

# Customer-Centric Service Provision in Academic Libraries in Universities: Systematic Literature Review

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**How to cite this paper:** Mayende, C., Awuor, F. M., & Namande, B. (2021). Customer-Centric Service Provision in Academic Libraries in Universities: Systematic Literature Review. *Technology and Investment*, 12, 217-239.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ti.2021.124013>

**Received:** September 20, 2021

**Accepted:** November 9, 2021

**Published:** November 12, 2021

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## Abstract

A customer-centered organization ensures that the needs of clients are at the focal point of all services offered in the organization and that the customer gets the best customer experience throughout the service. Research has shown that service institutions are deterred from offering customer-centric services due to issues relating to organizational culture, structure, processes, and financial metrics. This study explores strategies and mechanisms to support academic libraries towards achieving customer-centric service provision. In this regard, this study identifies three parameters and explores their role in delivering customer-centeredness in academic libraries, namely, access to library services, staff responsiveness and organizational support. Findings of this study show that library customers wish for a relevant library collection, an available service, unlimited information access, spacious reading area, a conducive study environment, sufficient library equipment and supportive staff.

## Keywords

Customer-Centric Services, Access to Library Services, Staff Responsiveness, Organizational Support, Customer Satisfaction

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## 1. Background to the Study

Academic libraries are established to provide relevant information to their clients to support learning, teaching and research functions of the universities in which the libraries are established. Pradhan and Mohanty (2016) noted that academic libraries are established to serve the University fraternity in provision, dissemination and preservation of knowledge to empower the university in car-

rying out its core activities of teaching, learning, publishing, research and community service. The purpose of a customer-centric library service is to offer the library customer quality service and to empower and sustain the library operations. The organizations' operations, activities and philosophy are focused on the client in a client-centric organization and therefore service organizations should indeed confirm that the client is the reason why the organization exists (Sudarshan, 2015).

Globally, Customer-Centric Service (CCS) research has shown that there are unexplored possibilities for customer involvement in library service innovations (Scupola & Nicolajsen, 2010). Shah, Rust, Parasuraman, Staelin and Day (2006) contend that institutions are deterred from offering customer-centric services due to issues relating to organizational culture, structure, processes, and financial metrics. In Georgia, for example, the academic library has a challenge to prove how information resources and services are acquired and disseminated so as to positively impact on accreditation of academic programs, and research (Li, 2017).

In Ukraine, University education has been challenged due to development of Information Technology and massive use of internet which have brought about emergence of many online platforms that offer online degrees. User needs, expectations and experience can be addressed by a client-centered library to support the university mission (Voropai, 2018). The perspective of customer value helps librarians to improve customer experience hence protecting customers from information rivals like search engines, online databases, internet service provision, etc. Weinstein and Mcfarlane (2016) contend that the best library service today is not sufficient. They argue that client-driven marketing together with the most recent innovations can add to library perceived worth. The customer should be a source, a co-creator and a user (Scupola & Nicolajsen, 2010).

Regarding customer centricity in the banking sector in Africa, research has shown that though many banks have a well-established network and banking infrastructure, for a bank to grow and thrive, its service providers must be aligned adequately with the expectations of the customers (Bick, Abratt, & Möller, 2010). This applies to service-oriented organizations like the library. The academic library should align its services with users' expectations in order to deliver relevant services.

A study done in Tanzania regarding users' satisfaction with library services by Bea, Musabila and Deogratus (2018) found that many information provision bureaus emerged as a result of information explosion giving competition to the library as an information hub which took away the attention of library users hence reducing library usage. If users are able to get a satisfying information service elsewhere, they will not consider visiting the academic library, and if the library does not offer the services that it was established to offer then it may not be of importance to the university. Therefore this calls for the academic library to be more innovative than other information-providing bureaus so that it can

win the attention of its clients and hence stay relevant.

Muema Kavulya (2004) contend that provision of library services in Kenyan public universities is challenged by extreme inadequacy of resources; less funding, limited information resources, limited equipment and staff. Ouda-Onyango & Minishi-Majanja (2020) in their study at Moi University regarding customer care services in MU library noted that although staff at MU library were very friendly and willing to assist library users, their attitude towards library users was wanting and that the library users information needs were hardly met. The research indicated that there is a need to develop a customer-oriented service to ensure that user needs are effectively met.

According to Maina, Mogaka, Omallah and Nyanyu (2017) an academic library is a dynamic social organization and a knowledge hub responsible for the preservation and use of information by University customers hence justifying need for its existence. This, therefore, means that for the academic library to purport to do well, it should work hard to ensure that users' information needs are adequately met. A customer-oriented service will ensure that individual user's information needs are met including faculty members' information needs. Many innovations in the information world, however, have given the academic library users various platforms to choose from whenever they want to access information and they can access any information at the comfort of their houses and offices giving the library the challenge to scramble for customers hence prove its relevance to the University.

Customer centricity is the art of creating and maintaining the best customer relationship to offer the best customer service as the organization also gets value from the service. A customer-centric library will ensure users get the service they want satisfactorily and this will give the library a competitive advantage (Hemel & Rademakers, 2016).

