

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON LIBRARY SERVICE QUALITY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF IIUM LIBRARY

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ABSTRACT

Academic libraries are currently facing their greatest challenge since the explosion in tertiary education and academic publishing, which began after World War II. The global digital revolution is affecting both the traditional forms of the creation, organisation, and dissemination of knowledge, and the world of tertiary education itself. In the challenging environment, academic library only one way can survive in the volatile competitive market to improve their service quality to meet their customers' expectations. In this qualitative research explored the students' perceptions on IIUM library service quality from the perspective of five students' respond at the main campus of IIUM. Research data were collected through face to face interviews near to the IIUM library. In this study, three important issues were considered regarding the student's perception on IIUM library service quality: (i) Positive and negative perception on library service quality (ii) Perception on technology and human context and (iii) Satisfaction. These three key issues were analyzed based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) procedures.

Keywords: Qualitative Methods, Student Perception, Service Quality, IIUM Library.

INTRODUCTION

The Universities and institutions provides research to serve humanity, and it also produces, teaches and implements scientific information, hypothesis and methods; synthesis, and also, synthesis and extending of national culture with international values, developing liberal and creative thoughts. The universities make contributions directly to economic growth and the development of a country by developing human resources, analyzing economic policies and conducting research, making suggestions for economic growth and transferring information technologies to industry (Yilmaz, et al., 2010). It is important that the requests and expectations of the internal customer (academic staff and administrative staff) and external customer (student, researcher, graduates, student families, society etc.) should be known in higher education (Gencel, 2001; cited on Yilmaz, et al., 2010). Gencel (2001) also suggests that higher education institutions should develop the necessary strategies for meeting these expectations. Higher education institutions have become more competitive due to new education technologies and new electronic information sources.

The concern about education quality in the universities is due to the increase in competition in recent years. Quality of education in the universities depends on social, political, economical, organizational, psychological and pedagogic factors. Improving the education quality is a pedagogical issue. The right conditions need to be created in the education-training process. These conditions include the need to improve the training quality given to administration staff, the need to improve the content of education, development of more effective educational materials and to have suitable levels and quality of staff (Shabanav, 2005).

This is qualitative research which was conducted on students' perception of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) library services. IIUM library is committed to manage and provide quality information resources and library services that meet customer and stakeholder requirements and to implement continual improvement to enhance the effectiveness of the quality management system. IIUM library also acquired collection of awards (i.e. Quality Agency Award 2002, Best Quality Customer Service Award 2002, Quality Customer Service Award

2007, and Quality Agency Award (Non-academic) 2008) by fulfilling their requirement as library which can give quality services and achieve students' expectation. However, it is very difficult for the library to fulfil their customers' expectation with existing facilities. This is because customer expectation on services may be different and changes need action from the organization like IUM library. The application of quality concept will be achieved, when customer expectation is fulfilled through the library facilities or services to achieve high customer satisfaction (Baba and Ali, 2005). Thus, this quality concept refers to satisfaction that will be acquired by user from the effective way of services provided by library.

The necessity on library to provide services quality is very a challenging task to support university's core business to produce number of graduates in every year which is required by the industry. However, the question is; did student obtain the quality that they must get? Other than that, what is their perception on library quality services provided as an important academic facility based on types of services? Is it low or more than their perception? Another thing, what is their satisfaction level on services quality at IUM library? Thus this study only focused on four main objectives which are

- To find out students' perception on service quality at the IUM library
- To investigate students' positive experience about the IUM library services
- To investigate students' negative experience regarding the IUM library services, and
- To know the students' perception on overall satisfaction about the IUM library services

