

Users' Perceptions of Makerere University Library Services

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Abstract. This paper presents findings of the 2012 mini survey of Makerere University Library (MakLib) services. The aim of the study was to gain an insight into the attitudes of users towards the Library and to determine whether the users' needs were being met. The study adopted a mixed methods research design. The qualitative research design provides opinions about users' information needs, experiences, and their recommendations. The quantitative design consisted of both printed and online survey aimed at obtaining a measure of the overall levels of satisfaction and attitudes to particular aspects of service delivery. Key findings indicated that, the library users are satisfied with a wide range of information services available. However, computer hardware and software, technical support and training were all identified as significant technological needs. In addition, there is a wide gap in the staffing levels within the library, therefore, there is need to recruit more staff. Greater emphasis should be put on re-skilling librarians and User Education programmes to impart access and retrieval skills among users.

Keywords. User Perceptions, User Satisfaction, Academic libraries, Service delivery, Makerere University, Uganda

1. Introduction

Libraries conduct evaluation of library services to comply with the principles governing the discipline which advocate for, 'high standards of provision and delivery of library and information services' outlined by the International Federation of Library Associations & Institutions (IFLA 2003a, section: Aims). Through evaluation, areas of service strengths and weaknesses are identified. This helps decision-makers to strengthen their focus on areas of excellence at the same time addressing service gaps. Evaluation of library services, based on user feedback, can take many forms depending on the objectives of the analysis.

Usability testing often focuses on assessing the effectiveness, efficiency and or satisfaction of the user experience.

Background

Makerere University is the oldest University in Eastern Africa founded in 1922. Makerere University Library (Maklib) is the official depository of United Nations printed materials in 1957. An act of Uganda's Legislature made Maklib the first Legal Deposit Unit in Uganda in 1958. In 1972, Maklib became the National Reference Library in addition to its primary role of serving Makerere University. The library building has undergone numerous renovations and extensions in 1965, 2007 and 2012 (Maklib, 2012). Currently, the library has a seating capacity of over 2,800 users and serves a population of approximately 40,000 users, consisting of about 1,626 Academic staff, 36,517 students of whom 34, 694 are Undergraduates and 1,823 are Postgraduates, and external users. The current library establishment consists of 71 professional and 217 support staff posts. Out of the 71 professional posts, 52 posts are filled while 19 are vacant.

The library collection consists of over 400,800 monographs, 12,000 titles of bound serials/periodicals, 22,893 titles of electronic journals, 378 journal databases, and 35,219 electronic books (Open Access). Maklib provides a wide range of services which include: Enquiries, Internet, Library catalogues (Online and Card catalogue), Current Awareness Service (CAS), Document Delivery Service (DDS), Binding, Photocopying, Library training programmes, Group study spaces, Microfilming, Research Carrels, 24/7 reading area, Learning and Commons and other computer laboratories (Academic staff and Training), Library Canteen. Mears (2000) identifies positive information services as including personal help, current awareness, and translation services.

One of the core values of Maklib is, "customer responsiveness or user-centered institutional operations". Therefore Maklib embarked on regular review of its services in a bid to improve service delivery. The first evaluation was conducted as part of the activities to mark the Library Day Celebrations in 2012. The overall objective of the study was to determine the current level of satisfaction with the services provided and the extent to which current needs are being met. The specific objectives of this research were to conduct an assessment with a representative sample of Students, researchers and academic staff to;

- a) To assess users' perceptions of library services
- b) To measure levels of satisfaction with Maklib services;
- c) To determine the direction of potential future information delivery.

2. Literature Review

Libraries, like all public and private sector services, are competing for resources hence the need to justify their expenditure and existence. According to Sheppard (2002), service efficiency and quality measurements are provided in order to petition for increased revenues, and to engage in dialogue with stakeholders. Service quality is defined as the extent to which a particular service satisfies the information needs of the user (Kyrillidou, 2002). Libraries

are social institutions, as such; their value should be expressed in terms of the value they provide to the users.

Measurement of library services is essential to determine the level of satisfaction of the users (Lucas, 2005). Any type of service can be evaluated at three levels: a) Effectiveness b) cost-effectiveness and c) cost-benefit. Effectiveness measures how well the service satisfies the demands placed upon it by its users. Cost-effectiveness measures how efficiently the system satisfies its objectives in terms of cost. Cost-benefit analysis determines how far the value/worth of a library service is justified in terms of the cost. However, Kyriolidou (2002) points out that the relationships between inputs and outputs within a library are not necessarily clear.

