

MEASUREMENT OF SERVICE QUALITY GAP IN THE SELECTED PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES/INSTITUTES OF PESHAWAR USING SERVQUAL MODEL

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ABSTRACT

This paper measures the service quality of private higher education sector of Peshawar, Pakistan with the help of famous SERVQUAL model. Quantitative approach adopted for measuring service quality by allocating 205 instruments among the students of three private universities and institutions of Peshawar. Data collected and analyzed through SPSS and revealed that student's expectations are higher than their perceived service quality in education sector. We got negative signs for all the servqual dimensions. The difference of the perceived and expected mean found to be -0.97. The highest split means for "responsiveness" which is -1.1 and the lowest is -0.748 for assurance.

Keywords: Servqual, Higher Education, Universities

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that, Higher education plays an imperative role in heightening of an individual's quality of life. The scrutiny of service quality has got ample consideration and become an important issue nowadays. Service quality is different from product hence difficult to measure. Gronos, (1984) described 2 facets of service quality such as; technical quality and functional quality. According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, (1988) service quality is the expectation of customers further more they explained that customers are having expectations from service providers and if perceived service quality is meeting or exceeding their expectation they would be delighted and if less than expectations, it will create disappointment.

Higher study in Pakistan is playing a vital role in the community development. There are 156 private and public higher education universities and institutions in Pakistan, out of which 87 are public and 69 are private universities and institutions (Higher Education Commission Pakistan 2014). Higher education universities and institutions are mostly offering Bachelor, Master, Master of Science (MS) and PhD in different subjects.

There is continues demand of skillful and competent human resource in different sectors of Pakistan. But the question is whether they are getting such education in the Country. For this reason there is a need of a research to measure the quality of these educational institutions and give recommendations on such basis.

1.1. Propose of the Research:

The primeaimof this research is to analyze the quality of educational services through servqual model.

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- To quantify the service quality in private sector higher education universities and institutions of Peshawar, Pakistan
- To identify the variation between students expectations and perceptions of service quality in private universities/institutions

1.2. Research Problem:

Higher Education improves individual's quality of life. There is demand of competent human resource in different sectors of Pakistan such as, Communication, infrastructure, banking, retail etc. But the question is that whether the private universities and institutions are providing such quality education to meet the demands and requirements of such industries. For this reason the researchers intentions are to determine the level of service quality in higher education and identify Gaps if any while using SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1988).

1.3. Significance of the study:

Literature shows that there is a great deal of confusion in terms of the definition of quality in service oriented industry. The best definition of service quality based on literature is customers' satisfaction. The quality expected by customer from the companies that is important. This study will identify the Gap of customer expectation and perception and will give recommendation based on Gaps that would be very useful to the owners of Higher education universities and institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

This part of the study will review the empirical work done on the perception of service quality. Different authors define quality for services differently. The below literature will discuss some of the well known definitions of service quality and then will discuss the empirical work done by well-known researchers.

2.1. Service Quality:

Service quality is important not only for service oriented firms but also for tangible product oriented company. There is a great deal of ambiguity found in text on the subject of service quality definition. Tangible products can be evaluated through standards but service quality measurement is different according to different authors.

Kotler & Keller, (2006), define service as “activities or benefits that are offered for sale, or that are offered for being related to a particular product”. Furthermore “Service is kind of performance that is offered by one party to another and in corporeality is a must part of it”. Beer, (2003) described them as a complete package which consists of all the activity that are important for customer satisfaction. However for Mohamed & Shirley (2009) service quality is a source of competitive advantage for service oriented industry. According to WalfriedLasser, Manolis, Robert & Winsor, (2000) service is a set of characteristics that fulfill customer's requirement as per expectation to build partnerships.

Kotler, Wong, Saunders, Armstrong, (2005) defined services as “Service is a product that consists of any activity, benefit or satisfaction that one party can offer to another for sale. Services are essentially intangible and do not result in the ownership of anything”.

