

# Total Quality Management in Academic Libraries: The Perception and Expectations of Graduate Students of The University of Ghana, Legon

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## ABSTRACT

*This study focused on the perception and expectations of graduate students on Total Quality Management (TQM) in academic libraries with special reference to the University of Ghana Central Library (The Balme Library). The main theme of the study is the analysis of data in relation to service excellence, service effectiveness, service efficiency and continuous improvement in the Balme Library. This study used the quantitative survey method to generate data from 200 respondents out of the 450 total graduate population and the responses were analyzed using Kruskal Wallis One-Way ANOVA (non-parametric) model to test the differences in perception and expectations of postgraduate users of the library. The study found out that in practical terms TQM is not being applied as a management technique in the Balme Library. It therefore concludes that the importance of TQM is not centered around postgraduate students' perception and expectations only, but also in anticipating and exceeding the demands of a fast changing environment of service delivery especially the academic libraries.*  
**Keywords:** Total Quality Management, academic libraries, perception and expectations

## INTRODUCTION

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a philosophy or management principle, which attempts to make optimum use of all available resources by dedication to constant improvement and the provision of the highest possible standard in all external and internal processes, which leads to customer satisfaction (University of Leicester Learning Resource materials, Module 620, 1999). According to Peters (1989), quality improvement is a never-ending journey. There is no such thing as quality product or service. All quality is relative. Each day, each product or service is getting relatively better and relatively worse, but it never stand still. Quality needs to be managed and the management of quality is dependent upon how well the user or the client obtains maximum satisfaction from the product or service provided him/her (Herman and Altman, 1998). A major preoccupation of modern institutions and managers of organizations is the new emphasis on Quality Customer Care. Providing quality service to clients, customers or users means remaining loyal to existing customers and attracting new ones. Customers or Users' needs have undergone radical changes and the existing costs in response to this, coupled with the need to maintain standard have become major issues. Quality services in both the provision of information as well as infrastructure and training is an uncompromising demand by users of today. The provision of high quality services has been the responsibility of library managers. With rapidly changing environment, greater competition for resources, the ever-increasing cost of information

carriers, the rising expectations of finances, and the increasing complexity of information provision from big variety of providers, it is evident that management skills must match these intense demands on Library and Information Services (Vilgoen and Underwood, 1997). Quality of goods or services is the set of features possessed by the goods or services. It is the absence of deficiencies in the goods or services. A common definition of quality is "fitness for use" that is, the goods or services have the needed features and these features are without defect. Quality has also been seen as meeting or exceeding customer expectations, that is, providing the features the customer expects and doing so without defect (Early, 1994). Total Quality Management (TQM) is a positive attempt by an organisation to improve structural, infrastructural, attitudinal, behaviour and methodological ways of delivering to the end customer (Zairi, 2001). TQM is the structured management process ensuring that all types of customers are delighted by all the goods and services produced by a company (Early, 1994). As complement to other strategies, quality strategy provides the context for other strategic decisions, keeping all other strategies consistent with delighting customers. Productivity and quality have an important relationship.

Reducing deficiencies means that fewer resources are employed, supervising or doing work over gain. If quality is improved by reducing deficiencies, fewer resources are consumed for each unit of output, that is, productivity rises! (Early, 1994). In an academic library, if the staff provide higher quality service by promptly and accurately meeting the user needs, then they have increased output as well. Quality in the library can be managed through three fundamental processes: Quality Planning; Quality Control; and Quality Improvement. Quality planning in the library will involve first identifying the users or stakeholders of the library. Stakeholders of the academic library include users and non-users in the academic community (students and faculty), the Library Board and the staff of the library. Quality planning in the library also involves determining users' needs. Library manager should look not only for the stated needs but also for the unstated needs. Needs in the library are revealed by actual usage, including misuse of the library resources. These needs must be properly analyzed and translated into the library's terms so that they can be measured and satisfied (Early, 1994).

Quality control in the library requires developing a feedback to know what users expect, how are staff delivering services, and the ability to monitor and regulate the behaviour and attitude of staff while delivering service to users. Quality improvement in the library involves identifying the causes of poor performance and delivery of service, designing appropriate training and other remedies to address these causes, and establishing the necessary controls to hold the gain (Early, 1994). The main reason for an academic library is to support the teaching, research and other academic programmes of its parent organisation. It is important to note that an academic library is a service organisation, which delivers products personally to the customer. In a study on Quality Management initiatives in Balme Library, Dadzie (2003) assessed the extent to which "initiatives", "response allocation", communication" and "recognition/or reward" were handled. In her conclusion, she pointed out that academic librarians were found to be committed to their work, but the major obstacle was the non-availability of financial resources. Dadzie (3003)

