

Faculty Insight on ALHOSN University Library Services: Is the Level of Resources Adequate?

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the availability of information resources to ALHOSN university faculty, the perception and awareness of the faculty about these resources, assessment of the level of information in terms of quality and quantity and find out how these resources could be enhanced from the faculty's actual and perceived needs. Data have been collected by way of online questionnaire to find out how faculty perceive and use the library services. The analyses and the results of the survey have revealed that the University library was partially meeting the needs of the faculty. However it transpired that there were certain areas of the services that need to be improved and enhanced. Based on the findings the paper suggested some recommendation towards improving services.

Keywords: Academic libraries, Library usage, User survey, Evaluation, Library resources, United Arab Emirates (UAE)

1. Introduction

It goes without saying that the library is an integral part of any university. It is the center for learning and as stated by D. Gyure "it is a heart of an academic institution for accumulating knowledge" (Gyure, 2008). Having a good library is an essential component to spring up the students with quality education and support the academic staff for excelling in research activities. As such, university libraries are expected to meet the teaching and research commitments through the provision of all types of information resources and facilities.

To ascertain good services to their clientele, university libraries need to assess their relationship with their users, particularly with academic staff. According to James G. Neal, this relationship should be viewed in the context of the core responsibilities of the academic libraries. These responsibilities include:

"Identifying (selection), getting (acquisition), organizing (synthesis), finding (navigation), distribution (dissemination), serving (interpretation). Teaching (understanding, using (application) and archiving (preservation) of research and scholarship"(Neal, 2009).

Obviously, the library roles are changing with the application of new technologies and this in turn will change and reshape the needs, perception and expectations of library users. Lisa Peters and Wendy Fiander, (2005) exploring the impact of investment in electronic resources at the University College Chester were able to develop a system to measure the impact of electronic information on learning and research and also produced an impact indicators to evaluate the usefulness of electronic resources so that a justification for an increased spending on electronic resources can be presented to the university financial authority.

A continuous investment on library resources and facilities will exhibit the commitment of the institution towards the students and academic staff by providing quality environment for education and research.

For the purpose of maintaining the relationship, users studies are employed to assess whether the university libraries are meeting the objectives and expectations and to determine how effectively a particular university library is functioning.

Claire Creaser argued that in a service environment such as library services “an understanding of how users perceive and value what is available is essentially central to effective service design and delivery” (Creaser, 2006). Not only that, but library evaluation became an integral part of the overall university evaluation for the purpose of accreditation. For example, in UAE’s Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR) make it an important component for its *Standards for Licensure and Accreditation* carried out through its regularity body the *Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA)*. (MHESR, 2011)

The library services are under section 6 of the standards which recommends and requires from the institutions “to provide library resources that should be sufficient in quality, depth, diversity and currency in order to support the institutions curricular offerings at the appropriate level of the programs offered and meet the needs of the faculty, students and academic support personnel, regardless of where they are located” (MHESR, 2011). The guidelines include 13 items covering budget, space, training facilities, opening hours, bibliographic instruction, efficient book and periodical acquisition, and circulation; orientation and information literacy programs, electronic resources and services, short and long-range plans, collection development, library technical services and organization of materials and their access, co-operative programs and resource sharing with other libraries and library professional staff (MHESR, 2011).

Section 2 of the document also emphasizes the importance of quality assurance at both institutional and operational levels including areas such as systematic evaluation of services, academic programs, short, medium and long term planning, and continuous quality enhancement and reporting (MHESR, 2011).

2. Background

ALHOSN University was established in the year 2005 at the city of Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Currently the University has three faculties; namely Engineering, Art & Social Sciences and Business offering Undergraduates and Graduates Programs. The University has around 100 Faculty members.

The University library contains print [English and Arabic languages] and electronic resources, providing on campus access and off-campus access (remote) to e-resources and for the library OPAC. The library has collection development policy and constantly reviewing new electronic resources for addition.

3. Review of Related Studies

A number of research studies around the world have documented the assessment of the level of perception of faculty at universities of the services rendered by university libraries.

