

Quality of Property Management Service in Public Educational Buildings in Nigeria

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Doi:10.59011/mjss.2013.v4n2p753

Abstract

Quality as a service management tool plays a vital role in measuring the performance of service providers in the service sectors. One of the approach to measuring quality in service is to measure how satisfied the customers or service consumers are with the service result. This study aimed at evaluating the satisfaction of the staff of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Bauchi with the property management services provided by the Works and Services unit of the university. A sample of 38 respondents was randomly selected from the members of staff of the School of Environmental Technology of the university. Out of the 38 questionnaires administered 25 were successfully retrieved and used for analysis. The questionnaire was designed in Liker-Scale format where the various items measuring service dimension in the SERVQUAL framework were rated based on a five-point scale. Data were analyzed using t-test statistics at 95% confidence level. The result revealed that there is significant gap between the respondents' service expectation and actual service encounter across the entire service dimension framework on the property management services provided in the university. This poses the need for urgent attention from the management of the university to address the issue as staff satisfaction with their work environment is a factor that contributes to achievement of the university's mission and visions.

Keywords: expectation, perception, property management, educational institution, service quality

1. Introduction

Property assets in form of land and buildings play a vital role in the successful operations of both private and public organizations/institutions. Real property assets are often critical to financing government operations; they can collateralize borrowing; they are essential to public service delivery such as health, education, internal security and more. The significant contribution of property to the success or failure of businesses and its strategic importance to company's financial structures in the private sector and its effect on annual financial statement and asset base in the public sector have been identified as among the reasons for an effective and efficient property management.

The responsibility for the management of property assets in any organization lies in the property manager whose primary duties include ensuring prompt payment of property-related expenses such as insurance premium, payroll and maintenance bills, electricity bill, water bill and mortgage charges among others. Similarly property managers are

reputable for the day-to-day maintenance of properties, for purchasing supplies and equipment for the property and for making arrangements with specialist for repairs that cannot be handled by the regular property maintenance staff.

The management of property assets in the public sector has been associated with many problems. Kaganova, McKeller and Peterson, (2011), identified economic inefficiencies including physical and economic underutilization and insufficient maintenance and repairs, which stem from the popular notion that real property held by government is a 'free good', owned by the taxpayers and need not to be subject to the same economic rationalization that occurs in the private sector, as some of the hindrances to effective public sector property management. Similarly, deferred maintenance and repairs, the effect of which manifest itself in the dilapidating nature of most public properties, is another inefficiency associated with the management of such properties in both the developed and emerging economies. A clear indication of this was contained in a World Bank Report of 2003 which stated that in Morocco, the resources allocated annually for maintenance of property portfolios of health, education and higher education sectors are estimated to cover between 5 to 10 percent of the amounts needed to maintain property quality.

Universities in Nigeria are faced with a myriad of problems ranging from inadequate funding, brain-drain syndrome, dilapidated structures and facilities and a host of other administrative challenges. In the area of property management Oladipo (2001) identified that Nigerians lag far behind in the culture of maintaining facilities especially public owned. On the other hand, Aminu (1986) lamented the poor strategic physical developmental planning in Nigerian universities and the associated inefficiencies, neglect and lack of care found in the universities.

In order to ensure staff retention and performance and actualization of overall service delivery, efficient and effective property management become imperative in any university (CABE, 2005). This is for the fact that working environment has been identified as one of the determinants of productivity (Chukwunye and Amgbare, 2010). Thus, staff satisfaction with their work environment, particularly offices, is critical to their performance.

It is against this backdrop that this study aimed at evaluating users' satisfaction with the property management services provided by the Works and Services unit of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Bauchi, Nigeria with a view to assessing its quality.

2. Property Management in Educational Institutions

One of the major challenges facing property managers in the educational institutions is the establishment of strategies that allow for responding to the changing modes of educational property management. This stem from the need for optimized operational and investment strategies necessary to meet the increasing need for continuing investment in assets maintenance by institutions. In order to meet up with this challenge, property managers need to strategized using the latest tools. Critical among these tools is an information system that facilitates decision on renovation and repairs, or tracking maintenance backlogs, or measuring performance against some indicators (OECD, 2005).

