

Using LibQUAL to assess user satisfaction with library services at the Aloe Park South African Police Service (SAPS) National Library, Pretoria, South Africa

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper reports on the findings of a study that was conducted by means of LibQUAL to establish user satisfaction with the current and perceived library resources and services at Aloe Park SAPS National Library in Pretoria.

Design/methodology/approach – The study used the interpretivist research paradigm, the qualitative approach and a case study research design.

Findings – The three core elements of LibQUAL – (1) affect of service, (2) information control and (3) library as place (physical library space) – were used to measure user satisfaction. Results related to the affect of service revealed a strong positive response: 16 (80%) of the 20 participants expressed satisfaction with the quality of service provided by library staff. In terms of information control, the findings indicated that most users were aware of library resources such as books, library databases and the computer centre. However, they were not using these resources optimally for various reasons, such as a dated collection, irregular or non-subscription to library databases and inadequate computer systems in the computer centre. For example, out of the 20 sampled participants, 12 (60%) were aware of the existence of the computer centre, but eight (40%) of them did not have sufficient knowledge about the computer centre. Concerning Library as Place, 14 (70%) participants responded positively, while six (30%) expressed dissatisfaction with the unfriendly library environment, inadequate study space and intermittent noise in the library.

Research delimitations – There are various special branch libraries that are linked to the main South African Police Service National Library, but the focus of the study was only on the main library. Therefore, results for the study can be extended to other special libraries with caution.

Practical implications – Findings for this study would help in understanding gaps in terms of the three LibQUAL dimensions that were assessed. Additionally, findings of the study would help library management to understand users' information needs and thus respond accordingly.

Social implications – Future studies of the special libraries, particularly SAPS libraries across the country, should focus on the development of policy frameworks that cater for the information needs of their users.

Originality/value – The review of available literature points to limited research on library user satisfaction in special libraries, such as the Aloe Park SAPS National Library. As such, the findings of this study provide valuable insight into potential service gaps across the three LibQUAL dimensions assessed. These research findings can assist library management in understanding users' information needs and tailoring resources and services accordingly. It is recommended that future studies of the special libraries, particularly SAPS libraries



across the country, should focus on the development of policy frameworks that cater for the information needs of their users.

Keywords Library user satisfaction, Special libraries, Library resources, Service quality, LibQUAL, SERVQUAL, Aloe Park SAPS national library

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction and background

The rapid advancement of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and emerging digital technologies – such as the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics (Fukuyama, 2018) – are continuously challenging traditional libraries, even rendering them as endangered species, in some perspectives. In the view of Mallya and Payini (2016), contemporary libraries are increasingly facing challenges of non-usage or low usage, often resulting from perceived irrelevance and inadequate skills in the ethical use of these emerging technologies. It is under this premise that libraries – particularly academic and special libraries – are compelled to assess their relevance continuously, particularly in terms of the affect of service and overall customer satisfaction.

According to Hudin *et al.* (2023) and Kaapu (2024), “customer satisfaction” in libraries refers to the feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from the comparison between the customer’s actual service experience and their initial expectations. Afthanorhan *et al.* (2019) and Kaapu (2024) assert that “customer service” refers to the levels of quality service performances that match customer expectations. Service quality can be assessed by considering the customers’ perception of the service, their psychological expectations and their perceptions of the service cost.

In the context of libraries, various approaches have been employed to measure customer satisfaction. For example, Tetteh and Nyantakyi-Baah (2019) posit that the measurement of customer satisfaction should be based on the behaviour of staff (affect of service), information sources and the library environment (library as place). Afthanorhan *et al.* (2019), cited in Hudin *et al.* (2023) assert that library customer satisfaction should be measured in terms of library collection, facilities, environment and customer behaviour. Afthanorhan *et al.* (2019) and Hudin *et al.* (2023) view quality service as the difference between the actual service provided and the expected service. According to Mutisya (2017, p. 2), quality library services can be explained as the ability of a library to satisfy the information needs of every user by providing accurate and comprehensive responses in a timely manner.

The goal of service quality assessment is to improve the performance outcomes of the library operations. However, as opined by Hudin *et al.* (2023), it is more challenging to measure service quality than product quality. Numerous libraries, particularly academic libraries, have adopted LibQUAL as a standardised survey tool to measure service quality and customer satisfaction (Afthanorhan *et al.*, 2019). However, it should be noted that LibQUAL is the brainchild of SERVQUAL (Afthanorhan *et al.*, 2019; Mallya and Payini, 2016). The widespread application of SERVQUAL across various sectors – such as marketing, business, health sciences, tourism, education and information systems – highlights the need for a more customised instrument to assess service quality in libraries (Afthanorhan *et al.*, 2019; Mallya and Payini, 2016). Consequently, this study adopted the LibQUAL instrument to measure customer service satisfaction and service quality at the sampled library. The study is particularly significant, because the Aloe Park SAPS National Library is a government entity and a special library mandated to provide library services to the South African Police Service (SAPS) officers.