An Overview of IUM Library

IUM library system consists of five libraries at different campuses of this university: the Main Library is located at Gombak campus (main campus), two Medical libraries are located at Kuantan (medical campus) (Indera Mahkota and Jalan Hospital branches), ISTAC Library is located at Damansara, IIBF Library is located at Jalan Duta and the Centre for Foundation Studies (CENFOS) Library is located at Petaling Jaya and Nilai. It has

approximately 557,076 volumes of monographs, 1,674 serial titles on subscription, 24,066 volumes of bound serials, 60,091 units of audio-visuals and 29,148 microforms. In addition, it also provides access to the internet, subscribes to a number of online databases and electronic journals and e-books. Library operations are computerized using an integrated library automation system. The system allows for speedy and convenient access to the library's catalogue both from within the library and remotely through the Internet. Its 'broadcast' search facility provides direct access and simultaneous searches to a selection of other libraries' online catalogues. The main library (Gombak campus library) provides a spacious and conducive study environment with 40 carrel rooms, 15 research rooms, 8 discussion rooms, 4 audio-visual viewing rooms, an auditorium, and a multi-purpose room. It has a seating capacity for 2,077 users. Moreover, the library also has three computer labs as well as computer facilities for the library users.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation of Library Services

Higher education is transformed to global phenomena in the developed and developing countries. Since the key of success in economics is based on information, developing techniques and intellectual skills, higher education is becoming more important (Randall, 2002). According to Yilmaz, et al. (2010), higher education achieved an international dimension gradually by means of globalization. By globalization, rapid technological changes became important in the process of education-training in higher education. Pearson and Chatterjee (2004) stated that the rapid technological transformation in the university systems has brought about new expectations. Entrepreneurial efforts over the last hundred years have been associated with a student centred approach.

Library is an important academic facility at higher level institution. Therefore, library needs to improve their service quality to achieve high students' satisfaction about the library facilities. The higher level of institution provides library facility with best quality service to achieve the objectives and fulfil their customers' expectation. In

addition, providing best library services will support the education activities (Buckley, et al., 2003). According to Doyle (1995), good library service enhances the quality of education at higher level of institution. She also mentioned that a good library is the heart of a good university which brings academic excellence.

According to Hewlett and Walton (2001), library services are integral to support and guidance to the students through six aspects of provision at the higher education institution. These six aspects of provision are: curriculum design, content and organisation; teaching, learning and assessment; student progression and achievement; student support and guidance; learning resources; and quality management and enhancement. Library service establish a basic and vital role to achieve sustainable development in the higher educational institution and it's also play a major role by providing required information to improve in the Research and Development (R&D) sector (Salarzahi, et al., 2010).

However, nowadays the modern library faces a number of challenges in the competitive market. For the years libraries have operated as part of the public sector, and have being subject to public thinking. This has resulted in institutions that operate within a 'bubble' and they are identified as a inefficiency and non-market thinking for the public sector (Vitaliano, 1997). More recently there has been increasing awareness of the ineffectiveness of this institution, and changed is being demanded. This demand is partly influenced by the fact that governments are being increasingly required to be accountable for public spending, and this has put pressure on many services to ensure that they offer 'value for money' to the taxpayer by providing relevant services (Evans and Zarnosky, 2000).

The requirement of accountability does not only provided by the libraries, but also provided by the academic institutions. Cullen (2001) mentioned that universities are accountable to their students and fee payers, and if they fail to offer accountabilities then there is a high risk that students and fee payers will take their business elsewhere. The competition to gain students means that universities must ensure that all of their facilities operate in a user

requirement and remain competitive with other universities.

Cullen (2001) also stated that competition not only comes from other libraries, but also from other information sources. Advanced and modern technology has increasingly diversified the ways in which people can access data and information. As a result, libraries no longer maintain the monopoly on information storage, and people are increasing turning to other formats for their information needs. This increase in competition means that libraries are no longer able to exist in a 'bubble' of secure funding and zero accountability.

Implications for Library Services

According to Cordes (2008), recent research results found that a strong trend toward increased human interaction on the job as the nature of work changes in developed economies such as globalization, specialization, and new technologies are making interactions far more pervasive in developed economies. This movement could be particularly critical for library service which often involves multiple resources, participants, and connections; "jobs involving the most complex type of interactions – those requiring employees to analyze information, grapple with ambiguity, and solve problems – make up the fastest-growing segment" (Johnson et al., 2005). Therefore, understanding relationships in the library service system is more important than ever before.

In an age where some questions the viability of library reference service, understanding this new dynamic is crucial to ensuring future success. These questions are: How well library will play their part to contribute quality service in the higher educational institution? How well the library can understand about their customers/users expectation? Nevertheless, it could be challenging for the library if they will bring new service or new dynamic environment for their customers/user. Only tools for diagramming and managing human interaction can help to the library services to develop and manage more effectively to meet their customers/user expectation (Cordes, 2008).

