Improving the Quality of Library Services using the Qualibib Reference System

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Abstract: Qualibib is a reference system and toolbox developed by the French standards association (AFNOR) to improve the quality of library services. It is based on various standards, including ISO 9001, which focuses on the management system, and ISO 11620, which pertains to performance indicators. The Marianne standard and Libqual+ standards, which emphasize user perspectives, provide a framework for library quality initiatives. Qualibib comprises 10 requirement areas (e.g., facilitated access, documentary resources, and complaints handling…) with measurable indicators. Easily adaptable to all types of libraries, Qualibib enables institutions to assess the performance and efficiency of their services. This facilitates process optimization and enhances user satisfaction through systematic feedback, supporting continuous improvement.

Key words: *Improvement -Quality-Services- Library- QUALIBIB.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Evaluating the quality of library services has become a major concern, particularly as user expectations and skill requirements increase in the era of digital transformation. In this context, documentary institutions in general, and libraries in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in particular, must adopt rigorous evaluation methods to measure their effectiveness, quality, and impact.

The application of the Qualibib integrated model in libraries in the DRC aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the services offered, while addressing the specific expectations of all researchers. The integration of a systematic approach to evaluation within these establishments would not only improve the quality of documentary services but also enhance the impact and quality offered by the library to its users.

Indeed, François Gouyon (2008, p.92.), in his work entitled "L'Evaluation en bibliothèque publique: permanence des enjeux, nouveaux outils, nouvelles méthodes, mémoire de conservateur de bibliothèque" (Evaluation in a public library: ongoing challenges, new tools, new methods, a library curator's dissertation), argues that this benchmark provides clear, measurable criteria, thus facilitating analysis of library performance.

Using indicators such as ease of access to services, systematic handling of complaints, relevance of responses, quality of multimedia services and websites, orientation, bibliographic information and research assistance, documentary resources,(i.e. assessment of the relevance and quality of documentary collections), communication and document consultation, support services and materials, commitment of resources (assessment of the resources allocated to support librarians' services), user satisfaction, accessibility of resources, and relevance of collections, libraries can identify not only their strengths and quality of service but also areas requiring improvement. (Olivier Chourrot, "Qualibib", Arabesques, 2020, pp.9-11).

The implementation of this reference framework in all documentary institutions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will not only improve the services offered but also strengthen the stakeholder confidence in the institution. Therefore, this research is part of a broader effort to professionalize libraries worldwide, and particularly in the DRC, where evaluation is becoming a strategic tool for justifying investments and mobilizing the necessary resources.

In the spirit of continuous improvement, this work views library evaluation not as an objective in itself, but rather as an approach aimed at promoting innovation, improving service quality and strengthening user commitment. Our aim is to promote quality, provide librarians in the DRC in particular, and globally, with concrete resources and pragmatic tactics to overcome current challenges. Consequently, the evaluation of libraries via quality indicators is a complex and extensive field of study that requires a rigorous and systematic approach. As Qualibib is an evaluation tool applied in the quality approach, only a survey based on its indicators can

effectively detect performance and service quality within libraries.

II. RESEARCH CONTEXT

Evaluation Research of the quality of the library services is essential. The Qualibib reference system, a tool for measuring the quality of a library, is very important for assessing the progress of the services offered to the public and researchers. Indeed, libraries in general are expected to measure their performance and reorient their services for the benefit and advantage of their users. This study focuses on the quality approach derived from several ISO standards, such as 11620, which is based on performance indicators, as well as other standards such as Marianne, which deals with the quality of reception in a library, for example.

The Qualibib standard, for example, contains 10 requirement areas that must be applied to the library in order to study its quality and performance. With this in mind, we have focused on this approach with a view to making this management tool available to the managing public of documentary institutions, in order to strengthen and improve documentary services.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

➤ *The Objectives of this Research Project are as follows:*

- Develop a working tool to strengthen library management and service;
- Articulate performance and service quality in the library;
- Reorganize the library's operational quality approach;
- Identify organizational and management strategies to improve service quality.

