Student's Perspective of Service Quality in Higher Learning Institutions; An evidence Based Approach

Mubbsher Munawar khan
Ishfaq Ahmed
Muhammd Musarrat Nawaz

Hailey College of Commerce
University of the Punjab, Pakistan
E-mail: ishfakahmed@gmail.com

Abstract

With changing business world service industry has been an area that has drastically changed. Now provision of quality services has been an issue of great significance. Just like other service sectors educational sector is also assessed for the quality of service offered. This paper is aimed to discuss the impact of quality of service on the satisfaction level of students and willingness to put more efforts. It considers five dimensions of service quality (SERVQUAL model) given by Parasuraman et al. (1988), i.e. assurance, empathy, reliability, tangibility and responsiveness. Findings show that there is significant relationship between dimensions of service quality i.e. Reliability, Assurance Responsiveness and Empathy with satisfaction while Tangible was having an insignificant relation with student satisfaction. It was also observed that higher the level of students' satisfaction greater was their willingness to put great efforts towards their studies.

Key words:　　SERQUAL, satisfaction, willingness to put efforts, university, Pakistan.

Introduction

World has witnessed a great shift in their economic systems. Now many economies are shifting form manufacturing and industry based economies to service economies. Out of the various services that are used for source of earning money is education sector. Now it is considered as a business and all the concepts and theories of business are applied on this sector as well. One of the important concepts, that are deemed to be of great significance from the perspective of all the stakeholders, is the concept of quality. Applying the business model over educational sector has increased competition among universities. In order to make up with the changing demands and to be competitive in the market is the dream of the time. In order to put it in reality offering quality in the education is need of time. On the other hand, how the educational institutions are using quality standards, how they are emphasizing on the quality is the debate of time. This issue has attracted both academicians and researchers. These researchers and academicians are looking at the quality of institution from all perspectives i.e. input state, process and output stage. One of the widely used models to assess quality is SERVQUAL model given by Parasurman *et al.* (1988). Various renowned quality practitioners have also recommended use of service quality concept in educational sector.

As Deming (2000) concept of service quality can also be applied by educational sector just like manufacturing and other service sectors. Service quality model given by Parasuraman et al. (1988) contains five dimensions of quality i.e. Assurance, Responsiveness, Reliability, Tangibles and Empathy. These dimensions of service quality are agreed upon and widely used by researchers. These dimensions are also applied in educational sector as well in various set ups, like, Ahmed et al. (2010) used this model to judge the quality of service of universities and how that service is related with their performance, Hill (1995) also studied that impact of service quality on the academic institutions, Anderson (1995) used this model to judge the quality of administrative services in educational institutions, Banwet & Datta (2002) used these dimensions to judge the service quality in library.

There are many stakeholders of educational institutions ranging from internal to external stakeholders. Out of all these, students are considered to be one of the most important stakeholders. They are important as all the process of quality implications i.e. input, process and output are applied on them. They are also considered important as they bridge the relationship between academic institutions and other stakeholders i.e. parents, employers, society and satisfaction of all these stakeholders is dependent on the satisfaction of students. Considering the strategic importance of students, studying students' satisfaction has been prime interest of many researchers using SERVQUAL model. This manuscript targets the impact of quality of service offered by academic institutions to the students in the shape of overall satisfaction with the institution and willingness to put more work efforts.

This study is a contribution to the extant literature from Pakistan's perspectives. There are very few studies available on the concept of service quality in academic institutions and those too don't consider student's willingness to put more efforts.

Literature Review

Out of all the stakeholders of academic institutions, students are considered to be the most important of all. The bridge academic institution with external stakeholders i.e. parents, employers, society. In order to get best from external stakeholders it is important that academic institutions should give them best students who become source of pride for the institute. In order to get best form students, it is important that students should be satisfied. Higher their level of satisfaction greater would be the quality of students (Ahmed et al., 2010). In order to see the quality of academic institution SERVQUAL model is widely used and accepted model. The following sections consist of literature on the service quality and its use in the educational institutions. Various researchers have studies service quality of academic institutions from students' perspective. Gold (2001) comments that students are the basic customers of academic institutions and educational institutions should offer student's centered service and education. In the words of Emery et al. (2001) students should be analyzed and assessed as the product offered by the academic institutions. Students are considered very important as the educational institutions and students have a two-fold relation. Students rely on educational institution to impart knowledge and to get employment, while educational institutes look at students to meet their financial needs.