Usefulness of Library Services

There are two questions about the usefulness of library

services: one is why do some students use libraries more than others, and another is why is using some libraries easier than others? The main factor for using library service is familiarity with how the library, as a whole, can be optimally used. Students who are more familiar with library and its facilities can use them more easily (Whitaker, 1972; cited on Mohammadi, et al., 2008). Whitaker (1972) also found that user education in a library among new students have no significant difference between the lecture method and programmed user education. Moreover, some studies have concluded that library education can have a positive impact on the quality of students' education. For example, Mohammadi, et al. (2008) demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between library user education and student grades.

According to Clarke (1999), the development of user education is follows within the context of arguments for and against it. Library orientation tours and different approaches describe and guide to the users, as well as develop to the academic programmes of undergraduate and postgraduate of user education. Yu (2003) described that how Taiwanese college and technical institution libraries familiarize users with library facilities and information resources. The most common programs a basic introduction to library services, OPAC instruction, searching tools, Internet instruction, CD-ROMs, databases and electronic journals, and audio and video materials. In addition, Alimohammadi and Sajjadi (2006) indicated about the most common skills or activities in library services for the application of instructions which are library tour, instruction in subject headings and classification, searching both manual/computerized catalogues, use of reference materials, CD-ROM databases, using microform equipment, and assignments: Instruction should finish with a theoretical/practical test.

Methodology

The general objective of this study was to investigate the phenomena on student's perception of IIUM library services through qualitative research methods. Aim of study phenomena is to find out student life experiences regarding the IIUM library service quality (Schwandt, 2001). According to Giorgi (1989, 1997) phenomenology

refers to the totality of lived experiences that belong to a single person. He also mentioned that there are four characteristics of psychological phenomenological approaches which hold across all variations: (i) research is rigorously descriptive, (ii) phenomenological reductions, (iii) explore the internal relationship between persons and situation, and (iv) search for essences in human experiences through the use of imaginative variation. The author was interested to conducting this study because of his involvement in the IIUM library services as a postgraduate student. The author also expected that the process of conducting and developing the survey would yield a suitable instrument to evaluate the student's perception of library services from a qualitative perspective. Basically, this research was mainly focused on student perception on library services such as quality service, positive experience, negative experience, and satisfaction.

Sampling

This research study method was derived from the phenomenological assumptions that means the phenomena was explored by asking individual respondent who has experienced the phenomena to describe his/her experiences (Sale, 2007). Sampling is therefore, purposeful in that individual who has experienced the phenomena and able to describe his/her perception or experiences about the IIUM library services. This study was conducted a qualitative interviews about the IIUM library services and only five respondents were participated in this study.

Data Collection

In this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with participants about their perception on IIUM library services. Interviewees were given the option of meeting at the library, at faculty, or at another location that was convenient for them. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes.

An interview guide was constructed with various subjects: the interviewee's most interested reading subject/area, his/her preferable books/journals/magazines, what kind of library services actually they use and how often, and what

information sources do they seek at library? They were asked about their perception on library service quality. The following are typical of the questions used as prompts in the interview: Describe a positive experience you had at the IUM library? Describe a negative experience you had at the IUM library? Are you satisfied with the IUM library services? What is your suggestion/recommendation to improve IUM library service? Participants were encouraged to discuss anything in relation to the survey including the survey findings. To guide the conversation, an interview protocol was used with probe questions embedded within the main question such as why do you think library services need to be improved, and how they can improve their library service quality? Notes were taken during the interviews.

In order to describe the study sample, the gender of the participant was noted. Seven demographic questions were asked at the beginning of the interview: gender, age, nationality, programme of studying at IUM, study status, major of study, and do they go to library often or not? After completed the interview, each interviewee was given a chocolate (worth RM 2.50) and a signature gel pen (worth RM 2.00) as a gift for their participation (participants were not aware of the gift certificate at the beginning of the interview). At the end of the interview, the researcher (author) was requested to participant for their permission to contact in the future to review the transcript of their interview. During the interviews, the author used pen and papers to make notes about the interviews. He also used his mobile phone (Nokia C1) to record all the conversations of interviews (at the beginning of the interview, the author asked permission from the participant to record his/her interview conversation). Therefore, when interview was finished the author read through his notes and added details from his recoding conversation.