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, (1988) service quality is the expectation of customers. According to them customers having expectations from companies and they compare these expectations with perceived service quality. If perceived service quality meets or exceeds expectations customers are feeling happy, but on the other hand if perceived service quality is less than expectation, then customer would be disappointed. For such purpose the proposed Gap model by presenting five different types of Gaps might occur between service provider and receiver. These gaps are the following

1. Gap between customer expectation and management perception
2. Gap between management perception and service quality perception
3. Gap between service quality specification and service delivery
4. Gap between service delivery and external communication
5. Gap between expected service and perceived service

From the above literature one can conclude that there should be proper dimensions of service quality against which service quality should be measured.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, (1988) determined five dimensions for the measurement of service quality in different service oriented industries. The dimensions identified by them are as follows:

1. **Tangibles:** include the physical evidence of the service. In our case the class rooms, computer labs, common rooms, toilets canteen and the physical appearance of the universities.
2. **Reliability:** It involves how consistently organization is providing quality service and how much customer can rely on the firm. In our case the consistency of private universities regarding service quality and competent lecturers and how much students can rely on university and the faculty members.
3. **Responsiveness:** It includes how much the staff members are ready and willing to provide services. In our case the faculty members and the administrative staff and their devotion to organizations and students. How much they are having concern regarding students complaint, learning process and their best interest at their heart
4. **Assurance:** It refers to the skills of the service providers. In our case the awareness of the faculty members and the ability to implant self-reliance in students regarding service providers.
5. **Empathy:** It shows how much organization understands customer's requirements. In our case the ability of teachers to interact with students in order to get the exact requirement and fulfill the need accordingly.

Babakus and Mangold (1992) measured the service quality gap in hospitals with the help of servqual model. They used quantitative approach and modified the instrument of servqual model by bringing changes to the words and also shrink the instrument from 22 paired questions to 15 paired questions. They found Cronbach's Alpha for all five dimensions greater than 0.5

Bagherzadeh&Bagherzadeh (2010) evaluated the higher educational services in Tabriz through servqual model. They found that higher educational institutes in Tabriz failed to deliver quality education as he got negative signs for all the five dimensions of servqual model. He got the minimum gap for assurance and the highest for empathy.

Arbuni, Shoghli, Badriposhteh, &Mohajeri, (2009) measured the service quality while using servqual model in Zanjan university of Medical Sciences. They found negative signs for five dimensions. They found the highest gap for empathy and the least for assurance.

Aghamolaie, Zare, and Abedini, (2007) measured the service quality in Hurmuzgan University of medical sciences. Their results showed gap among all the five dimensions of servqual model. They found the highest in responsiveness and least in reliability.

Ahmadi and Ghelichli, (2006) evaluated service quality in Payamenoor University using servqual model. They got the gap of -0.7., hence shows that student's expectations were higher than perceptions. Chau (2006) did his study on "perception quality in higher education" and observed the highest gap in assurance dimensions. The SERVQUAL model also used by Kang & James, (2004) in telecommunication Industry in South Korea. They used 464 users of two cellular companies of South Korea. They found that not only the functional quality is important but also technical quality is valued by customer for over all service quality.

Karassavidou, Glaveli&Papadopoulos,(2009) used servqual model in NSH (National Service Hospital) in Greek. Authors modified the original instrument by bringing changes to the words and also added some questions and distributed 26 paired instruments among 137 patients. They found all dimensions highly reliable and got significant gap between patient expectations and perceived service quality.

Ahmad and Shoab (2009) used servqual model for service quality measurement of Library Sciences in one of the National Universities of Bangladesh. They revealed that the student's expectations were higher than perceptions of students. Lim and Tang (2000) used the same SERVQUAL model with two additional dimensions, "accessibility and affordability". They used the extended SERVQUAL model to gauge the difference between patient's expectations and perceptions in Singapore hospitals. They used 25 items paired questionnaire with 3 additional questions for the two extra dimensions. Their findings revealed that both "Assurance" and "Responsiveness" the most valued factor for health sector.