This paper suggests that for the academic library to meet the diverse user information needs, it has to be customer-centric and that library staff should ensure that initial user training of library users is done to incorporate training on access to library resources remotely so as users can know how to seek and find information independently on-demand, regardless of their location. Staff should often engage users to get the views of users regarding the offered or desired service. Lastly, customer satisfaction should be done periodically through carrying out user surveys in order to measure the service performance and to identify gaps in the service to note areas that need improvement so as to devise a plan of action to seal the gaps. Feedback should be sought from the users of the library service and based on the feedback, adjustments or introduction of service can be planned to make the library service effective.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 defines the statement of the problem and the research questions; Section 3 defines and discusses the concept of customer centeredness in libraries while Section 4 demonstrates the role of access to library resources in realizing customer centeredness. Effect of

staff responsiveness on customer-centric service delivery in libraries and role of organizational support in customer centric service are presented in Sections 5 and 6 respectively. Section 7 discusses the customer satisfaction in relation to customer centric services provision in academic libraries. Discussion and conclusion are presented in Section 8.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Many service-oriented institutions, which the Library is part of, are deterred from offering customer-centric services due to issues relating to organizational culture, structure, processes, and financial matters. The culture of the organization, its structure and financial metrics are factors that affect service delivery. With widespread use of web advancements and use of handheld gadgets, libraries are struggling with the changing patterns of library users and their expectations and as [Weinstein and Mcfarlane \(2016\)](#) note; the best library service today is not sufficient. The library clients have many options of getting the information they need, other than the library. They can find information at any time at the comfort of their homes and offices without restrictions. This is likely to make the academic library lose its clients and even cause library staff to be jobless.

There are many efforts that the academic library today does to remain competitive in the digital environment. Among the efforts in automating library functions like acquisitions, cataloguing and circulation, these efforts may not be enough to give the library an advantage over other information providing and interactive platforms like online collaborative applications such as Flowdock which is both a group and private chat platform, cloud computing to store, manage and process data and even social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and others. The techno-savvy information users, who are apparently the academic library users, want to get information, share and contribute in a convenient way which the above information engines can provide and this gives a big challenge to the library to ensure it is competitive in information provision.

To this end, this study explores the strategies and mechanisms to support academic libraries toward achieving customer-centric service provision. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the role of access to library services on customer-centric service provision in the academic libraries in universities?
- 2) How does staff responsiveness affect customer-centric service provision in the academic libraries in universities?
- 3) What is the role of organizational support in ensuring customer-centric service provision in the academic libraries in universities?

## 3. Customer Centeredness in Libraries

Customer-centered services are services provided to the customer according to the customer's demands. According to [Neelameghan \(2008\)](#) customer-centered

service is the essential principle of management of the library and information service. The purpose of a customer-centric library service is to offer the library customers quality services and to empower and sustain the library operations. The organizations' operations, activities and philosophy are focused on the client in a client-centric organization and therefore service organizations should indeed confirm that the client is the reason why the organization exists (Sudarsan, 2015).

Hemel and Rademakers (2016) define customer centricity as the basis for the process of value creation in an organization; it is the ability to establish and strengthen unique customer relationships and ensures that in as much as the customer benefits because of his needs being met effectively, the organization to benefits because it gains profit in a unique way. Customer centricity is the art of creating and maintaining the best customer relationships in an effort to offer the customer the best service as the organization also gets value from the service. A customer-centric library will ensure users get the service they want satisfactorily and this will give the library a competitive advantage. Fader and Tom (2018) argue that customer centricity involves the process of estimating anticipated long term profits from service and they also propose the need for a system to manage client relationships to oversee and manage both current and future customers through use of available information and maximization of the limited resources. Voropai (2018) notes that user's information needs, expectations and experiences can be addressed by a client-centered library to support the university mission.

For an academic library to realize improved library service usage then it should be customer-centered. Basak and Bandyopadhyay (2016) note that frequency of use of the library, desire to visit and use the library service, time spent in the library, sufficiency of information resources, right information formats, currency of information resources are determined by a client-centered service. This therefore means that the library customer should be given reason to use the library service by ensuring that their information needs are met in a timely, efficient and effective manner and in a conducive environment. The information resources should therefore be available, enough, up-to-date, and in the desired format. Since user information needs are unique, the librarian should be able to device a way of identifying individual users' information needs so as to offer the preferred information service or product. Ngian (2011) argued that with the widespread use of web advancements and use of handheld gadgets, libraries are struggling with the changing patterns of library users and their expectations and this calls for a customer-centered service for the academic library to be able to meet the information needs of individual users satisfactorily.

In their report of findings of a user-centric approach for Personalized Service Provision in Pervasive Environments, Yazidi et al. (2011) observed that in order to realize a more diversified service category matching, a wider range of pieces of contextual information like where, when, and what should be integrated and not

only the location. This implies that the librarian should know the location of the user, how prompt the information is needed and what information and in which desired or appropriate format. [Macdonald \(2020\)](#) argues that a customer-centric service requires the leadership of the library service to be customer-focused, for instance, the customer input should be sought during acquisition process to ensure relevance in the collection. The library service providers should well understand their clients. They should seek to know the customer information needs, their information-seeking behavior, and library usage patterns, they should also know the appropriate times when the clients want to use the library and the information delivery formats appropriate to every user.