2. Contextual background

The Aloe Park SAPS National Library (APSNL), which is governed by SAPS regulations, plays a critical role in the growth and upliftment of police officers. The Division of Human Resource Development of the SAPS is the mother body of the Aloe Park SAPS National

Library. As the main library, the APSNL in Gauteng Province is linked to two satellite or branch libraries – one based in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal Province (South Africa) and the other in the Free State Province (South Africa). The APSNL has signed memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with 37 SAPS libraries nationally: nine (9) provincial libraries, 22 academic libraries and six (6) divisional libraries. Consequently, the SAPS has a responsibility to ensure the effective development of its human resources. To support this mandate, the Division: Human Resource Development has been tasked with overseeing the efficient operation of library services.

The Aloe Park SAPS Library is situated at 1 Rebecca Street, Aloe Park Building, Pretoria West (Gauteng Province). The library building consists of different sections, including circulation desks and shelving area; cataloguing section; distribution area, computer section and study area and offices, all on the same floor. The library has adequate space for users, facilities, collections and staff members ([South African Police Service, 2019](#)).

This APSNL provides special reference and study materials – in printed and digital format – to SAPS employees. There are more than 16,053 books (including textbooks and law books) in the library collection, covering all study fields and a special collection for police-related subjects. The collection also includes journals, periodicals, reports, statutes, dictionaries and DVDs. In order to facilitate easy access to and retrieval of information resources, the library collections are arranged and organised according to the Dewey Decimal Classification 23rd ed. (DDC) system and the Anglo American Cataloguing Rules (AACR2) ([South African Police Service, 2019](#)).

The SAPS libraries subscribe to several electronic databases, such as:

- (1) LexisNexis – Legislation, law reports, law commentary, reference works, e-journals
- (2) Juta – Legislation, law reports, Government Gazettes, e-journals, law commentary
- (3) Sabinet – Bibliographic databases, theses and dissertations, newspaper articles, e-journals, legislation, Government Gazettes
- (4) Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG) – Minutes of Portfolio Committee Meetings and other documents generated by Parliament
- (5) Computer room with Internet and Wi-Fi connection and service, so that library users can search for any information
- (6) Inmagic Genie – Integrated library system ([South African Police Service, 2019](#))

According to National Instruction 23 of 2019 of the SAPS, a library provides access to relevant, authoritative information resources and services in accordance with its user needs ([South African Police Service, 2019](#)). The purpose of National Instruction 23 of 2019 is to regulate the establishment and functioning of libraries in the SAPS; ensure the effective and efficient provision of information to users; and set criteria for the safekeeping and provisioning of information resources and services.

As an employee of the Aloe Park SAPS National Library, Pretoria, the researcher's observation is that police officers, who are researchers, legal officials, registered students at different institutions and police investigators around Pretoria, are not utilising library resources and services optimally. Therefore, the aim of this study was to assess the users' satisfaction with the library service by means of LibQUAL. The significance of this study lies in the limited availability – or complete absence of – empirical data on the impact of the library service quality within the South African Police Service (SAPS), particularly with reference to the Aloe Park SAPS National Library.

3. Problem statement

As indicated previously, the Aloe Park SAPS National Library is a government entity and a special library mandated to provide library services to the South African Police Service

(SAPS) officers. [Khan and Parveen \(2020\)](#) regard special libraries as libraries that have a specialised concern for their clientele, material and setup. They are viewed as academic libraries created in a special institution to achieve the goals of its parent organisation. [Ahmed and Soroya \(2016\)](#), cited in [Kaapu \(2024, p. 10\)](#), maintain that the collections and services of a special library differ from those of other libraries. Special libraries are not without challenges. Despite spending more time on sourcing information and knowledge resources for their users, special libraries usually face drastic budget cuts, financial shortages and space constraints ([Ahmed and Soroya, 2019; Kaapu, 2024](#)).

This study was conducted by the researcher, a staff member of the Aloe Park Library, for over five years, in response to the significant underutilisation of extensive library information resources. Although a wide range of valuable materials is available to support users in meeting their information needs, these resources remain largely underutilised by police officers and other categories of users. While several studies assessed the use of library resources and services, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, none of these specifically focused on the assessment of library resources and customer satisfaction at the Aloe Park SAPS National Library. This study intended to fill this gap by employing the LibQUAL tool to evaluate user satisfaction with library services within SAPS.

4. Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study was to use LibQUAL to evaluate user satisfaction regarding the current and perceived library resources and services at Aloe Park SAPS National library in Pretoria.

The research objectives for this study were to:

- (1) Establish users' level of awareness of the current library resources, services and their usage
- (2) Evaluate users' level of satisfaction with the current library resources and services
- (3) Explore library users' perceptions regarding the expected library resources, services and the library as a space
- (4) Make recommendations based on the research findings of the study

5. Literature review

[DeCarlo \(2018\)](#) describes the literature review as a process that encompasses an examination of numerous scholarly resources, such as books, journal articles, papers and other relevant materials, which are utilised to conduct a critical analysis of the subject matter pertaining to the phenomenon being researched. The literature review of this paper, which aligns with the research objectives of the study, is presented in the following sections.