A good library service is rated based on how satisfactorily it meets the users' needs (Bamigboye, 2007). According to Fabunmi (2004) library users seek an information service that is timely, accurate, reliable, and authentic, meets their needs, easy to understand and use, and delivered by courteous and knowledgeable staff. Users require a conducive environment to study and undertake research.

3. Research Methodology

The study used both qualitative and quantitative designs to obtain the data from the library users. The qualitative research design provides opinions about users' information needs, experiences, and their recommendations (Radford, 2001). On the other hand the quantitative design aimed at obtaining a measure of the overall levels of satisfaction and attitudes to particular aspects of service delivery (Janesick, 2000). Convenience sampling technique was used to obtain data from respondents. Questionnaires were distributed to the students as they entered the library and filled questionnaires were collected at the library exit. The questions for the survey were pre-tested on a few students by the Library Day Committee members. The questionnaire was further modified with a final set approved before implementation.

An online survey using Google Forms was conducted for the academic staff as this proved the easiest means of reaching the dispersed and busy respondents. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with the students and academic staff. The different groups of people were asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes towards the library services. The study employed a 5-point Likert type (Very good, Good, Fair, Poor, Very poor) survey to evaluate users' satisfaction with various library services at Makerere University Library. The main instrument for data collection was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was brief and structured. Respondents were given time and opportunity to complete the questionnaire in the library.

4. Discussion of Findings

This section presents an overview of the findings derived from the data collected. During analysis, frequencies were computed from the responses to the

questions and converted to percentages as presented in tables and analyzed as follows:

Out of the 1,000 questionnaires distributed to the different categories of library users, only 821 (82%) copies were properly completed and returned. Analysis of the returned questionnaires indicates that 612 (74.5%) were Undergraduates, 188 (22.9%) Postgraduates while 21 (2.6%) were Academic staff. Analysis by gender reveals that 493 (60%) were males while 328 (40%) were female.

Category	Number of respondents	Percentage
Undergraduates	612	74.5
Postgraduates	188	22.9
Academic staff	21	2.6
Total	821	100

Table 1. Categories of respondents

Findings indicate that the majority of the respondents were Undergraduates (612 or 74.5%) as shown in Table 1 above. This is because they are the largest population in the university enrollment.

5. Awareness levels of Maklib services

Findings revealed that there is a high level of awareness of core services offered by Maklib as illustrated in the Table 2 below. This is attributed to the library training programmes which create awareness of the available resources. The Library web page provides information about the different services and facilities at Maklib as well as updates under the “News and Events link” (<http://mulib.mak.ac.ug>).

Enquiries, Internet, Library Catalogues (both the card catalogue and Online Public Access Catalogue-OPAC), Photocopying, Library training programmes (User Education, Electronic Resources, Information Competence and Management-ICM, Research Management, Scholarly Writing and Communication Skills), Binding, Electronic journals and Customer care are among the services that were rated highly as shown in Table 2 below.

Respondents (788, 96%) agreed that the Enquiries service provides accurate, timely, reliable and consistent information. However, promotion and training are needed to assist the remaining 4%. The Information Desk which is the central enquiry point addresses users’ issues and eliminates time wastage. This is supported by Jeffrey (2004) who argues that librarians must be willing to teach users to become self-reliant by imparting skills. Results of the study further indicated that although books and periodicals are available in the library, they were not sufficient enough to cater for all library users’ needs. Nearly a quarter (337, 41%) of users indicated that they were not aware of the Group Discussion Rooms, PWDs, Learning and Research Commons as indicated in Table 2 below.

Category	Number of respondents	Percentage
Reference/Enquiries	788	96
Internet	780	95
Library Catalogues (OPAC & Card catalogue)	772	94
Binding	764	93
Photocopying	755	92
Library Training Programmes	747	91
Document Delivery Service	706	86
Electronic journals	681	83
Books and Periodicals	575	70
Customer Care	534	65
Research Commons	99	12
Group Study rooms	90	11
Learning Commons	82	10
Facilities for Persons With Disabilities (PWDs)	66	8

Table. 2: Awareness of MakLib Services

5.1. Usage of the library services and facilities

The usage of the library services and facilities varies according to the level of awareness and the academic calendar. Usage of the library tends to be heavier during coursework and examination periods compared to the recess periods. This is partly due to the fact that the library provides a conducive environment for learning, teaching and research.

The most frequently used services include: Enquiries (96%); Internet services (95%); Library catalogues (94%); binding (93%); photocopying (92%); training programmes (91%); DDS (86); electronic journals (83%); Books and print periodicals (70%) as indicated in Table 2 above.