#### **4. Role of Access to Library Resources in Realizing Customer Centeredness**

Location of the library building, its space, physical environment and its security will determine its access and eventual usage. [Bonacchi and Perego \(2011\)](#) argue that an ideal customer-centric organization has all its functional services and activities integrated and aligned to achieve superior customer value. This will provide the library customer with a one stop shop where they can seek for information to find, share and even publish. Customer-centric organizations regard customer knowledge as a very valuable asset and they see the need for information sharing regarding customers.

Libraries are progressively adopting user-centered design ways to deal with the advancement of library services to support their clients since research has shown that traditional ways of library management and strategy execution might not give the academic library a competitive advantage in the ever-changing technological world where library users have very many options at their disposal to choose from with regard to information provision and management. The academic library serves the techno-savvy clients whose information needs change with technological developments and advancement defined by the communication speed brought about by available and affordable internet ([Kautonen & Nieminen, 2018](#)). It, therefore, calls for the academic library to devise new and modern ways to serve its clients.

The National University of Singapore (NUS) Library Service developed four pillars of excellence thus staff excellence, collection excellence, service excellence and operational excellence to ensure that library clients have the best experience of the service in the library and this has caused the NUS Library to be ranked among the best academic libraries in the world ([Lee, Kan, & Foo, 2012](#)). With service excellence, the university will ensure that the library is established in an accessible place by all users and provide for means to facilitate the access by persons living with disabilities (PWDs). The information resources and services should also be accessible regardless of the format of the resources and the distance of the user from the institution. The librarian should therefore determine user information needs before delivering the information.

#### 4.1. Library Building

Martin and Sheehan (2018) noted that “Library buildings are routinely re-imagined, remodeled or built new to meet the changing needs of their community in the always-evolving digital age of technology” user-centered design of the library should therefore be widely supported. Sudarshan (2015) argues that the internet and web technologies are vital in the design of a user-centric library. He explains that since the library today exists in a technological era that is changing day by day, library services should be delivered to meet the user requirements in an efficient and effective manner.

(Asemi et al., 2010) noted that customers of the library were not satisfied with the library building as their expectations of an ideal library building were not met, however; asked about information control, users indicated that they were satisfied but also wanted courteous members of staff other than creating independence for library usage. The academic library should be spacious enough to accommodate users and to provide space for library operations like cataloguing of acquired books, binding, photocopying among others. IFLA guidelines on the ideal library building indicate that the library must have a set-aside space for staff work and also a conference for meetings. Depending on the library establishment, a perfect design should be at the purpose of assembly of the library’s books/ documents, processing general organization zones to facilitate proper coordination of work in the academic library. In as much as library services are in direct contact with the library client, other services are not felt at all by these users, they are performed behind the scene e.g. information preservation, acquisition and library collaborations. Maina et al. (2017) noted that the library building should be spacious enough for the accommodation of library staff, other user publics, and library information resources. The University where the academic library is established should provide enough funding to ensure that space of the library building is sufficient to accommodate information resources and provide enough reading space for clients and other library operations that contribute to customer satisfaction. Therefore an ideal library should provide enough space for the accommodation of all library processes.

Echem & Udo-Anyanwu (2018) note that there is a positive and significant relationship between the library environment and students’ use of the library. The library building should be free of noise, well-lit and clean in order to create a good environment conducive for study. Students will frequently visit to use the library when the environment is clean and free from unnecessary noise.

#### 4.2. Information Services and Products

According to Sudarshan (2015) user needs should be factored in if a client-centered library is to be designed. The users’ conduct, attitude, patterns of use of the service and levels of satisfaction should be known by the librarian. Basak and Bandyopadhyay (2016) argue that information should be easy to obtain and access. Information kept in a book of some kind is only available and easy to

access if one has the book at hand. Suppose the physical book isn't available for perusal, then the digital book should be available to the user. This is made possible through the advent of technology. It is now easy to scan a book and convert it into a soft copy to ensure that people can access the same regardless of the distance. Library users will be academically empowered if the library staff is committed to availing themselves of the needed library services which can be easily accessible by users on-demand (Olatunji Ajegbomogun & Olubukola Diyaolu, 2018). On the other hand, Sudarshan (2015) argues that any document collection that is procured by libraries has to be in the interest of the user and needs to be put to use. Therefore, the library acquisition policies should be formulated and the collections acquired and organized accordingly, keeping in view the users' information needs.

Bhatti (2013) argues that the relevance of the library collection, client-driven library service and library staffs' supportive attitude influences the satisfaction levels of library clients and this leads to successful library services. In the current world where developments occur more often, the currency of information is very important. In cases where the timeliness of the information can determine its usefulness, the currency must be observed when considering stock information resources. The date of publication of the material must be examined when placing an order of an information resource. In fact, all information resources should be current unless the subject matter is historic. The currency also applies to information found on the web.

