

ASSESSING SERVICE QUALITY AT THE AMERICAN EMBASSY SWAZILAND INFORMATION RESOURCE CENTRE

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to assess service quality from the customers' perspective in the United States of America Embassy Swaziland Information Resource Centre (IRC). Traditionally, the IRC has been reporting statistics primarily on finances, the resources purchased with those finances, and staff workloads. However, these statistics did not really describe performance or indicate whether service quality was good, indifferent or bad. This descriptive study used a printed questionnaire that was adapted from the LibQUAL survey instrument. A stratified random sample of 200 IRC customers was drawn from a target population of 2489 registered members. A total of 183 valid survey responses were received, giving a response rate of 91.5%. The findings indicate that the quality of the IRC services was perceived to be high as evidenced by a D-M score of 83.46% and a service adequacy gap of 0.66. The service superiority gap was estimated at -0.14, meaning that the services were not exceeding the customers' desired expectations. The information resources (print and electronic) and the hours of service were perceived to be inadequate while staff were considered not courteous enough. Differences in quality perceptions were noted among the different segments of customers and some similarities in high expectations and low tolerance for service variations. The overall customer satisfaction rate was estimated at 80%. The suggested improvements included: acquiring relevant information resources, extending service hours, expanding the IRC, purchasing more equipment, and training staff on customer care.

Keywords: Library Service Quality; LibQUAL; Customer Satisfaction; Customer Expectations

1. Introduction and problem statement

Since its inception, the United States of America (USA) Embassy Swaziland Information Resource Centre (IRC) has been gathering and reporting statistics about its collection, funds, and staff. These statistics have, however, concentrated primarily on finances, the resources purchased with those finances, and staff workloads. The emphasis was on expenditure, which has since proven to be dangerous, because it highlighted the cost of the IRC to top management at a time when they are monitoring costs and seeking ways to contain them. Furthermore, an information gap still remained. These traditional statistics lacked relevance. They did not measure the IRC's performance in terms of elements that are important to its customers. They did not really describe performance or indicate whether service quality was good, indifferent or bad. Even worse, they did not indicate any action that the management should take to improve performance.

In today's rapidly changing information landscape, the focus is shifting from what the library has, to what the library does. Satisfying customers' needs, requests, and desires for information has become paramount for every library. The library customers' information needs are fast becoming the standard against which library performance is measured. Library customers are increasingly having a say in the type of services they want and are better placed to judge service quality (Rehman, 2013:60). Satisfied customers use the service more often and recommend the service to others. Customers who are not satisfied with a service change the provider and express their dissatisfaction to potential customers. Loss of customers and failure to attract new customers results in great losses for the library. A good reputation for the library is very critical especially in the long term as the Embassy seeks to attract and retain quality contacts with its target audiences. A library that shows an interest in knowing its customers' perceptions of its services and making efforts to address them can be viewed by its customers as caring. This perceived concern creates loyalty in customers. Obtaining feedback from customers on a regular basis can help the library survive in a competitive environment. Customers also need to see that their input is valued by the library.

Libraries have also become service organisations that function in a competitive environment. Due to the recent economic recession, the USA Embassies continue to face financial stringency and organisational changes. Consequently, IRCs all over the globe are required to prove their value to top management in order to command adequate resources to allow them to offer services to customers. In some instances, the IRCs have been completely shut down whilst others are receiving substantial budget cuts. The IRC in Swaziland has since adopted service quality assessment as a more credible means of justifying its continued funding.

2. Aim of the research

The aim of the study was to assess service quality in the IRC from the customers' perspective.

3. Objectives of the study

- To identify the attributes of library services that are most valued by customers
- To understand differences in service quality perceptions, if any, among the different segments of customers
- To determine the extent to which the current services are able to satisfy the expectations of customers
- To make recommendations on how the services can be improved

4. Significance of the research

Scholarly literature on various aspects of library service quality in developed countries is commonly available, but very few studies are available from developing countries (Rehman, 2013:60). Therefore, this research contributes to the literature on library services in Swaziland and highlights the numerous benefits of service quality assessment in libraries.