However, as lamented by Zarital, Abdul Hadi and Zainai (2009), the use of quality as management tool by property manager is abysmally low compared to other service sectors. Property managers were found to be more concern with those performance variables such as investment based performance measurement and occupancy cost performances which were easily and readily available.

3. Theoretical Framework: SERVEQUAL Model

Service quality as defined by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) is the differences between customer expectation of service and perceived service while Oakland, (1994) viewed it as the extent to which a service meets customer's needs or expectations. If the expectations are greater than performance, the perceived quality is less than satisfactory and hence customer dissatisfaction occurs. The idea of measuring service quality was originally rooted in goods sector and the pioneering work by Parasuraman, et al in 1985 laid the foundation for research in the area (Bhattacharjee, 2010). They noted that the concept of quality prevalent in the goods sector is not extendable to the services sector. Measurement of service requires unique structure for analysis because of its features of intangibility, heterogeneity, perishability, simultaneity and inseparability of production and consumption. While in the goods sector, tangible clues exist to satisfy consumers by product quality, on the other hand, quality in the service sector is accompanied in terms of parameters or attributes. Parasuraman et al (1985) measures service quality as a difference between consumer expectations of "what they want" and their perceptions of "what they get" and it is based on this that they developed what is called "SERVQUAL".

SERVQUAL is considered the most common method for measuring service quality. Service quality is seen as the comparison of service expectations with actual performance perceptions (Zeithaml et al., 1990; Bloemer, KodeRuyter and Wetzels, 1998). Research has shown SERVQUAL to be an effective and stable tool for measuring service quality across service industries (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988; Zeithaml et al., 1990; 1993; Bebko, 2000), hence its wider acceptability as a measuring instrument among service industries (Dabholkar et al., 1996; Caruana, Money, and Berthon, 1998). Service quality can be measured by the level of discrepancy between consumer expectations or desires and their perceptions of what they received, as described by the SERVQUAL scale (Bebko, 2000). Service quality is a function of the difference scores or gaps between expectations and perceptions ($P \pm E$). It measures the difference between what is expected from a service encounter and the perception of the actual service encounter. Parasuraman et al., (1988) expressed the service quality model as:

$$\text{Service Quality (Q)} = \text{Perception (P)} - \text{Expectation (E)}$$

Based on this model, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry developed and proposed the SERVQUAL survey instrument as a reliable, valid, and a general way to measure the service quality construct. The original SERVQUAL survey was comprised of a set of twenty-two paired expectations/performance items (making up to forty-four items) which purported to capture the domain of service quality (Noorsidi, Noor and Shahabudin, 2008)

Parasuraman et al., (1988) suggested that the domain of service quality can be conceptualized as comprised of five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Hemmasi, Strong, and Taylor, 1994) and it have provided researchers with the possibility of measuring the performance expectations gap.

4. Methodology

This study adapted the SERVEQUAL Model to assess users' satisfaction with regard to the property management services in the School of Environmental Technology Phase II of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Bauchi. The building was constructed in 2004 and contained 26 offices and 12 Students/Lecture rooms. The property management services offered in the building ranges from maintenance of electricity installations, plumbing, maintenance of general building fabric, landscaping, and security which were undertaken in-house and general cleaning which is out-sourced to a private firm. The choice of SERVQUAL Model in this study was justified based on its identified characteristics of being capable of adoption in any service organization (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

The original SERVQUAL instrument contained a pair of 22 items measuring the level of expectation and perception of customers to service provided along five service dimensions namely: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. In this study, however, a slightly modified instrument containing 20-paired items was designed to measure the satisfaction of the Staff of School of Environmental Technology, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Bauchi on the quality of property management services provided in the building. The items were categorized under the following

- ❖ Tangibles: statements 1-7
- ❖ Reliability: statement 8
- ❖ Responsiveness: statements 9-12
- ❖ Assurance: statements 13-16
- ❖ Empathy: statements 17-20

The questionnaires were self administered to the respondents and an interval of one week was given for retrieval. The respondents were the Staff of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi. A total of 38 questionnaires were administered to both members of academic and non-academic Staff who have offices within the building. A total of 25 questionnaires were successfully retrieved and used for analysis, thus achieving about 70% return. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed with the aid of the SPSS version 17.

