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ASSESSMENT OF STAFF READINESS IN MEETING USERS' INFORMATION NEEDS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN IMO STATE: A FRAMEWORK OF RESPONSIVENESS DIMENSION OF THE SERVQUAL MODEL

BY

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Abstract

Purpose: *This study investigated staff readiness in meeting students' needs in academic libraries in Imo State using the responsiveness dimension of the SERVQUAL Model. It was guided by three objectives and three research questions.*

Design/Methodology/Approach*: The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 23,986 undergraduate students who are registered library users of academic libraries in Imo State. The sample size was 393 registered library users (undergraduate students) determined using Taro Yamane's statistical formula, while a proportionate sampling technique was employed to determine the proportionate figure for each of the institutions. A rating scale titled "Staff Readiness in Meeting Users' Information Needs Using the Responsiveness Dimension of the SERVQUAL Model scale (SRMUINRDSMS)" was used as instrument for data collection. Data obtained for the study were analyzed using descriptive statistics.*

Findings: *The results revealed that staff in academic libraries in Imo State are generally perceived as willing and responsive, indicating high efficiency in reactive and technical assistance but fail to proactively approach struggling students; that staff in academic libraries in Imo State are highly effective at providing immediate assistance, clear guidance, and prompt complaint resolution, while they fall short in maintaining staff availability during peak hours and keeping students updated on unresolved inquiries.*

Implication: *These findings imply that relying solely on a reactive service model creates gaps in user engagement and operational communication. Unless library managements address peak-hour staffing constraints and shift staff mindsets from passive assistance to proactive support, students may experience unaddressed challenges, leading to underutilized library resources and decreased user satisfaction.*

Originality/Value: *It was recommended, among others that academic library management should implement a proactive, and student-centered outreach strategy by training staff in mobile reference and active engagement techniques; and that **a**cademic libraries in Imo State should implement a communication-focused service model that optimizes peak-hour staffing and automates inquiry tracking to enhance service efficiency, reduce patron wait times, and improve overall satisfaction through data-driven academic support.*

Keywords: *Academic Libraries; SERVQUAL Model; Service gaps; Service Quality; Staff Readiness; Users' Information Needs; Staff development*

Paper type: *Empirical research*

INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries are service institutions established within institutions of higher learning to provide information resources, as well as support teaching, learning, and research. Academic

libraries serve as the intellectual hub of higher education institutions, playing a fundamental role in meeting the information needs of the academic community in which the students are part of. According to Maponya (2020), an academic library is an institution established to maintain and preserve information resources, while providing essential user-focused services that align with the teaching and learning objectives of its parent institution. In the contemporary educational landscape, the core value of these libraries is increasingly measured by how effectively they respond to the evolving demands of library users, particularly students. Aslam, et al. (2021) assert that the quality of library services depends heavily on the proactive attitude and capability of library personnel. In this regard, assessing service quality through established metrics becomes critical, as maintaining high standards would ensure that the library remains relevant and vital to student academic success. This requires total commitment and readiness by library staff to guarantee effectiveness in service delivery to library users.

The readiness of academic library staff in meeting students' needs is a critical determinant of user satisfaction and overall institutional efficacy. In institutions of higher learning, this readiness encompasses the willingness, competence, and promptness of personnel to assist students navigating complex information environments. As emphasized by Awasthi and Sharma (2022), staff readiness is not merely about physical presence but involves a psychological and professional preparedness to address diverse user queries efficiently. Furthermore, Nitecki and Simpson (2019) opine that when library staff exhibit high readiness, they significantly reduce student anxiety and enhance the overall learning experience. However, challenges such as technological shifts and inadequate training can hinder this preparedness. This therefore calls for adequate training, continuous professional development, and robust institutional support to ensure librarians remain adaptive and equipped to meet evolving user demands.

In evaluating library staff readiness in meeting students' information meets, the responsiveness dimension of the SERVQUAL model provides a robust theoretical framework. This dimension specifically measures the willingness of service providers to help customers and provide prompt service. Kiran and Diljit (2021) explain that responsiveness in a

library context highlights how quickly and enthusiastically staff attend to student requests, directly influencing perceived service quality. Raza and Upadhyay (2024) posit that utilizing the SERVQUAL model allows administrators to pinpoint exact gaps between student expectations and actual staff performance. Therefore by focusing closely on responsiveness, libraries can transform passive service points into active centers of academic support. Ultimately, utilizing the SERVQUAL framework to assess staff responsiveness would guarantee a culture of immediacy and empathy among librarians, and is key to satisfying the diverse information needs of library users.

