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The Service Quality and User Satisfaction in Sri Lankan Academic Libraries:Literature Review

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Abstract **- It is beyond controversy that the libraries are for the benefit of the readers. The objective of a library is to produce better citizens, happier people and finally a better society. Libraries furnish information on all subjects, provide the means of self-education in order to help people to participate intelligently in society and give an opportunity of reading for pleasure as well as educational purposes. In the event we were to look back to hundred years, we would find these ideas quite unknown to that age, but in the modern age, library is an essential part of the educational resources. It has grown with the schools, colleges, and universities and shares with them the onerous responsibility for helping to maintain and to promote heritage, freedom and opportunity. A study of world history and civilization has evidence to prove that libraries in some form or other existed in all ages as a part of social fabric. Libraries can be classified into live groups. Firstly, there are national libraries, the main purpose of which is to collect and preserve books and other printed matter. Secondly, there are special libraries which deal with specific subjects for the benefit of special readers. Libraries of industries, firms, Government research organization and professional bodies come under this segment. Thirdly, there are public libraries which aim at providing reading materials for the community. Fourthly, there are private libraries which are owned and looked after by intellectuals. Finally, there are academic libraries for universities. Academic libraries are for research and educational needs of the students. Books and printed matters have a great place in life. They are our reliable and abiding companions in the pilgrimage of life. They give us both light and delight. The purpose of this paper is to investigate to explore the literature of service quality and user satisfaction of the academic libraries. It reviewed the knowledge contributions of previous studies in the area of Service quality and user satisfaction. The endeavour was to examine the extent of the knowledge contribution on this study.**

Keywords: **Service quality, User satisfaction, Academic libraries, Sri Lankan Libraries**

I. Introduction

Library is a place where books and reading materials are collected and stored for the purpose of reference for the readers and academics and library is considered as a heart of the University (Huang, 1995). It is a significant responsibility for libraries to make available reference materials for researches and also preserving these resources for the benefit of future generation. It is the responsibility of the librarians to arrange them in an orderly manner and also for easy reference for library users of modern contemporary society. It is the prime obligation of librarian to encourage the readers to use the reference materials of the library. A well equipped as well as appropriately maintained library is a precious asset for modern-day educational structure. Education and libraries can be introduced as twin sisters of formal education. Librarians have to perform not only traditional library services such as cataloguing, classification and indexing etc, but it is their responsibility to offer value added services in order to satisfy the library users. During the past, upgrading the library means increasing the number of books and adding new building structures etc. The quality standard of an academic library has been described in terms of its collection of materials and measured by the various counts of its usage. These traditional measurements are not valid any longer. Identifying new strategies and quality standards to be

monitored to assess the library and this is the real challenge before librarians in academic libraries today.

A. Quality Standards

Alternative approaches to measure quality standard emerged in marketing research the SERVQUAL has evolved as a tool to measure service standards and quality of the library (Nitecki, 1996). Traditional concepts have been changed entirely at present and no validity at all. It is more concerned with the service standard of the university libraries and reader satisfaction are paramount important. Researches in Library and Information Science (LIS) have observed the information requirement, user needs and perceptions about the standards and quality of library services (Kiran, 2010). At present researches all over the world are very much concerned on this fact. The shortcomings of the libraries were determined and various recommendations have also been submitted to uplift the present status and conditions of the academic libraries (Somarathne, 2010). Even though lot of researches have been completed in developed counties, a very few researches have been carried out by the Sri Lankan Library Sciences researchers on service quality and users satisfaction of Academic libraries. It is necessary to carry out a literature survey based on searches carried out in the other counties during the recent past.

B. Government Expenditure on Academic Libraries

Sri Lankan Government is spending vast sum of money for University libraries annually. It is the expectation of the Ministry of Higher Education to provide better library services to university students. Yet it is proved in the recent researches carried out, university students are not benefited comparing to the vast sum of money spent by the government (Nawarathne, 2011). There are complaints from University lecturers with regard to academic libraries.

