

Student's Satisfaction in Higher Level Education

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Abstract

The emergence of a global economy due to increased trade, investment and mobility of people and, more recently, work across borders has forced nation states to adapt their systems of higher education to the changed global realities. Several countries are reshaping their systems of higher education for making them globally competitive. Pragmatism, rather than ideology, is driving this change. The Indian higher education industry is facing turbulent times. Lowering of entry barriers, the advent of distance education, the huge growth in student numbers, internationalization of education, the need to reduce dependence on government funding and increasing competitive pressures are the prominent forces for Change which have prompted a need to focus on quality and customer service. Quality in education services is complex in its facets largely undefined and un-researched. This paper endeavors to fill the gap in the service quality literature by reporting insights obtained in an extensive exploratory investigation of quality in the education sector.

Key words: Change, Quality service, Management

Introduction

With growing student mobility and the increasing demand in the global labour market for the highly skilled, higher education has now gone international. With the entry of a large number of private and foreign providers, there is intense competition in the higher education sector. The students and academics now have the choice to opt for the best deal. (The Economist, 2005b).

In the new global realities of competition and increased mobility of students and workforce, there is a need to focus on quality and customer service and this can be only possible when there is transformation of skills,

pedagogy, and technology .It is often said that if someone from the 19th century were to travel forward in time, he or she would find a revolutionary change in nearly every dimension of society, with the exception of the classroom; with a teacher at the front, writing on a board, and pupils in rows of desks taking notes. Our education systems continue to reinforce traditional approaches to teaching. Changing this will require leaders to develop a compelling vision of 21st century learning, communicate it with passion, and ensure that it is translated into action at all levels of the system. The transformation will need to be holistic; from government ministries to principals and classroom teachers. It will also require a holistic reform of education delivery, to align incentives and provide resources for

teacher training, curriculum development, accountability, and assessment.

Review of Literature

Higher education is a service, it is undoubtedly both intangible and heterogeneous, and is produced and consumed simultaneously when the consumers are participating in the delivery process. This meets the criterion of inseparability. Finally, education is perishable for it is impossible to store, despite the technology of video (Cuthbert 1996).

Berry (1985) and Gronroos (1982) demonstrate that consumer perception of service quality results from comparing expectations before receiving the service and the actual experience with the service. Based on this, customer satisfaction is associated with service quality. If the service delivered fails to match expectations, then customers perceive the service delivery to be imperfect. If service delivery matches expectations, then the customer is satisfied. If the service delivery exceeds expectations, then customers have the impression that service delivery is excellent. Thus, service quality is an attitude; $\text{service quality} = \text{perception} - \text{expectation}$. The model examining the discrepancy between the expectation and perception is often referred to as a disconfirmation model. (Oliver 1979, 1980, Churchill and Surprenant 1982). To manage service quality, it is important to understand consumer expectations (Zeithaml et al. 1990). Regarding

the definition of expectation Parasuraman et al. (1988) indicate expectation as desires, wants, normative expectation, and ideal standards. Although many debates concern themselves with this statement, there is widespread agreement that most consumers go to a service encounter with some form of expectation. Maybe the expectations differ from ill-defined in the unfamiliar situation to well-defined with familiar ones, whether or not these expectations are met, it influences perceived service quality (Hill 1995). Zeithaml et al. (1990) define several factors which influence the consumer's expectation. These are: Word of mouth: what customers hear from other customers, Personal needs: determined by individual characteristics and circumstances, Past experience of the service: or related service, External communications for the service provider: for example, printed advertisements, TV commercials, brochures, and oral promises from service provider employees. Gronroos (1984), Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) provide a well-known framework for measuring service quality – gap theory which has defined service quality as the gap between consumers' expectations and their perceptions of how the service is performed. For higher education, Mc Elwee and Redman (1993) used a model of SERVQUAL developed by Parasuraman et al (1985, 1988). Anderson, Hill (1995) also investigated the implications of service quality theory for higher education. The SERVQUAL model is important for the evaluation of quality of higher education.

Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality:

Consumers' satisfaction assessments relate to specific service transactions, while service quality is a general attitude relating to the service provider's overall excellence or superiority (Bitner 1990). Parasuraman et al, (1985) and Cornin and Taylor, (1992) show that service quality should be treated as an antecedent of service satisfaction, and that service quality leads to satisfaction. However, the opposite point has been raised by some researchers. Bitner (1990) debates that consumer satisfaction leads to perceived service quality, and that satisfaction affects service quality. In the education industry, Athiyaman (1997) in his research among students found that service quality is directly related to satisfaction. Regarding the view taken, the relationship between satisfaction and service quality is strong. Plamer (2004) indicates that the terms quality and satisfaction are quite often used interchangeably.

The Importance of Customer Involvement:

In managing service quality, it is not enough to focus on the service provider personnel; one also has to pay attention to the behavior of the consumer (Hill 1995). In the service delivery process of higher education, effective customer involvement is significant in service quality creation. In the context of higher education, students need to be set clear criteria in assignments, deadlines, pre-reading and so on. Teachers have to find a way to arouse their student participants. Consumers are temporary participants in organizations that must develop

mechanisms to ensure that consumers behave appropriately in the service operations (Mills 1986).

Purpose of Research

Management colleges of Ghaziabad, has only a limited capability to measure student satisfaction and very little understanding of student expectations. Therefore by understanding student perceptions of service quality, the colleges can raise its overall level of service of quality, and it can take some measures for changing and improving service quality to adjust and allocate scarce sources in some areas which are ill –performed. The purpose of this research is to survey student expectations, service quality and student satisfaction at Management Colleges of NCR. Ghaziabad regards itself as one of largest academic centre for Management colleges. It only focuses on postgraduate study.

Research Methodology

According to the objectives of this research, the research study adopted quantitative phase; the main component of the research is quantitative research using SERVQUAL model for testing the gap between service quality expectations and perceptions.

The SERVQUAL instrument was used for the quantitative data collection (Refer Annexure 1) the questionnaire contained a number of variables related to different areas of the college service providing. The respondents were asked about the quality of the service

offering by making the comparison between perceptions and expectations for a number of statements. The population size of each college is different.

Results and Discussions

The questionnaire based on SERVQUAL was used in this study to measure students' expectations and perceptions of service quality (refer Appendix). A modified SERVQUAL instrument was utilized. The questionnaire comprised of 20 statements.

The Respondents were rated on five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy on Likert scale where 'strongly agree' was coded as one, whilst 'strongly disagree' was coded as five. The second part of the questionnaire measured

student's rating on overall quality, value for money, and satisfaction. The elements are Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. Students were asked to rank the most important element as 1 and least important as 5 for influencing student perceptions according to the service quality were filled. The data of the questionnaire were transformed into 'difference' quality scores. For each item, the author calculated the different quality scores based on the difference between the student's perceived quality of service and the expectations that they held of the service that they expected to receive. This is represented by the equation below:

$$\text{Service Quality} = \text{perceived quality of service} - \text{expectations of service quality.}$$

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Name of College	Students No. who filled questionnaire	No. of male respondent	No. of Female respondent
Students of PGDBM from 9 different Management Colleges of Ghaziabad	159	95	64

Male respondents occupy a large part compared female. 60% are the male respondents and 40% are the female respondents who filled the questionnaire completely. The Cronbach's alphas for each of the perception and expectations dimensions of service quality are outlined in Table

Table 2: Reliability Analysis –Scale Test

Reliability Analysis –Scale Test (ALPHA)		
Number of Items	Perception	Expectations
20	0.726	0.781

The total alpha of 0.726 and 0.781 indicates that the five dimensions of SERVQUAL are highly internally reliable (Nunnally 1978). Thus the scales used to measure the various

aspects of service quality can be regarded as reliable.

Student Expectations: Quantitative Study

The data was collected using SERVQUAL from the 159 sample for both the expectation and perception regarding education sector using 5- point scale with 1 (strongly agree) and 5 (strongly disagree). The average mean score for 4 dimensions and 20 statements of the expectation and perception is shown in table 4. The average expectation and perception for tangible was found to be 2.75 and 2.10 respectively. Then the service quality gap was found for each dimension and along 20 statements using basic gap model without considering the weightage each dimensions. So, the service quality gap of service dimension Tangible will be 0.65 (2.75-2.10). Similarly the gap was found for each dimension and 20 statements. The table 3 shows the gap for the 4 dimensions i.e. Tangible (0.65), Empathy (0.45), Assurance (0.02), Responsiveness (0.29) and reliability (0.81). Since, the gap above all the five dimensions is positive so the perceived service is greater than the expected service. The ranks are given to the five dimensions on the basis of the service gap, the maximum gap is rated as rank 1 and minimum gap is ranked 4. Since; 1 is rated as strongly agree, so lower the mean

better the service is being performed. So, a positive gap (Expected - Perceived) is considered as good, i.e. the perception is better than expectations.

