps of GRA are shown as follows: find the benchmark and referential series, list the series of comparison, normalization, calculate the difference series, calculation of the grey relational coefficients and ranking grey relational coefficients.

Research Problem

The North West University – Mafikeng campus library currently offers services to the university community of about 6000 registered students and about 2500 members of staff as well as the community of the North West Province. The mission of this library is to support the core business of its parent body which is teaching, learning and research through satisfying the information needs of its users. Evident from the library's annual reports, the library has over the years identified problem areas and planned, resourced and implemented solutions such as introducing information literacy program with a full time staff to train staff and students on information skills. It has budgeted millions of Rand for buying books, journals and databases. It has used international standards when cataloging and classifying materials to make them accessible to users. It has also sent surveys to users including an international survey on libraries (LIBQUAL) which received poor response from users and offered to send a representative on academic board meetings to assist clarify and /or inform academic staff on library matters as well forming partnerships with other professional bodies such Gauteng and Environs Library Consortium (GAELIC), Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) and publishers to widen accessibility of materials to users. In 2004, it took academic staff to major bookshops to buy books and organize yearly book exhibitions on campus to garner cooperation from academic staff. Furthermore, it has acted on user complaints such as bad customer care by sending frontline staff to customer care workshops (NWU 2005). Despite all these efforts, complaints have continued on both sides and have become a matter of grave concern to students, library and academic staff as well as university campus management. The campus management, at the beginning of 2011, arranged a meeting between Deans of faculties and library staff to discuss complaints from academic staff, in which all allegations were successfully accounted for by library staff, but the complaints have not stopped. Anecdotal evidences suggested that the expectations of users of library services are not met by the library and the perception thereof is that the library does not offer quality service. The problem therefore is that, could it be truly asserted and supported with evidence that the library does not offer quality services to the Library users in Mafikeng Campus?

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the paper was to examine the patrons' perceptions of North West University- Mafikeng Campus Library. Specifically the paper identified the personal characteristics of students and staff that used the library and then examines their perception on the level of services provides by the library.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at the Mafikeng Campus of the North West University which is located in the capital of the North West Province and has an international ambience, with students from 22 different countries enrolled in its five faculties. The Campus has a rural atmosphere, with buildings and a safe environment. The Global Position System coordinates of its position are S25º49´44´´ and E25º36´32´´ (North –West University 2010). The university is physically located at the corner of Dr Albert Lithuli and University drive. North-West University, Mafikeng campus was started in 2004, as one of the multi campuses of the merged institutions with five faculties, Academic Development Centre, Centre for Applied, Radiation, Science and Technology, Library, Soccer Institute, maintenances and administration. The population of study was 202 members of academic staff and 7845 students of the North West University (Mafikeng Campus) in all five Faculties. Within each faculty, a random sample technique was used by the researcher to ensure that each member within the strata has an equal opportunity to be selected. The final sample size was made of 96 students and 33 staff. A structured questionnaire was designed based on review of related literature and objectives of the study. The questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents during the 2010 academic year. The questionnaire consisted of sections on personal characteristics of library users and their perception of library services which was rated on a 4-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was face validated by Lecturers in the communication and senior library staff of the North West University (Mafikeng Campus); and has a reliability coefficient of 0.88 using a split-half technique. Data collected were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), with means, standard deviation and t-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal Characteristics of Respondents

Personal data of respondents covered in the study included gender, age, programme of study, year and level of study, mode of study and frequency of visits to the library for students and gender, age, educational level, work experience and frequency of visits to the library for staff. The distribution of gender of the respondents shows that 30.3% of female and 69.7% of male staff participated in the survey. The gender distribution for student respondents is not in line with the enrollment statistics which show that 65% of students were females and 35% were males (North West University 2010). This might mean that male students use the library more than their female counterparts. The age for most student respondents was between 15 and 30 years (84%), followed by respondents aged between 31 and 41 years; and lastly by respondents aged between 46 and 55 years. There were no respondents above the age of 55 years. The majority of respondents who were members of staff were between the ages 31-45 (39.4%) followed by respondents aged between 56 and 65 (27.3%), and respondents aged 46-55 at 24.2%.

