

Relationship between Perceived Service Quality and Student's Satisfaction among Undergraduate Students: A Case Study of Private Higher Education Institute in Dubai

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the five (5) dimensions of service quality; tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance empathy (SERVQUAL) and student's satisfaction. For this purpose a private university in Dubai, has been selected as case study to appraise the satisfaction and the service quality of the university students. Valid and reliable questionnaires were used for this cross section study and data were captured by a self administered approach. The correlation statistics was used to examine the relationship between the students and SERVQUAL. The correlation analysis revealed that among the five dimensions empathy and assurance were positively and significantly correlated with student's satisfaction in the university.

Key Words: Service quality, Students satisfaction and service quality, SERVQUAL.

I. INTRODUCTION

Colleges and establishments at higher education level in any countries assume an urgent part in creating exceptional HR and in addition set them up to face difficulties of changing worldwide and contemporary aptitudes prerequisites for practical competitiveness level of the particular nation. According to Palacio, Meneses and Perez (2002), if educational institutions can give quality training to students, it can pull in gifted and talented pool of students, who could promote and upgrade their aptitudes and turn into a beneficial piece of social-monetary arrangement of the country.

A perception of quality education services in the higher education institutes by its students is therefore, a crucial indicator of the institute's performance. Therefore, the students of those institutions are more capable, superior performers and useful who retain the better educational service quality and provide their students what they want for their strong academic and carrier accomplishment (Rowley, 1996).

They further argued that "in order to make the institution progressive and effective the knowledge of students' expectations, academic preferences and quality perception about the educational environment should be kept by the higher authorities of the institute" (Palacio et al., 2002).

A perception of quality education services in the higher education institutes by its students is therefore, a crucial indicator of the institute's performance, particularly the students who are at a higher academic level i.e. studying in a higher educational institution seek more quality education and perfection of the system at study place because it satisfies their esteem and develops them with all the essentials and capabilities to be an effective educational personality (Rowley, 1996). The main purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between service quality and students' satisfaction at private higher educational institution in UAE. The following section of the papers discusses the literature reviews on satisfaction and service quality while focusing has been given on education sector followed by research methodology and findings of the research with conclusions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To develop the theoretical framework of the study, the literature review of this paper has been focused on student satisfaction and the service quality, while discussing the relationship of service quality and student satisfaction.

Student Satisfaction

According to Hom (2002), "While most student satisfaction study focus on the perspective of customer, researchers are facing a problem of creating a standard definition for student satisfaction thus providing a need of customer satisfaction theory to be selected and modified so that it can explain the meaning of student satisfaction". One of the most widely used definition of satisfaction from the customer's expectations perspective was provided by Kotler and Clarke (1987).

Kotler and Clarke (1987) define "satisfaction as a state felt by a person who has experience performance or an outcome that fulfill his or her expectation". Satisfaction is considered as the function of a relative level of expectations and perceived performance of a product or a service. adopting the definition of Kotler and Clarke (1987) of customer's satisfaction in education sector, Palacio et al. (2002) defined it as "an students thinks of getting admission into any institutes, he/she expects the level of service quality such as people in the university, facilities, culture, teachers etc, this suggests that it is important to the researchers to determine first what the students expect before entering the university.

Service Quality

This is a common understanding among academicians and people from industry that the definition of quality can only be provided by the idea of how user or consumer judges the services of what they have experienced. The construct of quality as conceptualized in the services literature is based on the perceived quality. Perceived quality is defined as the consumer's judgment about an entity's overall experience or superiority (Zeithaml, 1987; Zammuto et al. 1996).

Similarly, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1990) also concluded that consumer perceptions of service quality result from comparing expectations prior to receiving the service, and their actual experience of the service. Perceived quality is also seen as a form of attitude, related to, but not the same as satisfaction, and resulting from a comparison of expectations with perceptions of performance (Rowley, 1996).

Therefore, perceived service quality could be the product of the evaluations of a number of service encounters and in this case, of a student, these could range from encounters with office staff, to encounters with tutors, lecturers, the head of departments, etc (Hill, 1995). As a result, if an organization regularly provides service at a level that exceeds customer expectations, the service will be evaluated as high quality. In contrast, if an organization fails to meet customer expectations, the service will be judge as poor quality (Zammuto et al., 1996).