5.1 Level of awareness regarding library resources and services

According to [Ashikuzzaman \(2023\)](#), libraries must build strong collections of library resources in print and digital formats to provide for the information and knowledge requirements of their diverse users. [Gumede \(2021\)](#) suggests that library users require access to library resources, together with computers and network structures, the ability to work with digital and electronic database tools and a system structure supporting rapid and convenient networks. Additionally, the knowledge, computer skills and abilities to use e-resources efficiently are also important ([Abdullah, 2022; Kaapu, 2024](#)).

[Hickerson et al. \(2022\)](#) argue that, since the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries have become agile, focusing more on online resources and services than on manual ones. Libraries have been adopting platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, Telegram,

LinkedIn, Instagram and blogs as significant online communication tools. This study argues that these library resources and services are of no value if library users are not aware of them. For example, [Ngulube and Saurombe \(2016\)](#) remark that it is critical for information centres to engage in public programming services to increase visibility and accessibility to library and archival resources.

[Jayaraj and Kannappanavar \(2021\)](#) conducted a study at the college libraries in the Udupi District (India), and the results of the study suggested the need for information awareness programmes to enrich and promote the use of library resources and services. This was important to enhance knowledge of the available resources, thereby promoting increased utilisation of library resources. The provision of efficient services is crucial in promoting optimal utilisation of the library. [Adeoya and Popoola \(2011\)](#) observe that the higher the awareness of information resources and services, the higher the usage; hence, the importance of increasing the level of awareness by expanding the advocacy and marketing campaigns and improving the quality of library resources and services.

5.2 Level of satisfaction regarding library resources and services

[Hudin et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Tetteh and Nyantakyi-Baah \(2019\)](#) agree that customer satisfaction comprises the following three dimensions, which can be used to assess user satisfaction: (1) affect of service, (2) information control and (3) library as a place. It can be measured based on the quality of the service perceived by the customer, the psychological expectation of the service, and the customer's perception of the cost of the service. [Afthanorhan et al. \(2019\)](#) reiterate that the items that can be used to measure customer satisfaction include: (1) general service, (2) search for materials, (3) library staff, (4) library collection, (5) facilities and (6) library environment. This study used the measurement tools recommended by [Hudin et al. \(2023\)](#), [Tetteh and Nyantakyi-Baah \(2019\)](#) and [Afthanorhan et al. \(2019\)](#), because they provide a detailed view and overlapping meaning of the term "customer satisfaction".

6. Conceptual framework

The existing literature indicates that there are different models that can be used to measure service quality and customer satisfaction, including the Service Quality Model (SERVQUAL), the Performance Component of the Service Quality Scale (SERVPERF), the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM), Total Quality Management (TQM) and LibQUAL. Because of the restriction of the journal regarding the number of words, the discussion will focus on SERVQUAL and LibQUAL only, as they were employed in this study.

6.1 SERVQUAL

The Service Quality Model (SERVQUAL) was conceptualised and put into practice in 1985 by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry ([Bhasin, 2023](#)). After reviewing the model in 1988, they concluded that SERVQUAL can be regarded as a measure of service quality that can meet the expectations of customers. SERVQUAL serves as a prominent model employed for the assessment of service quality and customer satisfaction ([Kaapu, 2024](#); [Bhasin, 2023](#)). The model is used by the libraries to capture and analyse customer expectations and perceptions of the service rendered. [Ghavimi et al. \(2017\)](#) indicate that this model is an investigative tool for identifying the strong and weak points of educational services and is used to evaluate the gaps between the clients' expectations and perceptions and the actual quality of educational services.

6.2 LibQUAL

LibQUAL, which was modified from the SERVQUAL model, was developed, tested and refined by Texas A&M University in conjunction with the Association of Research Libraries

(Mamta and Kumar, 2023). The University of South Dakota (2023) defines *LibQUAL +* as a tool that was developed by the Association of Research Libraries. Its purpose is to provide academic libraries with a standardised effective method to measure the quality of library services. Perplexity.ai (2024) makes it clear that both *LibQUAL +* and *SERVQUAL* are grounded in the Gap Theory of Service Quality, originally developed by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985). Furthermore, *SERVQUAL* is described as a generic instrument designed for assessing service quality across various industries in the private sector. *LibQUAL +*, on the other hand, is viewed as an adaptation specifically tailored for the library context, developed by Texas Agricultural and Mechanical (A&M) University Libraries and the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), based on extensive research and interviews with library users (Perplexity.ai [2024]).

In South Africa, the *LibQUAL* model was first used by Rhodes University. The use of the *LibQUAL* model by Rhodes University was influenced by the need of the university library to benchmark the quality of their service against that of other South African university libraries (Kekana and Kheswa, 2020). *LibQUAL* was adopted in this study to assess user satisfaction with library services at the Aloe Park South African Police Service (SAPS) National Library, Pretoria (South Africa).

