QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF INTERNATIONAL COURT LIBRARIES: A STUDY OF THE AFRICAN UNION COURT ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS LIBRARY

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Abstract

This paper is based on an on-going doctoral research entitled Quality assessment of international court libraries: a study of the African Union Court on Human and Peoples' Rights Library, at the Department of Information Science, University of South Africa. The African Court is an organ of the African Union. It is a continental judiciary court that has competence to take final and binding decisions on human rights violations on the continent. Established in 2004, its headquarters are in Arusha, Tanzania. The purpose of this research is to assess the quality of services offered by the AfCHPR library, both print and electronic. The study has used LibQUAL and SERVQUAL protocols for the non-digital services, and DigiQUAL for the digital services. The research is an empirical study that has not been carried out before in international court libraries or in any African Union library. It uses the mixed method approach for comprehensiveness, breadth and depth of the investigation. Both qualitative and quantitative data will be collected from all the categories of the library users. The method adopted is the survey method while the main data collection instrument is the standard LibQUAL questionnaire supplemented by focus group interviews. Data will be tabulated and presented using descriptive statistics and analysed using quantitative and qualitative methods. The study will help the African Union and its various partners to assess the quality of their inputs to the library and also to point out areas that will need improvement.

Keywords: Libraries; Digital services, African Court; Quality assessment;

1. Introduction and conceptual setting

From the 1990s, institutions increasingly became concerned about the quality of services provided to their customers and started to take action to improve it (Hernon & Altman, 1998:17). Libraries are no exception. They need to keep their customers and funding bodies satisfied that their inputs are put to good use. If this does not happen, they stand to lose both the funding and users, who will drift to competing sources of information (Woodward, 2009: 157-159). Thus the assessment of the quality of services in libraries has become an important aspect in the profession. In the library profession, service quality is typically defined in terms of gap analysis, or the gap between customers' expectations in general (for an ideal library and its services) and those perceptions relating to the particular library and its services (Hernon & Whitman 2008: 15). Therefore, service quality evaluation in libraries means examining the difference between the users' expectations and their perception of actual performance of the library.

According to Calvert & Hernon (1997: 199), the focus of service quality is the interaction between customers and service providers, satisfying the query of each and every user accurately, exhaustively and expeditiously (Sharma, 2001: 169). In addition it may suggest the areas of weakness that may need to be addressed. The exercise of service evaluation has other certain benefits. For instance, where the library personnel are usually involved in the evaluation, the experience increases their appreciation of the factors that affect and contribute to quality generally and specifically in their library work (Grigoroudis and Siskos, 2009: 1-3).

The ultimate purpose of quality assessment of a service is to improve the outcomes or effectiveness of the library. The assessment of service quality provides an important feedback that can be employed to improve services to users (Filiz, 2007: 1). Like all service-oriented organisations, libraries and information centres should expect that the quality of their services will be evaluated. According to Oloomi (2000), the main reason for assessing the performance of the library is to reach the optimal goal of satisfying customers all the time and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the library operations. The increasing expectations of customers for better services have motivated libraries to view quality management as an effective means of incorporating quality improvement into their related services (Hsieh, 2000: 1).

2. Contextual setting

2.1 International Courts

The subject of this study is quality assessment of library services in the context of international court libraries. The term *international court* refers to courts whose jurisdiction covers more than one country (Mackenzie: 2010, 184). International courts are established by treaties between nations, such as the *Rome Treaty* that established the International Criminal Court and *Protocol Number 11* of the European Convention on Human Rights that established the European Court of Human Rights. Currently, there are three international human rights courts in the world. These are the European Court of Human Rights, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the African Union Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. Any state or citizen of a member state can file a case before the court, having fulfilled all the requirements as stipulated by that particular court (Janis, 1992: 22). Each of these courts has a library that is instrumental in its activities. Like other modern libraries, these libraries have incorporated modern technologies and digital collections in their services.

2.2 African Union Court on Human and Peoples Rights

The African Union Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR) is a continental judiciary court that was established by virtue of Article 1 of the *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights* (African Union, 1998: 3). The Protocol was adopted on 9 June 1998 in Burkina Faso and came into force on 25 January, 2004 (African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2011: 2). The headquarters of the Court is in the city of Arusha, the United Republic of Tanzania. Like other international courts, the AfCHPR has two main sections;

- The Court: This is composed of eleven (11) Judges, nationals of Member States of the African Union, elected in their individual capacity. The Judges are elected by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union for a period of six (6) years, and may be re-elected only once.