The majority of students (67.7%) were registered for their first degree while 24% are registered for their Honours Degree and 7.3% are registered for their Masters Degrees. This indicates that the library is predominantly used by undergraduate students. The results show an equal number of members of staff respondents with Master's degrees and PhD's (45.5%), Honours degree (6.1%) and those with a Bachelor's Degree (3.0%). This is probably a result of the minimum requirements for the lecturers' post, that is, Honours degree. This shows that most members of staff are engaged in research and their needs should be catered as such by the library. About 63.5% of students' respondents visit the library daily, 34.4% visit the library once a week and 1% once a month. The majority of respondents who visit the library daily and weekly are probably full time students who attend classes daily on campus, while those respondents who visit the library once a month are part time students who attend classes on monthly basis. The majority of staff respondents

(45.5%) visit the library on a weekly basis, followed by monthly basis (36.4%) and there are those who visit the library once a semester, probably to put books on short loan for the students. This indicates that staff respondents do not visit the library as frequently as students probably because they can access information they need in the comfort of their offices from the databases, a view also shared by Cook and Heath (2001) findings. It can also mean that their needs are not catered for by the library and therefore use other resources, for example, internet to obtain infor-mation. Furthermore, they could be having copies of books that they need in their offices as they are loaned out to them for a longer period and they can loan out to a maximum of 10 books at a time.

Perceptions of Library Service

Table 1 shows a list of 30 attitudinal statements about users' perception of library services. The respondents were asked to rate the statements using 4 point Likert type scale as follows; 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (Disagree) 3 (Agree) and 4 (Strongly agree). The actual mean is 2.5 due to the rating scale and a mean of greater than 2.5 denoted a positive attitude while a mean less than 2.5 denoted negative attitude towards library services. The results revealed that staff have a positive attitude towards library services in 21 out of the 30 items, while students were favorably disposed to library services on 16 items. The most prominent attitudinal statements as ranked by the staff were statements: I borrow books available only in the other campuses through Inter-Campus loans (3.24); articles from electronic journals are accessible (3.06), information from the internet can be downloaded (3.06); I can access information available in the library on the University's website in my office or at home or computer laboratory or library's Media Centre (3.03), information from databases can be downloaded (2.93) and articles from electronic journals are downloadable (2.93). This trend of results among staff is consistent with the findings of Ho and Crowley (2003) and Cook and Heath (2001) who reported that the speed in acquiring the materials depends also

on the speed with which it will be supplied by the other library. However, the library should give constant feedback to users on their requests and explain constraints experienced to assure the user that his request is being attended to and improve his perception of the service.

For the students, the most positively ranked favourable items were: I find books that I need from shelves (93.01), there are enough books for my field of study in the library (2.98), The catalogue is user friendly (2.95) and I borrow books that I need from normal loans (2.78). Majid et al. (2001) reported similar findings that the library must therefore identify gaps to be filled together with users to develop a collection that is relevant to their needs and improve the perception of library services. That the library must develop an adequate collection is seen by users as rendering the library to be effective and initiate the necessary actions. Also, the findings that users find speedy re-shelving of materials in their proper locations to be extremely important while librarians regard it as a non-professional duty (Hermon and Altman 1996). Cook and Heath (2001) noted that users' perception of library services improve when they can find both books and journals in the shelves. Sahu (2006) also concur with the findings.

In Table 2, the mean score for students and staff respondents in the different variables were close such that circulations and information services is 29.60 for staff and 28.85 for students, media centre, special collections and collection development is 17.39 for staff and 16.29 for students, information access is 20.18 for staff and 18.65 for students; and constraints to information access is 9.75 for staff and 11.53 for students. There are no significant differences for circulations and information services (t= 0.54 p>0.05), media centre, special collections and collection development (t= 1.138 p>0.05), and information access (t= 1.584 p>0.05). However significant difference exist in the constraints to information access (t= 2.344 p<0.05) between staff and students. It means then that there are no differences in the perceptions of staff and students on most of the library services. This mean the library must improve their services in order to improve the perceptions of both students and staff in all its service areas.