O. Olajide and F.A. Fabunmi (2011) studying “*Lecturer’s perception of the adequacy of resource and services of the university of ADO- Ekiti library*” [in Nigeria] surveyed the perception and information needs of lecturers at that university by way of a questionnaire to collect data in order to answer research questions. Based on the results obtained, it was found that there were some problems and inadequacy of library services particularly electronic resources resulting of dissatisfaction of the lecturers with library services. Based on the findings, the authors made recommendations to improve the library services in that university.

In another study entitled: “*User surveys in Academic libraries*” Claire Creaser (2006) has analyzed results from a number of separate studies carried out on some UK university libraries which used survey approach as the main instrument for determining the academic library conditions and the attitudes of academic library users. Her analysis resulted in a number of findings upon which she was able to develop a pilot benchmark for user evaluation survey across UK universities.

Robert K. Baker, (1997) working on “*Faculty perceptions towards students library use in a large urban community college*” employed a two- phase multi- method strategy for data collection and assessment regarding his research questions and mainly to answer question regarding the roles and responsibilities of community college faculty they see for themselves in supporting student’s use of the library. Following the analysis of the survey results, he was able to draw some conclusions with regards to faculty roles in enhancing the library use.

Mahabaleshwara Rao Baikady and Mahesh V. Mudhot (2011) study focused on the perception of faculty and students of the web as learning resources in an Indian medical college employed a self administered questionnaire for extensive survey to assess the overall perception of web resources by medical faculty and students. They observed that “medical faculty members prefer using the web more to the traditional library on the ground that the web is more knowledgeable, exhaustive authoritarian and easy to use” (Baikady and Mudhot, 2011).

Finally, in what looks like a departure from the survey patterns presented so far, Kathleen E. Joswick and Jeanne K. Stierman, (1995) in *their perception vs. use: comparing faculty evaluation of journal titles with faculty and student usage* did not employ the survey method to collect data about journal evaluation by faculty for the purpose of renewal or cancellation. Rather they examined titled in which faculty published or which they cited in their published research to find out about the desirability undesirability of journal renewal/ cancellation. Based on the analysis and the result they concluded that faculty assigned consistently high rankings to the journals they published in or cited in their own in their own research.

4. Methodology

In the social and behavioral sciences, a number of research methods present themselves as options or combinations to be used if quantitative or qualitative data or information is to be collected. Each method has of course its advantages and disadvantages. However the crucial factor to be considered is the ability to use the most appropriate method or a combination of methods for a particular study.

The nature of this study and its objectives require the employment of survey research methods which is essentially a descriptive exploratory approach.

4.1 The Survey Method

A survey research method can be defined in the context of this study as a systematic collection of data concerning university libraries, their activities, operations, staff, use and users at a given time or even a given period. Surveys can be employed for a variety of purpose. Thus: “descriptions of phenomena or characteristics associated with a subject population (the *who, what, when, where* and *how* of a topic) estimates of the proportions of a population that have these characteristics. Discovery of associations among different variables” (Gay, Geoffrey and Airasian, 2012).

4.2 Procedure

A user survey was adapted from a template available from the Society of College, National and University libraries (SCONUL). The survey covers the following:

- Usage of print collections and online resources;
- Textbook ordering procedure;
- Students’ library usage and
- Satisfaction levels and future expectations

An online web Survey Monkey was carried out over a period of three weeks, from May 12 to May 30, 2013. The response rate of the survey was about 30% (i.e., 26 out of 100 academic staff).

5. Analysis and Results

5.1 Profile of Respondents

Twenty-six academic staff members participated in the survey. Among these respondents, 38% were assistant professors, 23% were teaching assistants, and 19% were instructors. Unfortunately not many professors and associate professors were involved in this survey (Figure 1). Reflecting the composition of the academic staff’s areas of expertise, 39% of the respondents were from the Engineering field, followed by 23% from the Social Sciences, and 19% from each of Arts and Humanities and Business and Law (Figure 2).

5.2 Current usage of the Library and Evaluation of Library Resources: Print and e-resources

5.2.1 Library Hours

Currently the library is open from 8:30 AM to 8:00 PM (Sunday to Wednesday) and 8:30 AM to 5:30 PM (Thursday) during the Fall and Spring Semesters. The library opens at 8:30 AM to 5:30 PM during the Inter-Semester Break and the Summer Semester.