The recorded interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word 2007. Sale (2007) recommended that the transcripts should be verified against the voice recording (tap recording). This process of transcript was continued until the author was satisfied with the quality of the transcriptions. The verified transcripts were sent to the participants who were given a couple of days to respond

with comments and/or corrections.

Data Analysis

According to Moustakas (1994), the aim of phenomenological analysis was to portray the essential nature of the phenomenon experienced. Therefore, this study data were analysed based on Giorgi's (1989, 1997, and 2010) and Smith and Eatough (2008) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) procedures. Analysis of the data began after the first interview and was an iterative process and coding approach was used to the data for the editing style. The transcripts were read in their entirety to appreciate a sense of the whole data; the transcripts were read more slowly and the text was segregated into manageable units referred to as "meaning units". A coding process was utilized to organize the data into the meaning units to relate comments of participants regarding their common perception on IUM library services.

Results

This research was conducted face to face qualitative interviews and five respondents were participated in the interviews. Out of five respondents, three were female and two were male students and their mean age was about 21 years. Among these five respondents, four were international students and one was local (Malaysian) student. This research found that all respondents were studying bachelor programme at IUM as a full time student, but their major of study was different. Three students' major of study was law; one was human science; and another was engineering science. All five participants responded with some comments and corrections after reading their transcripts. They also confirmed that the transcript was satisfactory to them. However, they did not change the content or meaning of the transcripts.

The structure of reporting the results of this exploratory study has been organized in context of student perception on IUM library service quality which is as follows:

Students' Perception on Library Service Quality

In this part, the respondents were asked five questions regarding their perception on IUM library services. Participants were commented about these five questions respectively (participant 1, participant 2 ... participant 5)

which are given below:

Question 1: How do you find the service quality at the IIUM library?

"Ok, first satisfactory, but other than that internet service is down ... ahh... I think if they provide more computers for the students and ... hmm... and more reading areas for the students. Sometimes library is so full..."

"To me, IIUM library is quite ok, because there internet services newspaper, and ... hmm... many references have comfortable place, air conditioning. There are also quite places to study. For the Photostat service free could be much better (laughing)."

"It's a good. They are friendly and helpful especially law area at ground level of library is very helpful."

"It's ok, I think it's alright, but I think should be nice. However, they have nice facilities rather than other universities in Malaysia. What I feel that they could improve good attraction books. If they attract people new book come in, because we are like to need new book, if they will bring that to read it."

"There are so many services at library which are very nice but security is very bad. There is laptop stolen and another part is noisy especially during the final exam. What else.... They don't give longer time to use the library."

According to the above comments, all participants were satisfied about the quality service of IIUM library. However, they have given some suggestions about the service quality improvement of IIUM library. Someone suggested providing more new books to attract to the customers to visit more to the library. Another person said that library should increase number of computers and reading areas for the students. Based on the fifth respondent comments, it was appeared that he was happy about the library service quality, but he was concerned about the IIUM library security system. He mentioned that one laptop was stolen from the library and he blamed to the library security system.

Question 2: Describe a positive experience you had at the IIUM library (technology and human context)

"Though library orientation programme like you can

find books, journals, or cases, and how to find database... I think librarian (library staff) helps to find the books, I don't know how to use library (she was laughing)"

"For me about... ahh... for technology about IIUM internet services very crucial to find the services and find examination paper. For me I am a law student, I need to find law cases through online database and also find Malay journals through internet and find the softcopy of law cases, and there are... hmm... there are also very good staffs at the library. They helped me when I had difficulty to find law cases, books."

"Like I said the department of law at ground level of the library has most cases for reading which easy to find out. The person who works at library who helped me to find a book which was quite helpful. On the other hand, online databases are very helpful to find cases."

"They have multi machines, such as printing, copying very helpful, that things helpful lot, and other than that positive thing just cleanness, you know. You know... they don't really disturb people, keep quiet and the staffs of the library don't disturb us, they leave us alone."