Manaf&Nooi, (2009) used servqual hospital in Malaysia's Hospitals. They distributed 1216 instruments among in-patients and out-patients and did factor analysis which comes up with clinical and physical dimensions of service. Oliveria and Ferreira's (2008) used the same five dimensions SERVQUAL model to measure the higher educational institutes' service quality in Brazil and designed instrument consists of 19 questions. They collected data from 38 students in the Production and Engineering department. They designed questions in two parts; one for expectation and other for perception. They found negative signs for all the 19 items, which shows that student expectations are higher in higher education in Brazil than perception. Bradley (2006) measured the service quality of Chinese post graduate students and found the perceptions of students lower than expectations.

Arambewela& Hall, (2006; cited in Mahmoodi, Salarzadeh and Paslari, 2015) did proportional study of overseas education and its satisfaction level. They used servqual

model and conducted research on different nationals in same university. They revealed that different nationals give priority to different variable based on their nationality and values. According to their finding the most effective dimension of servqual model was tangibility and least was empathy.

Enayati, Modanloo, Behnamfar, & Rezaei, (2013) adopted Servqual model to Islamic Azad University of Mazandaran. They used stratified random sampling technique and distributed 373 questionnaires among the students. They revealed that student expectation from Azad University is greater than perceived service quality. Amelia, Hidayanto & Hapsari, (2011) used the SERVQUAL model for expectations and perceptual gaps in universities they were engaged. They designed questionnaire and distributed among 200 students. They found that overall service quality offered by such universities is satisfactory, but they still got some gaps in reliability and assurance. Arbuni, Shoghli, Badriposhteh, & Mohajeri, (2009) used the famous servqual model to assess the service quality in Zanjan University of Medical Sciences. They found that all the dimensions of servqual model were lacking behind the expectations of customers. Zavar, Behrangi, Asgarian, & Naderi, (2007) did the same study in Payamenoor University Azarbaijan and they also got the same results, such as students expectations were higher than perception in Payamenoor University.

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative approach used to identify the gap by designing instrument for each dimension of SERVQUAL. 21 items questionnaire designed for all the five dimensions of SERVQUAL. For the measurement of responses authors used 5 point Likert scale. The objective of the study is the identification of the difference of customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality with the help of the following equation.

Quality = Perceived Quality – Expected Quality (Ford, Walker, and Churchill 1975; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, (1988).

Questionnaire is designed in two sections; first 21 questions were regarding expectation of students, in which customers were asked about their expectation from the excellent private universities/institutions of Peshawar, Pakistan. Second part questions were regarding their perception of service quality of the university they had chosen.

Questionnaires were distributed among 205 students in the selected universities and institutions using convenience non probability random sampling. Data was collected from 205 students of selected private universities in Peshawar, Pakistan.

The instrument reliability was checked separately for Expected questionnaire and Perceived questionnaire through SPSS and found the Cronbach's alpha 0.853 and 0.880 respectively. Cronbach's alpha is greater than 0.7, which shows good reliability of questionnaire

Table 1. Shows Reliability Test and Cronbach's Alpha Score

Items	Cronbach's Alpha Customer Expectations	Cronbach's Alpha Customer Perceptions
Tangibles	0.505	0.591
Reliability	0.663	0.700
Responsiveness	0.509	0.646
Assurance	0.616	0.646
Empathy	0.687	0.708

The collected data was then analyzed through SPSS. The researcher found the mean of expected quality and perceived quality as 4.3207 and 3.373211 respectively. The mean for all five dimensions of servqual model is given below.