LibQUAL is designed to assist librarians in understanding user perceptions, with the aim of improving service quality to meet users' information needs more efficiently (Kekana and Kheswa, 2020). *LibQUAL* has changed from its initial eight dimensions to the following three dimensions (Habiburrahman and Erlianti, 2020):

- (1) Affect of service: The way users are treated and served by library staff
- (2) Information control: The ability to navigate through information
- (3) The library as place: The way in which the library meets the information and other needs of users

As reflected in the evidence in existing literature, depending on the item(s) of interest in service assessment in libraries, they have resorted to using diverse measuring methods to collect data on customer satisfaction. For example, Hudin *et al.* (2023) argue that the assessment of customer satisfaction should be based on the behaviour of library staff, information sources and the library environment. Similarly, Twum and Peprah (2020) recommend three items – behaviour of library staff, information sources and the library environment – to measure library customer satisfaction. However, in their study, Afthanorhan *et al.* (2019) measured library customer satisfaction by using seven items, including library collection, facilities, environment and customer behaviour. The findings of their study revealed that service quality had a significant impact on customer satisfaction. Among the service quality dimensions, library environment and general service were viewed as the most significant in the index list. Implications for research and practice resulting from these findings were also viewed as critical (Afthanorhan *et al.*, 2019).

Furthermore, Ncwane (2016), as cited in Kaapu (2024, p. 44), used *LibQUAL* to assess the disparity between customer expectations for exceptional service and their assessments of the actual services provided by the library of the Mangosuthu University of Technology. The research findings of the study indicated that most of the participants, comprising both students and library staff members, had a positive perspective of the overall quality of the library services. Based on these findings, recommendations were aimed at resolving the identified challenges to service quality and improving the satisfaction levels of staff and users at the Faculty of Natural Sciences of the Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT-NSF). For this study, *LibQUAL* was used to measure customer satisfaction in terms of the behaviour of staff (affect of service), information sources and the library environment (library as place).

7. Research methodology

The concept of research methodology is described as a systematic framework that outlines the approach and procedures to be followed in conducting research (Leavy, 2017, p. 263). Within the context of the interpretivist research paradigm, this study employed a qualitative approach and the case study design, while utilising a purposive sampling technique and conducting semi-structured interviews to collect primary data. At its core, interpretivism deals with understanding the way in which people make sense of their world. The interpretivist paradigm was adopted in this study because it explores subjective meanings, perspectives and context and allows participants and researchers to construct the world based on their experience and understanding of the world. In this way, the interpretivist paradigm allowed the researcher to listen to the library users’ expressions of their perceptions and experiences regarding the Aloe Park Library services and resources. Interpretivism resonated well with this study, which aimed to explore and assess user satisfaction with library resources, services and the library as a place – i.e. the Aloe Park SAPS National Library in Pretoria.

According to Yin (2018), a case study is an in-depth inquiry of a subject or occurrence in its actual context. The target population of this study comprised 2,447 police officers, who were the registered users of the Aloe Park SAPS National Library. The study adopted a purposive sampling technique in selecting the research participants. Purposive sampling is employed when a researcher wishes to learn more about a particular occurrence, rather than making statistical inferences, or when the population is small and specific (Merriam and Grenier, 2019). To choose a purposive sample, the researcher establishes criteria for selection (Denieffe, 2020): it is the representativeness of the sample that matters – not the size of the sample (Neuman, 2014).

As indicated in Table 1, the sample size of this study comprised two (2) legal officers, two (2) researchers, two (2) library workers, two (2) police investigators, two (2) ETD practitioners, and 10 (ten) registered understudies. In this case, the purposive sample size was 20 participants. Mason (2010) states that the most common sample size in qualitative research is 20–30 participants, followed by 40, 10 and 20. This sample embraced all categories of the Aloe Park SAPS library users, which was considered representative of the target population.

Semi-structured interviews, guided by the research objectives of the study and the three-dimensional quality elements of LibQUAL, were used to collect primary data for this study. Employing the semi-structured interview technique enabled the researcher to conduct a concentrated and in-depth exploration of the phenomenon being researched. The interviews with the target participants were conducted when they went to the library for various purposes, such as to borrow books, use the Internet services, or use the study room in the library. If the participants did not have time to answer the interview questions, appointments were made so that the researcher could conduct interviews at a convenient time and location, which was usually the office of the participant or the researcher.

Table 1. Sample size of the target population

Category of users of library	Population	Sample size
Police investigators	773	2
ETD practitioners	60	2
Registered understudy	666	10
Researchers	189	2
Legal officers	750	2
Library staff	9	2
TOTAL	2,447	20

Source(s): Table by Kaapu (2024, p. 64)

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the course of the research. Participation in the interviews was entirely voluntarily, and the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any point. Participants were also made aware that they were not obligated to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. Furthermore, the necessary institutional approvals were secured from both the SAPS Component Research and in accordance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics ([University of South Africa, 2016](#)). Based on these approvals, the researcher ensured that each participant signed the informed consent form before the interview sessions commenced. The interviews were recorded on audiotape (with the participants' consent), so that an accurate record of the interview could be preserved and transcribed for analysis purposes. While the interviews were conducted and recorded, participants' anonymity was ensured. Even at this stage, participants were still reminded that they could withdraw from the study or end the interview at any moment. The questions posed to participants aligned with the research objectives of the study and the three quality dimensions of LibQUAL.