Considering the significance of the relationship there has been continuance effort by educational institutions to increase the satisfaction level of students with the quality of service and they are regularly judged for their level of satisfaction with educational institutes (Low, 2000). Quality can be termed as "ability of a service to satisfy customers" (ISO, 9004-2) (ISO, 1991). Asthiyaman (1997) defined service quality as *"Perceived service quality is defined as an overall evaluation of the goodness or badness of a product or service"*. It has been proved by researchers that quality of service is an important determinant of satisfaction (Shemwell *et al.* 1998; Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Application of concept of service quality in educational institutions has been suggested by various researchers. Its application has also been part of debate at various levels, like Ahmed et al. (2010) investigated the educational institutions by using service quality dimensions and what impact it had on the performance of students, Banwet & Datta (2002) applied the five dimensions of service quality i.e. tangibles, responsiveness, empathy, reliability and assurance; Hill (1995) investigated higher educational institutions using the concept of service quality; Anderson (1995) judged the quality of administration with the use of SERVQUAL model. All these studies have considered the quality dimensions given by Parasuraman et al. (1988).

This study considers these dimensions for assessing service quality. In the words of Gold (2001) students are the basic customers of the academic institutions and should be assessed for the quality. Applying the concept of customer and service quality relation the following section discusses the relationship between service quality and student's satisfaction. Athiyaman (1997) concluded that there is positive and significant relationship between quality of services presented and customer satisfaction. Ahmed *et al.* (2010) also found that provision of quality services is significantly associated with customer satisfaction. In the words of Spreng & Singh (1993) *"Satisfaction is emotional reaction to a product or service experience"*. While looking at the causes of satisfaction it has been noticed that Satisfaction is a result of quality service (Shemwell *et al.* 1998, Cronin & Taylor, 1992 & Bolton & Drew, 1991). While discussing the customer (students) criteria for selection of academic institution, Veloutsou *et al.* (2004) found students use quality as the prime criteria to select and institute for admission and education. Low (2000) also concluded that provision of better quality services is key source of lure, satisfy and retain students, which in result have direct bearing on financial resources, security of job and viability of educational institution.

Students assess the quality of institution on the grounds of tangibility (teachers), reliability and responsiveness (methods of teaching) and management of the institute and these factors have direct bearing on the satisfaction level of students. (Navarro *et al.* 2005). University administration should focus on the quality of service to increase the satisfaction level of students (Helgesen & Nesset, 2007). If the students are satisfied with the institution that reflects that students have positive perception regarding service quality of academic institution (Gruber *et al.* 2010). In the increasing competition in the educational sector, provision of better quality services is the basic strategic tool used by academic institutions (Donaldson & Runciman, 1995). Positive perception about the quality of service offered leaves positive image in the mind of students which finally leads them towards higher level of satisfaction (Alves & Raposo 2010; Ahmed et al., 2010). Customer satisfaction is based on the perceptions and expectations of customers about service quality (Ekinci, 2004; Christou and Sigala, 2002).

DeShields Jr. et al. (2005) found that students with positive experience about the quality are prone to be more satisfied then students those are not satisfied. Juillerat & Schreiner (1996) discussed that students have certain expectations with their institute, and if these expectations are met they are more satisfied.

Level of satisfaction directly affects students' performance (Chambel & Curral, 2005). Eom *et al.* (2006) also found significant and positive relationship between level of student's satisfaction and his success ration; and it was found that students who were successful were having higher level of satisfaction with the academic institution. Rost (n.d.) argue that success is the outcome of students motivation, greater is the level of motivation higher are the efforts put by students are better are the results in shaper of performance. Students who are willing to put more efforts will learn more and do better academically. Ames (1990) viewed students' motivation to put more efforts as the outcome of better provision of service quality. Students motivation to put more efforts is outcome of students perception about quality of service offered, better the perception about the quality of service offered (satisfaction with service quality) higher will be motivation to put extra efforts to perform better academically (Sobral, 2004). Greater the level of students' satisfaction, higher will be their motivation to put more efforts and they will produce better results (Frankola, 2001; LaRose & Whitten, 2000).

Figure-1   Research Model
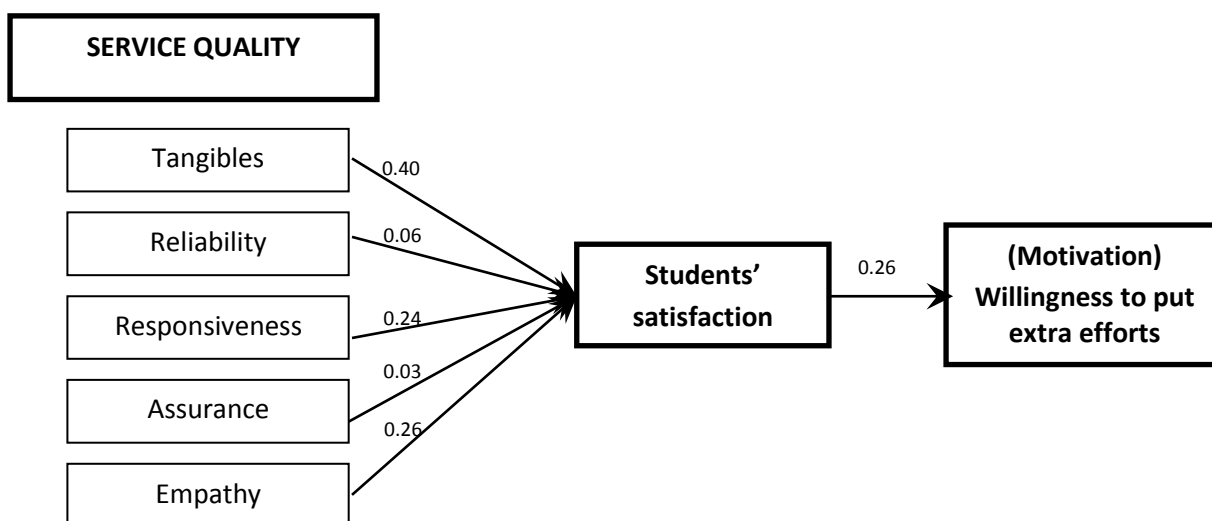
Research Hypothesis