IV. SOME DEFINITIONS

A. Quality
To start, the authors Anne Mayène and Florence Muet (1998, n°1, pp.10-18) define quality as a collection of characteristics of an entity that enables it to meet expressed needs. Additionally, Eric Bizot, Marie-Hélène Chimisanas, and Jean P. (2014, p.104) enhance this definition by describing quality as "the ability to achieve various operational objectives."

The ISO 11620 standard states that quality is measured by performance indicators that assess the effectiveness, efficiency and performance of services. According to ISO 9000 (2009, p.19.), quality is defined as "the ability of a set of intrinsic characteristics to satisfy requirements". Quality in libraries is essential to guarantee an effective and satisfactory service for users.

➤ *Service quality*
Service quality refers to a service's ability to meet users' expectations and satisfy their needs. It is often measured by comparing customers' (users') expectations with their perceptions of the service received.

Library service quality is a key topic addressed by several authors. These two authors, Anne Mayère and Florence Muet (1998, n°1, pp.10-18.) stress that quality approaches must take account of the specific features of libraries, notably the immateriality of the service and the importance of the user experience. Furthermore, research into interlibrary loans highlights the difficulty of assessing user satisfaction, which is often based on subjective perceptions rather than objective criteria. Moreover, Klaus P. (1995, Vol. 41, No. 4.), points out that service quality is determined by the comparison between user perceptions and expectations.

➤ *The application of quality in libraries*
The notion of quality in libraries is closely tied to the ethical standards of the profession. However, this perspective alone is insufficient to fully define quality. The understanding of quality has shifted from merely ensuring product conformity to focusing on the quality of services offered, which takes into account the needs of the "user" customer. In the context of libraries, user satisfaction is a pivotal aspect of the quality framework. This involves recognizing the disparity between the desired outcomes and the actual results, as well as comparing expected outcomes with perceived ones. To evaluate user-perceived quality, standards like ISO 9001 and various reference systems, including Libqual, Predocqual, and Qualibib, were developed.

To this end, the French Association for Standardization (AFNOR) defines library quality as "the ability to satisfy expressed or implicit needs or expectations". The quality approach aims to establish a management system that enables libraries to control and direct their activities towards user satisfaction (Sylvie Lavalée, 2008).

The quality of library services depends on the skills of the managers (librarians or documentalists), in terms of their mastery of activities and the intellectual level they possess.

The application of quality in the library is a vital element that facilitates the progression, development and growth of users. This can be properly achieved by putting in place a good service and management policy, especially efficiency in work organization.

Managing service quality in a library is a matter of compliance, and good quality management requires the right choice or signage, procedures and monitoring of compliance by staff.

Continuous improvement of service quality, symbolized by the acronym "PDCA" from the Deming Wheel, theorizes the following circle: Plan (to plan), do (to do), check (to check), in order to identify any causes of malfunction and factors for improvement, and react (to act) by implementing them.

➤ *Why library service quality?*
In any service, service quality is a key element in conveying its impact to target audiences. In addition, service

quality provides the library a broad understanding of the service it provides, and helps to orient the library towards user expectations and satisfaction (Eric Sutter, 1997).

Any production or service activity can implement quality management. In this respect, the library, like any other management service, is not sidelined, which is why it requires certification and quality assessment in order to improve its operation and management.

Indeed, quality means focusing and prioritizing on the essential, as perceived and experienced by users, and not as imagined or imposed by staff (Eric Sutter, 1997).

Libraries have a lot to learn about how to provide good service to users. This requires, first and foremost, a good understanding of the role of librarians, the role of management in ensuring the service offered to staff by fulfilling the basic requirements of maintaining the tools, training, capacity and necessary competence required by any library in order to meet, above all, the needs and demands of users (François Hébert, 1995).