The academic library should deliver on its promises regarding service delivery, provision of needed information and services and solving client problems in an effective manner. Scholarly research should be free of any biases and the author of any given literary work should be able to provide more than one point of view and his/her work should be free from the use of inflammatory language. The information resource secured by the academic library should be specific to address the subject which it is intended to address. Accuracy is paramount when dealing with topics in research concerning events in the real world. Information must be based on observations, measurements, analyses, interpretations and conclusions. Publication dates and place of publication should be well stated and information should be verifiable too.

Information resources should be available; availability involves acquisition and offering means through which library customers can get needed information. This is possible through availability of information retrieval tools to help users to retrieve relevant information to satisfy their information needs. Information availability ensures that every library client gets an information resource which can satisfy his/her information demand. Nwachukwu, Abdulsalami and Paulina (2014) note that the academic library offers options for information access to her clients through book loans. Through book loans, users are able to take library books for use away from the library. The circulation desk in the library is mandated to loan books and other information resources to clients and to respond to questions regarding location and use of all library materials, assis-



tance with academic research, and any other library-related issues can be addressed at the issue desk and through the library help desk. Through remote access, library clients can access the available online information resources off-campus.

Retrieval of information should be made easy by availing necessary tools for information retrieval. [Echem & Udo-Anyanwu \(2018\)](#) note that there is a very strong and positive relationship between available information retrieval tools and the library environment with students' use of the library. Through current awareness services (CAS) users are notified of new acquisitions in the library such as new books and new journal articles. Also included are news on meetings, training courses and other events of interest to users.

Selective dissemination of information (SDI) is another way through which users can access information. This is a more personalized current awareness service that alerts users on the latest publications in their specified field(s) of interest which are generated from pre-defined user profiles. According to [Kautonen and Nieminen \(2018\)](#) current awareness service—CAS is an announcement strategy usually in a documentary form which aims at making clients aware of the current literature in their subject of orientation while SDI-Selective dissemination of information service is a unique information service offered in academic libraries to satisfy the current as well as exhaustive approaches of individual-specific information needs of users. User orientation and initial user training is another strategy that the academic library uses to make users aware of the library services.

Users can also get information through Photocopying, printing and scanning information materials like book chapters and revision notes. The library should offer photocopying services to enable users who don't have user IDs to get copies of information resources since they are not legible borrowers. Lastly, users can access information resources through remote access services. The academic library provides remote access services to enable those off-campus users to access electronic information resources at the comfort of their houses and offices without getting to access the library building and this bridges the distance gap between library clients and the academic library.

Information resources should also be adequate. It would be reasonable to consider the number of users when determining the quantity of information materials to purchase. Quantity of information materials especially physical materials should be purchased with regards to the number of users so that not many users struggle to access few available copies of books and or bound journals since it might increase the wear and tear factor of the books and bound journals. According to ISO 9001 Requirements Clause 7.1 concerning information resources, the library should have adequate resources in order to ensure product conformity and to satisfy customer requirements like having adequate personnel, materials and equipment to ensure timely production and delivery of products and services. Ability of a library's resources to satisfy its client information needs will yield to client satisfaction for its services.

### 4.3. Information Formats and Coverage

Format is the specific way in which information is organized, packaged, and distributed for library patrons to use. Users will be inspired when the high quality authoritative and unique information materials and services are easily found in a variety of workflows like books, magazine articles, and scholarly journal articles.

Libraries are now required to change to virtual libraries and to maintain frequent contact with users. The reference service, help desk, and circulation services should all be transformed into virtual services to enable users to connect with the library resources, share their opinions and ideas, place literature search requests, and hence receive library services remotely (Lynn Silipigni et al., 2015). Academic libraries should acquire books alongside electronic resources to solve the users' information needs. E resources can also be shared among the many users of the library. Library users are encouraged to provide feedback for the services that they receive. This can be through emailing compliments and or complaints giving suggestions through suggestion boxes and most importantly through frequent customer surveys. It is critical for the academic library to have an e-content and improved information access. Some of the information formats include; books, e-books, journals, technical reports, government publications, standards, conference proceedings, theses and dissertations, almanacs and newspapers.

In as much as the internet has created new ways for accessing literature, it has also proven to be a competitor to the library service, the library should therefore work hard to achieve a competitive advantage through manipulating the library services to be able to satisfy the needs of users (Okocha, 2017).

Some of the IT-enabled services that help the libraries in the present times according to Sudarshan (2015) in developing contacts with the users and delivering instant information services to the users include; Document Delivery Services (Digital/e-Resources) Sharing of Consortia based resources, Online Database Search and Retrieval service, E-Mail, Blogs and Wikis, Social Networks, Teleconferences/Videoconferences/Webinars, BBS (Bulletin Board Service)/Current Awareness Services, OPACs and Library Websites.