Through this survey, the IRC got an opportunity to develop a baseline for its future service quality evaluations. It further enabled it to benchmark its services against other libraries who participate in service quality evaluations across the globe. It also fosters a culture of excellence and identifies best practices in providing quality library services.

Other peer libraries will obtain comparable assessment information from this study. The study enabled the IRC to collect and interpret library customer feedback systematically and enhanced IRC staff members' analytical skills for interpreting and acting on data.

5. Literature review

Since 1999, "service quality" has become a topic of considerable interest in library and information science literature (Tan and Foo, 1999:1). However, there is no consensus on its definition. It is proving to be an elusive, ambiguous, subjective, and multi-dimensional concept. The common thread among the various definitions is that they define it in terms of gap analysis, specifically the gap between customers' minimum acceptable level of service and perceptions of actual services received (Hernon and Altman, 2010:4).

5.1 Theoretical foundations of service quality

The confirmation/disconfirmation theory suggests that expectations form a frame of reference against which customers' experiences can be measured. 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. Perceptions are judgments about service performance. Customers form their expectations prior to using a service. These expectations become a standard against which actual performance is compared. After gaining some experience with a service, the customer can compare any expectations of its performance (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1994:202).

The model further postulates that expectations are confirmed when perceived performance meets them (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1994:202). Expectations are affirmed (reinforced by positive disconfirmation) when perceived performance exceeds them resulting in a positive gap. The customer is delighted and considers the service quality as exceptionally good. On the contrary, when the perceived service quality is lower than acceptable levels, expectations are disconfirmed negatively (failed by negative disconfirmation) and customer's expectations are not met. The customer perceives the quality of the service as low and is disappointed.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1994:202) further suggest that customers have two types of expectations: desired service, and adequate service. Desired service is the level of service that the customer believes can be and should be provided, whereas adequate service is the minimum level of service that customers are willing to accept. The difference between desired service quality and the minimum acceptable service quality is called the zone of tolerance. The difference between perceived service quality and the minimum acceptable service quality is called the service adequacy gap. While the difference between perceived service quality and desired service quality is called the service superiority gap.

5.2 Service quality assessment in libraries

5.2.1 LibQUAL

LibQUAL (LibrayQUALity) is a service quality assessment tool based on the that serves particular interests of libraries (ARL, 2015). It was developed in 1999 by the Texas A and M University Libraries and the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) after several years of using modified SERVQUAL instruments.

The tool has been tested and refined several times over the years. It has become a popular and recognized instrument that libraries use to identify, track, understand, and act upon customers' opinions of service quality. The current version is known as the LibQUAL+ model.

There are twenty two core questions which are rated on a Likert scale of one to nine. The latest version of LibQUAL+ has three interrelated dimensions that customers value the most when they evaluate service quality in libraries. According to ARL (2015), the three dimensions are:

- **Affect of Service (AS):** refers to how the customer is treated in the library. It measures how customers want to interact with the modern library include, scope, timeliness and convenience, ease of navigation, modern equipment, and self-reliance.
- **Information Control (IC):** is the extent of information and the ability of customers to find, use and manage information on their own. It also assesses the empathy, responsiveness, assurance and reliability of library employees.
- **Library as a Place (LP):** which refers to the environment and functionality of the library building and its facilities. It measures the usefulness of the space, the symbolic value of the library and the library as a refuge for work or study.

ARL (2015) further provides that more than 1,200 libraries have participated in LibQUAL+, including college and university libraries, community college libraries, health sciences libraries, academic law libraries, and public libraries. LibQUAL+ has expanded internationally, with participating institutions in Africa, Asia, Australia, and Europe. The growing LibQUAL+ community of participants and its extensive dataset are rich resources for improving library services. (ARL, 2015). However, Hernon and Altman (2010:2) warn that librarians should not consider that there is only one way to measure service quality.