- The Registry: This is responsible for the day-to-day running and administration of the Court. Its purpose is to assist the Court in the exercise of its judicial functions. It comprises of the Registrar, Deputy Registrar, and other administrative staff required for the effective exercise of its functions. The Library is falls under the registry. Staff of the registry are recruited on a professional competitive basis. Citizens of all member states of the African Union are eligible.

The Court is a multicultural organization consisting of staff from all corners of the African continent. The official languages of the Court are the same as those of the African Union, which are English, French, Arabic and Portuguese. English and French are the working languages of the Court (African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2010: 15).

2.3 The library

The library was established in 2008 with a general purpose of supporting the judicial activities and legal endeavors of the members and staff of the court, but it also serves external clients. The library exists to provide appropriate library and information services to the African Union Court on Human and Peoples' Rights together with its registry. By nature, it is a specialised library focusing mainly on the subject of human rights and its subsidiary subjects. The role of the library therefore, is:

- To collect, record, evaluate and provide access to information in the subject of human rights and related areas.

- To offer different types of services to the primary audience (the Court and the Registry) and so essentially support the work of these bodies.

2.4 Users of the library

The users of the library fall into 2 main categories; internal users and external users. Internal users comprise of the staff of the Registry and the Court. They include the *registry staff* that run the day to day activities of the Court and the *Judges* who deal with judicial matters before the Court. External users are guest users of the library. They neither work for the Registry nor the Court.

2.5 Digital and electronic services

Apart from its print collection, the library has subscribed to electronic databases and journals, has an OPAC, a database of articles relevant to the mandate of the court, an audio-visual section and collection, and an internet access section with 8 desk top computers. The library has a web page which will be upgraded to a portal by August 2016. There is Wi-Fi available within the library.

3. Research problem

Economic constraints have forced library managers to rethink their general direction and particularly to think in economic terms. They have been forced to justify their budgets in detail and to allocate their resources with great care (Powell, 2006: 104). Accountability demands by parent organizations, donors, governments, changing demands by users, proliferation of other sources of information, birth of new disciplines, and restrictions on funding have forced libraries to rethink how they run their affairs. Organisations have generally started to demand greater accountability from libraries, especially those receiving public funding (Himmel & Wilson, 1998). The requirement to be accountable to funding agencies demands that measures must be used to demonstrate success. Results from quality surveys are an objective way of demonstrating accountability and achievement. The rise of other competing sources and services that offer library-like resources such as the Internet and its various search engines and encyclopaedias has made librarians realise that they must improve the quality of their services in order to survive (Cullen, 2001: 668). To improve quality, librarians need to first measure it so that this can form a basis for improvement.

Traditionally, the quality of a library has been described in terms of its collection and measured by the size of the library's holding and various counts of its use (Nitecki, 1996: 184). This has changed and hence the need to continuously assess the many factors that have come to be known as the determinants of quality service. For instance, the traditional library user has evolved; he is more literate, with complex information needs, demands, behaviour and expectations. This has not only increased the demand for information but also the complexity of the type of information needed has increased significantly. Library users have started to question the quality of library services and the functioning of the service delivery system. The increasing expectations of users have challenged libraries to improve the quality of their services. As a result of the above issues, libraries and information services have been forced to adopt quality assessment practices (Hsieh 2000: 2). Libraries and those who manage them are under pressure to evaluate their activities just like other organisations, with a view to quality improvement. According to Bawden, Petuchovaite, & Vilar (2005: 4554-463), the pressure to evaluate has become international. International court libraries are no exemption, although they are unique. Since the inception of the AfCHPR library in 2008 there has been no assessment of the quality of its services. This is the first study to do so. After 7 years of operation, the time is ripe for the library to assess the quality of its services.

3.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to assess the quality of physical and electronic services offered by the AfCHPR library by determining user satisfaction, experiences, perceptions and expectations of library services using the LibQUAL,and DigiQUAL protocols.

3.2 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are:

- Establish the level of user satisfaction of library services in the LibQUAL, and DigiQUAL dimensions by establishing the *minimum* level of service that the users would find acceptable;

- Establish user expectations of library services by finding out the desired level of service the users would like to receive;

- To assess the quality of library services from the perspective of the users through an analysis of the actual level of service the users perceive to have been provided;

- Investigate gaps between current situation and expected situation of library services;

- Make recommendations on how to improve service delivery in accordance with the users' needs.