### 4.4. Security of Users and Resources

Omoosejimi, Ijiekhuamhen and Ojeme (2015) note that Librarians have an obligation to come up with good ways to secure the University library together with the library stock and users. Electronic security frameworks should be installed in the library to ensure maximum security. Libraries have had security measures in place to guard the library against theft for instance hiring security guards to keep surveillance so that library materials cannot be stolen, however, even with the security guards manning the entrance and exit, library materials have been stolen! A system should be put in place too to control access to the library's electronic resources. Fire and smoke detectors should be installed to detect any smoke or fire so that the risk can be combated. Lightning arrestors

should be installed to protect the library from risk that comes with lightning.

## 5. Effect of Staff Responsiveness on Customer Centric Service Delivery in Libraries

The researcher purposed to find answers to how staff responsiveness can affect customer-centric services in the academic library. According to Neelameghan (2008) the librarian who can organize, integrate, and coordinate every other single library asset with the aim of serving clients satisfactorily is a very vital asset to that particular library. The librarian should be able to assess, select, and adjust new systems and apparatus for knowledge creation and sharing to accomplish the essential objective of the library and information service. Haddow and Mamtora (2017) there are three major contributors to research support. They include services, staff and resources. Kautonen et al. note that if the library stocks relevant library resources, establishes relevant library services and hires trained and supportive library staff, the research output of the university will be fully supported. Regardless of how independent a library client supposes he is, there are times when they would require some assistance. In that case, if the information professional is available to offer an effective service, the client will definitely be happy and will often return for consultation. Such a satisfied client will always be an advocate of the library. The library staff therefore should be at the service of the library client. What therefore this means is that the researchers and library users will get the information that they seek. It is good to appreciate the fact that user needs are diverse, this therefore means that information provision should be diverse to meet the diverse user needs.

Hernon, Danuta and Ellen (1999) argue that staff should set goals and objectives and learn to set priorities right regarding crucial services demanded by library users and that management should put in place a mechanism to help identify, recognize and reward an excellent staff member. In his article regarding the design of a user-centric library service system & services in the changing IT era, Sudarshan (2015) suggests that information professionals should change the philosophy of the library from Institution centered to client-centered in order to maintain the relevance of the library. He notes that it is important to focus all library operations and services on the client with the aim of fulfilling their information needs. In as much as some library functions concern users directly like information literacy, user orientation, SDI, CAS, book lending and e-resources, other functions don't directly involve users like cataloguing of new books, procurement procedures, engagement of staff/human resources and budgeting. Both direct and indirect services affect the library user in one way or the other. In as much as cataloguing function doesn't directly affect the user, the librarian has the obligation of classifying and cataloguing books to place them in their correct places on the shelves to facilitate fast retrieval of the same hence saving the time of the user during the retrieval process (Bonacchi & Perego, 2011). Lastly, feedback should be sought from clients in order to get the customer say

concerning the offered services; this will help the librarian to know where to improve and how to improve, for the best service delivery.

### **5.1. Empathy and Customer Advocacy**

Bonacchi and Perego (2011) note that in the customer-centric approach, the employees are the customers' advocates and profitability is through customer loyalty and that satisfied customers are advocates of other customers. The service providers should be courteous to serve their clients with a smile all the time. Under normal circumstances, a satisfied customer will always tell another customer regarding the satisfying service and in fact, refer them to the satisfying service provider. This will hence add usage of the library service through customers, who will tell a friend and the friend to tell another friend! Library clients are likely to make mistakes while in the library, for instance, talk on mobile when they are forbidden to!!! The librarian does not have to shout at the client, instead talk to the client with respect as they warn the client why it is wrong to pick calls in the library. Instead of confiscating the customer's phone as the library rule may be, the librarian would request the customer for a chat after the customer finishes their business in the library; there, then the librarian would explain to the customer the need to mute their phones while in the library. There are times when library customers fail to return borrowed library materials on time. The librarian needs to know from the customer why they failed to get back library books on time before penalizing the customer since they might have been sick during the return time. Lastly library operations, policies, laws and regulations should be formulated with users in mind if possible library users should be involved when formulating the laws and regulations so that the users don't feel as if the laws imposed on them are too harsh and difficult on them.

Libraries have an obligation to manage information, adapt to new desires of customers, employ skilled, highly educated staff, leverage technology, new media & social networking; and outthink their direct and indirect competitors (Weinstein & Mcfarlane, 2016).

### **5.2. Staff Public Relation and Assurance**

Library staff should have excellent public relations to handle all client requests regardless of the conduct of the clients. Proper communication is encouraged so as no misunderstanding between the organization and the clients especially when needed services are not well communicated doesn't arise. It's good for library customers to comprehend why there may be delays in service or in case of any felt de-service to them so that they may be able to understand why there is the de-service. Communication is important as it keeps clients updated regarding services offered, services unavailable and any new services or products introduced. The University library needs to promote and market its library services to its user publics in order to attract the customer's attention also employ ICT capabilities to inform users regarding services offered by the library. In their

mandate to provide information to users effectively, the information professional should apply public relations insights (Nwezeh, 2010).