"Overall I have positive experience about the library, like diverse of books. From the services, services are nice even sometimes people helpful to find information, and discussion room is good."

Above question was asked to the participants regarding their positive experiences at IIUM library based on human and technological context. All the participants mentioned that librarian (library staff) helped them to find their required books from the library. Some of them mentioned that librarian didn't disturb them while they were reading at library and they (library staffs) also helped them to find information about the books or cases. Similarly, library online database and internet service also helped them to find previous examination papers, to get information about the books or cases, and to get softcopy of Malay journal and law cases. In addition, one participant stated that he had positive experience about the IIUM library services because he found that IIUM library has diverse of books and good discussion rooms.

Question 3: Describe a negative experience you had at the IUM library (technology and human context)

"Ok, sometimes printing service ...ahh... and it's really bad when I need it, I don't get it other than that it's ok."

"The negative experiences ...ahh... there are e-books or references in the library ...ahh... which is very hard for me to find e-book and references in the library, and ... other than that I think it's ok"

"There is no discussion room for the law students, internet service is very slow, time of discussion is not long enough like if you want to exceed the time then it could be only one hour. About the person who open the gate is really grumpy, she didn't let me in the library. I don't know what happened, but she is very grumpy."

"Like borrowing the book, you know the borrow the book is limited and sometimes finding system device don't work because technological error. It claim that you borrowed the book but actually you didn't and it sound like quite embarrassing. The fact is that people are not happy, they are not very friendly. They (library staffs) are not motivated to help, seems like they are force to help you. I never seen their smiling face or anything. So, we feel that librarian is boring, very boring... and last thing is time of opening and closing. They said that they will close at this time, like they open lately but close early from the schedule time. Actually, they don't respect their rules."

"Again noisy part, time during the final exam should be longer, lack of security and they should admit it"

Based on the above comments, it revealed that all participants had some negative experiences on IUM library services. Someone said printing service is very bad and another person said that he had difficulty to find the e-book from the online library database. Third participant mentioned that there is no discussion room for the law student at library and she also mentioned that internet service is very slow and she had a bad experience with a library staff who actually didn't allow her to enter the library, during the office hours. Similarly, another person (participant 4) mentioned that the library staffs are not friendly enough. She also observed that the librarians are

not motivated and they don't have smiling face. Moreover, one participant (participant 5) claimed that library become noisy during the final exam and he found that library has lack of security for the users.

Question 4: Are you satisfied with the IUM library? Explain

"Quite satisfactory, like whatever we need we can get all the privileges and enjoy it. I think it...ahh... it's all satisfactory... (researcher asked her what could be the major issue for your satisfaction?) she replied that "to me to find out the law books from the library is quite satisfactory to myself"."

"For me, IUM library need to be improve because of references books because ...ahh... there are many empty spaces, and IUM library is very small rather than other universities in Malaysia and they have only few references book, other than that it. Overall, IUM library is satisfactory because there many information to get such as TV service (BBC, CNN), it's very informative."

"Yes, I am satisfied. Because I am able to find my required books, and photocopy and printing machine is there. Even seats are comfortable. I love the library (she said it with a baby voice)"

"I am bit satisfied. It's ok, it's not bad, I think it's fine. I feel that it's much more better because library facilities really helped me and really helpful. I am quite satisfy about it, but overall I am not satisfy."

"Yes, even though negative side from my opinion, but overall I am eighty percent satisfy. Improvement should be very nice."

Regarding IUM library services all the participants were quite satisfied. However, some of the participants commented on further improvement of the library services. For an example, one participant (respondent 2) said that library need to increase more reference books, because he thinks that IUM library has fewer reference books than other Malaysian universities. Another participant mentioned that she is bit satisfied about the IUM library services, but overall she is not satisfied. In contrast, the fifth participant mentioned that overall he is eighty percent satisfied about the IUM library services.

At the end of the interview, the author asked one question

to the participants "what is your suggestion/recommendation to improve IUM library service?" All participants were replied as below

"For mefor sometimes when I go to information counter....counter is empty, I think they should add more staffs, you know, to provide more services, improve internet connection, printing services. I think it will be more helpful to improve service quality ...hmm...that's it."

