User library service expectations in health science vs. other settings

Focused Question:

Do people expect a different sort of service from health care libraries compared to university libraries?

Citation:


Search terms:

Expect*, perceive, perception*, survey*

Summary of the aim and methods of the study

Aims:

- To explore how library service expectations and perceptions of users might differ across health care libraries compared to other major research libraries.
- To determine whether users of health care libraries demand better library service quality.

Population:

- 697 participants from 10 NHS libraries operating within the UK, and 4330 participants from US institutions belonging to the Association of Academic Health Science Libraries (AAHSL).

Intervention:

- LibQUAL+® total and subscale scores

Comparison/Control:

- 21302 participants from US and Canadian non-health libraries that are members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL).

Outcomes:

- Differences in expectations and perceptions for health compared to other library settings.

Study methods:

- LibQUAL+® survey, quantitative sections only
- Comparison of LibQUAL+® total and subscale (Information Control, Service Affect, Library as Place) scores across the three groups described above.

Main results:

Participant characteristics:

- No further information provided.

LibQUAL+® survey results:

- LibQUAL+® provides reliable scores, as the Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the scores analysed across the three groups were high (lowest = 0.88).
- There was no significant difference in the means for the Minimum, Perceived and Desired ratings for Information Control, Service Affect, Library as Place or Total Scores across the three groups.
In all three groups, the Information Control subscale had the highest means on the Desired ratings (NHS mean =8.03, AAHSL mean =8.26, ARL mean =8.24).

In all three groups, the “adequacy gap divided by the zone of tolerance width” scores were lower for the Information Control subscale than for the other two subscales (NHS =0.06, AAHSL =0.15, ARL =0.13).

In all three groups, participants had the lowest means on Desired ratings for the Library as Place subscale (NHS mean =7.38, AAHSL mean =7.69, ARL mean =7.62).

In all three groups, Perceived ratings were the most heterogeneous for the Library as Place subscale (NHS SD =1.52, AAHSL SD =1.56, ARL SD =1.53).

In all three groups, the most favourable “adequacy gap divided by the zone of tolerance width” scores were for the Service Affect subscale (NHS =0.74, AAHSL =0.54, ARL =0.43).

Comments:

- The population groups were not explained fully (ie: why were these libraries selected, and how many individual libraries were involved in the study?), and did not include representatives from UK research libraries.
- The NHS group was a lot smaller than the other two groups, and we don’t know if this is a representative sample of all NHS libraries or NHS/HE hybrid libraries.
- The authors provided a lot of background information for the survey instrument and discussed its value as a tool for collecting quantitative and qualitative information, but did not explain why only quantitative data were used for this study.
- The authors did not provide the survey questions that were used to collect the data that was analysed.
- The emphasis of the study appeared to be on the validity of the survey instrument, rather than on the differences in readers’ expectations.
- The authors’ premise re: “anticipated differences” is not grounded on any evidence. Library users’ expectations would depend on the differences between and within the groups involved, and this has not been explored.
- More clarification of the “adequacy gap divided by the zone of tolerance width” is required, before conclusions can be drawn from this calculation.

Journal Club’s conclusions:

- This research would not be helpful in supporting a case for the differences in user expectations between NHS and other research libraries, as it has not explored the differences in expectations for each survey question.
- The LibQUAL+® instrument could be used for surveying users’ expectations across the OULS libraries, including the qualitative data.