It's important for all libraries to prioritize the quality of their service to meet users' needs, and to popularize and strengthen the effectiveness of documentary institutions. To this end, a number of elements need to be considered and implemented, including user satisfaction. Indeed, users are very vigilant when it comes to judging service quality. Between objective measurement and perception, it's important for any library to be able to focus on loan times and success rates.

Interaction between staff and users: it goes without saying that the quality of a service also depends on good collaboration. So staff must be competent, able to respond in a timely manner, with a smile when greeting users, guiding them to find the information they need, and so on.

Service quality in the library is about operationalizing performance and experience between staff and users, pooling skills and adapting to the library's different challenges.

B. Referential or reference system

The term *référentiel* (reference system) comes from the word *référence,* and has several meanings depending on the author. Here are a few definitions and example.

- In physics, and more specifically in mechanics, a reference frame is a reference used to describe motion;
- In computing, a repository is considered to be a set of databases containing the references of an information system;
- In human resources, a skills repository is a descriptive list of the skills required for a function or job;
- According to AFNOR, a *referential* is a document, usually drawn up by professionals in a sector, under the aegis of an official standardization organization and controlled by consumer associations (Roselle Cros & Nicole Gautier, 2001).

In a nutshell, a referential is a document that outlines the guidelines for implementing a quality approach in a service and achieving certification. It details the characteristics of the product or service and the information that should be communicated to consumers.

Service standards can be adopted and must be the subject of service certification. The institution applying for certification must first of all organize itself to put in place all the necessary requirements, keeping in mind that a standard may indicate a minimum level to be achieved.

The standards defining the minimum level of requirements are subject to constant evolution. In line with the evolving needs of customers and consumers, standards must be regularly updated to meet new expectations.

C. Qualibib

Qualibib is a reference system, created by the French standards association AFNOR, for studying the quality approach used in libraries. It comprises 10 areas, including multimedia services, access to services, documentary offer, etc. It is defined as a practical guide dedicated to improving the quality of services in libraries and documentation centers, or archives and documentation centers, with a focus on user satisfaction.

According to the ISO 9001 standard, this guide is a toolbox that defines the concepts of a quality approach within libraries or documentation centers. Published in December 2009, in an paper by Olivier Chourrot, in the January-March 2010 issue of *Arabesque* magazine, by a group of documentation experts from the public sector. Considered as a toolbox of requirements and quality indicators for library services.

It is identified as a toolbox containing requirements, instructions, statements and indicators, grouped under 10 main areas. These areas cover all the important aspects of library services, such as access to services, complaints management, the range of documents on offer and listening to users.

➢ *Objective of Qualibib*

The main aim of the Qualibib standard is to help document services and libraries to organize themselves using a user-oriented quality approach.

➢ *Qualibib's specific objectives*

The Qualibib standard is designed to:

- Structure quality processes in libraries;
- Encourage continuous improvement by actively listening to users;
- Enable self-assessment or quality certification in certain contexts, such as higher education.

➢ *It presents ten areas of requirements, which can be called indicators:*

- Easy access to services;
- Comprehensible response to your requests within an announced timeframe;
- Systematic handling of complaints;
- Multimedia services and websites;
- Orientation and research assistance;
- Documentary services;
- Loan and consultation of documents;
- Support services and materials;
- Listening to users to make progress;
- Commitment of resources.

➢ *These sections are divided into requirements and numbered from 1 to 49. To achieve this, each requirement is associated with:*

- Interactions that send to the processes, documents and technical supports needed to put the commitment into practice;
- Examples of concrete evidence to facilitate monitoring of compliance with the commitment;
- Indicators, which can be used to create quality dashboards.

The Qualibib standard presents a list of 9 commitments that libraries and documentation centers can use as the basis for their self-assessment. It contains the quality and performance indicators needed to improve the quality of services provided by these institutions and their users. This standard emphasizes a direct user-oriented approach, meaning that user satisfaction is a key element driving and defining the institution's policy.