4.1 Measurement Instrument

In order to assess the users' satisfaction of the quality of Property Management services provided in the SET Phase II a questionnaire was developed which focused on two measures i.e. expectations and perceptions of performance. Measurement scales was adopted from the literature and each contained 20 items based on SERVQUAL, which were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from "Strongly Agree with weight of (5) to "Strongly Disagree" with weight of (1) for

perception statements and “Absolutely Essential” with weight of (5) to “Absolutely not Essential” with weight of (1).The minimum mean score that a statement can record is one (1) with a maximum of five (5). The midpoint of the scale is three (3), which implies a neutral opinion on the statement. Mean scores higher than three show that the respondents agree with the statement, while mean scores lower than three show disagreement. Similarly, mean score higher than three in the case of the expectation statements shows respondents have high expectation while mean score less than three shows lower expectation.

5. Result and Discussion

The mean scores of the scale values for each of the expectation and perception statements in the questionnaire are shown in Table 1. Table 2 shows the mean gap score obtained from subtracting the mean expectations from the mean perceptions and the respective test of significance of each mean service gap.

Table 1: Mean Score of Expectations and Perceptions

Element	Mean	
	Perception	Expectation
Physically appealing	3.88	4.48
Neatly dress	3.04	4.16
Efficient internet service	1.56	4.56
Security	1.92	4.68
Efficient Air Conditioning	2.08	4.36
Stand-by electricity generating set	1.32	4.24
Adequate Parking Space	3.08	4.12
Always Fulfill Promise	2.80	4.28
Sincerity in solving users problems	2.88	4.40
Keep up-to-date records	2.80	4.44
Users were told when service will be performed	2.28	3.56
Performed Service Right the first time	1.60	3.60
Staff's willingness to help	3.24	3.84
Responding to Users' Request Promptly	2.68	3.84
Staff Behaviour instill confidence in the Users	3.12	3.56
Staff Consistently Courteous with Users	3.28	3.80
Staff are Knowledgeable	3.36	4.60
Management gives Attention to Individual Problems	3.00	3.56
Management understands Individual specific needs	2.56	3.64
Staff have users' interest at heart	2.88	4.00

As shown in Table 1, the respondents have the higher expectations with regards to tangible elements of the service provided. This is indicated by the mean scores of the four statements measuring tangibility aspects in the questionnaire where all the statements have mean score greater than 4.00 with security being the most highly expected (mean score 4.68), followed by availability of efficient internet service (mean score 4.56), physically appealing building (mean score 4.48), availability of stand-by electricity generating set (mean score 4.24), and lastly neatness (mean score 4.16) and provision of adequate parking space (mean score 4.12). However, users' perception of the facilities management service rendered in the building was generally low on all the statements measuring tangibility. With the exception of physical element which has a mean score of 3.88 the other six statements recorded mean score ranging from 1.32 to 3.08, thus indicating that users' expectations far exceed their actual service encounter in the case study.

Similarly, the respondents have high expectation on the reliability aspect of the service. This is indicated by the mean score of the statement measuring the reliability dimension where a mean score of 4.28 was recorded. On the responsiveness dimension, the respondents indicated high expectation on the service provider's ability to keep up-to-date record (mean score 4.44) and sincerity in solving users' problems with a mean score of 4.40. the remaining statements

that constituted the responsiveness dimension recorded mean scores of 3.60 and 3.56 for performance of service right at first encounter and the need for users' to be informed when service will be performed respectively. Conversely, the perception of service along the responsiveness dimension among the respondents indicated that the services provided by the facilities management service provider (s) in the building fall short of the expectations of the building users as the mean scores of all the statements measuring the responsiveness dimension of service fall between 1.60 to 2.88.

Furthermore, the result revealed that respondents have moderate expectations with regards to the assurance dimension of the property management service in the building. As indicated in Table 1, the mean scores of the statements measuring the assurance dimension range from 3.56 to 3.84, which is above the neutral point of 3.00. Thus respondents showed moderate expectation on the service providers' willingness to help (mean score 3.84), service provider's response to users' request (mean score 3.84), show of consistent courtesy by service provider (mean score 3.80) and the need for service provider's confidence (3.56). On the other hand, the users' perception, with the exception of the statement "service provider's response to users' request" which recorded a mean score of 2.68, the respondents showed almost a neutral position on all the statements measuring the assurance dimension.