6. Methodology

The study adopted the quantitative approach since a relatively large number of customers (target population) required a bigger sample for the results to be reliable. A descriptive strategy was adopted because it suited the objectives and research questions of this study. A probability sampling strategy was adopted and a stratified random sample of 200 IRC customers which represented all categories of members (students, the employed, the unemployed and retired) was drawn from a target population of 2489 registered members. A printed questionnaire was administered to every third member who entered the IRC and had used the IRC at least once prior to the study. The method was chosen to ensure that every IRC member had an equal chance of participating in the study, thereby preventing the researcher from purposely selecting IRC members that would give a positive (bias) rating.

6.1 Data analysis

The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 software. Means of ratings provided by respondents were used to calculate the degree to which the IRC met the minimum expectations of customers. A service adequacy gap (SAG) was calculated by subtracting the minimum from the perceived level of service. A negative service adequacy gap implied a need for improvement in that particular service area. At the other end, a service superiority gap (SSG) was calculated by subtracting the desired service rating from the perceived level of service. A positive superiority gap indicated that the IRC exceeded expectations for that particular service area. In addition to the gap scores, the range from the minimum service rating to the desired service rating were calculated, which is called the zone of tolerance (ZOT).

6.1.1 D-M score

Further analysis was performed on the LibQUAL data using a D-M Score which is calculated by dividing the SAG by the ZOT. Then, the quotient is multiplied by 100 to have a score that will typically range from 0 to 100. The formula is:

$$\text{D-M Score} = (\text{SAG} / \text{ZOT}) * 100$$

The D-M score is the location of the perceived level of service in relation to the minimum acceptable level of service (represented by “0”) and the desired level of service (represented by “100”). **Table 1** presents the standard for interpreting D-M scores and the actions that a library needs to take to improve or maintain its service quality rating.

D-M Score	Evaluation	Action Required
> 100	Exceeds expectations	Maintenance
71 - 100	Meets expectations	Maintenance
60 - 70	Not so problematic	Monitoring
51 - 59	Potentially problematic	Close monitoring
= 50	Midpoint in ZOT	Requires improvement
40 - 49	Mildly problematic	Requires improvement
15 - 39	Problematic	Requires special improvement
0 - 14	Considerably problematic	Requires immediate improvement
< 0	Below minimum expectations	Dire need for immediate improvement

Table 1: D-M Score Interpretation Standard
(Adapted from Dennis and Bower (2007:11-12))

6.1.2 Relative value ranking

In order to identify the service quality attributes/measures that were most (and least) preferred/valued by customers, a relative ranking system was used. The worth of assigning relative value to service items is that it shows librarians the importance of given services from the customers’ perspective. The formula is:

$$(\text{Minimum Rank score} + \text{Desired Rank score}) / 2 = \text{Overall Rank Score}$$

Both expectation scores (minimum and desired scores) were used in assigning relative value to a service item. The minimum and desired mean scores were ranked independently and then the rankings (not the means) were averaged for each item to determine the relative value of the service item. To ascertain the relative value or preference of the services provided by the library the minimum mean scores of the twenty two items were ordered according to rank. The item with the highest mean score received a rank score of “1” while the item with the lowest mean score received a rank score of “22”.

Next, the desired mean scores for each of the items were rank ordered in the same fashion. The two rank scores for each item were summed and then divided by two in order to acquire an overall rank score that ranges between “1” and “22”; a service item with a value rank score of “1” was deemed as valued the most while a service item with a score of 22 was valued the least.

The final step is to rank the items based upon the overall value rank scores, the item with the highest overall rank score was assigned an item value rank score of 1, the second highest overall rank score a rank of 2, and so on. In cases where two or more items had identical overall rank scores, those items were given identical value rankings.

7. Findings and discussion

7.1 Membership categories of respondents

A total of 183 valid responses was obtained, which culminated in a total response rate of 91.5 percent, as shown in **Table 2 below**. Nine cases that either gave incomplete ratings (did not rate an item three times) or exceeded eleven blank or not applicable responses were removed as per the LibQUAL rules.

