OBSERVATIONS ON SERVICE QUALITY IN A MODERN LIBRARY AND ITS IMPACT ON SUPPORTING EDUCATION AND RESEARCH. CASE STUDY ON THE LIBRARY OF THE "LUCIAN BLAGA" UNIVERSITY OF SIBIU

Rodica Maria VOLOVICI [1], Elena MĂRGINEAN [2], Liliana OPRESCU [3], Ioan-Irinel VIŞA [4]

[1,2,3,4] The Library of the "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, rodica.volovici@ulbsibiu.ro

Abstract

To achieve high academic prestige and better funding, universities try to ensure the best conditions for research, and libraries play a fundamental part in ensuring the necessary support to the basic educational process and to the scientific and research activity. In its capacity of information and documentation centre, the library offers access to quality information, be it traditionally - through proper book purchasing, or by accessing recent scientific data bases. For modern libraries, it is a challenge to develop new quality services, by improving classic services through information technology. Quality assurance with a view to meeting users' demands is one key to success. This paper reveals the research on improved services offered by the LBUS Library.

Keywords: higher education, library services, quality assurance, library survey

1   Premise: Scientific research, Academic excellence

The academic environment is subject to the competition laws between competitors seeking a better national or international classification, based on the performance achieved in the education process. A determinant key of academic reputation is the performance of research, which also ensures financial success. Therefore, the universities have an increased interest in a good support for research.

In order to improve the research activity, libraries play a central role by supporting the basic education process as well as by providing new services for access to quality information, to scientific databases, publishing the research papers.

The university libraries offer professional services in the basic fields of a modern society like education - learning - research. The quality of service is given by all its features, by the ability to meet the requirements of the need for information.

Ensuring the quality of services must include the totality of the measures adopted to achieve it consistently at a certain quality level. The purpose of library services is directly connected to the transfer of information to the beneficiary.

The relationship between the library, as provider of information services, and the beneficiary, as requester of information services, can be seen in analogy with the supply and demand on a goods market. A library's entire activity should focus on its beneficiary and their need for information. Proper library marketing is the starting point for its future development strategy.

In this world of information, the role of libraries and librarians acquire a new dimension. The market economy grants libraries the chance to turn their focus towards efficiency, to new paid services, and to come up with services to meet the user's requests. Faced with the challenges of information technology, libraries should be able to meet the demands of new technologies, the information market (continuously expanding), and most especially of the users. More and more users are already accustomed with the new information and documentation tools.

The Digital Libraries come to complete and improve access to information. These are relatively new and have gone through the pioneering phase as modern information systems, but are continuously in change and development.

Ensuring user satisfaction and quality service are the main drivers of library success. Consequently, quality has become essential in meeting consumer expectations and satisfaction.

2 Case Study: The Library of the "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu

During October 2017-February 2018, the Library of the "Lucian Blaga University" of Sibiu undertook a research on "Improving the activity of the library and improving the quality of its services".

This looks at the quality level of the services offered within the library, aiming at identifying the needs of the library users with a view to unfolding good information-documentation-research activities, determining the complexity and the usefulness of the information-documentation sources made available to the university community, as well as the user satisfaction level.

To fulfil these objectives, starting from the below hypotheses, we used the empirical research method - a questionnaire-based survey - on a sample of 102 subjects representing library users:
- the better the library services, the more satisfied the users,
- the more open library users are to new information-documentation trends, the more satisfied they are about the topics approached,
- the better and more varied the library, the more satisfied the users by its services.

3 Results and discussions:

The first set of questions was designed to learn the users' opinions on the quality of the LBUS Library services, correlating the level of importance with personal satisfaction in the case of a series of aspects related to document communication services.

Table 1: Level of importance as assigned by user

	1 (very important)	2 (important)	3 (accessible)	4 (less important)	5 (not at all important)	6 (I don't use this)
Ease of finding a book on the shelves	75 answers = 73%	18 answers = 18%	6 answers = 6%	0	3 answers = 3%	0
Ease of finding periodical publications on the shelves	61 answers = 59%	18 answers = 18%	9 answers = 9%	0	14 answers = 14%	0
Ease of finding other documents	48 answers = 46%	18 answers = 18%	18 answers = 18%	9 answers = 9%	6 answers = 6%	3 answers = 3%
Documentary area of existing publications	78 answers = 76%	15 answers = 15%	3 answers = 3%	3 answers = 3%	3 answers = 3%	0
Access to a public-cation which is not in the library stocks	54 answers = 52%	15 answers = 15%	12 answers = 12%	9 answers = 9%	6 answers = 6%	6 answers = 6%
Ease of browsing the library website	75 answers = 73%	9 answers = 9%	15 answers = 15%	0	3 answers = 3%	0
Ease of retrieving information from the library online catalogue	81 answers = 79%	12 answers = 12%	9 answers = 9%	0	0	0

The above table shows that, for users, the most important aspects have to do with accessibility, the library's capacity to grant access to its collections, regardless of the format.

