CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The subject of performance measurement in library and information services is not new. Library professionals wishing to research the topic will find an abundance of literature, dating from the late 1960s onwards. Performance measurement is an important component of a quality-oriented organizational culture. The growth of the consumer movement in the 1970s encouraged consumers of goods and services to view much more critically the quality of service they received and to complain if they were not satisfied.

Therefore, performance measurement should be an essential part of every academic library. Without assessing its performance, an academic library cannot ensure that it is using its resources to the greatest effect. Neither can it be sure that it is continuing to meet needs within the society. Pressures to develop performance measurement have often come as much from forces outside the library or parent institution as from within it. The most important and enduring argument in favour of performance measurement in any organization is quite simply that it is an essential part of good management practice.

It is important to distinguish between evaluation and performance measurement. The term 'performance measurement' is used to describe the activity of using performance
Performance indicators contribute to the process of evaluation but the latter is a broader term for the assessment of performance. There are different approaches to assessment. Lancaster (1993) advocates approaching evaluation from the perspective of performance measurement and uses a systematic approach. It is a method, which emphasizes technical services issues (for example, the weeding of stock), and illustrates a tension between the two main types of measure: technical services and user-oriented measures. The former have a strong quantitative emphasis and may impact on services to users (for example, the speed of cataloguing sought materials), while user orientated measures are more qualitative and might well be those which users would choose themselves.

Developing performance indicators should be linked to other aspects of management, as performance indicators are integral to the management process, informing decisions, aiding the setting of objectives and priorities, providing explanations and evidence for courses of action, and helping to give direction and focus to the work of staff at all levels.
1.2 The Importance of Performance Measurement

In times of rapid and profound societal and technological change, performance measurement is essential to preserve the viability and the visibility of academic libraries. Although most librarians would probably reject the notion that some mythical digital beast will eventually replace libraries, there are members of the public who have extensively bought into the notion of a truly paperless society and who equate libraries with the ancient traditions of print on paper (Wallace and Van Fleet, 2001). Some of those believers in the digital epoch serve as municipal administrators, members of governing boards, and university executives. Thus, performance measurement of the library and its benefits ultimately is essential to the survival of the library itself (Wallace and Van Fleet, 2001).

Performance measurement leads to enhanced efficiency and avoidance of errors. The history of libraries is rich with examples of inappropriate policies, processes, tools, and techniques that were promulgated for protracted periods of time because they were never properly evaluated, much too frequently, were never evaluated at all. Studies of library fines, for instance, have found that their impact is generally much more negative than positive, but fines remain an entrenched aspect of library practice. Such mistakes as creating catalogs that please librarians more than they serve patrons and imposing fine systems that discourage library use can be avoided through the relatively simple means of evaluating local needs, policies, and processes.

Even when performance measurement is not required for purposes of accountability, for demonstrating the need for libraries, for avoiding costly mistakes, or for planning, systematic performance measurement is desirable as an expression of the library's
concern for its public trust. Libraries are among the most service oriented and consumer-friendly of all institutions. The focus on the public that pervades all types of libraries and library services in itself suggests a need for evaluation, for exploring ways to do things better, for demonstrating that the library’s administration and staff want to provide the best possible library. The desire to improve, to grow, and to provide ever better services and products, is a deeply rooted part of the librarian’s philosophy (Wallace and Van Fleet, 2001).

1.3 Characteristics of Information Services

Services are interactions among people. Their eminent characteristic is that they are bundles of activities or processes. From the perspective of the user, information services are becoming more and more complex entities of physical things (tangibles) and processes (intangibles) (Snoj and Petermanec, 2001).

According to Snoj and Petermanec (2001), when managing information services, librarians must understand their basic characteristics:

- The nature of the process;
- Intangibility;
- Perishability;
- Variability;
- User involvement in the performance;
- People as part of the experience;
- That users do not obtain ownership; and
- The importance of time.
Users have problems in the conceptualization of information services and, therefore, also in their assessment. Usually they assess the value and the quality of services on the basis of those attributes upon which they feel they have the capability for assessment, and they need tangible clues to do this. Consequently, the attributes of physical evidence, library image, and the impression made by contact employees, and the soft attributes of information service (knowledge, courtesy, friendliness, politeness, empathy, promptness, accuracy, individualized attention, ability to convey trust and confidence) turn out to be strategically important components of efficient and effective management of information services. Information services cannot be separated from those who deliver the service or from active user involvement during the time of service delivery. Such involvement of personnel and users in the operational system makes it difficult to standardize and control service variability and consequently this intensifies user sensitivity towards service quality (Snoj and Petermanec, 2001).