H1   There is positive association between service quality and students' satisfaction
H2   There is positive association between tangibles and students' satisfaction
H3   There is positive association between assurance and students' satisfaction
H4   There is positive association between responsiveness and students' satisfaction
H5   There is positive association between assurance and students' satisfaction
H6   There is positive association between empathy and students' satisfaction
H7   There is positive association between students' satisfaction and willingness to put more efforts

Research Methodology/Design
Sample

As this study focused on students, 600 students were selected (using simple random sampling technique) to participate in the study from a public sector university. Response of these students was elicited though personally administrated questionnaires. Questionnaires were distributed in classes. 105 questionnaires were not usable so 495 complete questionnaire were used for data analysis. Out of the respondents 56% were male and 44% were female students, make almost equal response. Average age of respondents was 21.78 years.

In order to operationalize variables, instrument was adopted from Banwent & Datta (2003). AMOS 16.0 and SPSS 18.0 were used for analysis.

Findings and Conclusion

The results regarding the issue are as follows.

Table-1   Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Tangibles	4.2278	.87709	495
Reliability	5.1092	.98891	495
Responsiveness	4.8300	1.07967	495
Assurance	4.7398	1.18446	495
Empathy	5.2191	1.11507	495
Service quality	5.2374	.82658	495
Satisfaction	4.7975	1.37020	495
Motivation	4.8450	1.63176	495

Table-1 presents students perception about the service quality dimension, students' satisfaction, and willingness to put more efforts. Table contains mean scores and standard deviations. The instrument used for data collection consisted of 7 points, so the interpretation would be on 7 point scale ranging from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1). Table shows that score mean for quality of service is 5.2374; it shows that respondents are slightly satisfied about the overall quality of service offered by the university. Mean scores of dimensions of service quality show that students are slightly satisfied about the dimensions of responsiveness, reliability, empathy and assurance, but their score about tangibles is around 4 which is the neutral point at the scale, so students are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied about tangibles. While looking at the mean scores of satisfaction and willingness to put more efforts, it has been witnessed that students are slightly satisfied with the service quality and they are also slightly agreeing to put more efforts.

So in summing up it can be inferred that students are slightly satisfied with the quality of service provided and their perception about the service quality also falls at this level. Students are neither satisfied nor satisfied with the tangibles and empathy. Results of hypothesis testing are given below.

Table-2   Index of Model fit

Index of fit	Chi-Square (df)	P	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	RMR
Value	175.655	.000	.919	.514	.905	.906	.133

Table-2 shows model fitness. With value of degree of freedom 155.495, most values shows in the table suffice the minimum standards for value of index fit. The standards that are generally accepted for various values of model fitness index are: Significance level of Chi-square value (< 0.05), GFI (goodness of fit index > 0.80), AGFI (Adjusted goodness of fit index > 0.80), NFI (Normed fit index > 0.90), CFI (comparative fit index Close to 1 or > 0.90), and RMR (root means square residual < 0.05). As the table shows that the values of the model suffice the minimum standards it can be inferred that the model is fit.

Table-3   Regression Weights (Results of Hypotheses tests)

Path	Estimates	S.E.	C.R.	P	Hypothesis	Results
Tangibles-Satisfaction	.397	.067	5.906	.129	H1a	Accept
Reliability-Satisfaction	.064	.052	1.231	.002	H1b	Reject
Responsiveness-Satisfaction	.235	.068	3.445	.000	H1c	Accept
Assurance-Satisfaction	.032	.068	.467	.005	H1d	Reject
Empathy-Satisfaction	.257	.059	4.349	.006	H1e	Accept
Service Quality-Satisfaction	.186	.082	2.276	.003	H2a	Accept
Satisfaction-Motivation	.257	.031	8.363	.000	H3	Accept

Table-3 shows the regression results of service quality, its dimensions, students' satisfaction and their motivation (willingness to put more efforts). Results of the study show that there is positive and significant relationship between dimensions of service quality and students' satisfaction (Assurance, Responsiveness Empathy and Reliability) with satisfaction i.e. ($P<.01$ or $.001$), while one facet of service quality i.e. Tangibles is positively associated but there is no an insignificant relationship with students' satisfaction. When finding the relationship between overall service quality and satisfaction it was found that there is significant relationship between service quality and students satisfaction ($p<.01$).