➢ *Implementing Qualibib in a Library*
Qualibib represents a quality approach within a library, aimed at improving the services offered to readers. It is presented as a toolbox containing performance indicators classified under 10 areas, and the requirements to be met, from reception to the dissemination of information.

Like any other public or private service, the library is not exempt from any study of the quality or performance of its service. In fact, with the rise of digital tools in all sectors and fields, expectations regarding the quality of services offered to readers, users or users in companies, particularly libraries, are becoming increasingly important. For libraries, Qualibib is one of the most important tools for meeting user needs, enabling the evaluation and improvement of services within a library, information center or documentation center.

It follows an intermittent approach based on four essential elements: Plan, Develop, Control and Act. These elements enable documentary institutions, particularly libraries, to adapt this tool to the specific needs of users and the library itself. In this way, Qualibib draws its existence from other ISO standards that focus on service quality, such as Predocqual, Libqual, Libqual +, and so on.It is an important benchmark for any library wishing to improve services and quality to satisfy users.

➢ *Advantages of Qualibib in Libraries*
Because of the advantages offered by this standard, including its application and components (such as the wide range of tools), and the fact that assessments are based on both internal and external criteria, it is of interest to the entire library environment. In principle, Qualibib covers the whole field of reception and services in libraries and documentation centers, and its scope includes assessment.

The use of Qualibib as part of a quality approach must be carefully considered, taking into account the missions of the organization concerned, its sector of activity, the standards to which the sector is subject, and the quality policy pursued by management. Its greatest advantage is that it is not intended to be applied in its entirety, but on an as-needed basis. For the same reason, Qualibib does not have normative status, so it can be enriched at any time with new information based on feedback, subject to the agreement of the members of the expert group of AFNOR's General Commission 46.

➢ *Proposed Strategies to Improve Service Quality*
The strategies that need to be put in place must first help improve the quality of services offered by the library on a daily basis. There are several effective strategies that can have a positive impact on improving the quality and services of this library, including:

- The development of performance indicators based on ISO standards, particularly ISO 11620 which is based on measuring the performance and effectiveness of services in a library;
- The implementation of documentary software to automate various processes, for example cataloguing, indexing, disseminating information, etc.;
- The creation of a database to store information on resources, services, readers, etc.;
- Skill Development of staff to increase knowledge and skills in the subject matter and field;
- The provision of financial and material resources to support quality and other initiatives;
- Implementation of a suggestion box to improve services through the processing of collected data;
- Regular studies to collect interventions through interactions and feedbacks between users and staff;
- High-level IT hardware and tools for users;
- Establishment of an inter-library loan service and system to enable users to use other resources available elsewhere;
- Update the document acquisition system;
- Make regular document background assessments to allow for updating;
- Set up a free online form to allow users to make complaints.

The relationship between the library and its public extends beyond merely facilitating access to collections and circulation of documents. It encompasses a range of services shaped by the library's assigned missions, an analysis of the needs of the served public, and the nature and significance of the collections. These elements form a professional practice that combines techniques and accumulated expertise. Qualibib, serving as a practical guide in this domain, is particularly well-suited to address service issues by prioritizing users at the heart of the library.

➤ *Contribution of Qualibib in library quality management*

The Qualibib is a practical guide developed to improve the quality of reception and services in libraries and documentation centers. Thus, it is based on proven standards and benchmarks. This reference document contains an introduction to the quality approach as well as indicators and a list of requirements for the quality of reception and services to users (https://www.bivi.fonctions-documentaires.afnor.org/content/.../3/.../Qualibib.pdf.).

It offers the enormous advantage of giving priority to the business approach within the library, that is to say, the document is dedicated to identifying the different functions and services in order to provide a solution to improve the quality of each one.

This tool provides a professional response to the need to implement a quality of service approach in libraries. This reference is designed to improve and facilitate the implementation of a quality approach focusing on the various international standards NF ISO 9001 & 11620 in libraries as well as other references. It covers certain requirements such as access, documentary offer, claims, etc. (Olivier Chourrot, 2010).