Generally, students have three main criteria that need to be satisfied with services. These has been labeled as Requisite encounters which essentially enable students to fulfill their study obligations; Acceptable encounters which students acknowledge as being desirable but not essential during their course of study and Functional, an encounter of a practical or utilitarian nature (Hom, 2002).

According to Lassar, Manolis and Winsor (2000), two most prevalent and widely accepted perspectives on service quality include the SERVQUAL model and the Technical/Functional Quality framework.

Gronroos (1984) held that service quality is made up of three dimensions "the technical quality of the outcome", "the functional quality of the encounter" and "the company corporate image". He argued that in examining the determinants of quality, it is necessary to differentiate between quality associated with the process of service delivery and quality associated with the outcome of service, judged by the consumer after the service is performed.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) however listed ten determinants of service quality that can be generalized to any type of service. The ten dimensions include tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security and understanding. In addition, these ten dimensions were then regrouped in the well-known five dimensions in the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1990) which include assurance, empathy, reliability, responsiveness and tangibility. The definition for each is explained:

1. *Tangibles*: Appearance of the physical facilities, equipment, personnel and written material.
2. *Reliability*: Ability to deliver the promised service dependably and accurately.
3. *Responsiveness*: Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
4. *Assurance*: Knowledge and courtesy of employees, and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.
5. *Empathy*: Caring, individualized attention that the organization provides its customers.

Therefore, an academic organization, must build resources in terms of the capacity and competency to not only develop new product and services, but also find ways (strategy) to actually use these resources in new product development or service creation. These new or improved products and services should satisfy students in terms of higher perceived value and quality (Dubey and Alam, 2012). It is interesting to identify here about the applicability of SERVQUAL to education sector, meaning that there is a suitability of applying it in higher education. Numerous studies have adapted this measurement in HEI, such as SQ in business schools (O' Niel, 2003) and higher educational institutions (Saaditul, Samsinar and Wong, 2000).

III. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

This study was adopted from Parasuraman's SERVQUAL dimensions. The dependent variable in this study is overall student satisfaction that is measured by the overall satisfaction with the HEIs. The independent variable in this study is service quality in higher education that measures the level of satisfaction with service performance. The dimensions included in this variable are tangibility, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, and empathy.

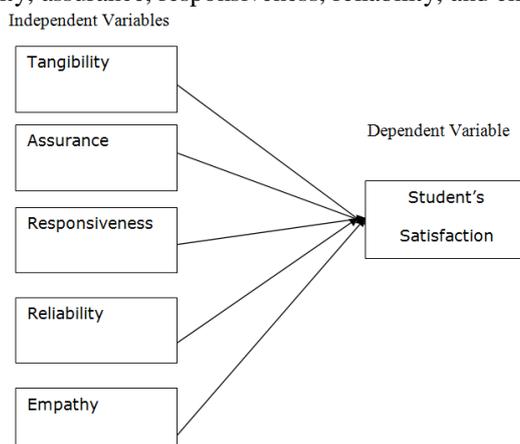


Figure 1: Research Model- Service Quality-Dimensions & Students Satisfaction

Research Methodology

Sample

The research design is a cross-sectional, field-based study of private higher education institute in Dubai. The exploratory research method comprising a field survey was used. A structured questionnaire was developed and administered to gather primary data from the students of Media Studies program at bachelor levels.

Instrument and Measurement

In the service quality instrument used by the study, aspects of service quality and its five dimensions were adopted from the original 20 service quality items of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988). However, the terms and terminologies of business functions were replaced where appropriate for the education sector.