Membership Category	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Employed	53	29.0	29.0
Retired	2	1.1	30.1
Student	124	67.8	97.8
Unemployed	4	2.2	100.0
Total	183	100.0	

Table 2: Membership Categories of Respondents

7.2 Service quality attributes

The results for the 22 core service quality statements are summarized in the radar chart (**Figure 1**) below. More detailed information on the respondents' service quality ratings is presented in **Table 3**. The overall scores for all respondents are: minimum mean is 6.97; the desired mean is 7.76; and the perceived mean is 7.62. Overall, the results indicate that the IRC services fall short (gap) by 0.14 (7.62 - 7.76) from meeting the respondents' desired level.

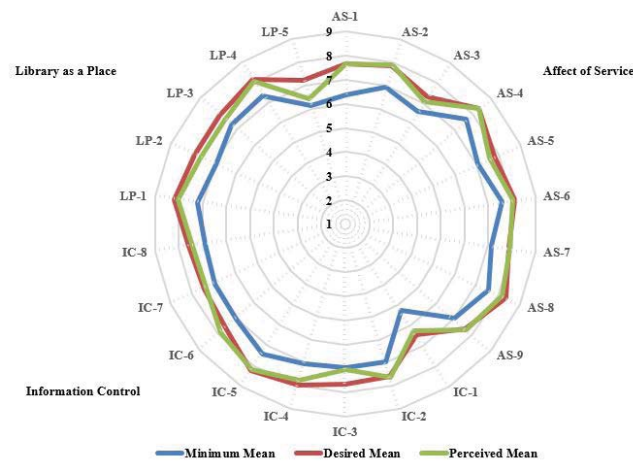


Figure 1: Mean scores of respondents' ratings of service quality

ID	IRC Service Quality Statement	Minimum Mean	Desired Mean	Perceived Mean	n
Affect of Service					
AS-1	IRC staff who instill confidence in customers	6.35	7.66	7.66	181
AS-2	IRC staff who give customers individual attention	6.93	7.85	7.89	170
AS-3	IRC staff who are consistently courteous	6.56	7.27	7.08	173
AS-4	IRC staff who are always ready to respond to customers' questions	7.65	8.33	8.34	183
AS-5	IRC staff who have the knowledge to answer customers' questions	7.07	7.79	7.60	175
AS-6	IRC staff who deal with customers in a caring manner	7.59	8.13	8.01	175
AS-7	IRC staff who understand the needs of customers	7.12	7.85	7.92	178
AS-8	IRC staff who are always willing to help customers	7.56	8.32	8.18	173
AS-9	IRC staff who are dependable in handling customers' service problems	6.99	7.61	7.67	168
Information Control					
IC-1	Making electronic resources accessible from my home or office	5.28	6.47	6.26	92
IC-2	Providing information skills I need in my work/study	6.96	7.59	7.64	177
IC-3	Printed information resources I need for my work	6.96	7.66	7.05	166
IC-4	Electronic information resources I need for my work	7.07	7.98	7.76	163
IC-5	Modern equipment that lets me easily access the information I need	7.40	8.24	8.20	179
IC-6	Easy-to-use access tools that allow me to find information on my own	7.03	7.60	7.86	169
IC-7	Making information easily accessible for independent use	6.96	7.47	7.37	179
IC-8	Print and/or electronic journal collections I need for my work/study	6.89	7.59	7.43	161
Library as a Place					
LP-1	IRC is a space that inspires study and learning	7.21	8.20	8.03	183
LP-2	IRC is a quiet space for individual activities	6.90	7.88	7.65	182
LP-3	IRC is a comfortable and inviting location	7.30	7.91	7.62	179
LP-4	IRC is a convenient space for study, learning, or research	7.35	8.16	8.07	175
LP-5	IRC hours of service are adequate for me	6.14	7.21	6.43	182
Overall:		6.97	7.76	7.62	183