Table 2. The Expected and Perceived Quality Means

Perceived Service Quality			Minus	Expected Service quality		
Dimensions	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	Equal
Tangibles	3.429	2.55104	Minus	4.315	1.8653	-0.886
Reliability	3.3688	3.49019	Minus	4.43	2.6877	-1.061
Responsiveness	3.0695	2.96479	Minus	4.179	2.2531	-1.11
Assurance	3.6098	2.73188	Minus	4.358	2.0029	-0.748
Empathy	3.389	2.94941	Minus	4.3219	2.2229	-0.933
Total	3.37321			4.3207		-0.947

Note: Split Means -0.947 shows higher Expected than Perceived Service Quality

According to Ford, Walker, and Churchill 1975); Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry; 1988) they measured the quality gap by subtracting expected quality from perceived quality; in this papers the researchers did the same.

Quality = Perceived Quality – Expected Quality (Ford, Walker, and Churchill 1975); Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry; 1988).

$$\text{Quality} = 3.373211 - 4.3207 = -0.947$$

Result shows that student's expectations in higher education from private universities in Peshawar are higher than the perceived service quality of the universities they have chosen for their higher studies.

The highest gap identified in “Responsiveness” -1.1095 followed by “Reliability” -1.06. The least gap found in Assurance which is -0.748 followed by tangibles -0.886.

The mean of perceived quality is 3.37211 which is not bad. It seems that student's satisfaction level from the universities they have chosen for their higher studies is not bad.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study was to look at the gap between expectation and perception of service quality in higher education sector of Peshawar, Pakistan through original SERVQUAL model. Questionnaires distributed among 205 students of 3 different private universities in Peshawar, the capital city of KP Province of Pakistan. The responses then analyzed through SPSS software. Finding shows gap among all the dimensions of servqual model. It is found that the perceived quality is lower than student's expectations. The gap measured was -0.974. It is also found that the gap in responsiveness is very high and assurance got the least gap. History shows the same trend, previous researchers also got the negative signs for all the five dimensions of servqual model in higher education sector. Such as Aghamolaie, Zare, & Abedini, (2007); Ahmadi and Ghelichli (2006); Bradley (2006) and Zavvar, Behrangi, Asgarian, & Naderi, (2007) got negative signs between customer expectations and perception of service quality.

However, in this study we got highest and lowest gaps in Responsiveness and Assurance respectively which is slightly different from other authors; such as studies conducted by Arbuni, Shoghli, Badriposhteh, & Mohajeri, (2009); Bagherzadeh and Bagherzadeh (2010). and the lowest and highest gaps were seen in assurance and empathy, respectively, and in the study by Aghamolaie, Zare and Abedini (2007) got high negative signs for "Responsiveness" same as we got in this study and lower gap identified by them was of "Reliability"; which is a bit different in our case, as we got the lowest minus score for "Assurance" This study and most of the previous studies in same respect got the negative signs which show the expectations are higher than the perceived quality. Service sector such as university, they should identify the gap and work on those areas which show highest gap. In this study the highest gap found in Responsiveness. Responsiveness is related to the performance of faculty and administrative members of the university.

One of the major benefits of Servqual model is that it identifies the exact problem area in service delivery. Management and administration can easily identify the problematic areas and can efficiently utilize their energy in the same area in order to get better results. In this study we got negative signs in all the dimensions of Servqual Model; however the highest gap identified was in Responsiveness. Responsiveness is related to Universities faculty and other administrative staff. Universities should interact with employees and educate them the importance of student's satisfaction. They should provide them training and development; they should encourage and motivate their employees by offering them rewards. Universities should change their traditional approach of teaching; they should interact with students, and should record the student's complaints and settle disputes on time and in friendly environment.

Service quality is the important variable for competitive advantage. Service quality in education is very important as the number of private education institutions and universities are growing rapidly which intensifies competition. In order to be successful in such a challenging environment, it is very important for Universities to maintain high quality educational standards.

Servqual model with its popularity still required more empirical evidence in different service oriented industries. This model can be used in health sector and can also be used with other important variables; such as customer loyalty and trust.

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