The data generated from the interviews was analysed thematically by using Thematic, a qualitative data analysis method that captured, coded and analysed the collected data. The transcription tool Hyper-Transcribe was used to transcribe the interviews, and Thematic was employed to classify the data. The data was analysed by using systematic text condensation (STC), a purposive, exploratory thematic analytic method ([Dawadi, 2020](#)).

In qualitative studies, trustworthiness is anchored in four key elements – credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability ([Maher et al., 2018](#)). Credibility ensures that the study measures what is intended and that it presents a true reflection of the participants' views. Transferability relates to the ability of the research findings to be transferred to other contexts or settings. Dependability ensures that the research process is described in sufficient detail, so that other researchers can relate to the study. Confirmability helps in minimising researcher bias by acknowledging the limitations and delimitations of the study ([Maher et al., 2018](#)).

To ensure trustworthiness, this study was piloted. Both the researcher and the participants read the interview schedule independently. During the analysis, telephone interviews were conducted to discuss the themes, meaningful units and procedures, thereby enriching discussions on the analysis and interpretation of the findings. To generate comparable results, the questions used in this study were constructed attentively to make them repeatable in a similar setting. To enhance rigour and trustworthiness, the conceptual framework served as a guide for the data collection instruments utilised in the study. Taking comprehensive field notes, recording all interviews and transcribing the information provided by the participants helped to increase the transparency and trustworthiness of the research findings ([Kaapu, 2024](#)).

8. Discussion of major findings

The discussion of the research findings is guided by the research objectives of the study and the assessment of the three-dimensional elements of LibQUAL – affect of service, information sources and library as a place.

8.1 Demographic information

[Table 2](#) presents the demographic information of the participants, such as gender, age, educational level and work experience.

[Table 2](#) shows the demographic data of the selected 20 participants, including gender, age, rank, qualifications and number of years of working experience in the SAPS. As shown in [Table 2](#), a total of 20 participants from different departments and categories of the SAPS were interviewed. The breakdown reveals that two (2) participants were drawn from each of the

Table 2. Demographic information

Category of library users	Sample size	Gender	Age range	Education level	Work experience
Police investigators	2	M (X2)	26–45	Degrees	20 years<
ETD practitioners	2	F and M	26–50	Matric; Masters	40 years<
Registered understudy	10	F (X7) M (X3)	26–50	Matric; Diplomas; Master’s	11–20 years< 21–30 years<
Researchers	2	F and M	26–51<	Degree; PhD	30 years<
Legal officers	2	M (x2)	51<	Degree; Master’s	40 years<
Library staff	2	F (X2)	51<	Certificate; Degree	40 years<
Total	20	F (X11) M (X9)			

Source(s): Table by [Kaapu \(2024\)](#)

identified categories, but ten (10) participants came from the departments of registered understudies. As earlier stated, the Aloe Park SAPS Library is a special library designated for police officers, which justified the need for their strong representation in the study. The ages of the participants ranged from 26 and older. There were 11 female participants and nine (9) male participants, suggesting that females used the library more frequently than their male colleagues.

Although ranks are not indicated in [Table 2](#), the results indicated that colonels demonstrated a higher frequency of library usage compared to other ranks. For example, six (6) out of 20 participants held the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, and five (5) held the rank of Full Colonel, respectively. This also suggested that senior managers, such as Brigadiers and Generals, had a lower frequency of library visits, possibly because they were already at the peak of their career and were no longer under pressure to acquire more qualifications. Regarding qualifications, seven (7) participants had degrees; three (3) participants held Grade 12 qualifications; three (3) held certificates; three (3) had Master’s degrees; two (2) had postgraduate diplomas; one participant held a diploma, while one held a doctorate. Concerning their work experience, ten (10) participants reported having work experience of 11–20 years in the SAPS; five (5) participants indicated having 21–30 years of work experience; four (4) had 31–40 years of work experience; and one participant had 1–10 years of work experience.

8.2 Level of awareness regarding the current library resources

To assess the affect of the service and the library as the place, it was necessary to understand the level of awareness regarding information sources, services and the library as a place. The first research objective involved the evaluation of the level of awareness of the availability of library computers and Internet services, legal databases, printed books, the reference desk and loan services, printing and copying services and study places.

8.3 Awareness of current library resources

The participants were asked to identify library resources of which they were aware but did not use often and to explain the reason for not using them. The question was asked in order to assess the level of awareness by applying the LibQUAL dimension of Information Control. The participants were distributed in the following categories: six (6) participants were from the registered understudy category; two (2) from research; two (2) from legal services; and two (2) were ETD practitioners. The findings indicated that 12 (60%) participants had a high level of awareness of the computer service, although these participants also revealed that they were not using the Internet and computer resources. One of the reasons adduced for the limited or lack of usage was that the service was irregular. The following responses were captured:

Participant 3: *The Internet is very slow; I can access the Internet, intranet and electronic journals from my office, and I have access to the UNISA digital library for journals.*

Participant 7: *I have my own Internet access; the library will be closed by the time I knock off.*

Additional responses also indicated that the library had only one computer with Internet access, which was highly inadequate. Moreover, the inadequate computer systems were always occupied, and the operational hours of the library (8:00–16:00, South African time) were not suitable. Participant 4, an ETD practitioner, responded as follows: *During library operating hours, I am occupied with work, and I have limited time to use the library's computers and Internet. I am using the one at work.*