1.4 Benchmarking Against Standards or Institution-Centered

When organizations want to improve their performance, they benchmark. The process of benchmarking is used to identify useful business practices; innovative ideas, effective operating procedures and winning strategies that can be adopted by an organization to accelerate its own progress by ensuring quality, productivity and cost improvements (Henczel, 2002).

They compare and measure their policies, practices, philosophies and performance against high-performing organizations anywhere in the world. In other words, benchmarking involves investigating how things are done elsewhere and where they are
done differently or better, to see whether a group could adapt the processes of another organization to improve their own processes (Henczel, 2002).

Libraries have traditionally used external comparative benchmarking studies to measure themselves against others in order to justify their existence or prove their value and support their case for maintaining existing levels of staffing or funding. These studies were invariably based on statistics gathered and shared for the purposes of measuring how they rank with other libraries (Gohlke, 1998). Libraries have also employed internal benchmarking methodologies to measure the "value" they contribute to their organization and compare this against what is contributed by other departments, divisions or information providers (Henczel, 2002).

One of the primary aims of a librarian is to ensure the service they offer contributes significantly to the success of the organization and is as good as it can be. To do this, a librarian must utilize internal and external benchmarking processes to measure performance and identify possible areas of improvement (Henczel, 2002).

Henczel (2002) commented that many of the benchmarking case studies were focused on the identification of the benchmarks and the measurement and comparison process, while very few followed through to the process of adapting best practice to improve a process.

Foot (1998) defines benchmarking as the process of comparing yourself with others—measuring your service's processes and performance and systematically comparing them to the performance of others in order to seek best practice. It enables the identification of areas where improvement is possible, how it might be achieved and what benefit it might deliver. Other definitions include the implementation of best practice to improve a
process beyond the benchmark performance such as that used by Partnership Sourcing (1997).

Bogan and English (1994), Balm (1992) clarify some of the associated terms: A benchmark is a fixed point, target or standard against which you can be measured. A benchmarking partner is any group or organization that is used for comparison. The highest performer in a benchmarking partnership is considered the best practices organization (that is, the one that has the most efficient and effective practices in place). The goal of benchmarking is to improve performance by adopting the best practices of benchmarking partners.

Performance indicators are used for measuring performance and monitoring progress against set targets.

Benchmarking can be done within an organization or externally, with other organizations. Internal benchmarking is a comparison of similar operations within an organization, while external forms of benchmarking include competitive benchmarking (a comparison with competitors) and functional benchmarking (a comparison of methods with organizations who have similar processes in a different industry) (Hinton, Francis and Holloway, 2000).

Data benchmarking measures and compares inputs and outputs of a process against a benchmark to assess performance. Process benchmarking analyzes a sequence of activities and compares them with similar functions in best practice organizations (Henczel, 2002).
1.5 Customer or Client-Centered (or Perceived) Quality Services

Neither the tangible product or service or the known market is the starting point for management. What counts is value of the offer perceived by users. This value is usually different from the one perceived by the supplier (Drucker, 2000). Therefore librarians have to understand the difference between the expected and perceived value and quality of their services. Good library performance depends on numerous external and internal factors such as the status of library in the external environment, the degree of library management autonomy in decision-making, the professional level of managers and employees, the internal quality of work life, and employee loyalty. However, it undeniably depends on the level of quality of information services as perceived by users.

According to the results of numerous research projects (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1990; Christopher, 1992; Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996; Kandampully, 1998) customers are becoming more and more sensitive to service elements and the overall quality of organizational output. There is enormous evidence from studies that high quality enhances profitability, improves productivity, and strengthens the competitive position (Cina, 1990; Heskett, Sasser and Hart, 1990; Teboul, 1991; Whiteley, 1991; Lawrence and Early, 1992; Quinn and Humble, 1993; Anderson, Fornell and Lehmann, 1994; Iacobucci, Grayson, and Ostrom, 1994; Caruana, Pitt, and Morris, 1995; Donaldson, 1995; Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996; Kandampully, 1998). Offering a high quality service is one visible way by which an organization can distinguish itself from its competitors in building a close relationship with customers and attaining a competitive advantage (Durvasula, Lyonski and Mehta, 1999). The quest for superior quality of its offerings is one of the most important strategic priorities confronting top management in
all kinds of organizations. Thus concepts such as perceived quality, customer satisfaction, perceived value and customer loyalty have become mainstream in managerial decisions (Grönroos, 1998. In consequence, long-term partnership relations are facilitated by this effort invested in perceived quality, customer satisfaction, perceived value and customer loyalty (Snoj and Petermanec, 2001).