In light of these dynamics, the critical function of library personnel in ensuring prompt and attentive service remains very important to institutional success. However, the exact level of promptness and willingness to provide assistance by these personnel, when examined specifically through the lens of service responsiveness in academic libraries within Imo State, has not been comprehensively determined. Hence, this study evaluated staff readiness in meeting students' needs in academic libraries in Imo State using the responsiveness dimension of the SERVQUAL model.

Statement of the Problem

Academic libraries, as service institutions, are established to support the foundational goals of higher education by providing access to information resources that satisfy the research and learning requirements of the students. However, there is a growing concern regarding the apparent lack of staff readiness and promptness in addressing the diverse and evolving queries of library users. This challenge manifests as delayed service delivery, poor disposition toward users, and an inadequate willingness to offer real-time assistance, which collectively compromise the students' academic productivity. According to Uwandu (2022), academic libraries frequently face operational friction when personnel are not fully equipped or motivated to navigate contemporary information requests. Consequently, this gap between student expectations and the actual speed of library assistance results in frustration, underutilization of library resources, and diminished institutional satisfaction.

This persistent problem may be rooted in the lack of specific assessments utilizing standardized metrics like the responsiveness dimension of the SERVQUAL model. The responsiveness

dimension focuses explicitly on the willingness of employees to help users and provide prompt service, which is a critical determinant of user satisfaction. While several operational factors such as poor funding, inadequate training, and infrastructural deficits have been broadly discussed in existing literature, their specific impact on staff responsiveness remains largely unquantified in academic libraries. Therefore, a critical gap persists in empirically determining how library personnel's behavioural readiness and promptness influence overall service efficiency within tertiary institutions. Consequently, this study investigated staff readiness in meeting students' needs in academic libraries in Imo State using the responsiveness dimension of the SERVQUAL Model

Purpose of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. determine the current level of academic library staff willingness to assist students promptly in Imo State.
2. assess how effectively staff in academic libraries in Imo State handle student inquiries and complaints based on SERVQUAL responsiveness indicators.
3. examine the extent to which staff readiness matches student expectations for timely service delivery in these libraries.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the current level of academic library staff willingness to assist students promptly in Imo State?
2. How effectively do staff in academic libraries in Imo State handle student inquiries and complaints based on SERVQUAL responsiveness indicators?
3. To what extent does staff readiness match student expectations for timely service delivery in these libraries?

Review of Literature

Academic libraries serve as vital repositories of information and hubs for knowledge generation where the personnel plays an indispensable role in translating available resources into useful assets for researchers and learners. Regarding how staff show their readiness in meeting students' needs, Masinde, et al. (2025) state that library service quality relies directly on human intervention, making staff demeanor and readiness a critical indicator of organizational performance. In a similar study, Oden and Owolabi (2021) assert that

an active, and positive attitude from library workers transforms the library space from a quiet physical repository into an engaged environment capable of dynamic user support. Furthermore, Wang and Shieh (2023) add that when measuring institutional performance under the SERVQUAL framework, responsiveness acts as the fundamental bridge showing whether personnel are physically and behaviorally equipped to prioritize student assistance. To optimize this environment, digital integration and readiness among contemporary desk workers are mandatory traits required to effectively meet student informational requests in modern educational climates.

The issue of academic library staff willingness to assist students promptly requires immediate action to significantly reduce the psychological anxiety of students working under tight academic deadlines. Commenting on this, Tella, et al. (2023) suggest that prompt attention from service desks could promote a welcoming academic library ecosystem, which encourages recurring usage and increases overall resource utilization. Anyanwu and Okafor (2023) state that library personnel in tertiary institutions exhibit high responsiveness when approached by users but rarely initiate contact with students who appear lost or confused within the library environment. In a similar development, Mensah (2021) states that academic library staff demonstrate commendable efficiency in resolving technical and reference queries reactively, yet they consistently struggle to transition into proactive service models that anticipate user vulnerabilities. This discrepancy highlights that while library staff are capable and efficient when directly prompted, their reactive nature leaves a critical gap in support for anxious students who may be hesitant to ask for help under tight deadlines.