Regarding online legal databases, the results indicated that a total of 16 participants were unaware of these databases. However, two (2) participants from the legal services category and two (2) from the library staff category were aware of the online services provided by the library. Participant 19 provided the following response: *Legal service patrons were aware of the database, and they often use the services.* The primary factor hindering the use of these resources, as reflected in the results, was the frequent occurrence of error messages when accessing some of the databases: *The database system last updated your server in either June or July 2019, hence refusing updates and access.*

Concerning the book collection of the library, all 20 participants were aware of the book collection of the library. However, most of the participants expressed disaffection over the currency of the library collection, most of which were published before 2010. The following responses were captured:

Participant 1: *The books which were older than ten years were considered to be outdated depending on the subject.*

Participant 2: *There is a shortage of new books in the library as many of them were published before 2013 and thus considered outdated.*

8.4 Awareness of current library services

All the participants demonstrated awareness of the reference desk and loan services offered by the library. The two participants from the library indicated that clients often used the library reference desk to obtain desired information and services, such as like borrowing, renewing and returning of books. Other services included lending, reference, current awareness service (CAS), inter-lending loans, display of new arrivals, selective dissemination of information (SDI), user education and reprographic services. The findings further revealed that most participants visited the section regularly, with frequencies ranging from monthly to weekly and every other day. Their primary reason for visiting the library was to borrow books. With the following responses captured, the participants also indicated that they were satisfied with the services offered in the library:

Participant 1: *I am aware of reference desk, and I often use it to enquire about academic-related literature on policing issues and loan books on research.*

Participant 2: *I am aware of reference desk, and I often booked out books.*

Concerning printing and photocopy services, the results indicated that all the participants were aware of printing and copying services provided by the library. The library personnel also confirmed that library patrons used the printing and photocopying facilities; particularly because they were free of charge. Regarding space utilisation and the study area, the results showed that 17 of the 20 participants were aware of the study area.

As previously indicated, the responses to the question of “awareness of current library resources” revealed that participants from the understudy, research, legal services and ETD

detective agencies had knowledge about library resources and services. However, despite being aware of the availability of these resources, they were not putting them to maximum use because of some challenges highlighted in their responses. For instance, some participants indicated that they relied more on computers in their offices.

Based on the foregoing results and findings, it could be concluded that the Aloe Park Library was, to a certain extent, falling short of expected standards of the three LibQUAL dimensions of quality customer service – Information Control, Impact of Services and Library as a Place. As shown in the results, the majority of the participants expressed satisfaction with the reference desk but expressed dissatisfaction with the resources and the library as a place.

8.5 Level of satisfaction regarding the current library resources and services

The second research objective of the study was aimed at evaluating user satisfaction with respect to library resources, access to information, services and environment. The breakdown is shown in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3, results revealed an equal distribution of positive and negative responses regarding library resources and services. Ten (10) participants expressed dissatisfaction with available resources and services in the library. For example, five (5) registered understudies, one (1) researcher, two (2) legal services and two (2) library staff members expressed dissatisfaction with the resources and services of the Aloe Park SAPS Library. For the ten dissatisfied participants, the key concern was the datedness of the book collection and legal databases. For example, both participants from the legal unit lamented the limited number of online legal resources. In addition, the few legal databases available were, in most cases, not updated regularly. The following responses were captured from legal personnel:

Participant 5: *I am dissatisfied with the books the library provided; they were outdated, and the electronic databases were no longer active.*

Participant 6: *I am dissatisfied because the systems have expired, and the legal services department relies on the court decisions provided by LexisNexis and Juta; without these resources and services, our work is difficult.*

The understudy participants expressed concern about the limited Internet access and the limited number of computers in the computer centre. Participant 14, an understudy, responded as follows: *There is only one computer with Internet access, and it is extremely slow; I use the Internet at the office.*

Interestingly, several participants complained about the lack of robust Internet access on the computers, although they still used the computers. When asked why they still used the service despite its failure to meet their expectations, participants responded with several reasons. For example, two (2) participants from legal services used the Internet services to research legal

Table 3. Level of satisfaction regarding the current library resources and services

Theme	ETD	Legal	Library	Police investigation	Research	Understudy	Total
Satisfied with library resources	2x (S)	2x (D)	2x (D)	2x (S)	1x (D) 1x (S)	5x (D) 5x (S)	10x (D) 10x (S)
Access to information	2x (S)	2x (D)	2x (D)	2x (S)	2x (S)	5x (D) 5x (S)	9x (D) 11x (S)
Library environment	2x (S)	2x (S)	2x (S)	1x (D) 1x (S)	2x (S)	5x (D) 5x (S)	6x (D) 14x (S)
TOTAL	6x (S)	4x (D) 2x (S)	4x (D) 2x (S)	5x (S) 1x (D)	5x (S) 1x (D)	15x (D) 15x (S)	25x (D) 35x (S)

Source(s): Table by Kaapu (2024)

documents and decide court cases to complete a legal opinion. Two (2) police detectives used the forensic investigation resources and the study space of the library to obtain accurate information on any aspect of a criminal investigation. Five (5) of the understudy participants used the Internet to search for journals and to type assignments. Similarly, two ETD practitioners used the computers and Internet service for typing and accessing their emails. Notwithstanding, the highlighted challenges, it could be deduced that this service was essential to participants and had, therefore, forced them to use the service optimally.