"As I said earlier, IUM library need to be renovated to become larger and larger, so that there will be more information for the students. I think for the ...ahh... period of lend books should be given longer and amount of books...ahh... given more amount of books to lend because ...ahh... I have like about Islamic cases... For the one student, they can lend one hundred books...they (students) can borrow books from the library as many as they can."

"Speed of internet service should be improved, more printing machine should be provided, more prayer rooms provided, Set-up the female TV area near to the students seating area whether students can listen TV program clearly, need more space (especially for the final exams), and should provide silence place to study quite."

"The word of service, they should provide that I never seen. They should improve their service to attracting young people through new books, new educational book, you know...facilities...you know new message ...ahh... what it's called?... just update new things...technology, new book. I think lot of people like read new book, I also like to read new book. People think library don't have new books. They (the library) don't advertise about the new books. Eventually, we see the students at library because of exams and I think having a programme at library like free to everyone to help services and call people to show what IUM library is."

"My past experience in my school, there wasn't a big library, but as I am saying that security, limitation time and they should use CCTV to improve the library service quality. If they can provide new edition of books, then it

will helps lot. For an example... if I go to library then I can find only old edition (which is 10 years back from the latest edition)."

According to the above comments, majority of the participants suggested that improve internet service, provide more printing machines, bring more new edition books, set-up the TV area near to the audience, and add more staffs at the information counter of the library. In addition, some of participants suggested that to extent the library service hours and also extent the time to borrow the books from the library for the longer period. Similarly, one of the participants (respondent 3) suggested that library should provide prayer room for the students to pray inside of the library, and she also recommended that to provide a silence environment inside of the library. Another participant (respondent 5) suggested that library should use CCTV to improve their security system, whether none of the student can lose their valuable thing or item from the library.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, participants (students) were interviewed to explore their perceptions of the IUM library service quality. This research finding indicates that overall all participants were satisfied regarding the service quality of IUM library, but they were not happy on some library services such as internet service, printing service, reading area, and discussion room. They were argued that they are not getting same privileges of quality services as compare to the other Malaysian public universities' library. They suggested that IUM library should focus on better quality service according to the students' needs and expectations. According to the five respondents opinions it was clearly understood that IUM library must improve their service quality in reading room area, discussion room, internet service, and printing service. However, library user expectations could be changed through electronic environment and other facilities. This change will impact at both the macro and micro level on service quality and overall satisfaction of the customer/user (Cullen, 2001).

In addition, the respondents also indicated some others

problems which are existing in the IIUM library services such as lack of security system, lack of new edition books, lack of discussion room for the law students, lack of printing machines, slow internet service, and unfriendly library staff behaviour. Due to these problems, library service quality could be declined. According to Ababa (2003), library service quality can be due to some reasons which are

- Lack of current books, journals and other information sources
- Lack of inadequate application of library information technology
- Unavailability internet access
- Empty reading rooms due to the poor customer service
- Lack of resources for training and development for the librarians
- Poor library support system for the learning process
- Library shelves are organized and decorated with old and irrelevant books rather than new books
- No physical development is matching for current needs
- Absence of professional library activism and advocacy, and
- Library is lag behind from the global trends due to inadequate resources, reliance of process inefficient processes, and weak professional networking. (Chisenga, 2000; and Enyia, 1998)

However, library management can stop or reduce their decline of service quality if they can keep pace with student needs and employ expert and skillful librarians who can provide user education to improve the service quality. They should offer user education to the university faculty, and provide them with instructional material to present to their students (Mohammadi, et al., 2008). Moreover, Yilmaz et al. (2010) proposed some recommendations to increase the positive perception and satisfaction of students regarding the library services

- Library facilities should be increased
- Scientific environment of the library should be improved

- Develop library web pages to provide update information to the users about the upcoming library event, publications, new books, new journals, and new facilities.
- Ensure smooth and seamless access to the library computers.
- Training of staff members in providing quality information services.

Limitations

This research has a number of limitations. Sample size of this research was very few and time was very limited to conduct this qualitative research. The findings might have also varied depending on the group of students interviewed at the main campus of IIUM. Although these study findings are context-specific, but this research elements can be applicable or usefulness in the further study for the students' perception about the other university's library service quality.

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