

Students' Perception on Core Service Quality in Higher Education Institutions in UAE

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Abstract

The service quality in educational institutions has been focused on two dimensions, namely core and value-added service quality. The core service quality is the various basic service quality variables established by the pioneer in the field. These are reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles. The paper focuses on the core service quality as viewed by the students of selected Higher Education Institutions in the UAE.

Keywords: Core Service Quality, Higher Education Institutions, Expectation, Perception, Service quality Gap.

Introduction

The services offered by the institutions should satisfy the customers. The primary aim of any service organization is to establish the customers' loyalty. It is possible when there is customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction can be enriched by the improvement of the service quality of the service providers. The educational institutions are not exceptional cases. The service quality in educational institutions has been focused on two dimensions, namely core and value-added service quality. The core service quality is the various basic service quality variables established by the pioneer in the field. These are reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles. The value-added service qualities are the service quality variables that are essential to the competitive market.

Importance

Service quality is not consistent for all customers or even a single customer at all times. So the marketers' job becomes tough. They are required to ensure that these features of the education services are better utilized to meet the varying needs of the customers. The marketing mix can be better utilized to overcome the problems associated with the specific service features of education.

By offering education with enhanced features like updated syllabus and industry interaction, they can improve the quality of the product. With franchising and better infrastructure facilities and experienced instructors, marketers can meet customer expectations. With the right mix of all the Ps, tailor-made customer-focused courses can be offered.

Technology, like computers, LCD projectors, and multimedia, has helped service providers offer better services to more customers. It has enabled them to concentrate more on knowledge management rather than on the preparation of teaching notes.

It has paved the way for increasing the scope of the market and scale of operations with the introduction of modern systems like web-based training. There has been a complete transformation in the field of education in UAE in the past 15 years. Of late, there is a shift in focus from conventional courses like engineering and commerce to specialized courses in management.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the profile of the students;
2. To study the service quality in higher education institutions as perceived by the students;
3. To evaluate the core service quality gap that exists in the selected institutions;

Research Design of the Study

The followed research design of the present study is finely descriptive because of the following reason; the study tries to explain the characteristics of the students and their level of perception and expectation on the service quality of Higher Education institutions.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was adopted to select the number of students for the present study. At the first stage, 25 Arts and Science Colleges (Group I), 25 Management Institutes (Group II), and 25 Engineering Colleges (Group III) were selected at the convenience of among UAE institutions. In total, five students from each institute were selected as the sample of the study. The selected sample is 375 students, each from three groups of institutes.

Collection of Data

The present study highly depends on the primary data collected from the students studying Higher Education at various institutes. The Structured questionnaire has two components, one - the profile of the students and the other the expectation and perception of them on core service quality variables. The variables are drawn from relevant reviews from previous studies and views of the experts. It was pretested and included.

Service Quality

The definition of quality has evolved from 'quality is excellence' to 'quality is value' to 'quality is conformance to specifications' to 'quality is meeting and or exceeding customers' expectations' (Reeves and Bednas, 1994), Parasuraman et al., (1988). Referred to the core service quality are five namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, and empathy. The measurement of service quality was mentioned by Parasuram et al., (1985); Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Teas 1993). The core service quality in education is an extension of original core service quality factors in the education sector (Ewell, 1993); Brigham, 1994 and Gupta and Chen, 1995 The identified dimensions are the same five service quality factors with a different meanings.

Assurance indicates the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence (Quelch and Ash, 1994)

The responsiveness describes the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service (Coate, 1990). The empathy shows the caring, individual attention the institution provides its customers, whereas the reliability indicates the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. The tangibles indicate the conditions of facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel (Dotchin and Dakland, 1994; Horini et al., 1993). The variables related to core service quality of management institutes have been identified with the help of reviews (Gatfield et al., 1999 ; McNay, 1997). These are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Variables in Core Service quality

Sl.No.	Variables CSQ
1	Staffs are courteous with students
2	Respond to the request of students
3	Provisions of service as they promised
4	Students are informed what services provided
5	Personal attention
6	Instil confidence in students
7	Physical facilities
8	Individual attention
9	Professional appearance of staffs
10	Sincere interest in solving problems
11	Perform services right the first time

12	Modern equipment
13	Materials delivered by faculties
14	Promise to do something by certain time
15	Error-free records
16	Prompt service to students
17	Willingness to help students
18	Feeling of safety
19	Knowledgeable faculties
20	Convenient class times and office hour
21	Students test interest at heart
22	Understand specific needs of the students

The respondents are asked to rate the above-said variables at a five-point scale according to their order of expectation and perception.

