

Importance of Staff Capabilities to Provide a Quality Service in University Libraries: Users' Perspective in Sri Lankan Context

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Abstract

In the ever-evolving landscape of modern libraries, where technology and digital resources have become integral components, one might assume that the role of library staff has diminished. However, this research underscores the enduring and indispensable importance of the human factor in university libraries, particularly in the context of Sri Lanka. The study examines the perception of users regarding the significance of library staff capabilities in enhancing the overall quality of service and the library experience.

The research methodology employed a sample survey, encompassing 2131 participants, consisting of 1638 undergraduates and 493 academic staff members. These individuals were selected at random from seven state universities across different provinces of Sri Lanka. A structured Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 to 9, was utilized to gauge the users' perceptions of service quality based on nine key staff capability attributes. These attributes encompassed qualities such as dedication to instilling confidence in users, personalized user care, the ability to address user queries, user empathy, competency in responding to user queries, dependability, courtesy and politeness, willingness to serve, and the ability to understand user needs. These attributes collectively represent the diverse skills and traits library staff can bring to the table to enhance user experiences.

The analysis of the collected data employed descriptive analysis and importance-performance analysis. These analytical approaches allowed for an examination of the gap between users' expectations and their perceived experiences in the library regarding the nine staff capability attributes.

The findings of this research demonstrate that, out of the nine staff capability attributes, seven were perceived by users as highly important and highly performed. This suggests that library staff excel in these areas and meet or exceed user expectations. However, two attributes, namely, employees' caring for users and their proficiency in addressing user queries, were deemed both low in importance and performance. Notably, attributes related to instilling

confidence in users and providing personalized user care were found to be lacking in both importance and performance.

In conclusion, this study reiterates that employee support remains a crucial component of university libraries, even in the age of digitalization and automation. It highlights the need for libraries to focus on developing and enhancing various aspects of staff capabilities, particularly in the context of the evolving digital networked environment. By addressing the identified gaps in staff capabilities, libraries can continue to serve as vital hubs of knowledge and support in the academic journey of students and researchers, enriching the overall library experience.

Keywords: Service quality, University libraries, Staff capabilities, Human support, User perception

Introduction

In the ever-advancing landscape of modern libraries, marked by the seamless integration of technology and a plethora of digital resources, one might be tempted to believe that the traditional role of library staff has waned (Seal, 2015). While many sophisticated tools for searching, retrieving, and exchanging information quickly and easily are available in the current technology-associated environment, human support is essential. This is because, without the proper knowledge of how to verify the authenticity of information on the web, students often resort to questionable, non-authoritative online resources in their academic assignments and projects (Owolabi et. al, 2022; Harisanty, et al. 2022).

However, this research underscores a fundamental truth: the role of library staff remains irreplaceable and indispensable. In the context of university libraries, human support continues to be a cornerstone of the user experience. The human factor, as perceived by library patrons, plays a pivotal role in elevating the overall library experience from merely accessing information to a holistic journey of knowledge acquisition and academic success (Lenstra, 2015).

Librarians, with their wealth of expertise, provide more than just information retrieval; they serve as vital guides and facilitators in the pursuit of knowledge (Halder, 2009). Their personalized assistance, tailored to the unique needs of each user, adds immeasurable value to

the academic journey. It is the librarian's human touch—understanding, empathy, and dedication—that transforms libraries into vibrant hubs of not just information but comprehensive support (Caspe, & Lopez, 2018; Shahzadet al. 2023).

Aim and Objectives

This study represents a systematic exploration into the multifaceted dimensions of library staff capabilities and their impact on the perceived quality of university libraries. It aims to unravel the intricate web of attributes and skills that contribute to patrons' assessments of library services.

Methodology

To achieve this, a sample survey was conducted, encompassing a diverse group of 2131 participants, including 1638 undergraduates and 493 academic staff members. These participants were thoughtfully selected from seven distinct state universities, spanning various provinces. The research employed a carefully structured Likert-type scale, spanning from 1 to 9, to meticulously gauge users' perceptions of service quality. This measurement was based on nine key attributes of staff capabilities. These attributes encompass a spectrum of qualities, from instilling confidence in users and providing personalized care to addressing queries, demonstrating empathy, exhibiting competency in answering questions, ensuring dependability, upholding courtesy and politeness, displaying willingness to serve, and understanding users' unique needs. Together, these attributes symbolize the diverse skills and qualities that library staff bring to the table to enhance the library experience.