The majority of respondents (80%) felt that the library's opening hours meet their needs. Considering the strength of present library staff of four fulltime librarians, the library opening hours are appropriate not only to fulfill the needs of the academic staff, but also to operate the library services.

5.2.2 Library Usage

The library has two types of resources: print resources, which are located in the library stack area, and online resources. This goes along the internationally recognized library service delivery as pointed out by Mikesell (2004).

The results of the question about the frequency of the use of library resources show that the respondents visit the library less frequently than they use online resources, which they access both on and off campus.. Forty percent of the respondents visit the library less often in person, and 30% of them make a monthly visit to the library. According to some studies it was found that many users found it convenient to use online resources rather than using traditional sources (Thanuskodi, 2011). The survey found that approximately 40% of the respondents access the online resources monthly by computer or mobile device from on or off campus (see Figure 4).

Among the five available online databases (i.e., *ebrary*, *Access Science*, *Informa World*, *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, and *EBSCO-Art Source*), *ebrary* is used most often. A previous study done by Abdoulaye Kaba and Raed Said (2012) about the usage of electronic books in the United Arab Emirates found that ALHOSN University *ebrary* usage was very low, however this survey has shown significant increase of usage recently. Ten percent of the respondents use it weekly, and monthly users account for 24% while 38% of them use it less often. *Access Science* is also frequently used. Ten percent of the respondents access it weekly, although 60% used it less often. Thirty percent of the respondents use the *EBSCO-Art Source* monthly. *Informa World* and *Gale Virtual Reference Library* are used less frequently with 60% of the respondents accessing it less often. Anna Gakibayo and Constant Okello-Obura (2013) found that "familiarity among the users with certain resource help increase utilization." However, the frequency of the use of each online resource reflects the types of journals available in each resource and the academic specialty of the respondents. The potential for a correlation between the available electronic resources and the needs of the academic staff should be examined more carefully (Figure 5).

The reasons for the less frequent visits or less library usage as reflected by the respondents are: lack of information for their needs from the available library resources and the library resources are not supporting their information needs.

On the other hand, the reason for their less frequent use of the library is the non availability of the required electronic and print collections in the library as shown in Figure 6. However, 11% of the respondents mentioned that they have less familiarity with the electronic resources. According to Anna Gakibayo and C. Okello-Obura "less familiarity leads to less usage" (Gakibayo and Okello, 2013).

The majority of those who chose the "Other" answer said that the available online databases do not cover their relevant fields or the specializations of the faculties. Some commented that their courses do not need the assistance of online databases.

5.2.3 Evaluation of Library Resources

The library collections generally meet the respondents' needs. Approximately 75% of the respondents felt that the library collections meet their needs either frequently or sometimes. If we look at these responses more closely, 57% of the respondents partly find what they are looking for, 24% usually not having a problem finding the items they need. Yet 19% said that they cannot find the items they require (see Figure 7). Similar to the evaluation of the library collections, nearly half of the respondents only partially find the information they are looking for, and 28% usually find such information from e-resources. However, 24% do not find any of the information they need in the online resources (Figure 8).

According to 47% of the respondents, the reason for partially finding the items they need was the non availability in the library due to missing, overdue, or not found on the shelf. Those who chose the "Other" option also commented on the insufficient library resources and collections. This deficiency was also reported in similar studies (Olajide and Fabunmi, 2011). This survey result also emphasis for a significant improvement in the library collection development. (Figure 9).

When needed information is not found in the library print or online collections, users tend to go to an Internet search engine such as Google Scholar to find information. T. Cothran study found that 75% of survey participants prefer Google Scholar for research works (Cothran, 2011). Some users taking help from friends or others from outside the university or buy the necessary information by themselves. Only a limited number of users ask the library to purchase it (see Figure 10). In fact, 33% of the respondents have never requested the library to purchase materials, although more than half have sent book requests frequently or sometimes (Figure 11). This result shows that academic staff are not well informed about the book request procedure, even though the procedure and request forms are posted on the library website.