Core Service Quality in Management Institutions

The mean score of each variable in CSQ among the students in Group I, II, and III institutions have been computed separately. The one-way analysis of variance has been executed for this purpose. The mean score of each variable in CSQ among the three groups of students and its respective 'F' statistics are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 The expectation of Variables in Core Service Quality (CSQ) in Institutes

Sl. No.	Variables in CSQ	Mean score among students in institutes in			'F' statistics
		Group I	Group II	Group III	
1.	Staffs are courteous with students	3.8868	3.4541	3.0676	3.4869*
2.	Respond the request of students	3.9245	3.2963	3.1779	3.1185*
3.	Provision of service as they promised	3.9393	3.4845	3.2646	3.1039*
4.	Students are informed what services are provided	3.7318	3.1891	3.0735	3.0996*
5.	Personal attention	3.9193	3.1038	3.0446	3.6544*
6.	Instill confidence in students	3.8142	3.6566	3.2641	2.8541
7.	Physical facilities	3.9089	3.5887	3.1125	3.5862*
8.	Individual attention	3.9391	3.6439	3.2089	3.6556*
9.	Professional appearance of staffs	3.7659	3.6589	3.1045	3.6897*
10.	Sincere interest in solving problems	3.8041	3.4026	3.1144	3.2676*
11.	Perform services right at first time	3.8529	3.4733	3.2991	3.1132*
12.	Modern equipment	3.9045	3.3081	3.3865	2.5646
13.	Materials delivered by faculties	3.8114	3.2996	3.1884	2.7969
14.	Promise to do some timing by certain time	3.9011	3.8517	3.2448	2.8143
15.	Error-free records	3.9249	3.5496	3.2881	2.9094
16.	Prompt service to students	3.9041	3.8446	3.3085	2.4519
17.	Willingness to help students	3.8646	3.4961	3.2148	2.5868
18.	Feeling of safety	3.6676	3.5088	3.2991	2.0885
19.	Knowledgeable faculties	3.9245	3.6563	3.1889	3.4547*
20.	Convenient class times and office hours	3.8717	3.5864	3.1408	3.1208*
21.	Student best interest at heart	3.8909	3.4027	3.1179	3.0664*
22.	Understand specific needs of the students	3.9117	3.3279	3.1042	3.2441*

*Significant at five percent level

The highly expected CSQ variable by the students in Group I institutions is individual attention and provision of service. Their mean scores are 3.9391 and 3.9393, respectively. Among the students in Group II institutions, these variables are prompt service to students and promise to do something by a

certain time since its mean scores 3.8446 and 3.8517, respectively.

Among the students in Group III institutions, these variables are modern equipment and prompt service to students since its mean scores are 3.3865 and 3.3085, respectively. Regarding the level of

expectation on the CSQ variables, the significant difference among the three groups of students has been noticed in the case of 14 variables out of 22 CSQ variables since their respective 'F' statistics are significant at five percent level.

Important Core Service Quality Factors (CSQFs) in Institutes

The total score of 22 variables in core service quality in institutes has been included for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to narrate the variables into

factors. Initially, the validity of data for EFA is conducted by the Kaiser-Meyer-Ohlin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Both these two tests satisfy the conditions of the validity of data for factor analysis. The executed EFA results in five important core service quality factors (CSQFs), namely reliability, empathy, responsiveness, assurance, and tangibles. The Eigen value and the percent of variation explained by the CSQFs are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3 Important Core Service Quality Factors (CSQFs)

Sl. No.	CSQFs	Number of variables in	Eigen value	Percent of variation explained	Cumulative percent of variation explained
1.	Reliability	5	4.1785	18.99	18.99
2.	Empathy	5	4.0966	18.62	37.61
3.	Responsiveness	4	3.5843	16.29	53.90
4.	Assurance	4	3.1829	14.47	68.37
5.	Tangibles	4	3.0154	13.71	82.08
KMO measure of sampling adequacy: 0.7863			Bartlett's test of sphericity: Chi-square value: 79.03*		

* Significant at five percent level.

The first two important CSQFs are reliability and empathy since the eigen values are 4.1785 & 4.0966, respectively. The percent of variation explained by these two factors is 18.99 and 18.62 percent, respectively. The next two CSQFs identified by the EFA are responsiveness and assurance since its eigen values are 3.5843 and 3.1829, respectively. The last CSQF noticed by EFA is tangibles since its eigen value is 3.0154. The narrated five CSQFs explain the 22 variables in CSQ to the extent of 82.08 percent.

Students' Expectation of CSQ Factors

The level of expectation on CSQFs among the students has been measured by the mean scores of the variables in each CSQF. The mean score on each CSQF among the students in Group I, II, and III institutes have been computed separately. The one-way analysis of variance has been executed to find out the significant difference among the three groups of students regarding their level of expectation on CSQFs. The results are given in Table 4.