Data analysis

Data analysis in this study entailed both descriptive examination and importance-performance analysis. These analytical tools provided a comprehensive view of the dispersion among these nine service quality attributes concerning users' expectations versus their perceived experiences (Wong, et al. 2011).

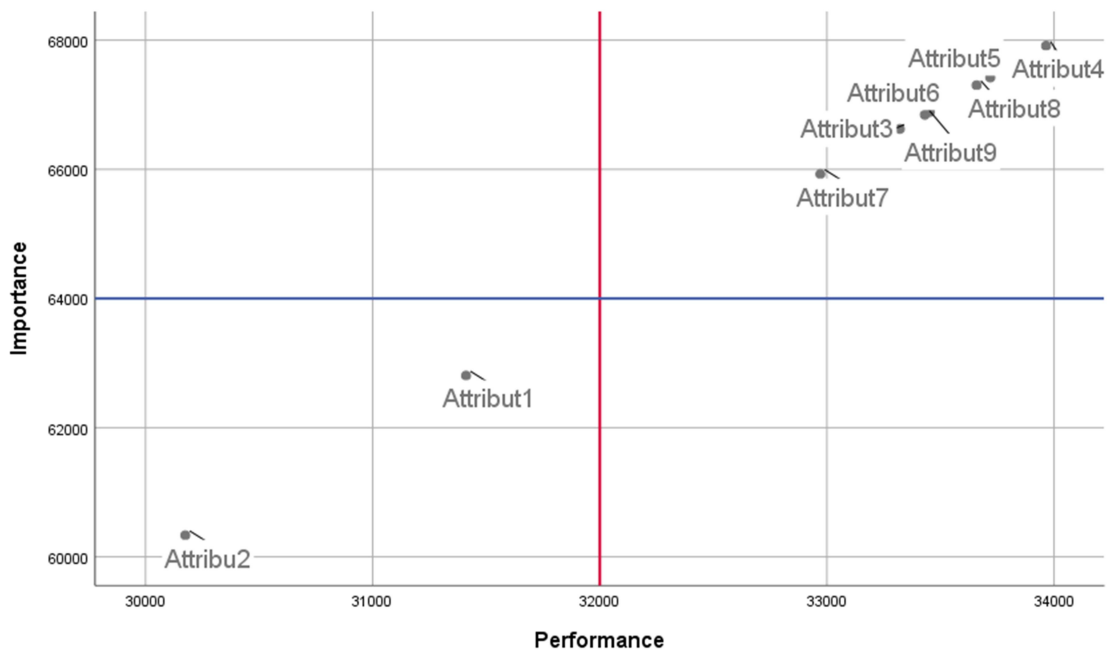
Findings

Perception Differences

Table 1- Difference between expected level and perceived level of staff capabilities

Capability Attribute	Perceived level	Expected level	Difference
1. Expertise and dedication of the library employees to instill constant confidence in users	31411	62805	-31394
2. Ability of the library staff to provide personalized and attentive care for users	30175	60333	-30158
3. Ability of the library staff to continuously and promptly address user questions	33321	66625	-33304
4. Ability of the library employees to engage with users in an attentive and empathetic manner to creating a welcoming environment	33965	67912	-33947
5. Knowledge and competency of the library personnel to proficiently answer user inquiries	33719	67422	-33703
6. Dependability of the library staff in resolving service-related issues	33453	66889	-33436
7. Ability of the library staff to consistently uphold the standard of courtesy and politeness in interactions with users	32971	65926	-32955
8. Willingness of the library staff to assist users to fulfill their diversity of information needs	33659	67301	-33642
9. Ability of the library employees comprehend and address the unique requirements of each user, ensuring a tailored and enriching experience for all	33431	66845	-33414

Importance-Performance analysis



Conclusion

In conclusion, this research reaffirms the enduring importance of human support in university libraries, even in an era characterized by digitalization and automation. It underscores the necessity for libraries to continually evolve and nurture various facets of staff capabilities, especially in response to the ever-changing digital landscape. Addressing the identified gaps in staff capabilities ensures that libraries continue to stand as indispensable hubs of knowledge and unwavering support throughout the academic journey of students and researchers, thereby enriching the overall library experience.

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