5.3 Textbook Ordering

5.3.1 Evaluation of Textbook Ordering Procedure

The survey result of the evaluation of the current textbook ordering procedure is 50-50. Fifty-two percent of the respondents are not satisfied with the current procedure, while 48% are satisfied (Figure 12). The respondents pointed out two reasons for their dissatisfaction:

- inefficiency of the procedure (34%) and
- the late delivery of textbooks (33%).

The respondents who have chosen “Other” expressed their past unpleasant experiences on ordering textbooks (Figure 13).

5.4 Students’ Library Use

5.4.1. Evaluation of Students’ Library Use

The survey asked the academic staff how they perceive students’ library use. At first, 33% of the respondents felt that the library collections sufficiently satisfy students’ needs, meaning always or frequently (see Figure 14). Nevertheless, 62% of the respondents thought that the library collections only occasionally meet students’ needs. Over 80% of the academic staff felt that students are not familiar with the library resources, which indicates that the library is underutilized by students (Figure 15).

However, the academic staff take action to encourage students to use the library. More than 80% of the respondents said that they make an effort to motivate the students to use the library (Figure 16). Parker-Gibson reported that “providing class assignments or research works requiring use of the library resources is the most common practice taken by the academic staff to increase library usage by students” (Parker-Gibson, 2001). Other activities involve a more direct approach, such as introducing the library resources and taking students to the library during class hours (Figure 17).

5.5 Overall Evaluation and Expectations of the Library

5.5.1 Importance of the Library Resources and Services

To explore the steps that the library can take to improve the standards, the survey asked questions about the importance of the library’s resources and services, the levels of satisfaction with the library’s resources and services, and the expected areas for improvement.

The respondents identified online databases and literacy programs as the two most important aspects of the library’s resources and services. Both H. Egberongbe (Egberongbe, 2011) and M. B. Eisenberg (2011) studies stressed the value of the above two aspects. It is striking that 65% of the respondents think that online databases are very important. Similarly, 53% of the respondents perceived literacy programs as quite important. Approximately 80% of the respondents agreed with the importance of the two items for their research and education. The library collections are also considered to be very important or quite important by 64% of the respondents. About 50% of the respondents identified the importance of public services (e.g., interlibrary loans), reference and research assistances and the library’s physical space and facilities (Figure 18).

With respect to a question about the importance of the various library resources, the responses clearly highlighted the values of journals and databases. Seventy-one percent and 67% of the respondents opinion say journals and databases are very important resources, respectively. Nearly 85% of the respondents pointed out that these two resources are very or quite important. Books are another resource that is perceived as important. The importance of books was recognized by 72% of the respondents, including 43% of the respondents who felt they are very important and 29% who considered them as quite important.

Furthermore, 45% of the respondents felt manuals, handbooks and standards are important, followed by the other three resources (i.e., manuscripts and archival materials, news sources, and audiovisual media), which were identified as very or quite important by 35% of the respondents (Figure 19).

5.6 Overall Satisfaction of the Library

The satisfaction levels with the various library resources and services are shown in Figure 20. The existing library resources and services received positive feedback from the respondents. Indeed, 65% of the respondents expressed their satisfaction with them. In particular, the respondents indicated a higher level of satisfaction with the library services. Seventy percent of the respondents provided a positive evaluation of the overall library services, and 90% of the respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the library staff assistance.

It is worth to mention that 52% of the respondents were very satisfied with the staff assistance.

A respondent appreciated the efforts of the library staff in spite of the limited resources. Haipeng Li, (2007) describes the necessity of collaboration among librarians and faculty members to run effective literacy programs. Here based on the librarians and faculty members collaboration, the librarian's visit to classroom for literacy programs were rated highly by 75% of the respondents, including 30% who were very satisfied and 45% who were satisfied, followed by textbook ordering, which received a positive response from 60% of the respondents. This was followed by the library website and the e-resources in Moodle. D. A. Becker and L Yannotta study found a positive relationship between the library web design and usage (Becker, 2013).