C. World Wide Web and Libraries

It is also a fact to be considered is reading habit of books and using of libraries are decreasing rapidly. The main reason behind this may be the popularity of World Wide Web and people are inclined more and more to use internet for reference and reading materials. E-books, online databases, E-journals and multimedia products and developing global digital environment have decreased the use of university libraries (Cullen, 2001). Information superhighways, dwindling library budgets, increase user needs, complexity of information requirements accountability, competition and outflow of information are some of the factors forcing university libraries to optimize use of resources and services (Kaur, 2008).

II. Challenges for Academic Libraries

Necessity has been arisen to prepare the university libraries to face to the challenges and motivate students to utilize the libraries applying managerial techniques. Service quality and user satisfactions are the parameters to gauge strengths and weaknesses of any organization. Therefore, necessity is arisen at present to motivate university students to use libraries and researches should be carried out on the subject matter in order to check the service standard of university libraries. The feedback of researches should be evaluated and steps should be taken to enhance the satisfaction of the services offered by the libraries to the readers.

A. Surveys

In contemporary business world companies constantly carry out surveys to find out the customer satisfaction and service standards for the purpose of increasing profits (Hernon and Altman, 1998). On the feedback of such surveys, continuously they are applying strategies and techniques to improve the service standards of quality of goods and customer satisfaction. Even though libraries are not profit making institutions, purpose of library is to provide necessary reading materials and satisfy the readers constantly. Library services generally do not have an explicit price, so libraries complete not by price, but rather by quality of their services (Einasto, 2009). Non-profit institutions like libraries tend not to performance and results. Yet performance and results are far more important and far more difficult to measure and control in the non-profit institution than in a business.

B. Students and Librarians

Non-profit organizations that are focused on themselves rather than their customers display certain characteristics. They see their services as inherently desirable, blame customer ignorance or lack of motivation when their services are not used, relegate research about customers to a minor role and assume that they have no generic competition

(Hernon & Altman, 1996). Taking into consideration the views and perceptions of the readers' library services can be upgraded or improved. Views of the students are necessary to realize expectation of students from a library. A student may be needing to complete a course or getting a degree and their expectation is short term and it is usual that everybody wants to complete their work with minimum efforts. Expectation of the librarian is contrary to the needs of the student. Students can be regarded as customers in a library and librarian's duty is to not only to satisfy them but to exceed their expectations (Schwatzman, 1995).

C. Service Standards

Services standard and user satisfaction are inter-related but it is interpreted as different in concepts. Some features are common in both the concepts. User satisfaction can be identified as a broad concept and it is an ongoing process. Standard of the services is based on quality of services provided in a library. Improving the quality standards of services and enhancing user satisfaction and loyalty are integrated measurements of the management. Service quality is a form of attitude, related, but not equal to satisfactions with perceptions of performance. Expectations of customers are viewed as desires or wants, i.e. what they feel a service provider look after rather than would offer (Parasuraman and Zeithaml, 1994).

D. Traditional Measurements

Traditional measures of academic library quality included such factors as number of volumes owned, number of journal subscriptions, number of staff, and size of budget (Weiner, 2005). The quality of university library is evaluated based on the resources and physical equipment but such traditional measurements are inadequate according to the contemporary requirements. Librarians will have to face to the challenges and monitor expectations of readers as a result of the situation created through the development of information technology. It is very difficult to predict what kind of library services will be requested in the future as changes of technology occurring at rapid space. It is to be considered the standard of services and how to measure the standards of service quality. Service quality and user satisfaction are inter-related with each other and they are not synonyms concepts but they are combinations.