presents TQM with emphasis on the internal customer, without making reference to the overall effect on the users of library services. Begun and Nissa (2003) make a comparison of the customer in the manufacturing sector and the library by pointing out that in the manufacturing sector, the customer is "remote" whereas in service organization like an academic library, producers and customers meet face-to-face. They admit that the complexity of managing service organization is usually compounded by the existence of multiple interfaces. They point out that customer satisfaction means fulfilling expectations. It is up to library managers to devote their energies for finding out what their clients/users want, and designing a means of meeting these needs in order to provide them with ultimate satisfaction. Arys (2000) believes that it is better to develop one or two factors that are important to customers and concentrate on them. According to him, service delivery is like a theoretical performance and if customers are to gain maximum benefit from service then they must know how to use it. User education as a must for academic libraries and emphasizes that support systems should reflect customer's priorities, without necessarily losing the personal touch when it comes to the use of automation (Arys, 2000).

Pilling (1997) in her article "Putting the customer first: total quality customer service at the British Library Documents Supply Centre", mentions a recent step which has been the creation of a new post of ARTTel (Automated Request Transmission by Telecommunication) customer liaison officer to become the focal point for information and training about all the available methods which customers can use to send their requests to BLDSC. All registered customers are sent two free quarterly publications. Pilling (1997) explains that there is a link-up programme which provides existing and potential customers with the opportunity to learn about BLDSC's range of products and services, to talk to experts and have hand-on experience. Mullins (2001) emphasizes on the fact that because of new threats to the hegemony traditionally enjoyed by libraries as the chief source of information and literature, library managers now have to place a higher premium on management attitudes towards staff and in turn on attitude or manner of all staff towards customers. Mullins (2001) believes that, for libraries to become more customer-focused than processed focused, they will need to have more flexible organizational structure to allow library sector to be more self-directed and more adaptable in responding to internal and external pressures. This will require more effective communication mechanisms, new collaborations among staff at all levels to stimulate creativity and risk taking which result in an increase in innovation and initiative. Brophy and Coullings (1996) are of the opinion that the media through which a potential customer may hear about a service influences the image that is held. When the service is approached, its immediate impact enables the customer/client or user to redefine the image still more. At least a regular user of a service has more realistic set of expectations than newcomers. Brophy and Coullings (1996) admit that in libraries and information services, customer expectations may be difficult to assess, partly because there is little direct interaction between library staff and customer, thus training staff to improve their level of understanding is very important. In every service organization such as an academic library, users are of central importance and should their demands not met, there is bound to be failures in meeting the objectives of that library.

## METHOD

The main source of data used was a survey conducted during the beginning of the second semester of the 2010/2011 academic year. A structured questionnaire was used as an instrument of data collection in the survey. Out of a total population of 450 postgraduate students, a stratified random sampling technique was adopted in selecting and administering questionnaire to 200 postgraduate student who are regular users of the University of Ghana, Central Library (Balme Library). The respondents were asked to what degree the quality of services offered by the Central Library corresponded to their expectations. The questionnaire was pre-tested on students. Finally, 150 copies of questionnaire were returned for analysis. Among them, 55 students were in Arts and Humanities programme; 46 were in Business programmes; 30 were in Science and Engineering programmes; and 20 were in Agriculture and Consumer Sciences. The data obtained were subjected to statistical analysis using Kruskal Wallis One-Way ANOVA (non-parametric) model to test the differences in perception and expectations of postgraduate users of the library. The results were presented in simple percentage.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On the issue of services excellence, 75% of Science and Engineering students indicated that some of the information they found in the library were inadequate and unreliable. The situation was a bit different among the Arts and Humanities students, where only 35% indicated that they hardly find adequate and reliable information in response to their queries in the reference collection. A greater proportion of the Business students, however, indicated that the information they found in the library were adequate and reliable. The overall results show that the respondents (Arts and Humanities, Business, Science and Engineering, Agriculture and Consumer Sciences students) have a positive perception about the availability of adequate and reliable information.