A Multi-item measures were partly developed by the authors and partly borrowed from the study by Jabnoun and Al-Tamimi (2003). To measure the five dimensions in service quality (tangibility, assurance, reliability, responsiveness and empathy) a five (5) point Likert scale from 1 for not satisfied at all to 5 for very satisfied is used. For measuring student satisfaction, instrument for this variable was adapted from Atheyyaman (1997). In this variable, it has three (3) items with Likert scale ranges from 1 highly dissatisfied to 5 for highly satisfied. The both variables were computed as average summated method and for this, three items of student’s satisfaction were summated while, four (4) items for tangibility, five (5) items for reliability, four (4) items for responsiveness, three (3) items for assurance and finally four (4) items for empathy were average computed. The reliability test for all the items were used to assess the reliability of the items of all variables and found that all the variables were reliable between the alpha score of 0.69-0.83. In Table 1.0, the reliability test scores of all the variables are presented

Table 1.0: Reliability Test of the Variables

Variables	No of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha Scores
Tangibles	4	0.72
Reliability	5	0.83
Responsiveness	5	0.69
Assurance	3	0.70
Empathy	4	0.80
Student’s Satisfaction	3	0.71

In addition to measuring service quality and student’s satisfaction, this study also captured respondent information. Respondents were asked to give information on age, gender, education profile, marital status, and majoring in their degree program. A total of 34 students (68%) were male while 16 students (32%) were female. The participant of this study was mainly from college of Law and College of media studies. There were 32 students (64%) from College of law and 18 students (36%) from the Media College. Among these students 49 (98%) studying bachelor degree while, 1 student (2.0%) were from the Masters program. The findings of the respondents information is presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
Age	18-24	18	36.0
	25-30	16	32.0
	31-35	9	18.0
	36-40	4	8.0
	Over 40	3	6.0
	Total	50	100.0
		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
Gender	Male	34	68.0
	Female	16	32.0
	Total	50	100.0
Marital Status	Married	17	34.0
	Unmarried	27	54.0
	Other	6	12.0
	Total	50	100.0
		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
Program of Study	Bachelor	49	98.0
	Masters	01	2.0

	Total	50	100.0
		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
Major	Media	18	36.0
	Law	32	64.0
	Total	50.0	100.0

Findings: Relationship between Service Quality and Students Satisfaction

To examine the relationship between the five dimension of service quality and the student satisfaction, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. Table 1.2, presented the correlation statistics of the analysis. The findings from the correlation statistics indicated that, tangibility, reliability and responsiveness of the service quality were not significantly correlated/associated with the student’s perceived satisfaction. This further suggested that these three (3) dimensions of the service quality had no significant relationship with the student satisfaction.

However, the relationship was found between assurance and student satisfaction the $r = .475$ (sig 0.001) this indicates that the significant relationship between students’ perceived level of assurance is positive and the strength of the association is also at moderate level. Similarly the association of the strength between empathy and satisfaction was also found to be positive $r = .65$ (sig 0.00) and also at moderate level, but the association of empathy students’ satisfaction is even greater than the assurance.

Table 1.2: Correlation between SEVQUAL and Students' Satisfaction
Correlation between SEVQUAL and Students' Satisfaction

	Tangibility	Reliability	Assurance	Empathy	Responsiveness	Satisfaction
Tangibility	1	.647**	.257	.146	.581**	.095
		.000	.071	.311	.000	.515
Reliability	.647**	1	.310*	.131	.683**	.135
	.000		.028	.364	.000	.357
Assurance	.257	.310*	1	.636**	.219	.475**
	.071	.028		.000	.127	.001
Empathy	.146	.131	.636**	1	.182	.645**
	.311	.364	.000		.206	.000
Res	.581**	.683**	.219	.182	1	.092
	.000	.000	.127	.206		.531
Satisfaction	.095	.135	.475**	.645**	.092	1
	.515	.357	.001	.000	.531	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

IV. CONCLUSION

The study findings are exceptionally specific to the particular private university in Dubai and their students; therefore, caution must be taken before generalizing the findings of the study. The correlation study revealed that empathy was one of the most crucial factors of the perceived satisfaction and students perceived high quality services if they had been given respect, taken care by the university management, staff and faculty. Similarly, in terms of assurance, the perceived level of trust while dealing with information sharing and also the overall attitude and behavior of the staff and faculty appeared to be significant with students’ level of higher perceived satisfaction. These further implies that in this private university, student value respect, expected to be treated professionally as well as expect faculty and management of the university to be polite and helpful to them in their education and solving issues.

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