E. Service Quality Evaluation

Service quality evaluation of specific attributes which are designed to provide for users. Service quality is defined as a component of customer satisfaction and vice versa. Library Science researches have focussed their attention on user needs and their interests. They have taken collection of materials of library as a tool to measure the standards of the library. Yet during the recent past, attention was focused on user satisfaction and service quality as the library is considered the place where services are rendered to users or readers. Even though it is a non-profitable organization, librarians have to market their services by applying theory and practices of the management strategies. User attitudes, perception and interests are highly affected library services which are designed to cater to users. Therefore, library science researchers are doing researches relevant to service quality and user satisfaction in order to face myriad of challenges occurred in their field as a result of rapid development in the information technology and impact of digitized information resources.

F. Improvement in Service Design

Nitecki and Hernon (2000) argued that it is possible to examine expectation from coequal and probably interrelated concepts, service standards and satisfaction. Academic library staff can be considered as managers. They have to realize what the influences of users' judgment of service standards, what is expected from specific services, what improvements in service design and effective delivery respectively. They need to understand their users not merely as recipients of the services offered. Whatever, it is yet as partners in the development and implementation of services to make higher education. As a result of ever increasing user expectations created with the global digital environment, university libraries in Sri Lanka are facing new challenges. Online database and easy access to the World Wide Web has become a competitor for the libraries (Wang, 2006). This environment is gravely affecting the traditional services provided by the academic libraries. As the essential common components of library are service quality and user satisfaction, library profession has focussed their attention on them. Therefore, collection of materials and service quality and user satisfaction are the primary objective of an academic library.

G. Duties Of Librarian

Libraries should provide prompt, courteous and reliable services to users by making use of three methods. They ate attracting new users, doing more for the existing users and reducing the loss of users. Librarian's duty is to find out what are the requirements of readers and taking necessary steps to fulfil their needs. Librarians must ask questions like who are the customers. What do they want? What can the library provide? And find answers in order to enhance quality of the library. There are usually two kinds of users in a library. Those who really want information and those who want to kill time. It is the duty of the librarian to identify the nature of the customers and serve different customers appropriately (Begun, 2003).

III. Problems Identified

A university library is usually regarded as an Academic library. Academic library differs from public and other libraries in purpose, scope and service requirements. The primary purpose of an academic library is to act as an auxiliary of the parent institution which is university in carrying out its duties to effectively support the programme of the university. It has to provide service to the university in information environment. Academic library should acquire, arrange and disseminate accurate information to the right person in the right amount at the right time and right form. Academic library's excellence can be measured through its resources and services to the extent it is helpful to the university's objectives. Library is the most significant intellectual reserve of the academic community and facilitates the members of the university individually as well as collectively. A vast sum of money is spent on academic libraries annually. The process of utilizing money differs from university to university. The number of readers and courses offered are considered as main measuring elements while allocating money for academic libraries. Readers or users are concerned over methods that alter physical appearance of library resources and the way in which information delivers and proliferation. We must examine this scenario in order to understand whether they are satisfied or not with the service standard and quality of service.

A. Critical Problem

In this regard, new processes or modifications could be introduced after evaluation of the existing services in academic libraries. Certain studies have been conducted and have confirmed that many users of libraries keep away from using libraries due to various reasons at present (Somaratne, 2010). As this is a critical problem, the professionals in the field should study the contemporary situation at hand in library services of all the university libraries in Sri Lanka. That is the exact way to understand what is to be removed from the libraries and what is to be added to libraries and make sure that libraries are beneficial to users and the money spent is not wasted. Subsequently the various measures can be adapted to introduce new ways and means to improve the service standards of academic libraries in Sri Lanka.

IV. Objective of This Study

As there is deficiency of materials in respect of service quality and satisfaction of users in academic libraries in Sri Lanka, the author expects to provide recent research results on said topic in Sri Lankan context and foreign context respectively. This question has not been adequately addressed by Sri Lankan librarians or researches in the field of library and information science. They must focus their attention to the service standard and users satisfaction of academic library in order to keep its customer base.

1. Author focuses his attention to find out nature of researches which has been carried out relevant to service quality and user satisfaction of academic libraries in Sri Lanka
2. What has been found out from those researches?
3. How do we utilize the research findings and recommendations in order to increase service quality and user satisfaction to face competitive digital environment to retain users?