The results of the question on satisfaction with “access to information” showed that of the 20 participants, 11 responded positively regarding information access, while nine (9) responded negatively (see also [Table 3](#)). Those with negative opinion re-emphasised challenges such as inadequate Internet access, Wi-Fi connectivity, limited number of computers and outdated library collection and databases. For the satisfied participants, the consensus indicated their satisfaction with the reference desk services. In addition, they experienced the library as a quiet and peaceful place. However, there was a divergent opinion from one of the understudy participants who indicated that “library as a place” was sometimes not a conducive place for study, due to surrounding noise pollution and filthy environment.

As shown in [Table 3](#), findings revealed that 14 participants responded positively, while six (6) participants expressed unhappiness with the library setting, hinging their opinions on drawbacks such as the filthy and unfriendly library environment, inadequate study space and occasional noise disturbances.

8.6 Perceptions and expectations regarding library resources and quality services

The third research objective investigated the perceptions of library users on the current and expected resources and services of the library. Using the dimension of information resources, the findings revealed that 13 participants believed that the resources at the Aloe Park SAPS Library did not meet LibQUAL standard. They expressed concerns about the datedness of the book collection and the electronic databases of the library, which were not regularly updated. However, seven (7) participants expressed satisfaction with the library resources provided.

Concerning the services provided by library staff, the results showed that 16 participants had positive perceptions of the library staff’s service quality – particularly at the reference desk – while two participants expressed negative views regarding the services provided by library staff. In terms of participant perception of the regarding library environment, the results shown in [Table 3](#) indicated that most of the participants (14) had a positive perception of the library environment, finding it welcoming and satisfactory. However, six (6) participants expressed dissatisfaction, mentioning concerns about limited study space, intermittent noise, the filthy library environment and the untidy landscape.

The findings concerning the third research objective showed that a substantial number of participants had a positive perception of the library as a place. However, it is imperative to emphasise that there was still room for improvement – particularly in terms of the Aloe Park Library keeping updated of technological trends in terms of library resources and service provision. In addition, the library needs to update its electronic databases and library collection continuously. Therefore, it is crucial for library management to prioritise the provision of adequate study space, lighting and other amenities to meet the demands of library users in the digital era.

9. Conclusion

Overall, the findings of the study demonstrated that the Aloe Park SAPS National Library met the fundamental expectations of users in terms of LibQUAL dimensions of Impact of Services and the Library as a Physical Space. However, it was unable to satisfy the minimum level of user expectation with respect to information resources and computer and Internet services. The following sections present the final conclusions in alignment with the research objectives of the study.

9.1 Level of awareness of library resources and services

On the level of awareness of library resources and services, the results indicated that there was a gap in the knowledge and awareness of different library services and resources among library users; particularly about the computer centre and Internet services. This may be because the Aloe Park SAPS National Library usually conducts its advocacy and marketing campaigns only once or twice every six months. The library may need to review its policy on the frequency of advocacy and awareness campaigns.

9.2 Information sources and affect of services

The non-current and limited availability of printed and electronic materials, inadequate computer systems and the weak Internet connection are additional obstacles hindering the provision of high-quality services at the Aloe Park SAPS National Library.

9.3 Library as a place

The research findings of the study revealed serious concerns about study environment, particularly due to intermittent noise disturbances, insufficient space and inadequate lighting and air conditioning facilities, as reported by some participants.

9.4 Perceptions and expectations regarding library resources and quality services

As revealed by the findings of the study, ten (10) participants expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of available resources in terms of currency, adequacy and functionality.

Considering the identified challenges, the practical implications and recommendations in the following sections are proposed.

10. Recommendations and implications for practice

Develop library programmes and policies that accommodate evolving technological trends and promote visibility and inclusivity such as:

- (1) Strengthening the usage of digital libraries to facilitate accessibility, visibility and inclusivity among all SAPS libraries and their partners

According to the SAPS National Instruction of Library Services (2019), a library needs to provide access to relevant, authoritative information resources and services in accordance with the needs of its users (Kaapu, 2024). However, the findings of the study revealed that the Aloe Park SAPS National Library is not sufficiently meeting users' needs in terms of resources, the library as a place and the affect of services; particularly in terms of library operational hours. For example, one of the participants from the ETD category indicated that, because of the slow Internet connection in the library, she/he was using the UNISA digital library to access needed journals (Kaapu, 2024). In addition, the accessibility challenges faced by library users during the COVID-19 pandemic prompted libraries to adapt to and adopt digital library solutions. It is, therefore, envisaged that findings for this study will help to raise awareness among senior management regarding the importance of enhancing and promoting the use of digital library services at the Aloe Park National Library and its affiliated 39 SAPS libraries across South Africa.