In respect of the empathy dimension, respondents indicated high expectations on the need for the service provider being knowledgeable (mean score 4.60) and the need for service providers to have users' interest at heart (mean score 4.00). However, the respondents held moderate expectations on the need for attention to be given to individual problems (mean score 3.56) and the need for service provider to understand individual specific needs (mean score 3.64).

Table 2: Test of Significance of the Mean Gap of Expectations and Perceptions

	Mean		Mean Gap (P-E)	t-test	P-Value
	Perception (P)	Expectation (E)			
Physically Appealing	3.88	4.48	-0.60	-2.521	.019
Neatly Dress	3.04	4.16	-1.12	-4.067	.000
Efficient Internet Service	1.56	4.56	-3.00	-13.887	.000
Security	1.92	4.68	-2.76	-13.118	.000
Efficient Air Conditioning	2.08	4.36	-2.28	-10.364	.000
Stand-by Electricity Generating Set	1.32	4.24	-2.92	-10.341	.000
Adequate Parking Space	3.08	4.12	-1.04	-5.099	.000
Always Fulfill Promise	2.80	4.28	-1.48	-6.592	.000
Sincerity in Solving users' Problems	2.88	4.40	-1.52	-6.185	.000
Keep up-to-date records	2.80	4.44	-1.64	-8.612	.000
Users were told when service will be performed	2.28	3.56	-1.28	-4.151	.000
Performed Service Right the first time	1.60	3.60	-2.00	-3.473	.002
Willingness to help	3.24	3.84	-0.60	-3.286	.003
Responds to users' Request Promptly	2.68	3.84	-1.16	-3.965	.001
Staff's Behaviour instill confidence in the users	3.12	3.56	-0.46	-3.219	.004
Staff Consistently Courteous with users	3.28	3.80	-0.52	-3.641	.001
Staff are Knowledgeable	3.36	4.60	-1.24	-5.508	.000
Attention to Individual Problems	3.00	3.56	-0.56	-2.682	.013
Understands Individual specific needs	2.56	3.64	-1.08	-6.636	.000
Staff have occupants' interest at heart	2.88	4.00	-1.12	-4.661	.000

Table 2 shows the mean gap score of the statements measuring the various service dimensions and the test of significance of the mean gap scores. As shown in Table 2 all the mean gap score (P-E) obtained by subtracting the mean expectation from the mean perceptions of the statement measuring the various service dimension were negative. The least service gap was recorded in the assurance dimension which a mean gap score of -0.46 was recorded. For the statement "employees' behaviour instills confidence". However, the highest service gap was associated with the tangible dimension, where a mean gap score of -3.00, -2.92, -2.78, -2.28 were recorded for availability of efficient internet facility, availability of stand-by generating set, security and efficient air conditioning system. All the other statements recorded a mean gap score ranging from -0.60 to -2.00 hence indicative of the fact that users' expectation of the facilities service provided in the case study far exceeds the actual perceived service provided.

In order to further verified the existence of service gap in the property management service provided in the case study, a test of significance of the mean gap scores was carried out at $\alpha = 0.05$. As shown in Table 2 the mean gaps

between the users' expectations and perceptions were all significant at 0.05 level of significance, thus indicating that there was service quality gap in the property management service provided in the SET Phase II building.

6. Conclusion

This study adopts the SERVQUAL technique in assessing the property management service offered in School of Environmental Technology of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Bauchi. The paper focused on the evaluation of users' expectations and perceptions on the level of service quality in their offices. In this case, the respondents have uniformly high expectations across all dimensions and lead to negative gaps which reflect the low quality services in building. Although all the service dimensions showed high gap scores, the most important dimension as found in this study is tangibility aspect of the service. This therefore calls for more attention to be given to the elements that make up of this factor. The measurement of service quality can provide specific data that can be used in quality management. This allows a university to focus its resources and to maximize service quality whilst costs are controlled. With the knowledge of the service quality dimensions, the decision making unit/property manager can then judge how well the staff performed on each dimension, identify the weakness in order to make improvements, be able to monitor and maintain quality service and efficiently design the service delivery process.

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