V. Literature Review

The service quality of an academic library is very significant factor as user satisfaction is based on service quality offered by the library. Service quality of academic library is vital factor for any university which is service oriented. Their survival and reputation of library solely

depend on the standard of services. Libraries can be regarded as non-profit institutions and based on activities and output of services. Users are the purpose of a library and therefore, best assessors of service standard in libraries are their users. In an academic library, students and administrators of the faculty are the customers or patrons or users. Each one's expectation is different (Quinn, 1997 and Sirkin, 1993). Companies expect profit for the services or goods supplied by them and primarily they measure the return according to the investment. In the same manner, libraries produce information to the society. The value or return on investment delivered by libraries is of a social, educational or cultural values and this is not easy to measure (Carnegie, 2003). Even though functions are similar but output is different. According to the Nitecki (1996), the traditional indicators which were used to measure the service quality of academic libraries like size of collections has become out of date when meeting the demands of modern society and academic communities. Service quality is a form of attitude and not equivalent to satisfaction of the users. Expectations are viewed as customer's needs and i.e. What they feel, a service provider should offer rather than would offer (Parasuraman et al., 1994). SERQUAL model was introduced by the Parasuraman (1985) to measure of the service excellence of the institutes using 10 dimensions as responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding, customer and tangibility. Later he revised this dimension in 1988 and reduced them up to 5items. It comprised 22 item instruments in which are requested to indicate their expected and perceived levels of services. The seven-point Likert scale is adopted to gauge them. The 22 items of SERQUAL indicate various characteristics of service standards based on five dimensions.

I. *Tangibles* - Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personal and communicational materials;

II. *Reliability* - ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately;

III. *Responsiveness* - willingness to help customers and provide prompt service;

IV. *Assurance* - knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence;

V. *Empathy* - caring individualized attention the firm provides its customers.

After introducing the SERQUAL model by the Parasuraman and Berry (1985), lot of researchers have been conducted their researches based on the model. It was applied to various organizations to measure service quality and user satisfaction under different context. Particularly, library science researchers have been applying five dimensions according to the needs of the library service as follows;;

Table I Characteristics of Service Standards

Tangibles	Physical conditions of the collection, Comfortable library furniture, Library interiors, Sanitary facilities, Photocopiers, Multimedia peripherals, comfortable and inviting place.
Reliability	Entire services as a library, error free services, error free records, right time services, right information, ,right users, Text books, Bibliographical information, OPAC, Internet facilities, Library websites.
Responsiveness	Proper shelving, prompt shelving, Reception and consult services, willing to help users, listening to user's quarries.
Assurance	Qualified library staff, Consideration of user recommendation, User education services.
Empathy	Personal approach, gateway for study and research, convenient operating hours, free services for users

Culvert and Hernon (2001) pointed out that concept relevant to service standard in order to make benefit for the stakeholders. According to him, there are three steps should be followed to be kept the interaction of the customers in any organization. It can be applied for the academic library environment as well.

The customer,

I. Past experience of the customers;

II. Word of mouth from other customers;

III. Personal needs of the customer.

The service provider,

I. Communications (direct and indirect) about what the customer can expect.

II. Service provided by other providers that act as a benchmark.

Users' expectations should be measured in order to improve products or services. It is specific project to measure the service quality and it also continuous process in libraries. Service quality measures the gap between the customer's levels of expectation. There are many tools, techniques and questionnaires and focus groups with users, interviews, keeping suggestions boxes and doing research to reduce the gaps. Staffs of the library also surveyed and get the feedback. The data should be collected and analysed. The unneeded services should be eliminated and needed services consolidated in order to make them easier and more convenient for users. Frontline staffs need to pass along customer feedback to upper management and upper management needs to give staff enough authority to enable them to resolve customer problems that they experience in job (Millson-Martula and Menon, 1995).