Table 3: service quality attributes and mean scores of respondents' ratings

7.3 Service quality measures

Researchers tend to only compute three scores, namely; service adequacy gap (SAG), service superiority gap (SSG), and zone of tolerance (ZOT). Dennis and Bower (2007:11) opine that these scores alone do not provide a full account of the customers' assessment of library service quality. They suggest two additional measures; D-M score and relative value ranking. **Table 4** below presents the scores obtained through using the five methods. The first column shows the identifier for each of the 22 service quality attributes. The next three columns are the mean scores calculated based on customer ratings. Since all the five methods use mean scores, the minimum mean (MM), desired mean (DM), and perceived mean (PM) are computed first. The rest of the columns present the scores for each method (SAG, SSG, ZOT, D-M score and relative value rank). Each of these five measures are discussed in turns.

ID	Minimum Mean	Desired Mean	Perceived Mean	SAG (PM-MM)	SSG (PM-DM)	ZOT (DM-MM)	D-M Score (SAG/ZOTx100)	Relative Value Rank	n
Affect of Service									
AS-1	6.35	7.66	7.66	1.31	0.01	1.30	100	17	181
AS-2	6.93	7.85	7.89	0.96	0.04	0.92	104	13.5	170
AS-3	6.56	7.27	7.08	0.51	-0.20	0.71	72	19.5	173
AS-4	7.65	8.33	8.34	0.69	0.01	0.68	101	1	183
AS-5	7.07	7.79	7.60	0.53	-0.19	0.72	73	10.5	175
AS-6	7.59	8.13	8.01	0.42	-0.12	0.54	78	4	175
AS-7	7.12	7.85	7.92	0.80	0.06	0.74	108	9	178
AS-8	7.56	8.32	8.18	0.62	-0.14	0.76	82	2.5	173
AS-9	6.99	7.61	7.67	0.68	0.06	0.63	110	13.5	168
Information Control									
IC-1	5.28	6.47	6.26	0.98	-0.21	1.18	83	22	92
IC-2	6.96	7.59	7.64	0.68	0.05	0.63	108	16	177
IC-3	6.96	7.66	7.05	0.09	-0.61	0.70	13	13	166
IC-4	7.07	7.98	7.76	0.69	-0.22	0.91	76	8.5	163
IC-5	7.40	8.24	8.20	0.80	-0.04	0.84	95	3.5	179
IC-6	7.03	7.60	7.86	0.83	0.27	0.57	147	13.5	169
IC-7	6.96	7.47	7.37	0.41	-0.10	0.51	80	16.5	179
IC-8	6.89	7.59	7.43	0.53	-0.16	0.69	77	18	161
Library as a Place									
LP-1	7.21	8.20	8.03	0.82	-0.16	0.98	83	5.5	183
LP-2	6.90	7.88	7.65	0.75	-0.24	0.98	76	13	182
LP-3	7.30	7.91	7.62	0.32	-0.28	0.61	53	7	179
LP-4	7.35	8.16	8.07	0.72	-0.09	0.81	89	5	175
LP-5	6.14	7.21	6.43	0.29	-0.79	1.07	27	21	182
All	6.97	7.76	7.62	0.66	-0.14	0.80	83.46	-	183

Table 4: Five Service Quality Measures

7.3.1 Service adequacy gap

The SAG is an indicator of the extent to which the IRC is meeting the minimum expectations of its customers. It is calculated by subtracting the minimum mean score from the perceived mean score on any of the twenty two statements. As shown in fifth column in **Table 4**, the IRC's overall SAG is **0.66**. The gap is positive and is above zero, which means that the IRC is exceeding the customers' minimum expectations. However, the IRC still needs to address shortages of relevant print based resources (IC-3) and inadequate hours of service (LP-5) since both attributes attained the lowest SAG scores. The implication of this score is that the IRC needs to ensure that its services do not fall below the customers' minimum level of expectation.