Also from Table 3 it is seen that the t test value for Pair E4 and P4 (Tangible dimension) is greater than 0.05 at 95% level of significance. So the null hypothesis in the above pair is accepted and there is a no significant difference between the expected and perceived. It is seen that the t test value for Pair E10 and P10 (Responsiveness dimension) is greater than 0.05 at 95% level of significance. So the null hypothesis in the above pair is accepted and there is a no significant difference between the expected and perceived. It is seen that the t test value for Pair E 17 and P17 and E19 and P 19 (Empathy dimension) is greater than 0.05 at 95% level of significance. So the null hypothesis in the above pair is accepted and there is a no significant difference between the expected and perceived. But in both the pair the perceived mean is less than the expected mean so there is not much more need to improve this statement, but in long term college needs to check on this parameter as at any moment expectation may be more than perception.

Table 3: Student Expectations

Sl. No.	Dimensions	E	P	Mean (E)	Mean (P)	Gap (E-P)	Rank	Sig. (2-tailed)	Sig.
Tangibility				2.75	2.10	0.65			
1	College have up-to-date appropriate equipment	E1	P1	2.76	1.99	0.77	6	0.000	S
2	College physical facilities, such as accommodation are well designed for their use	E2	P2	2.75	1.84	0.91	3	0.000	S
3	College employees are neat and professionally dressed	E3	P3	2.70	1.88	0.82	5	0.000	S
4	Materials associated with the service (such as course packs or brochures) are informative and easy to read	E4	P4	2.80	2.67	0.13	17	0.182	NS
Reliability				2.74	1.93	0.81			
5	College promise to do something by a certain time, they will do it	E5	P5	3.54	1.84	1.7	1	0.000	S
6	When students have problems, College will show a sincere interest in understanding the problem and resolving it	E6	P6	2.04	1.76	0.28	12	0.001	S
7	College delivers its services on time	E7	P7	2.62	2.14	0.86	4	0.000	S
8	College insist on error free records, such as participants, results of exams	E8	P8	2.74	1.98	0.76	7	0.000	S
Responsiveness				2.02	1.73	0.29			
9	Employees of College will tell students exactly when a service such as answering student's requests, deadline of course work, exam will be performed	E9	P9	2.13	1.86	0.27	13	0.003	S
10	Employees of College will give prompt service to students	E10	P10	1.53	1.53	0	19	1.000	NS
11	Employees of College will always be willing to help students	E11	P11	2.13	1.95	0.18	15	0.029	S
12	Employees at College will never be too busy to respond to student requests	E12	P12	2.30	1.59	0.71	8	0.000	S

Assurance				2.17	2.15	0.02			
13	The behaviour of employees of College will instill confidence in students	E13	P13	1.93	1.69	0.24	14	0.008	S
14	Employees of College will be consistently courteous with students	E14	P14	2.41	3.49	-1.08	20	0.000	S
15	Employees of College will have the appropriate knowledge to answer student questions	E15	P15	2.16	2.69	0.47	9	0.000	S
16	Guest Lecture always insists confidence in me	E16	P16	2.18	1.74	0.44	10	0.000	S
Empathy				2.57	2.12	0.45			
17	College give students individual Attention	E17	P17	2.29	2.12	0.17	16	0.076	NS
18	College have operating hours convenient to their students	E18	P18	2.15	1.82	0.33	11	0.002	S
19	Employees of College will understand the specific needs of their students	E19	P19	2.69	2.58	0.11	18	0.403	NS
20	The employees of College will understand the specific needs of their students	E20	P20	3.14	1.97	1.17	2	0.000	S