### 5.3. Professionalism

The vital asset of a library of any kind is the service professional who can organize, connect, and coordinate every single other asset to serve clients. Staff of the academic library should have knowledge to carry out library operations and therefore trained and professional staff should be hired to provide services of the library (Neelameghan, 2008). Trainers in the field of education and library science should appreciate the option to assess new thoughts, techniques and innovations in an attempt to revise the curriculum for library and information science which may be necessary for today's digital age and the future. The librarian today has the challenge to meet information needs of library customers amidst many competing sources of information.

Lynn Silipigni et al. (2015) note that Library staff needs to understand the library customers' pain and their frustrations. In order to identify the information needs of the users and information-seeking behavior, libraries conduct user surveys regularly and obtain feedback on the library services and products for their improvement. Hakala and Nygrén (2010) focus on the significance of listening to clients at the academic library and the need to move from a library-based service viewpoint to a client-based service perspective. Their study was conducted in the academic libraries in Finland and indicated that libraries have up to this point, based their activities and improvement basically on conventional strategies and library-based perspectives. The library staff should therefore have good listening skills and should listen to their users if they have to serve them the same way they serve their parent organizations.

According to Omekwu (2003) librarians need to use their professional training and experience to proactively deliver services in an environment of change and reforms. Staff may be retrained to be equipped with knowledge concerning customer service in order to give the customer the best experience in the library in their quest to seek information so however irritating the library client may be, professional etiquette demand that the staff member does not argue with the library client even when the client is rude to them. I agree with Tella et al. (2007) that if library staff is equitably paid then they are bound to have a positive attitude towards their work and will hence help in attaining the library goals. If only university management could understand the motivators of their subordinates, they could assess and amend their workload in order to compensate their staff well.

According to Lee et al. (2012) in order to acquire excellent staff, excellent collection, provide excellent service and have excellent procedures, the librarian will adopt some strategies like hiring and retaining high performing innovative staff, developing timely and relevant resources and services, enhancing collection retrieval tools, conduct literacy programs, improve and promote library resources and services, collaborate with teaching faculty and continually improve on infra-

structure.

#### 5.4. Communication Skills

A library with a well-trained manager who has good communication skills will impact the conduct of his subordinates in light of the fact that he is likely to determine the response of his subordinates. Poor correspondence may result in insubordination and resistance by subordinates. Academic library staff should have knowledge of who the library clients are and what their information needs are. They should be courteous and have the ability to convey trust and confidence to library clients.

[Sudarshan \(2015\)](#) emphasizes that the information professional should make a commitment to provide user-centric services with the intention of empowering users and sustenance the library. Staff should learn to package and repackage library services effectively and to market them to clients in order to make the services appealing and more useful to the clients. This would save users' efforts of trying to leave one interface to the other in the search for relevant user information. Information packaging and repackaging together with the information marketing aspect of the service dictates that the librarian has effective communication skills. Librarians should work with both internal and external systems in order to ensure they deliver relevant information to clients as they observe the rule of law.

#### 6. Organizational Support and Customer Centric Service

[Shah, Rust, Parasuraman, Staelin and Day \(2006\)](#) argue that the idea of client-centricity and its advantages has been talked about for over 50 years, however, many service-oriented organizations are yet to completely adjust to the client-driven service due to issues related to the culture of the organization, its structure and money matters. They suggested that client-centered services should be directed by firm organizational leadership, realignment of the organization, support of systems and procedures, and improved budgetary allocations. University management is supposed to scale up IT support for the library by providing needed IT infrastructure for the university library. [Jahangir and Muhammad \(2019\)](#) note that information and communication technologies (ICTs) are being applied in the academic library to provide quality services to its clientele. They suggested that library functions like; acquisition, processing, Catalogues/OPAC, serials control, user management, interlibrary loans-ILL, circulation, reference and modules on report generation should be placed in one interactive system with both staff and users graphical user interfaces (GUIs). [Shah, Rust, Parasuraman, Staelin and Day \(2006\)](#) note that strong leadership commitment, organizational realignment, systems and process support, and revised financial metrics are solutions to hindrances to customer-centric services. Library management and university management should therefore not be a hindrance to the customer-centric service in the academic library.

### 6.1. Training and Retraining of Staff

An inadequately trained staff member risks giving the customer wrong information and will even take a long time to help the client. Investing in employee training and retraining will help in making clients happy and satisfied. Staff can be trained in a number of varied ways namely job training, understudy method, role play and off-job training (Neelameghan, 2008). Tella et al. (2007) note that commitment and satisfaction of library staff in academic institutions are influenced by their level of motivation. Alongside perception, character, staff attitude towards work and work environment, and learning, inspiration is a very significant piece to help define character and behavior of staff.

According to Lee et al. (2012) in order to support the strategic objectives and strengthen the library processes, the department of human resources needs to plan for five activities, namely; staff deployment, staff engagement, staff training & retraining, staff satisfaction and staff recognition. Proper deployment of staff should be done to encourage staff performance through recognition of well-performing staff, the establishment of staff training and development, ensuring proper staff engagement and commitment and lastly ensure staff wellbeing and satisfaction. Library staff should often be retrained to improve on their performance in order to satisfy the information need of users that is always changing (Scupola & Nicolajsen, 2010).