3.3 Research questions

The study will seek to answer the following research questions;

Objective	Research question	Possible source of data
1. Establish the level of user satisfaction of library services in the LibQUAL and DigiQUAL dimensions by establishing the *minimum* level of service that the users would find acceptable?	1. What is the level of user satisfaction of the AfCHPR library services? 2. What is the *minimum* level of service that the users would find acceptable?	1. Questionnaire 2. Focus Group Discussions 3. Literature review
2. Establish user expectations of library services by finding out the desired level of service the users would like to receive.	1. What are the expectations of the users regarding library services? 2. What is the desired level of service the users would prefer?	1.Questionnaire
3. Assess the service quality of the library from the perspective of the users through an analysis of the actual level of service the users perceive to have been provided?	1. What is the service quality of the library from the user perspective? 2. What is the actual level of service the users perceive to have been provided?	1. Questionnaire
4. Investigate gaps between current situation and expected situation of library services.	1. What is the current situation of library services? 2) What is the expected situation of library services?	1.Questionnaire 2. Focus group discussions.
5. Make recommendations on how to change service delivery in accordance with the members' needs.	1) From the conclusions, what can the library do in order to improve the quality of its services?	1. Data interpretation and conclusions.

Table 1: Research objectives, questions and possible sources of data

4. Theoretical framework and literature review

The theoretical framework of this study was guided by various service quality models, those addressing new technologies and also the traditional ones. There are two types of traditional Models; those based on the *disconfirmation conceptualisation* and those based on the *performance-only* conceptualisation. Models using the disconfirmation approach rely on customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction to explain service quality. According to Grönroos (1984) customers compared their expectations to their experience of service quality in forming judgments. The approach defines the concept of perceived service quality, as the outcome of an evaluation process, where the consumer compares his expectations with the service he perceives to have received (Zain and Othman, 2011). According to Hernon (2002), the approach measures customer perceptions of service quality by g differences or gaps (discrepancy), between customers' expectations and perceptions of service. Under the disconfirmation approach falls Grönroos Model, Gaps Model, LibQual, SERVQUAL and SERVPERF.

Models based on the performance-only conceptualisation rely on the postulation that *performance* and not *performance-expectation* is what determines service quality (Cronin & Taylor 1992). According to them performance only is a more advanced means of measuring service quality (Jayasundara, Ngulube & Minishi-Majanja; 2009: 68). From various studies, Cronin & Taylor (1992) developed a performance only measurement of service quality which they named SERVPERF. SERVPERF is therefore the performance component of the Service Quality scale (SERVQUAL). With the development of ICTs, various well-known models of e-service quality have been developed to measure the quality of e-services in both library and non-library setting. They include E-SERVQUAL Library E-SERVQUAL, WebQUAL, DigiQUAL, and SiteQUAL. E-SERVQUAL is the extent to which a website facilitates efficient shopping, purchasing, and delivery. Library E-SERVQUAL was developed from E-SERVQUAL with a focus on libraries. WebQUAL evaluates website quality using 36 questions. Based on LibQUAL, DigiQUAL collects feedback on a site's service, functionality and content. SiteQUAL measures perceived quality of internet shopping. Given the central role that the internet and electronic services have taken in modern libraries, more studies on e-service quality are still in progress (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003).

There have been conceptual criticisms levelled at the existing service quality models; it has been established that people generally have high expectations and that service quality and customer satisfaction are based on attitudes, which are psychological constructs (Van Dyke, Prybutok & Kappelman 1999). These are difficult to predict. There is also no standard definition of expectations, and the models are said to be fixed and constant (generic) and not tailored for specific situations such as libraries. Contextually, these models use pre-determined scales which are not assymetrical (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). They are static and linear, which means that important issues like history are not captured (Parasuraman, 1994). They have also been criticised for their use of different scales to measure quality attributes (Likert) and a semantic differential scale to measure satisfaction (Parasuraman, 1994). Researchers are in agreement that there is no best model for measuring service quality or customer satisfaction (Jayasundara, Ngulube and Minishi-Majanja, 2009: 184). No single model or paradigm can be applied across the board. This is because situations vary from company to company and from customer to customer (Schembri & Sandberg' 2002).