7.3.2 Service superiority gap

The SSG is an indicator of the extent to which the IRC is exceeding the desired expectations of its customers. It is calculated by subtracting the desired score from the perceived score on every one of the twenty two service quality items. **Table 4** column six, indicates that SSG is **-0.14**. The score is negative, which means that the services provided by the IRC are inferior when compared to customers' desired expectations. The services do not meet or exceed the desired expectations of its customers.

Worth noting is that the services are inferior in almost all the attributes because the SSG scores are negative. The worst perceived service quality dimension is Library as a Place since all the attributes got negative SSG scores, especially the hours of service. The information control dimension also got negative scores except for two attributes relating to information skills (IC-2) and easy-to-use access tools (IC-6) that allow customers to find information on their own. The affect of service dimension was rated better, as it accounted for most positive scores. However, there is still need to train IRC staff on courtesy (AS-3) and equipping them with knowledge to answer customers' questions (AS-5). The implication is that the IRC needs to buy more text books and journals in various disciplines, increase the hours of service, and continue to train IRC staff on caring for customers if it is to meet or even exceed customers' expectations.

7.3.3 Zone of tolerance

The zone of tolerance (ZOT) measures the extent to which customers are willing to accept a variation in service delivery. The ZOT is the range from the minimum service rating to the desired service. Perceived levels of service fall within this zone. Column seven in **Table 4** shows that IRC customers have a zone of tolerance of **0.8**. This indicates that the IRC customers have a very small margin for error in service delivery and very high expectations (as evidenced by desired mean of 7.76). It is worth highlighting that all the perceived levels of the IRC services fall within this zone (as shown in Figure 4.2). It is critical that perceived service levels do not drop below the minimum level because customers would feel dissatisfied and discontinue using the IRC services. Once customers stop using the IRC, the Embassy would have no option but to close the IRC and use its resources in more beneficial initiatives. Therefore, for the IRC, maintaining high quality services from customers' perspective is not an option but a key to its continued survival.

7.3.4 D-M score

The D-M score is the location of the perceived level of service in relation to the minimum acceptable level of service (represented by “0”) and the desired level of service (represented by “100”). The results in **Table 4** indicate that the IRC had a D-M score of **83.46**. This means that the IRC was 83.46 % from meeting the desired level of customers’ desired expectations. A gap of 16.54% still remained in order for it to meet customers’ desired expectations. This implies that the IRC services were perceived to be performing well by its customers, but (perhaps more crucially) there was still room for improvement.

7.4 Relative value ranking

The relative value ranking system is used to identify the service quality attributes that are most (and least) preferred/valued by customers. The results in **Table 5** indicate that, from the customers’ perspective, the most valued service attributes were; staff who are always willing and ready to respond to their questions in a caring manner; modern equipment; and a convenient place to study. The least valued items were the print resources or electronic journals, courteous staff, hours of service, and remote access to electronic resources. These were areas of weakness which the IRC needs to address if the service quality was to improve. It is perhaps not surprising that making electronic resources accessible from home or office is the last item on the list. Possible reasons for this could be that most Swazis are unable to access the internet due to high data charges and low download speeds. The high prices are due to the fact that Swaziland, being a landlocked country, depends on neighbouring countries for international fibre bandwidth. This could also explain why some customers appreciate the free internet service that the IRC provides. The implication is that the IRC would have to continue to provide free internet services if it is to enable its customers to access its electronic resources.

In general, the scores and results that the IRC obtained from the study are in line with findings from similar studies. The results emphasise the critical role played by staff in delivering a high quality library service. Studies by Killick, van Weerden, and van Weerden (2014:23) and Khaola and Mabilikoane (2015:52) found that if customers are satisfied with the level of service in the information control dimension, they are satisfied with the library overall. If they are dissatisfied with the level of service in the affect of service dimension, they are dissatisfied with the library overall.