The greatest importance is awarded to the ease of retrieving information from the library online catalogue: 81 users, i.e. 79% think this is very important. This aspect is concurrent with the efforts made over the last few years to maximize accessibility to information retrieval. Thus, the LBUS Library digital system - a first in Romania when it was launched ten years ago - integrates the Rfid system and the library's modern management system, Softlink Liberty5. Besides, the library tries to meet readers' wishes by processing the information within the documents (archiving-classifying-indexing) and through information collection, processing, and dissemination services.

A second highly important aspect refers to the documentary area of the publications within the library stocks, as 76% of respondents think this is very important. A fundamental objective of the LBUS Library is to set up and to permanently and systematically complete the documentary stock with scientific publication related to the specialization of the LBUS BA, MA and PhD programmes, as well as to the scientific research topics and to the scientific and cultural issues of interest.

Table 2: Satisfaction towards library services

	1 (highly satisfied)	2 (satisfied)	3 (acceptable level of satisfaction)	4 (low level of satisfaction)	5 (not at all satisfied)	6 (I don't use this)
Ease of finding a book on the shelves	66 answers = 64%	21 answers = 21%	12 answers = 12%	0	3 answers = 3%	0
Ease of finding periodical publications on the shelves	51 answers = 49%	24 answers = 24%	18 answers = 18%	3 answers = 3%	3 answers = 3%	3 answers = 3%
Ease of finding other documents	33 answers = 32%	30 answers = 29%	27 answers = 27%	6 answers = 6%	3 answers = 3%	3 answers = 3%
Documentary area of existing publications	42 answers = 41%	39 answers = 38%	9 answers = 9%	12 answers = 12%	0	0
Access to a publication which is not in the library stocks	24 answers = 24%	36 answers = 34%	12 answers = 12%	9 answers = 9%	3 answers = 3%	18 answers = 18%
Ease of browsing	54 answers = 52%	18 answers = 18%	15 answers = 15%	15 answers = 15%	0	0

the library website						
Ease of retrieving information from the library online catalogue	57 answers = 55%	24 answers = 24%	15 answers = 15%	3 answers = 3%	0	3 answers = 3%

After synthetizing the results on user satisfaction regarding the same aspects measured from the point of view of impact, we noticed that the highest degree of satisfaction was granted to the ease of finding a printed book on the shelves. Thus, 64% of the respondents said they were very satisfied, 21% satisfied, 12% answered that the way in which they find a book on shelves is acceptable, while 3% are totally dissatisfied. This is a highly important aspect for the LBUS Library: since approximately 60% of our printed books are freely accessible on shelves, one of our permanent concerns is to facilitate access to existing material and information, by ensuring assistance aimed at finding the proper material, information and services necessary for studying and research.

At the same time, accessing publications which are not part of the library stocks, through interlibrary loans, scored the lowest level of satisfaction: 24% of respondents are very satisfied, 34% satisfied, 12% think it is acceptable, 9% indicate a low satisfaction level, while 18% don't use this service. This is mainly due to the fact that users cannot access information in due time, because there is a delay between the moment when their information-documentation-research need appears and the time when personal satisfaction is achieved.

4 Correlations

In what follows, based on the above results, we will try to compare users' satisfaction, expectations, and perceptions to developing techniques to improve the quality of library services, in an attempt to meet the need of every reader.

Thus, we correlated the degree of satisfaction and the importance awarded to this with the ease of finding a book on the shelves, the degree of satisfaction with the importance of the documentary area of publications within the library stocks, the degree of satisfaction with the importance granted to the ease of retrieving information from the library online catalogue.

Analysing these correlations, we notice that, in general, users are satisfied with the ease of finding the resources they need in the library, regardless of their format, and less satisfied by the way in which the library website meets their information needs.

It is clear that, among all the publications offered in both traditional and electronic format, users prefer printed books.

Table 3: Correlations between the level of satisfaction and the importance of finding a book on the shelves

I M P	LEVEL OF SATISFACTION					
	$\sum$	66	21	12	0	3	0
	75	60	9	6	0	0	0

O	18	6	12	0	0	0	0
R	6	0	0	6	0	0	0
T	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
A	3	0	0	0	0	3	0
N							
C E	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The second correlation looks at the degree of satisfaction and the importance granted to the documentary area of the publications within the library stocks, as shown in the table below.