To a question of whether there have been occasions when they have given up search in the library either because of poor or lack of materials, 82% of Science and Engineering students quite often gave up on searching for information, while 64% of Agriculture and Consumer Sciences students also often gave up on searching for information. The situation was, however, different in the case of Arts and Humanities where only 30% often gave up in searches. Among the Arts and Humanities students, most of them (65.5%) rated the reliability and efficiency of the reader advisory services as good. The situation was the same among the Science and Engineering students where most of them (53.8%) also rated the reliability and efficiency of the reader advisory services as good. On quality of notices on shelves and the library as a whole for easy guidance for users of the library, most of the Arts and Humanities students (85%) rated it as satisfactory with the remaining (15%) rating it as excellent. Most of the Science and Engineering students (70%) expressed satisfaction on the quality of presentation of notices and shelves. The Business students on the other hand, had a positive perception about the quality presentation of notice, shelves, etc. With regard to access to equipment, 72.5% of the Arts and Humanities students

described access to equipment in the library as satisfactory. The same observation was made in the case of Business students, where 70% of them also described access to equipment at the library as satisfactory. Most (45.5%) of the Agriculture and Consumer Science students also described access to equipment in the library as satisfactory. This means that the perception of all the categories of respondents about access to equipment in the library was good. The University of Ghana Central Library (Balme Library) is the library with the longest hours of operation in the University of Ghana campus. The library operates for 106 hours during the week.

The result of the study was not unexpected since respondents had a positive perception about the hours of operation of the library. There were significant differences in the perception of the various categories of students with regard to the consistency in the supply of periodicals in the library. While most of the Business students (41.7%) described the supply of the periodicals in the Library as inconsistent, most of the Arts and Humanities students (62%), on the other hand were satisfied with the provision of the periodicals in the library. This suggests that patronages in the use of current periodicals could be a more prevalent habit of the Arts and Humanities students as compared with the Business and Science related students.

On the question of steady improvement in library facilities, most of the respondents (40.5%) stated that improvement and innovation in facilities in the library had been considerably favourable. The results show significant differences in the perceptions of Business, Arts and Humanities, and Science and Engineering students. Most of the Science and Engineering students (50%) indicated that they were not really aware of improvement and innovation in the library facilities while Business students (46.2%) indicated that they were not sure of improvement and innovations in the library facilities. Most of the Arts and Humanities students (45.8%), however, indicated that they had seen considerable improvement and innovations in facilities in the library. This means that the Business student had a negative perception; the Science and Engineering had a somehow positive perception and the Arts and Humanities student had a much more positive perception about improvement and innovation in the library facilities.

When respondents were asked whether users were provided with opportunities to add their views to the steady improvement of the library, most of the Business students (58.3%), and the Arts and Humanities students (34.4%) indicated that they were rarely offered opportunities to add their views to the improvement in the library. The fact that most of the Science and Engineering students had not had the opportunity to add their views to the improvement may be that they did not use the library more regularly. A mean rank of perception of service excellence was done to find out the extent to which the various categories of students perceive Service Excellence. The result shows that, significant differences exist in the perception of the various factors of service excellence among the students. The respondents differed significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) on their perception of adequate and reliable information, experience in giving up searches, reliability and efficiency of reader advisory services, quality of presentation of notices, presence of library staff, hours of library operations, availability of up-to-date information, availability of online services for

users. Modern method of quality management of organisations or institutions involve the use of productivity/improvement indicators to determine strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) and finding the appropriate measures if necessary. The study revealed that the management of library did not assess user or customer needs and expectations, and also staff had only slightly favourable perception about their collective responsibility of monitoring user or customer needs.

## CONCLUSION

In practical terms Total Quality Management (TQM) is not being applied or practised by the University of Ghana Central Library. An overhauling of the library's operational system in terms of management techniques, equipment, modernization of infrastructure and other facilities comparable to international standard, is something that should be given due attention by the library managers and authorities. Total Quality Management demands time and persistence and the support of the very top as well as commitment at all levels (Pilling, 1997). Results from the respondents appear to create an impression of relatively ideal or an almost ideal situation existing in the University of Ghana Central Library. This may be an illusion, which must be carefully examined. An "expectation", the right of customers to expect some level of service based on express or implied promise is quite different from "wishful thinking" which expresses what customers would want in a perfect world. The importance of TQM is not only centered around user's demands and needs but also in anticipating and exceeding the demands of a fast changing environment of service delivery in libraries. Training is of paramount importance to every academic library.

Training must involve both the user and the library staff. Properly planned user education is necessary for an academic library. If customers are to gain maximum benefit from the services, they should be able to use available facilities properly. Education must be properly planned and the long-term results monitored to ascertain its total impact on the operations of the library. Education would also arouse the consciousness of quality and how it can be managed also brings about the understanding of quality control management. There is also the urgent need for education on statistical concepts, which will equip the staff with the requisite tool to be able to scientifically monitor clients' perception and expectations from time-to-time. A well-trained staff according to Begun and Nissa (2003) are a "competitive weapon" for better quality service in the academic libraries. The staff of the library should be trained well enough to be able to undertake orientation of users in information retrieval techniques, deal with queries, manage crises, and manage the reader interface.

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