Table 1: Perceptions of library services among staff and students

Perception statements	Staff (n= 33) Mean (SD)	Students (n = 96) Mean (SD)
Circulations		
I borrow books that I need from normal loans	3.33(0.73)	2.78(0.93)
I borrow books from short-loans	1.15(0.87)	1.93(0.85)
I borrow books/ periodicals which the Library do not have through Inter-library Loans	2.75(1.52)	1.83(0.86)
I borrow books available only in the other campuses through Inter-Campus loans	3.24(0.90)	2.67(0.93)
Information Services		
I find books that I need from shelves	2.54(1.06)	3.01(0.90)
I find journals (Periodicals) that I need from the shelves	2.85(0.79)	2.58(1.03)
I am able to search and retrieve information that I need from the catalogue	2.27(0.84)	2.41(1.11)
The catalogue is user friendly	2.48(1.06)	2.95(0.92)
The library provides training on how to access and retrieve information from library resources	2.45(1.03)	2.61(1.05)
The library provides training on how to use the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)	2.09(1.04)	2.53(1.00)
Computers are always working properly	2.81(1.01)	2.05(1.05)
Media Centre and Special Collections		2.06(1.06)
Theses and dissertations housed in the Special Collections area of the library are accessible	2.69(1.04)	2.12(1.03)
Books housed in the Special Collection area of the library are accessible	2.66(0.85)	2.61(0.93)
Computers, CD's and DVD's housed in the Media Centre of the Library are accessible	2.66(1.05)	2.29(0.97)
Collection Development		
There are enough books for my field of study in the Library	2.45(1.12)	2.98(0.98)
There are enough journals for my field of study in the Library	2.58(0.96)	2.69(1.00)
Databases provide relevant information for teaching and learning	2.15(1.03)	2.62(0.97)
Inter-library loans provides books and journal articles that are not available in the Library	2.24(0.96)	2.78(0.99)
Information Access: Internet, Databases, E-journals Information is accessible through the internet	2.12(1.08)	2.54(0.99)
Information that I need from the databases is accessible	2.78(0.85)	2.48(1.00)
Articles from electronic journals are accessible	3.06(0.89)	2.53(1.12)
Information from the internet can be downloaded	3.06(0.86)	2.24(1.00)
Information from databases can be downloaded	2.93(0.86)	2.26(0.97)
Articles from electronic journals are downloadable	2.93(0.82)	2.09(0.92)
I can access information available in the library on the University's website in my office or at home or computer laboratory or library's Media Centre	3.03(0.84)	2.58(1.06)
Constraints to Information Access		
I do not know how to access information from databases	2.84(0.91)	2.35(0.97)
I can only access citations of journal articles from databases	2.61(1.05)	2.23(2.28)
I am unable to access information that I need from databases	2.75(1.09)	2.53(1.12)
I do not know how to access information from e-journals	1.84(0.87)	2.24(1.00)
I am unable to access information from e-journals	2.09(0.97)	2.26(0.97)

Table 2: t-test analysis of differences in perception among staff and students

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t	df	p
Circulation and Information Services	Staff	33	29.60	7.38	1.28	0.54	42	0.58
	Students	96	28.85	4.94	0.50			
Media Centre, Special Collections and Collection Development	Staff	33	17.39	4.78	0.83	1.14	56	0.26
	Students	96	16.29	4.83	0.49			
Information Access: Internet, Databases	Staff	33	20.18	4.48	0.78	1.58	67	0.12
	Students	96	18.65	5.51	0.56			
Constraints to Information Access	Staff	33	9.75	3.75	0.65	-2.34	55	0.02
	Students	96	11.53	3.74	0.38			

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that the perceptions of both students and staff are mixed towards library services due to lack of knowledge of library services and e-resources offered and unknown expectations by the library which must be changed as some of the services were found below expected performance level. The library must, therefore, come up with strategies to positively change the perceptions of its users and the users must help the library to improve the quality of the service it offers by giving feedback to the library and participating in the activities of the library when asked. The library services should offer services that are relevant to user need to change negative perceptions about the services offered and participation and involvement of users plays a major role.

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