Library staff effectiveness in handling students' inquiries and complaints based on SERVQUAL responsiveness indicators has shown that conflict resolution and query management serve as defining tests for service-oriented departments. On this score, Ismayilov, et al. (2019) assert the systematic categorization of student complaints combined with proactive problem-solving workshops can elevate the standard of reference desk operations. Eze (2021) observed that library personnel in Southeastern Nigeria demonstrate strong interpersonal willingness and promptness in addressing initial user grievances, but face severe operational constraints in sustaining workforce presence when student traffic

surges. However, Anunobi (2023) argues that while university library workers exhibit high levels of frontline responsiveness and guidance, their overall service quality suffers from a lack of post-inquiry tracking mechanisms and poor communication regarding unresolved complaints. Consequently, there is a critical need for structural frameworks that translate initial frontline willingness into sustained, and systematically tracked inquiry management systems.

The extent to which staff readiness matches student expectations for timely service delivery in academic libraries acts as a critical gauge for identifying operational service quality gaps. In addressing this relationship, Akomolafe and Ogunsola (2026) state that substantial differences frequently persist between the idealized, fast-paced service delivery that digital-native students expect and the slower procedural workflows actually provided by under-trained library personnel. Chukwu and Iheanacho (2024), in their study, found that library personnel in South-Eastern Nigerian universities maintain a highly receptive and proactive posture toward satisfying the immediate informational requests of undergraduates. Amadi (2022) adds that professional dedication and psychological readiness among academic library staff often mitigate institutional bottlenecks, ensuring that prompt service remains a core component of student-centered library operations. Resolving these service delivery variations requires academic libraries to implement routine service audits and targeted professional training programmes. Therefore, prioritizing and expanding the responsiveness attributes defined by the SERVQUAL model, contemporary academic libraries can systematically align staff operational capacities with evolving students' demands, thereby securing the library's relevance as a primary center of learning.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 23,986 undergraduate students who are registered library users of academic libraries in Imo State. The sample size was 393 registered library users (undergraduate students) determined using Taro Yamane's statistical formula, while a proportionate sampling technique was employed to determine the proportionate figure for each of the institutions. At the end of the administration and collection, it was found that three hundred and sixty five (365) copies of the instrument were returned out

of the 393 copies administered to the respondents. This number was used for data analyses. A rating scale titled "Staff Readiness in Meeting Users' Information Needs Using the Responsiveness Dimension of the SERVQUAL Model scale (SRMUINRDSMS)" was used as instrument for data collection. Data obtained for the study were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Data Analyses

Research Question One: What is the current level of academic library staff willingness to assist students promptly in Imo State?

Table 1: Current level of academic library staff willingness to assist students promptly in Imo State **(N-365)**

S/N	Item Statements	VHL(%)	HL(%)	LL(%)	VLL(%)	$\bar{X}$	Remark
1.	Library staff readily suspend their ongoing tasks to attend to students the moment they approach the service desk	95 (26.0%)	150 (41.1%)	80 (21.9%)	40 (11.0%)	2.82	HL
2.	Library staff actively approach students who appear to be struggling or searching for materials to offer immediate help	60 (16.4%)	110 (30.1%)	135 (37.0%)	60 (16.4%)	2.47	LL
3.	Library staff provide swift guidance when students ask for help navigating electronic databases, institutional repositories, or the OPAC	140 (38.4%)	165 (45.2%)	45 (12.3%)	15 (4.1%)	3.18	VHL
4;	Library staff maintain a welcoming, enthusiastic, and helpful attitude when resolving urgent student inquiries	125 (34.2%)	170 (46.6%)	50 (13.7%)	20 (5.5%)	3.10	VHL
5.	When a requested resource is missing or difficult to find, library staff promptly	110 (30.1%)	145 (39.7%)	75 (20.5%)	35 (9.6%)	2.90	HL

look for alternatives or escalate the issue instead of turning the student away						
Grand Mean	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**2.89**	**HL**

Key: VHL = Very High Level, HL = High Level, LL = Low Level, VLL = Very Low LEVEL, $\bar{X}$ = Mean

The data presented in the table reveals the current level of willingness among academic library staff in Imo State to assist students promptly, based on the evaluations of 365 library users. Going by the overall grand mean of 2.89, library users generally perceive academic library staff as willing and responsive. The highest-rated area of willingness is item 3, where staff provide swift guidance when students require help navigating electronic databases, institutional repositories, or the Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC), yielding a high mean score of 3.18. This is closely followed by item 4, which shows that staff maintain a welcoming, enthusiastic, and helpful attitude when resolving urgent inquiries, scoring a mean of 3.10. Library users also agree that staff promptly look for alternatives or escalate issues when resources are missing, as shown by a mean score of 2.90 for item 5, and that staff readily suspend their ongoing tasks to attend to students at the service desk, with a mean score of 2.82 for item 1. However, item 2 received the lowest rating, with a mean score of 2.47, falling just below the baseline benchmark. This indicates that while library staff are highly efficient and pleasant when directly approached, they are less likely to proactively approach students who appear to be struggling or searching for materials on their own.