Qualibib allows libraries to have the performance indicators from ISO 11620 and user satisfaction measures. The sections they contain are oriented towards continuous improvement through surveys and analyses of interactions between staff and users (Calameo/AFNOR, 2009).

In addition, libraries are being formalized internally using the quality indicator. This reference framework facilitates the reorganization and improvement of the quality of services within libraries, which is done through the identification channel of indicators by globalizing ISO standards and user needs. It formalizes essential processes such as inter-library loan, responses to users, internal and regular audits, etc.

V. EXISTING NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS

A. ISO 11620

The ISO 11620 standard defines performance indicators to assess the quality of library services. Originally published in 1998 and revised in 2014, it applies to all types of libraries and aims to promote standardized evaluation methods (Pierre Carbonne, 1998). It is an international standard that specifies a set of 23 indicators to assess the performance of library services. The indicators cover different aspects of library service quality, such as collections, access, use, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and satisfaction. The standard also provides guidance on how to collect, calculate and interpret data for each indicator, as well as how to compare and report results.

To use ISO 11620 to assess and compare the quality of service of your library, one/you must follow four steps. First, you must select the relevant and achievable indicators for your library based on your objectives, resources and context. Second, you must collect data for the selected indicators, using the methods and sources recommended by the standard. Third, you must calculate the values of the indicators using the formulas and units provided by the standard. Fourth, you must interpret and report the results using criteria and benchmarks suggested by the standard or other sources.

Implementing this standard to assess and compare the quality of service of your library can offer a number of benefits. It can help you recognize the strengths and weaknesses of your library services, as well as track the progress and impact of your library activities. In addition, you can compare your library's performance with that of other libraries to better understand their best practices and challenges. In addition, this standard can support decision-making and planning processes by ensuring that your library's objectives and strategies are aligned with the needs and expectations of users.

ISO 11620 provides a framework for assessing library performance through standardized indicators. It includes quantitative and qualitative measures, such as user satisfaction, to compare services between different libraries. It provides standardized terminology and a concise definition of performance indicators.

This standard provides an opportunity to evaluate and improve library services using indicators. For example, the availability indicator of titles, attendance rates, etc., these help to get a general idea about the tools and materials they own.

B. ISO 9001

The ISO 9001 standard is a quality management standard, which is recognized worldwide through its functions in document institutions or other enterprises. This standard helps libraries, documentation centers and other businesses to improve their performance meet the expectations of their users and demonstrate their commitment to quality services.

The implementation of this standard in a library allows for efficient processes to be established and staff capacity to provide clear and concise quality services.

➤ *The benefits of ISO 9001 are plenty:*

- Makes it easier for the library to maintain trust and confidence;
- Allows for the efficient handling of claims;
- Improves all processes in the library;

- Builds user confidence and satisfaction;
- Effectiveness of quality control processes;
- Facilitates content optimization.

ISO 9001 is the reference quality management system standard that helps libraries monitor and continuously improve service quality. This standard not only simplifies the importance of constant adaptation to meet the needs of users, thus fostering a culture of continuous development and excellence (https://www.bsigroup.com/fr-CA/products-and-services/standards/iso-9001-quality-management-systems.).

VI. CONCLUSION

Documentary institutions, including libraries, are viewed like any other enterprise and should be managed according to established management principles. The quality approach is a managerial technique that needs to be implemented and practiced in all libraries, as it is crucial for enhancing their visibility and effectiveness.

The Qualibib repository serves as a strategic tool for modernizing libraries. The adoption of international standards that prioritize user expectations, such as ISO 11620 and ISO 9001, aids in the effective management of library services. By utilizing a combination of performance indicators and self-assessment for continuous improvement, documentary institutions (including libraries and documentation centers) can enhance and solidify their management practices, enabling them to address the diverse needs of users and quality concerns.

Its implementation presents an opportunity for libraries, as it enhances the management systems of documentary institutions and contributes to a process of excellence within any organization regarding innovation, quality services, performance, and public service services.

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