5. Research methodology

5.1 Research approach

There are three basic research paradigms, namely qualitative research, quantitative research, and mixed methods research. In this study, since more than one methodology is used and both qualitative and quantitative data are collected, the mixed methods research (MMR) approach is used. Bryman (2012: 628) views mixed methods research (MMR) as a simple shorthand to stand for research that integrates quantitative and qualitative research within a single project. Cresswell (2009:203) notes that the development and perceived legitimacy of both qualitative and quantitative research in the social and human sciences has resulted in the emergence of mixed methods research which employs the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

5.2 Research design

This study adopted a mixed model design. This is a research method that brings together approaches from more than one research method, mostly qualitative and quantitative designs in a single research study (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009: 273). It goes by various other names such as integrative, multi-method, multiple methods, triangulated studies, ethnographic residual analysis, and mixed research (Harrison & Reilly 2011). In a Mixed-method study, the various methods mitigate and cancel out the inherent weaknesses of each type of the individual methods in the research (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009: 273). According to Collins, Onwuegbuzie and Sutton (2006), there are 3 main reasons for combining quantitative and qualitative research;

- Through triangulation, combined methods allow for confirmation and corroboration of each of the methods used.

- Richer and in depth data can be collected through combination of methods.

- Through combinations, challenges that emerge from the two data sources can be resolved.

The study used triangulation strategy as a means of seeking convergence across qualitative and quantitative approaches (Greene, Caracelli & Graham 1989). It triangulated the data collection methods of questionnaires and focus group discussions. This study adopted the dominant-less-dominant model design where one method is usually given priority over the other. As the primary instruments, LibQUAL and DigiQUAL questionnaires will be used to collect quantitative data while focus group discussions will be used to gather qualitative data. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods are kept separate but will be later combined or integrated into meta-inferences (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007:118). Both data sets are used for descriptive and explanatory purposes.

5.3 Sampling, data collection methods and procedure

In this research, sampling was not done as all the 65 staff of the registry were included in the study. Questionnaires (LibQUAL and DigiQUAL) are used as the main data collection tools, supported by interviews with focus groups. The researcher and his assistant will administer questionnaires to all the 65 staff members of the registry. The library has names and contacts of external users as these have to register whenever they visit the library. Currently the library has 29 consistent external users. These will all be included in the study. For the external users who will not be available at the time of the study, the questionnaire was be emailed to them.

491

After the administration of the questionnaire, follow up focus group discussions will be conducted with the key users of the library. They focus groups have been identified as per the departments of the Court: Legal staff, Administration & Finance, ICT, Languages and external users. Each group will comprise of 6-8 members randomly selected from the department. Each session will last about 1 hour. Care will be taken to make the focus group members feel at easy and free open to contribute. To achieve this, the participants in each group will be selected from the same department. The purpose of the focus group interviews will be to supplement the questionnaire by establishing the perceptions of the library services by the users.

5.4 Data analysis and presentation

Data gathered from questionnaires and interviews will be tabulated and presented using descriptive statistics. In analysing quantitative data, data will be coded and analysed using Microsoft Excel and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). This will be done with an aim of summarizing and defining the relations among the variables assessed by this study. Sufficient analysis of quantitative data will be done in order to provide descriptive statistics to obtain a profile of the respondents. A summary of the data will be described in quantitative terms, variable by variable, with frequency counts and percentages. Interview results from focus group discussions will be used to refine and supplement data collected from questionnaires. From this analysis, relevant conclusions will be drawn and suitable recommendations made.

Frequency distributions will be generated for all coded variables. Cross tabulations of selected variables will then be generated and correlation coefficients calculated between selected variables. Written comments provided by the respondents on several questions will be recorded, categorized, counted, and ranked respectively on a case by case basis. These comments will provide valuable descriptive and illustrative information. The comments will also provide the researcher with a better sense and understanding of participant experiences. As outlined by Creswell (2009), the study will follow a sequential explanatory strategy that stipulates that qualitative results can be used to explain and interpret the findings of quantitative studies.

6. Conclusion

Court libraries, and especially international court libraries, and their digital and electronic collections are relatively young in Africa. It is therefore important to assess their effectiveness in service delivery and to what extent they have or continue to meet user expectations in the region. This will set a precedence that will ensure that quality is continuously at the center of their operations, thus benefiting both users, funding organisations and the general public. Since independence, the African continent has faced many gross abuses of human rights. The mission of the AfCHPR is to address these abuses, by seeking justice, arbitration and promoting human rights in Africa. The findings of the study will therefore assist the AfCHPR in meeting its objectives of ensuring and promoting human rights in Africa. This study is the first quality assessment exercise in all African Union libraries. It is hoped that the study will trigger similar studies across the African Union libraries, especially of the evolving digital and electronic services. The next stage of the study is data collection.

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