Research Question Two: How effectively do staff in academic libraries in Imo State handle student inquiries and complaints based on SERVQUAL responsiveness indicators?

Table 2: Library staff effectiveness in handling student inquiries and complaints based on SERVQUAL responsiveness indicators **(N = 365)**

S/N	Item Statements	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	$\bar{X}$	Remark
1	Library staff respond to my inquiries and resolve my complaints in a timely and prompt manner	81 (22.2%)	173 (47.4%)	75 (20.5%)	36 (9.9%)	2.82	Agree
2	Library staff demonstrate a clear willingness to assist me when I have questions or run into issues	124 (34.0%)	165 (45.2%)	57 (15.6%)	19 (5.2%)	3.08	Agree
3	Library staff are never too busy to respond to my requests or handle my complaints	61 (16.7%)	156 (42.7%)	91 (24.9%)	57 (15.6%)	2.61	Agree
4	Library staff give me clear, direct answers and provide precise guidance on where or how to resolve my issues	103 (28.2%)	177 (48.5%)	59 (16.2%)	26 (7.1%)	2.98	Agree
5	Library staff keep me informed about the status of my inquiry or complaint if it cannot be resolved immediately	51 (14.0%)	132 (36.2%)	107 (29.3%)	75 (20.5%)	2.44	Disagree
	Grand Mean					**2.79**	

Key: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, $\bar{X}$ = Mean

Data presentation in the table reveals varying degrees of academic library staff effectiveness across the five key SERVQUAL responsiveness indicators in Imo State. The data, as presented, indicate that library staff perform optimally in

demonstrating willingness to assist students, which recorded the highest mean score of 3.08, showing a strong positive disposition toward user engagement. Similarly, staff are highly effective in offering clear, direct answers and providing precise guidance to resolve issues, yielding a substantial mean score of 2.98. Promptness in resolving complaints and responding to inquiries also stands above the threshold with a mean score of 2.82, showing an acceptable level of agility in standard service delivery operations. Conversely, critical gaps emerge in long-term communication and staff availability during peak hours. Although the mean score of 2.61 indicates that staff are technically perceived as available and not "too busy" to handle complaints, a substantial number of respondents (148 users) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this sentiment, suggesting that service pressure occasionally diminishes staff availability. Most noticeably, the library staff fell short of the effectiveness benchmark on the final indicator, where keeping students informed about the status of unresolved inquiries yielded an ineffective mean score of 2.44.

Research Question Three: To what extent does staff readiness match student expectations for timely service delivery in academic libraries in Imo State?

Table 3: Extent of staff readiness in matching student expectations for timely service delivery in academic libraries in Imo State **(N=365)**

S/N	Item Statements	VHE(%)	HE(%)	LE(%)	VLE(%)	$\bar{X}$	Remarks
1	Staff are exceptionally prepared and immediately available to assist, completely meeting or exceeding student expectations for quick service.	81 (22.2%)	164 (44.9%)	86 (23.6%)	34 (9.3%)	2.80	HE
2	Staff are well-prepared and prompt in their response, meeting student expectations with minimal or negligible	100 (27.4%)	166 (45.5%)	56 (15.3%)	43 (11.8%)	2.88	HE

	delays.						
3	Staff are somewhat prepared, meeting basic student expectations, but occasional delays or minor un-readiness occur.	114 (31.2%)	144 (39.5%)	69 (18.9%)	38 (10.4%)	2.92	HE
4	Staff are frequently unprepared or slow to respond, rarely meeting student expectations for timely service.	40 (11.0%)	73 (20.0%)	156 (42.7%)	96 (26.3%)	2.16	LE
5	Staff are completely unprepared or unavailable, consistently failing to meet student expectations for timely service.	16 (4.4%)	61 (16.7%)	140 (38.4%)	148 (40.5%)	1.85	VLE
	Grand Mean					**2.52**	

Show Code

Key: VHE = Very High Extent, HE = High Extent, LE = Low Extent, VLE = Very Low Extent, $\bar{X}$ = Mean

The table presents the data regarding the extent of staff readiness in matching student expectations for timely service delivery in academic libraries in Imo State. The analysis reveals that the positive indicators of staff readiness recorded mean scores above the baseline, with item 3, focusing on staff being somewhat prepared despite minor un-readiness, yielding the highest individual mean score of 2.92, followed closely by item 2 with a mean score of 2.88, and item 1 with a mean score of 2.80. Conversely, the negatively framed statements regarding frequent unpreparedness (item 4) and total unavailability (item 5) were rejected by the

respondents, yielding low mean scores of 2.16 and 1.85 respectively, which indicate that students generally disagree with claims of chronic staff deficiency. Ultimately, the grand mean score of 2.52 falls just above the 2.50 acceptance threshold, demonstrating that library staff in the studied institutions display a positive and acceptable extent of readiness in fulfilling student expectations for timely academic library service delivery.