It is important to note that all the five methods are merely estimations, not absolutes, they do not attempt to measure the exact quality or value of library services. In particular, the percentages that are above 100 in the D-M scores do not mean that the IRC is performing 120% better, but rather indicate that it is performing above the customers’ desired expectations. Similarly, the rankings are viewed as approximations, the further apart the items are from one another the more assured that one item is actually valued more than the other. Conversely, items with relative value rankings that are close should not be considered different from one another.

7.5 Differences in customers’ perception of service quality

The groups do not seem to value the service attributes the same way. The relative value rankings for all the groups are not closer to one another. This is indicated in the last column of **Table 6**. Rankings are regarded to be closer if the range is five or less. This could suggest that the perceptions of quality among the groups are different. The implication is that the IRC has to design services that are highly personalized or specific to a particular group of customers.

ID	IRC Service Quality Statement	Students n=124	Em- ployed n=53	Unem- ployed n=4	Retired n=2	Range
AS-1	IRC staff who instill confidence in customers	17	16.5	14	20	7
AS-2	IRC staff who give customers individual attention	14	6.5	18.5	10.5	13
AS-3	IRC staff who are consistently courteous	19.5	16.5	13	20	8
AS-4	IRC staff who are always ready to respond to customers' questions	1	6.5	5.5	1	6.5
AS-5	IRC staff who have the knowledge to answer customers' questions	10.5	16.5	4	11.5	13.5
AS-6	IRC staff who deal with customers in a caring manner	5	1.5	6.5	2	6
AS-7	IRC staff who understand the needs of customers	9.5	12	14	3	12
AS-8	IRC staff who are always willing to help customers	3	2.5	14.5	7.5	12.5
AS-9	IRC staff who are dependable in handling customers' service problems	16	9.5	10	16.5	8
IC-1	Making electronic resources accessible from my home or office	22	17.5	22	4.5	18.5
IC-2	Providing information skills I need in my work/study	16.5	6	18.5	13	13.5
IC-3	Printed information resources I need for my work	12	15	18	13.5	7
IC-4	Electronic information resources I need for my work	8	13.5	13	6	8.5
IC-5	Modern equipment that lets me easily access the information I need	4	9	3	7	7
IC-6	Easy-to-use access tools that allow me to find information on my own	13	17.5	6	8	12.5
IC-7	Making information easily accessible for independent use	15.5	15	12	14	4.5
IC-8	Print and/or electronic journal collections I need for my work/study	17.5	3.5	19.5	16	17
LP-1	IRC is a space that inspires study and learning	4	13.5	14.5	19.5	16.5
LP-2	IRC is a quiet space for individual activities	13	12.5	11	18.5	8.5
LP-3	IRC is a comfortable and inviting location	5	19.5	9.5	9	15.5
LP-4	IRC is a convenient space for study, learning, or research	6	5	2.5	15.5	14
LP-5	IRC hours of service are adequate for me	21	17.5	3.5	16.5	18.5

Table 6: Relative value ranking by membership category

The comparisons clearly indicate that the IRC customer categories are heterogeneous in terms of how they perceive service quality and they also value certain attributes more than others in different ways. These findings are in line with findings from other similar studies. Kalb (2010:13) found that the major library customer groups have more in common with each other

across different libraries than with the other customer groups in the same library. Dash and Padhi (2010:12) also found that the perception of library quality differs according to customers' experience with the service they use. Mohindra and Kumar (2015:60) found that there is a significant difference in levels of satisfaction and perceptions of library quality across various customer groups. The findings are also not surprising because service quality, being a multi-dimensional concept with multiple attributes, means different things to different people.

However, the common thread from this study is that customers generally demand higher standards of services. IRC customers generally have a narrow zone of tolerance which makes it imperative for the IRC to provide excellent services at all times. It is important for the IRC to identify service attributes that are most valued by customers and then allocate resources according to customer priorities. This can enhance the effectiveness of the IRC's services.

The value of analysing the individual IRC customer groups is that it provides insight into impressions of service quality held by the different groups. However, Dennis and Bower (2007:17) advise that, in order to make meaningful analysis and comparisons between various customer groups, occupation, discipline, gender and age, it is imperative to obtain large enough samples to draw solid conclusions.