### 6.2. Budgeting

Basak and Bandyopadhyay (2016) argue that frequency of use of the library and improved time spent in the library by patrons are motivated by adequate information assets, preferred information formats and up-to-date available information sources. All are informed by adequate funding. The University where the academic library is established should provide adequate funding to ensure that the space of the library building is sufficient to accommodate information resources and to provide enough reading space for clients and other library operations that contribute to customer satisfaction. The university should always purpose to support library budget towards the acquisition of needed information materials, training and retraining of staff through seminars and workshops and hiring of trained staff to add on the profitability of the library.

### 6.3. Information Technology Support

Kumah (2015) notes that often, post-graduate students opt to use online information sources for their academic and research work. The university should therefore ensure that Information Technology is well supported so that the clients can access online resources without challenges. In today's information age, it is important for the academic library to have some presence online on the university web page. This will absolutely improve visibility and keep the public up to date with happenings at the library. The academic library can be active electronically without necessarily employing an expensive and complicated strategy. The

library can use communication channels like Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn to improve visibility on the university web page.

The academic library can also create its own library website to frequently maintain and update (Jahangir & Muhammad, 2019). Dahibhate, Patil, Dhawle and Mugde (2009) note that Information and web technologies can be employed to provide an effective user-centric service; through user induction, training users via multimedia tools and provision of assisted learning to users, self-ordering of documents through virtual private networks (VPN) and electronic publications and FAQ service. The University, therefore, needs to support the library by providing needed infrastructure and a conducive environment for the library staff to discharge their duty of information service. Some of the IT-enabled services that the University management can help the library to establish include; sharing of consortia based resources, online database subscriptions, Internet connectivity to facilitate e-mail service, Blogs & Wikis, social networks like Facebook and LinkedIn, teleconferences/videoconferences, BBS (Bulletin Board Service)/Current Awareness Services, Library OPACs and library websites.

#### **6.4. Staffing and Staff Welfare**

Staffing involves functions like planning for human resources, recruitment of staff, selection, posting and placement, training and development, remuneration, performance appraisal, promotion and transfers. The management should be committed to employing qualified, competent staff to perform library duties. The management should also be willing to remunerate their staff well. Staff should be retrained to upgrade their skills through organizing seminars and workshops. The management can also facilitate library staff to do short courses that can help them in their service provision and to add to the profitability of the library. Gilbert and Parhizgari (2000) argue that organizations that provide employees with support structures and processes enable the employees to provide top-quality products and services to their user publics. Motivated workers will always work hard to achieve their goals and to support their organizations. Clients who come to the library or call the library via the library help desk to have an issue or question they'd like settled should be addressed by staff who are willing to help and also staff who understand the library service; otherwise, they would disappoint the clients. Tella et al. (2007) contend that if library staff is equitably paid then they are bound to have a positive attitude towards their work and will hence help in attaining the library goals.

#### **7. Customer Satisfaction and Customer-Centered Services**

It would not be enough to speak about customer-centricity without speaking about customer satisfaction since customer-centricity yields to customer satisfaction, which is the joy of every service-centered organization. Peter and Ellen (2010) define customer satisfaction as an emotional and individual reaction towards the satisfying service or a dissatisfying service. It is the level of content-



ment/ discontentment with the library service. It is short-term and entirely depends on an individuals' emotional perspective of the said service. The service that might be satisfactory to one client might be otherwise to the other client. This, therefore, calls for a personalized service since a library service that would satisfy a visually impaired person might not satisfy a hearing-impaired person or a person with a mobility challenge.

According to Saravanan & Rao (2007), customer satisfaction is based on the level of service quality delivered by the service providers and the quality of staff & client interactions. Asemi et al. (2010) noted that historically, academic library-quality has been described in terms of its collection, size of library holdings and other parameters like information control. According to Glushko and Tabas (2009) quality of the service, experience is determined at the final service encounter between the information provider and the information seeker. Bhatti (2013) noted that effective library services depend basically on the level of satisfaction of its clients with the relevant library collection, client-driven library services and library staffs' constant willing client support. Effective library services entirely depend on satisfaction levels of customers with the relevant collection of the library, client-driven library services and library staff willingness to support clients (Bhatti, 2013).

Customer-centric service is the relationship between the library and its customers and can be experienced in terms of the willingness of the academic library to fulfill and or even exceed the customer expectations through offering excellent services and products to enhance loyalty and usage; hence a satisfying service. This relationship should be a long-term relationship that would create a good reputation that will become known to the library's community and financiers (Peter & Ellen, 2010).

### 7.1. Measuring Customer Satisfaction

The academic library just like any other service-oriented organization has a variety of methods at its disposal to gather information regarding user satisfaction from their customers, such as examining data from library usage, survey results, focus groups, and face to face opportunistic encounters (Esson, Stevenson, Gildea, & Roberts, 2012).

Peter and Ellen (2010) note that customer satisfaction can be measured through monitoring library usage by carrying out user statistics, monitoring resources' usage and customer feedback through the suggestion box and even word of mouth.