The respondents indicated the least satisfaction with the library collections and information resources, which is understandable. Only 40% of the respondents provided a positive answer in this category.

5.7 Needs for Improvement of the Library

5.7.1 Expectations for Library Improvement

The last question of the survey asked the academic staff about their expectations for future library improvements. Corresponding with the importance of journals and online databases identified in previous answers, a significant need for an improvement in the electronic databases was identified. This finding agrees with a similar studies conducted by A.Gakibayo, and C. Okello-Obura, (2013) and G., F. F. (2010). The former concluded that "faculty members were comfortably relying exclusively on digital versions of scholarly materials" (Gakibayo and Okello, 2013). Eighteen respondents or 90% would like to see the electronic databases improved first and foremost. The second group of areas identified for improvement included collections, library space, and student activities, which may be more concerned with the education of the students. Seven persons (or 35% of the respondents) expected an improvement in these three areas. The last group, which included inter-library loans, document delivery, and research assistances were identified for improvement by only 30% of the respondents (see Figure 21). This may partly be attributed to an increased subscription of online resources, availability of open access sources and author personal web pages. This conclusion agrees with similar studies (see for example the study conducted by P. P. Rajendiran, A. U. Desphande, I Bhushan and Y. S. Parihar. (2008)

Regarding the need for electronic databases, the priority online databases were ranked by the respondents as follows: 1) JSTOR; 2) IEEE; 3) ProQuest; 4) Science Direct; 5) Lexis-Nexis Academic; 6) World Cat; and 7) Web of Science/ Knowledge in order of preference (i.e., the respondents identified JSTOR as the most necessary database, followed by IEEE and ProQuest) (see Figure 22).

6. Conclusion

Results and analysis of this survey have shown that ALHOSN University library was partly meeting the information needs of the university faculty. However there were some areas of the services that are not rendering adequate satisfaction or not perceived as satisfactory. The main area for concern was the e- resources and this is understandable as the advancement of technology brings many challenges to academic libraries in the form of requirement, budget, usefulness and much more. User survey is one among the main tool that the libraries need to use to identify the insight of their user community.

Understanding the users' needs and their satisfactory level is imperative for any academic library to keep that library in a right constructive path in align with the interest of the parent institution.

Evaluation of the library resources helps the library to take correct decisions at every step of development.

7. Recommendations

Library Use: Develop orientation programs, training, workshops and seminars to be conducted often to spread information about the library. Outreach programs and activities on library resource are to be organized.

Library Facilities: Attractive library facilities for group study activities are recommended.

Student Activities: A reading club, a reading week, a short workshop, and activities that could get students and library closer are recommended.

Resource sharing: Building a network with other universities and institutions libraries in this region is highly recommended for resource sharing such as Inter-Library Loan.

Textbook Ordering Procedure: Simplifying the ordering system, adopting e-Textbooks, online/electronic orders, automatic orders, and departmental orders are recommended.

Periodic Survey: Evaluate the performance of the library services and resources, identify the user needs, and to scale the standard of the library periodical survey are recommended.

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Figure 1 Academic Positions of Respondents

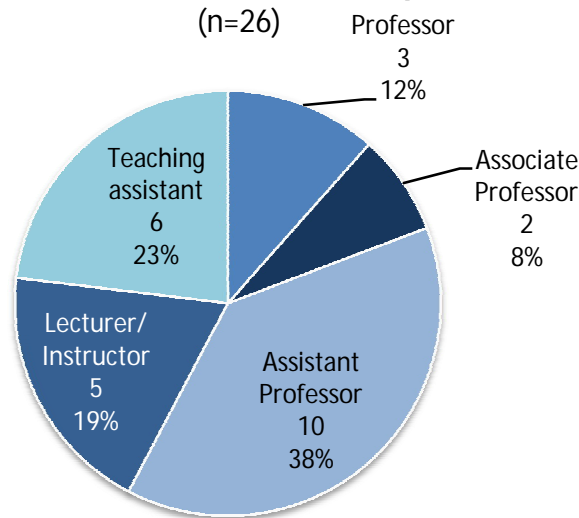


Figure 2 Academic Fields of Respondents