Discussion of Findings

The result of the analysis on the current level of academic library staff willingness to assist students promptly revealed that they are generally perceived as willing and responsive, indicating high efficiency in reactive and technical assistance but fail to proactively approach struggling students. It was therefore deduced from this finding that while library personnel excel at responding to direct user requests and managing technical inquiries, an operational gap exists in initiating assistance for students who may be hesitant to ask for help. This finding could be true because traditional library training heavily emphasizes service delivery upon request and technical workflow efficiency, which often inadvertently fosters a reactive service culture rather than a proactive, and student-centered engagement strategy. This finding is line with the finding by Anyanwu and Okafor (2023) that library personnel in tertiary institutions exhibit high responsiveness when approached by users but rarely initiate contact with students who appear lost or confused within the library environment. Similarly, Mensah (2021) states that academic library staff demonstrate commendable efficiency in resolving technical and reference queries reactively, yet they consistently struggle to transition into proactive service models that anticipate user vulnerabilities.

The result of data analysis indicates that staff in academic libraries in Imo State are highly effective at providing immediate assistance, clear guidance, and prompt complaint resolution, while they fall short in maintaining staff availability during peak hours and keeping students updated on unresolved inquiries. This pattern of service delivery is true in the sense that localized reference services and routine face-to-face interactions allow personnel to deploy immediate communication skills and clear directions to resolve straightforward student grievances on the spot, whereas structural challenges such as administrative understaffing, rigid shift rosters during peak

operational hours, and a lack of formalized tracking or digital ticketing systems prevent staff from systematically monitoring and reporting back on pending, long-term inquiries. The observation in this study agrees with the finding by Eze (2021) that library personnel in Southeastern Nigeria demonstrate strong interpersonal willingness and promptness in addressing initial user grievances, but face severe operational constraints in sustaining workforce presence when student traffic surges. Similarly, Anunobi (2023) observed that while university library workers exhibit high levels of frontline responsiveness and guidance, their overall service quality suffers from a lack of post-inquiry tracking mechanisms and poor communication regarding unresolved complaints.

The data analyses on the extent of staff readiness in matching student expectations for timely service delivery in academic libraries in Imo State indicate that the library staff demonstrate an acceptable and positive extent of readiness in meeting the student expectations. It was therefore inferred from this finding that, while administrative and resource challenges may exist within the institutions, the human library personnel are adequately prepared, competent, and willing to provide prompt information services to library users. This finding shows that the success of library service delivery may rely heavily on the attitude and responsiveness of its workforce, meaning that a willing and service-oriented staff can bridge operational gaps and significantly enhance the academic experiences of students. This finding is in tandem with the finding by Chukwu and Iheanacho (2024) that library personnel in South-Eastern Nigerian universities maintain a highly receptive and proactive posture toward satisfying the immediate informational requests of undergraduates. Along the same lines, Amadi (2022) states that professional dedication and psychological readiness among academic library staff often mitigate institutional bottlenecks, ensuring that prompt service remains a core component of student-centered library operations.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that staff in academic libraries in Imo State demonstrate an acceptable and positive overall extent of readiness in meeting student expectations, characterized by high efficiency in providing immediate assistance, clear guidance, and prompt complaint resolution.

However, while staff are widely perceived as willing and responsive when directly approached, this efficiency remains largely reactive rather than proactive, alongside critical operational gaps in maintaining adequate availability during peak hours and updating students on unresolved inquiries.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are made:

1. Academic library management should implement a proactive, and student-centered outreach strategy by training staff in mobile reference and active engagement techniques.
2. Academic libraries in Imo State should implement a communication-focused service model that optimizes peak-hour staffing and automates inquiry tracking to enhance service efficiency, reduce patron wait times, and improve overall satisfaction through data-driven academic support.
3. Academic libraries in Imo State should leverage the current staff readiness to establish a continuous professional development programme that aligns the library services with evolving digital and research needs of the students.

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