Customer satisfaction can also be done through gap analysis by doing a user survey to know the customer views regarding the service and how the service can be improved to satisfy the customer. McKinsey 7S framework can also be used to do the gap analysis. McKinsey examined seven strategic aspects to measure, in an effort to know if the organization is performing according to its expectations or not. These include checking the organizations' strategy, structure, systems,

shared values, skills, style and staff. The analysis looks at the characteristics of the library in terms of each of these aspects and examines the target group, where the gaps are, and fixes them. Once it is clear that the reason for the gap is lack of skills or poor strategy towards problem-solving, the management can then address the problem in a focused way. Kumar and Mahajan (2019) applaud LibQUAL model in measuring the quality of the library service as a customer-centered model that can be used to measure almost all aspects of the library resulting in quantitative and qualitative data characterized under three major dimensions; effect of service, information control and library as a place. The LibQUAL model however does not indicate other parameters related to the organizations' system and structure.

According to Lee et al. (2012) the library service performance can be measured using several ways; customer satisfaction, customer feedback, customer survey, user complaints and compliments. Sirkin (1993) offers insights that the academic library can employ towards improved service delivery by observing total quality management (TQM) principles among them; Publicizing of a new service or an improved service, offering document delivery service electronically, the orientation of new users, ensuring flexibility in assignments to staff, improvement in the signage of the library, development of library flyers, guides/brochures, serving with a smile and conducting user survey periodically among others.

## 7.2. Improved Reading Culture

Danladi and Yohanna (2018) noted that due to the influx of mobile phones and other communication gadgets that are smart, there is a decline in the reading culture in learning institutions. This is because, with smartphones, students can access a variety of sites for information, other than networking. Personalized services in the academic library will motivate library customers to use the library to access the information they need. Improved Internet technology in the library will motivate users to use their gadgets in the library. Academic libraries should provide free access to the internet for their clients, and this will motivate users to use the library other than visiting cyber cafes for paid services. Aina, Okusaga, Taiwo and Ogundipe (2011) contend that young people would like to meet with their peers to discuss matters affecting them, education being part than remain in the house to do personal studies. Discussion areas in the academic library should be created to allow for discussion in the library by customers.

## 7.3. Independent Information Access

Kadir, Johari and Hussin (2018) argue that as a result of the rapid proliferation of information, there is a need for individual customization of information if the university library is to satisfy the information needs of her clientele. Inability to access library resources is a result of ignorance regarding existing information resources and available information retrieval tools in the library. Librarians should therefore train library customers how to use available information re-

trieval tools and databases to search and retrieve accurate information from the available sources of information related to their information need. Training will too contribute to self-reliance in information seeking. Easy to use information retrieval tools facilitate independent information access (Asemi et al., 2010).

#### **7.4. Improved Library Usage**

According to Kumah (2015) communication medium like the Internet has enabled information seekers like the academic library patrons; lecturers, students and researchers to access and communicate/share information effectively and efficiently. The university management should support the library in acquiring IT equipment and to ensure that library patrons have access to electronic information and they can easily share the information. The library staff should also be competent in the use of computers. The university management should support staff training and retraining them on computer-based applications in the library service so that they can to train library users for improved library usage.

### **8. Discussion and Conclusion**

It is worth noting that the relevance of the library collection, client-driven library service and library staffs' supportive attitude influences the satisfaction levels of library clients and this leads to successful library services. Notably many academic libraries have a rich customer service culture which is not necessarily sufficient to facilitate the best customer experience. The perceived value of the library and better service delivery can be improved through the use of the latest technology for effective information access, organizational support, and competent staff. Customer feedback, user complaints and compliments register, suggestion box and comments got through direct interaction with the users should be taken into consideration. The perceived value of the library and customer service experience can be improved through organizational support, competent staff and the use of the latest technology.

As regards the first research question concerning the role of access on customer-centric services, library customers want an accessible, relevant library collection, an available service, unlimited information access, spacious reading area, conducive study environment, sufficient library equipment and supportive staff. The use of social media to engage with clients will enable the library to upscale its services.

Regarding how staff responsiveness affects customer-centric service provision in the academic libraries, users want to train courteous staff who can empathize with them and with the ability to communicate well. The staff has a role to do orientation of new library users, initial user training and library user education to empower users to independently seek and find information. Training users regarding remote access to information sources subscribed by the library should also be considered.

On the role of organizational support in ensuring customer-centric service provision in the academic libraries, customer-centered services should be directed by firm organizational leadership, with support of systems and procedures, and improved budgetary allocations, the sufficiency of information assets, preferred information formats and current information resources. These will yield to the frequency of utilization of the library services, improved time spent in the library, security of information resources and motivation for use of the library service. Lastly, library operations, policies, laws and regulations should be formulated with users in mind if possible library users should be involved when formulating the laws and regulations so that the users do not feel as if the laws imposed on them are too harsh and difficult on them.

Lastly, customer satisfaction should be done periodically by carrying out a user survey in order to measure the service performance and to identify gaps in the service to note areas that need improvement so as to devise a plan of action to seal the gaps. Feedback should be sought from the users of the library service and based on the feedback, adjustments or introduction of service can be planned to make it effective.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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