Table 4: Correlation between the degree of satisfaction and the importance of the documentary area of the publications within the library stocks

I	LEVEL OF SATISFACTION						
M	Σ	42	39	9	12	0	0
P	78	42	24	6	6	0	0
O	15	0	15	0	0	0	0
R	3	0	0	3	0	0	0
T	3	0	0	0	3	0	0
A	3	0	0	0	3	0	0
N							
C E	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

It is noteworthy that, out of the 78 users (76% of the total number of respondents) who think that the documentary area of the publications within the LBUS Library stocks is very important, only 42 (i.e. 53% of those who believe this is highly important) are very satisfied, while 24 (i.e. 30%) are satisfied, and 6 (8%) are not at all satisfied.

The third correlation refers to the degree of satisfaction when it comes to retrieving information from the library online catalogue compared to the level conferred by users, and the results are as follows:

Table 5: Correlations between the level of satisfaction and the importance of retrieving information from the library online catalogue

I	LEVEL OF SATISFACTION						
M	Σ	57	24	15	3	0	3
P	81	54	18	9	0	0	0
O	12	3	6	3	0	0	0
R	9	0	0	3	3	0	3
T	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
N							
C E	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The situation is similar, in the sense that, out of the 81 users for whom the online catalogue is very important, only 54 are very satisfied with the way in which the library catalogue, through its search interface, meets their information need. However, it is noteworthy that 3% of users who believe this service is not important, or less important, do not use it. This can be explained by the fact that some users have no ITC competences; for them, the LBUS Library organizes weekly meetings for groups of maximum 30 people, who are offered specific information retrieval services, guidance, and access to data bases.

Then, users were asked to appreciate the library's material fund and the human resources involved in supplying library services.

Table 6: Significant aspects from the user's viewpoint

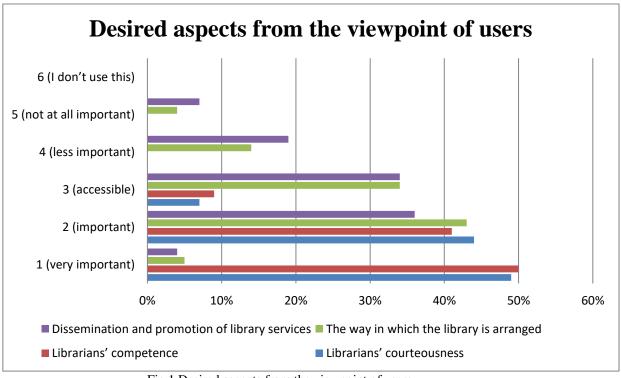|	1 (very important)	2 (important)	3 (accessible)	4 (less important)	5 (not at all important)	6 (I don't use this)
Librarians' courteousness	49%	44%	7%	0	0	0
Librarians' competence	50%	41%	9%	0	0	0
The way in which the library is arranged	5%	43%	34%	14%	4%	0
Dissemination and promotion of library services	4%	36%	34%	19%	7%	0

Fig.1 Desired aspects from the viewpoint of users

The results indicate that, for users, the most important aspects are related to the library staff, the human factor. As services are created by people, satisfaction increasingly depends on the personal relation established when unfolding these services. Therefore, the library staff must always be willing to help readers, be polite and professional.

5 Conclusions

The LBUS Library successfully fulfils the role of supporting the university's teaching and research activity, making documentary material and information services available to the academic community, as well as ensuring access to information sources outside the library.

High quality library services must meet users' expectations, emerge based on a need, ensure users' satisfaction, implement library criteria and professional ethics principles, be economically efficient and effective. It is important for the library to permanently improve the quality of the services offered, so as to attract more users and become more valuable, which can only happen when its resources are used.

The library must take on a new role, which involves a series of mutations to the services it supplies, the staff, the space available, and the access to its collections. The new structure highlights the importance of the services offered to users, which even influences the organization of collections. Library management mainly aims at high performance indices of the system. Since the result of the work in this field is information delivered in due time, in the proper format and correctly structured, performance indices can be associated to the level of satisfaction regarding these requirements.

References

[1]   Liviu-Mihai Băloiu; Ioan Frăsineanu. Gestiunea inovației. Editura Economică, București, 2001
[2]   Cosmin Dobrin. Calitatea în sectorul public. Editura ASE, București, 2005
[3]   Kotler, Philip – Conform lui Kotler: Cea mai importantă autoritate în marketing îți răspunde la întrebări. București: Brandbuilders Grup, 2006
[4]   Iacob, Dumitru; Cismaru, Diana-Maria – Organizația inteligentă: Zece teme de managementul organizațiilor. Ed. A 2-a, rev., București: Editura Comunicare.ro, 2010
[5]   Plumb, Ion; Zamfir, Andreea; Ionescu, Manuela; Ionescu, Sorin – Reingineria serviciilor. București: Editura ASE, 2004
[6]   Șincai, Ana – Informare și comunicare: Informarea documentara – o disciplină în expansiune. București: Editura Paralela 45, 2000
[7]   Standardul ISO 9004-2 – Quality Management (the library services must be included in professional services)