- (2) Providing continuous training sessions on the use of the digital library, online databases and related online services

In order to promote information and knowledge sharing at the Aloe Park National Library and its partners, it is crucial to present library orientation and instruction on the use of online library databases. For example, Jovita and Keshav (2021), as cited in Kaapu (2024, pp. 38–39), argue that for librarians to increase access and usage of digital resources, including social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, YouTube, LinkedIn, Telegram

and Blog, they must go through training to improve their digital literacy skills. Educating library users on the use of emerging digital technologies requires librarians to master those technologies themselves. Therefore, it is crucial for librarians to upgrade their digital literacy skills to function efficiently and to provide effective library services during disasters such as COVID-19 pandemic.

- (3) Instituting a collection development policy in line with the information needs of the library users

The Aloe Park Library is a government entity and a special library that is mandated to provide specific reference and supporting materials to SAPS employees (Kaapu, 2024). The findings of this study revealed a significant level of dissatisfaction with the availability and quality of information resources, the inadequacy of computer facilities, slow Internet connectivity and regular subscription to electronic databases. In order to address the challenges related to the delivery of online services, it is critical to increase the number of computer systems and the bandwidth of the Internet connection.

- (4) Updating policies continuously in tandem with user needs

Chapter 2 of the South African Public Library and Information Services Bill of 2012 advocates for the development of norms and standards in the provision of resources and services (Republic of South Africa, 2012). The Aloe Park Library can learn from these norms and standards. For example, the research findings indicated that library users were not happy about accessing outdated library databases, such as LexisNexis legal databases, to which the library subscribes. To enhance user satisfaction, regular reviews of the e-collection and the subscriptions to electronic databases are recommended.

- (5) Improving the library as a place

It is recommended that the library provides a study space that is friendly and conducive for study and research and equipped with air conditioning facilities. To control the noise level in the library, library management may consider redesigning the library building to create a serene space suitable for reading and research. In addition, rules and regulations prohibiting noise and other anti-social behaviour in the library should be implemented and enforced. However, these initiatives can only be realised if the library receives adequate budgetary support, or if it has an alternative source of income to help in meeting requirements of the three LibQUAL dimensions.

- (6) Engaging in advocacy and marketing campaigns

Rather than the occasional advocacy campaigns, the library may consider embarking on monthly advocacy campaigns. In addition, the library can promote its services by using internal communication channels, such as library guides, library bulletins, library exhibitions and book fairs. Moreover, given that most of its users are technology proficient, the library should enhance its online presence by creating and managing dedicated social media accounts on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Tik Tok. These strategies would not only increase the visibility and accessibility of the library, but also encourage the full engagement with and utilisation of its resources.

Mukwevho and Ngulube (2022) argue that one of the reasons for the underutilisation of information resources and services in the archives and libraries is the absence or limitation of public programming activities. Ngulube and Saurombe (2016) describe “public programming” as the activities that archives and libraries conduct to increase awareness of their collections and resources. These scholars assert that it is imperative for information centres to participate in public programming services to enhance the visibility and accessibility of library and archival resources (Ngulube and Saurombe, 2016). Similarly, Adeoya and Popoola (2011) reiterate that the likelihood of increased usage is directly proportional to the

level of awareness of information resources and services. Consequently, it is crucial to enhance awareness by increasing the frequency of advocacy and marketing campaigns and by enhancing the quality of library resources and services.

(7) Extending library opening official hours

Some of the participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the operating hours of the library, which coincide with their working hours, thereby denying them the opportunity of using the library after office hours. It is incumbent on library management to review the opening hours to accommodate their users who may want to use the library after office hours. Management may need to experiment with shift duty or extend the library opening hours.

(8) Conducting regular surveys to establish user satisfaction needs

To improve the quality of the library services of the Aloe Park Library, it is imperative for the library staff to undergo regular and standardised training in customer service needs. This will allow them to provide users with relevant and current information.

11. Further research

As previously indicated, as a government entity, the Aloe Park SAPS National Library is a special library that is mandated to provide relevant reference and supporting materials to SAPS employees (Kaapu, 2024). The findings of this study revealed a significant level of dissatisfaction with the library resources resulting from challenges such as access to outdated library databases, limited number of computers and the lack of strong bandwidth resulting in slow Internet connectivity. In addition, the library as a place emerged as weak in the results – mainly because of limited space to allow proper study environment for the library clientele. The challenges facing libraries, including special libraries, in terms of funding, resources and skill shortages are concerning, as the digital era is demanding them to prepare their clientele for Society 5.0. While advancing with technological demands, libraries are expected to avoid leaving anyone behind; particularly the potential users whose indigenous knowledge systems and languages have been disregarded for a long time.

Based on the challenges identified in the research results and findings, it is recommended that future studies of the special libraries – particularly SAPS libraries across the country – should focus on the following elements: the development of policy frameworks that cater for the information needs of their users; funding to improve library infrastructure and services; and the recruitment of skilled personnel to meet the demands of the digital age, while upskilling existing personnel (Akanbi and Sambo, 2022).

It is hoped that the research findings of this study will support the senior management of the APSNL to focus on improving the systemic and cultural factors that may have contributed to weak customer satisfaction scores.

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