7.6 Overall satisfaction with IRC services

The third objective of the study was to determine the extent to which the current IRC services are able to satisfy the expectations of its customers. **Table 7** displays the mean score and standard deviation (SD) for each of the three general satisfaction questions. The results indicate that the scores in all three questions are not very far apart (about 1.0) from the mean and the mean is about 8.0 in all the questions. This means that current IRC services are largely able to satisfy the expectations of customers about 80% of the time. This level of customer satisfaction is quite high.

Satisfaction Question	Mean	SD	n
Overall, how satisfied are you with the services of the IRC?	7.87	1.04	183
How well do these services compare to your expectations?	7.57	1.28	183
Overall, how do you rate the quality of the IRC services?	8.1	0.99	183

Table 7: Satisfaction Mean Scores

Heron and Altman (2010:5) observe that high levels of overall satisfaction are usually considered good and a positive reflection on the library. Zeithaml and Bitner (2013:91) suggest that increasing levels of customer satisfaction can be linked to customer loyalty, especially when customers are very satisfied. Therefore, since the IRC is not yet exceeding customer expectations, it needs to identify weaknesses and plan to improve on them in order to create loyalty.

The high satisfaction ratings could also be reliable because they seem to be consistent with responses given in Section B of the questionnaire which determined the customers' behaviour intentions. Zeithaml and Bitner (2013:91) postulate that satisfied customers say positive things about the service, recommend it to others, and repeatedly use the service. This then increases the number of customers who use the service which leads to improved organisational outcomes. This assertion seems to be supported by the findings of this study as well. All the respondents indicated (in Section B of questionnaire) that they would continue to use the IRC services and recommend it to others.

Ghotbabadi, Baharun and Feiz (2012:1) argue that service quality has a direct and strong effect on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Loyalty is a consequence of customer satisfaction and re-uses intention which leads to an increase in the usage of services. However, satisfied customers are not necessarily loyal, but loyal customers are definitely satisfied customers. Most of the respondents indicated that they had used the IRC more than three times (which could indicate loyalty) and intend to continue using the IRC services.

Contrary to expectations, customer satisfaction with the National University of Lesotho Library did not influence the frequency of usage of the library's resources (Khaola and Mabilikoane, 2015:44). This suggests that there could be other variables that influence usage of library services.

7.7 Recommendations to improve services

The last objective of the study was to make suggestions on how IRC service quality could be improved. The following recommendations were suggested.

- Promoting the use of electronic resources by training all customer categories on how to access and use the resources remotely. It is critical to maintain free internet access which will further facilitate access to electronic resources even within the IRC. Customers would also have to be allowed to save the resources on their memory devices or print them.
- Extending the hours of service by opening the IRC even on Wednesdays. This will require additional human resources which could be acquired through recruitment of an IRC assistant or volunteers.
- Training IRC staff on customer care, with special emphasis on courtesy and information retrieval skills in order to instill confidence in customers.
- Conducting an information needs assessment to determine the areas that are not covered by the current information resources and purchasing the relevant materials.
- Expanding the size of the IRC to include discussion and study rooms in order to reduce noise and also meet the increasing demand for services. This would also require adding more furniture and equipment (computers, printers, and scanners).

8. Conclusion

The IRC was perceived to be providing high quality services, but improvements are required in all dimensions if the services are to meet and exceed the expectations of customers. There was no conclusive evidence on the relative importance of service quality dimensions. All the dimensions appeared to be equally important. However the information control and affect of service dimensions were regarded as critical. Differences in perceptions of service quality between IRC customer categories were observed. Variations within each customer segment could not be determined because the groups got even smaller to make meaningful comparisons. The survival of the IRC depends on its ability to create more loyal customers who repeatedly use the services, and recommend it to their friends and colleagues. This will result in more customers who use the service and also lead to the attainment of the Embassy's mission and outcomes.

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