Although libraries are non-profit organization, they are also like a marketing organizations use their tools to attract users to utilize valuable products and services. Money, value or profit is not aim of the library yet in form of users' satisfaction. Libraries purchase documents, organize them in such a way that they may be easily accessible to the users. The users' satisfaction is the most significant considerations for the library. All the activities of library use based on users' requirements, when fresh users come to the library for the first time there must be a strategy to keep them continuously (Ram, 2003). The measurement of the service quality is necessary to identify where services need improvement from users' views to provide services that are more closely aligned with the expectation of users and to compare the service quality with other institutions in an effort to develop benchmarks or best practices (Sahu, 2006).

VI. User Satisfaction

Primary objective of academic library is user satisfaction and it is scaffolding with formal higher studies. Satisfaction is the consumer's good judgment about pleasure versus displeasure (Moliner, 2007. Masrek, 2009). It should be regularly conducted to know customer's point of view. In every academic year, new students enter the university with various educational needs and expectation under the vivid disciplines. Students are oriented to familiar with library resources. As new technological development, researchers and new innovative system of accessing information are deployed. These are challengers for librarians but also students. The new influx system should be indentified earlier and trained users to adapt to such environment. Although user satisfaction is an indispensable of service quality method in academic libraries, perceptions of students have been ignored by authorities in developing countries. Having applied service quality measurement, feedback can be assessed and improve the available services.

Service quality and user satisfaction is integrated with each other and they are not synonyms concepts but they are intermingling. Service quality evaluation of specific attributes which are designed to provide for users. Service quality is variously defined as a component of customer satisfaction and vice versa. Peter Hernon and John R.Whitman (2001) argued that is possible to examine expectation from two angles and probably interrelated concepts, service quality and satisfaction. Service quality deals with those expectations that the library chooses to meet and satisfaction is more of an emotional and subjective re-action to time limited event or the cumulative experiences that a customer has with a service provider. Academic libraries are facing global digital environment and increasing various format publication competition. In the event they want to survive, it is necessary to improve the service quality and measure the user satisfaction. Academic libraries can survive to support to the customer perceptions and measuring the user satisfaction in the unstable and rapidly changing competitive world. Conventional operations of the academic libraries have to be changed to cope with contemporary challenges, identifying demand for information, different requirement of users, inflation and tight budget and various information formats. The electronic resource databases and World Wide Web have affected to change the academic library services in the last twenty years and it is fraction of the library and information services.

VII. Conclusion and Recommendations

- Academic libraries are considered as non-profit service centres and they have been facing demands of users under the increasing competition. Library users are decreasing with impact of cyberspace. The resources have declined since the funds constraints.
- In Sri Lankan university library scenario, the concept of assessing service quality from customers' perspectives

is still in its infancy. University Grant Commission established the quality assurance team to measure the service quality universities and libraries. The concept of service quality of academic libraries is a new thing to Sri Lanka and some researchers are being conducted to measure user perceptions. Librarians have to implement this concept now widely and in tangible manner.

- Although user satisfaction is an indispensable method of service standard in academic libraries, perceptions of students have been ignored by authorities in developing countries. Having applied service quality measurement, feedback can be assessed and improve the available services.
- In this literature review, only two researches were found in Sri Lanka. However, those researches also based on service standard only. They were not directly studied the service quality and user satisfaction comparatively. There are 18 universities in Sri Lanka and they have libraries. In addition to that faculty libraries and postgraduate institutes' libraries are maintained by the parent Universities. It was found that any research has not been done about the service quality and user satisfaction which is important factor of researches on libraries. Finding about the researches has been done on this subject which becomes the objective of this literature review. It is clearly to be seen that only a few researches has been done on service quality and user satisfaction in academic libraries in Sri Lanka. Yet it could be found that vast number of researches had been done about this matter in the foreign countries.
- It could be found that various researches have been done in the library science field using the fundamental of SERQUAL model introduced for the management field by Parasuraman. By using such ways and methods of this research, the steps should be taken to serve the good university library service for the university community.

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