Table 4 Level of Expectation on Variables in CSQ Factors among the Students

Sl. No.	Variables in CSQF	Mean score among students in institutes in			'F' statistics
		Group I	Group II	Group III	
1.	Reliability	3.8845	3.5523	3.2422	3.0946*
2.	Empathy	3.8986	3.4129	3.1233	3.2509*
3.	Responsiveness	3.8563	3.4565	3.1937	3.0113*
4.	Assurance	3.8233	3.5689	3.2049	2.4581
5.	Tangibles	3.8811	3.3964	3.2130	2.9145
	Overall	3.8708	3.4779	3.1943	3.0245*

*Significant at five percent level.

The highly expected CSQFs among the students in group institutions are empathy and reliability since its mean scores are 3.8986 and 3.8845, respectively.

Among the students in Group II institutions, these are assurance and reliability since their mean scores are 3.5689 and 3.5523, respectively, whereas,

among the students in Group III institutions, these are reliability and tangibles since their mean scores are 3.2422 and 3.2130 respectively. The significant difference among the three groups of students has been noticed in the case of expectation on reliability, empathy, and responsiveness since their expectation on CSQFs among the students in Group I institutions is higher than among the students in Group II and III institutions.

Students Perception of CSQ Factors

The level of perception of CSQFs among the students has been measured by the mean scores of the variables in each CSQF. The mean scores of each CSQ factor among the students in three groups of institutions have been computed separately. The one-way analysis of variance has been executed to find out the significant difference among the three groups of students regarding their level of perception on CSQFs. The results are given in Table 5.

Table 5 Level of Perception in CSQ Factors among the Students

Sl. No.	Variables in CSQF	Mean score among students in institutes in			'F' statistics
		Group I	Group II	Group III	
1.	Reliability	3.5345	3.0446	2.6563	3.9896*
2.	Empathy	3.3889	2.9083	2.4588	4.1179*
3.	Responsiveness	3.2684	2.9646	2.5969	3.0146*
4.	Assurance	3.1189	2.9242	2.6973	2.6508
5.	Tangibles	3.2456	2.8109	2.4733	3.9042*
	Overall	3.3249	2.9347	2.5748	3.1886*

*Significant at five percent level.

The highly perceived CSQF among the students in Group I institutions are reliability and empathy since their mean scores are 3.5345 and 3.3889, respectively. Among the students in the Group II institution, these CSQFs are reliability and responsiveness since their mean scores are 3.0446 and 2.9646, respectively. Among the students in Group III institutions, these are assurance and reliability since their mean scores are 2.6973 and 2.6563, respectively. The significant difference between the three groups of students has been identified in the perception of reliability, empathy, responsiveness, and tangibles since their respective 'F' statistics are significant at the five percent level. The overall perception of core service

quality is higher on Group I institution than the other two groups of institutions.

Core Service Quality Gap in Higher Education Institutions

The core service quality gap represents the gap between the level of perception and expectation on core service quality factors related to management institutions. The negative score on the core service quality gap represents the higher level of expectation on CSQFs than the level of perception of CSQFs among the students. The mean of core service quality gap score is computed among the three groups of students along with its 'F' statistics. The results are given in Table 6.

Table 6 Service Quality Gap in CSQ Factors among the Students

Sl. No.	Variables in CSQF	Mean score among students in institutes in			'F' statistics
		Group I	Group II	Group III	
1.	Reliability	-0.3500	-0.5077	-0.5858	3.1885*
2.	Empathy	-0.5097	-0.5046	-0.6645	0.9967
3.	Responsiveness	-0.5879	-0.4919	-0.5968	1.3892
4.	Assurance	-0.7044	-0.6447	-0.5076	2.5339
5.	Tangibles	-0.6355	-0.5855	-0.7397	1.9341
	Overall	-0.5459	-0.5432	-0.6195	1.7032

*Significant at five percent level.

All the service quality gap scores are negative, which indicates the level of perception of CSQFs is not up to the level of expectation among the students. In the case of all three groups of institutions, the student's perception of CSQFs is not up to their level of expectation on CSQFs. The higher negative service quality gap is identified in the case of Group III institutions than the Group I and II institutions. Regarding the service quality gap, the significant difference between the three groups of institutions is identified in the case of reliability since its 'F' statistics are significant at the five percent level.

Conclusion

The narrated core service quality factors by the factor analysis are reliability, empathy, responsiveness, assurance and tangibles. The included variables in each factor explain it to a reliable extent. The highly expected factor among the students in group I institutions is empathy and reliability, whereas, among the students in group II institutions, these are assurance and reliability. Among the students in group III institutions, these are reliability and tangibles. The core service quality gap is identified negative among the students in all three groups of institutions. It shows that the level of perception of core service quality is not up to their level of expectation among all three groups of students.

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