These concepts serve also as operational goals for organizational effectiveness (Broady-Preston and Preston, 1999) and are well-documented pillars of the "service profit chain" (Heskett, Sasser and Schlesinger, 1997).

The construct of quality as conceptualized in the service literature centers on the concept of quality mainly from a marketing perspective. Therefore, it deals with the concept of perceived quality of service. Perceived quality is defined as the consumers' judgement about an entity's (service's) overall excellence or superiority (Rowley, 1998a).

The definition of quality is a difficult problem because, throughout history, technology has been built upon a human ability to specify, measure and control different concepts. As long as these concepts can be specified on the basis of objectively measurable phenomena like length, weight, hardness, and frequency, it is possible to set standards and develop control procedures based on these standards. The question is how should the degree of excellence, luxury and satisfaction or delight be translated into specifications and standards (Snoj and Petermanec, 2001). A comparison between the desired service and the perceived service (the perceived service superiority gap) reflects service quality (Oliver, 1996).
Customer satisfaction, on the other hand, is distinct from service quality assessments in that satisfaction results from a comparison between the predicted service (the level of service customers believe is likely to occur) and the perceived service.

Total quality in its broadest sense is couched in the customers' subjective understanding rather than in an objective understanding of quality. So, a human being makes the final judgement from a subjective point of view. However, mixed findings exist in the literature regarding the causal direction between these two constructs (Lee et al., 2000).

1.6 Statement of Problem

Library services are difficult to measure because their benefits are often intangible. There is no way to quantitatively measure how important a piece of information is to a particular client. However, the need to understand whether a library has achieved some standard of quality and has satisfied its clients is important. This is an attempt to find out whether the library of Universiti Tenaga Nasional Malaysia is providing adequate information services to its clients, and whether the clients are satisfied with these services.

1.7 Objectives of the Study

This study would highlight possible solutions to improve services and subsequently satisfy clientele's needs.

The primary objectives of this study are:-

1. To study the nature of the users' perceived expectations with regards to the quality of
information services offered by the library.

2. To assess and measure the users’ opinion on the adequacy and inadequacy of the library in providing information services.

3. To identify the service factors deemed important to clients of the library.

4. To identify the problem areas of information services in order to target the actual service elements for improvement.

1.8 Research Questions

The present study is conducted to address the following questions:

1. What is the nature of clients’ perceptions with regards to the quality of information services offered by the Library?

2. To what extent do clients perceived the adequacy of the information services provided by UNITEN Library?

3. What are the services perceived as important to clients of the Library?

4. What are the problem areas of information services of the Library perceived by users?

1.9 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study will cover undergraduate and postgraduate students of Universiti Tenaga Nasional. Questionnaires based on a modified version of the SERVPERF instrument will be distributed to three hundred randomly selected respondents. As such the findings of this study only reflect the opinions of the respondents from this selected institution and may not reflect the opinions of other university library patrons.
This study emphasizes on service provision due to the current trend of research on libraries nowadays which tend to focus on services, rather than on collections and things that a library possesses. By focusing on services, it is hoped that a library would improve better and there would be an ongoing relationship between users and library services.

1.10 Significance of the Study

1. The findings of the study will provide a useful contribution towards the development of performance measurement for academic libraries and add to the corpus of literature on the subject.

2. Data from the study will enable a generic set of performance indicators to be developed, which can be used as a tool for measuring the performance of information services in academic libraries.

1.11 Summary

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one highlights the background information of performance measurement and the characteristics of information services, followed by the objectives and the scope and limitation of the study. Chapter two includes a review of related literature on performance measurement. The method of data collection and analysis are described in chapter three. Chapter four presents the results of the statistical analysis and interpretation of the findings. Chapter five concludes this study with major findings on performance measurement calculated from the data, followed by suggestions for further research.