5.2. Satisfaction with Maklib Services

Maklib is seen to perform very well on most measures of service delivery. The overall satisfaction is 76% response. Aspects of the services that prompted positive comments include: access to information resources needed for learning, teaching and research. This is due to the fact that the Maklib has flexible opening hours even on public holidays. The library provides well equipped reading areas for individual and group work in addition to availing facilities for PWDs. Currently, the library has four (4) Group Study Rooms, Research Commons for Postgraduate students has one hundred thirty eight (138) computers. The Learning Commons has 151 computers and this facility is for Undergraduates. The library has well developed infrastructure for use of laptops and a Multi-media room equipped to facilitate watching videos and a Music Collection Section with eight (8) booths for listening to audio resources

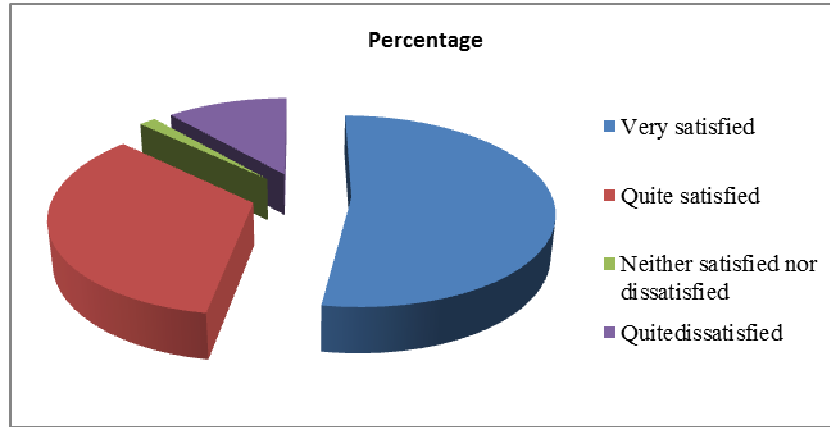


Chart 1: User Satisfaction

The largest number of respondents, 378 (46%) were “very satisfied” with the library services and facilities. 246 (30%) respondents were “Quite satisfied”, 115 (14%) were “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” while 82 respondents were Quite dissatisfied with the services and facilities available at Maklib.

Although Maklib has managed to maintain a high level of service delivery, some library users are dissatisfied with specific aspects of the library services and facilities due to the following reasons:

- a) Blocking Social networks (Facebook/Twitter) due to limited and width. Respondents indicated that this hinders effective communication between the library and its users;
- b) Library fines are too high
- c) Under staffing at the Service Windows hence unnecessary delays especially during the peak periods
- d) Few minutes allocated to students to use the Learning Commons (2 hours)
- e) Slow Internet connection in the Library
- f) Few copies of the available titles in the library

5.3. Attitudes, Opinions to the library staff

The majority of respondents (616, 75%) rated the library staff highly. This is because library staff answer queries professionally; treat users fairly and impartially, and are readily available to assist users. These findings confirm views expressed by Norlin (2000) who suggested that, “users have three major needs of the reference staff: approachability, ability to answer questions correctly and skills in offering ideas on how to get started”. One of the participants during the FGDs had this to say,

“Library staff are professional and prompt in providing services. They are generally willing to tackle time-consuming requests.”

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
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Very good	378	46
Good	238	29
Fair	205	25
Poor	-	-
Very poor	-	-
Total	821	100

Table 3: Users' Opinions about Library staff

The largest number of respondents, 378 (46%), rated library staff as, “Very good”, 238 (29%), “Good”, 205 (25%), “Fair”. None of the respondents rated the library staff as, "Poor or Very poor".

6. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

The demand for library services seems to be as diverse as human interests. Therefore, university libraries are expected to keep abreast with the ever changing users’ information needs and to adopt strategic means of promoting services and delivery system. The key areas in which improvement of services is perceived as necessary are:

Improving awareness of the range of services and facilities needs to be ongoing especially targeting new users of the library. The library should distribute publicity materials to the different colleges of the university. Emphasis should be put on strengthening relationships with new users in order to assist them in their early stages of their courses particularly in becoming familiar with core library services.

Strengthen the human resource base for development of the Library by requesting the University Administration to improve library staff recruitment and promotion processes. There is need to train library staff to cope with the changing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) environment, national and global needs in the library and information science profession. Short courses in customer care should be conducted for all library staff to improve service delivery.

Promoting effective and efficient information retrieval through periodic training of users become self-reliant.

The library should embrace social networks in order to improve communication with its users since they spend most of their time on social networks like Facebook and Twitter. To overcome the bandwidth limitations, Library Management should negotiate for allocation of more bandwidth with the Directorate of Information and Communication Technology Support Unit.

Periodic User Satisfaction Surveys should be carried out and results acted upon by the Library Management.

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