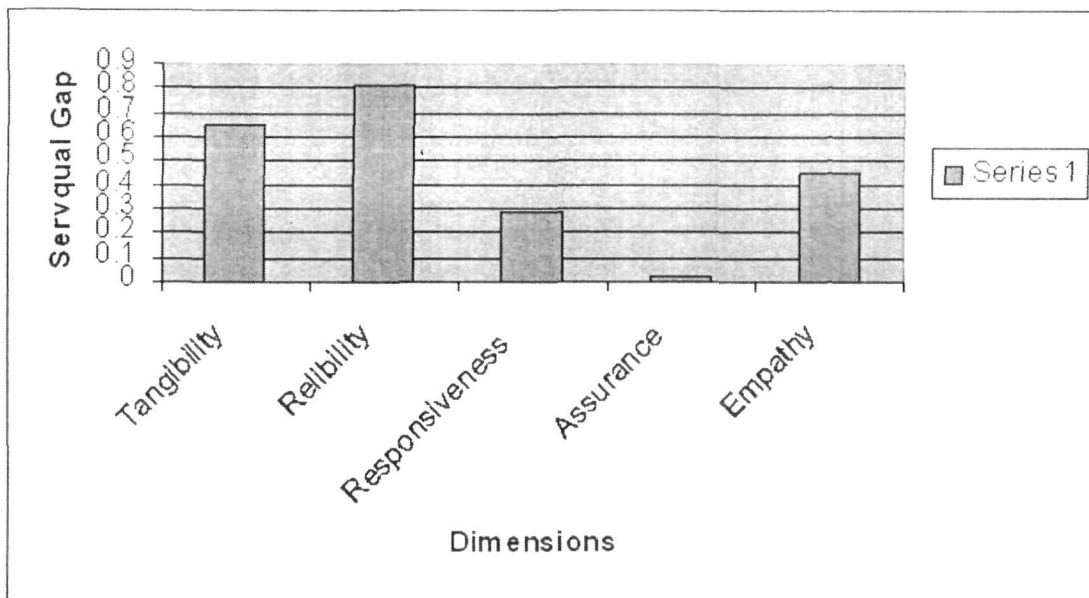
Student Perceptions of Quality of Service versus Expectations:

Table 3 display the means and standard deviations for each dimension of expectations and perceptions with each service quality statement. In terms of statement, most of the perceptions' scores are smaller than the expectations' corresponding scores, except the statement of 'Employees of College will be consistently courteous with students (-1.08). Positive Gaps shows that student expectations have been fulfilled in most of the cases.

It is observed from Table 4 the biggest gap between expectations and perceptions is

Reliability (0.81), followed Tangibility (0.65), Empathy (0.45), Responsiveness (0.29) and Assurance (0.02). About whether the statement of expectation and experience is different, the significance level decides it, thus if significance level lower than 0.05 they are difference. As the Gap in assurance dimension is minimum almost equal to zero, so college should give more emphasis on this dimensions to increase student satisfaction, as this dimensions is the loophole which needs to be checked.

Table 4: Service Gap for Each Dimension



Therefore, most of the gaps between perceptions and expectations are significantly different. The total service quality gap scores between perception and expectation has been calculated by the average scores of five dimensions is 0.44. In other words, overall the students' perceptions were higher than the expectations of the service they received.

The overall service quality and satisfaction scored by respondents is listed in Table 6, from the table, the mean of service quality and satisfaction are quite similar.

Table 5: Quality of Service and Satisfaction: Descriptive Statistics

Description	Mean
Rate the overall quality of service of your Institute	1.67
Are you satisfied with the quality of Service	1.79

Table 5 clearly shows that quality of services performed is better than the satisfaction level from those services among students.

Conclusion

This research gives an insight into expectations students had before they came to pursue PGDBM from Management Colleges of Ghaziabad. It provides the colleges with better understanding of the needs of students and what they most expect. Few areas of the colleges need to be improved. This research indicates that student expectations are being fulfilled in most of the cases. Management colleges of Ghaziabad are not quite delivering promised services related in. 'Employees of college will be consistently courteous with students, Employees of college will give prompt service to students, Employees of college will understand the specific needs of their students, materials associated with the service (such as course packs or brochures)

are informative and easy to read and 'College gives students individual Attention' Learner-centric teaching, active facilitation, and authentic, hands-on activities can lead to higher levels of student participation and engagement, which are prerequisites for better outcomes in the long term.

Limitations

This study has limited generalizability because it was conducted in a single time period, with a limited number of PGDBM Students of Ghaziabad. It is difficult to generalise across the whole PGDBM student base as a result and the results are certainly not transferable in higher education more generally.

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