When the relationship between satisfaction and motivation was inquired it was found that there is significant relationship between students satisfaction and overall motivation to exert more efforts (p<.001). So it can be concluded that service quality has direct bearing on the level of students' satisfaction and students' satisfaction is also has a great influence on students' willingness to put more working efforts.

Discussions

Findings of the study reveal that students are slightly satisfied with the overall service quality, all the dimensions of service quality, their satisfaction level is also not at high level and they willingness to put efforts is also at moderate level. When further inquired it is revealed that service quality has a significant impact on the satisfaction of students, which infers that if educational institutions wants to satisfy their students, better provision of services would be a good tool to do so. But tangible is the dimension that is not associated with the students' satisfaction. It means that tangibles are the physical appearance of the educational institution is not a matter of consideration for students. Students don't rate institute on the basis of building and physical appearance but on the grounds of quality of education.

Satisfaction is also having positive and significant relationship with students' motivation and willingness to put more work efforts. If the students' satisfaction level is high they will be willing to put even more efforts then their routine efforts. It can be concluded that better provision of service quality contributes towards increased level of students' satisfaction and which ultimately increases their willingness to excel in their studies.

Limitation and Future Implementations

This study targets satisfaction of only one stakeholder i.e student, more studies should be conducted from the point of view of other stakeholders like parents, employers, society etc. Moreover we have considered students of only one academic institution, future studies comparative studies may be conducted so that policy making guidelines could be derived.

References

1. Ahmed, I., Nawaz, M.M., Zulfqar Ahmad, Zafar Ahmad, Shaukat, .M.Z. Usman, A., & Rehman, W., & Ahmed, N. (2010). Does service quality affect students' performance? Evidence from institute of higher learning. *African journal of business management*, 4*(12)*, 2527-2533.
2. Alves H. & Raposo M. (2010), The influence of university image on students behavior. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *24(1)*, 73-85.
3. Ames, C. A. (1990). Motivation: What Teachers Need to Know. *Teachers College Record*, *91(3)*, 409-421.
4. Athiyaman A. (1997), Linking student satisfaction and service quality perceptions: the case of university education. *European Journal of Marketing*, *31(7)*, 528-540
5. Banwet, D.K. & Datta, B. (2003), A study of the effect of perceived lecture quality on post-lecture intentions. *Work Study, 52(5),* pp.234-243.
6. Bolton, R.N. & Drew, J.H. (1991), A longitudinal analysis of the impact of service changes on customer attitudes. *Journal of Marketing, 55, January*, 1-9.
7. Chambel M.J. & Curral L. (2005), Stress in Academic Life: Work Characteristics as Predicators of Student Well-being and Performance. *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 54(1)*,135-147
8. Christou, E. and Sigala, M. (2002), Conceptualizing the measurement of service quality and TQM performance for hotels: the HOSTQUAL model. *Acta Touristica, 14(2)*,140-169.
9. Cronin, J. J. Jr & Taylor, S. A. (1992), Measuring service quality: a reexamination and extension. *Journal of Marketing*, *56(3)*, 55-68
10. Deming, W.E. (2000), The New Economics: For industry Government, Education, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
11. DeShields Jr O.W., Kara A., & Kaynak E. (2005).Determinants of business student satisfaction and retention in higher education: applying Herzberg's two factor theory. *International Journal of Education Management, 19*(2), 128-139.
12. Ekinci, Y. (2004), An investigation of the determinants of customer satisfaction. *Tourism Analysis, 8*,197-203.

13. Emery, C., Kramer, T. & Tian R. (2001), Customer vs. product: adopting an effective approach to business students. *Quality Assurance in Education, 9(2)*, 110-115.

14. Eom S.B., Wen H. J. & Ashill N (2006), The determinants of students' perceived learning outcomes and satisfaction in university online education: An empirical investigation. *Decision Sciences Journals of Innovation Education*, *4(2)*, 215-235.

15. Frankola, K. (2001). Why online learner drop out. *Workforce, 80(1)*, 53–60.

16. Gold, E. (2001), Customer service: a key unifying force for today's campus, Netresults, National Association of Student Personnel Administration, 22 January, available at: www.naspa.org/netresults (Accessed 10 April 2010).

17. Gruber, T., Fub, S., Voss, R. & Glaser-Zikuda, M. (2010), Examining student satisfaction with higher education services using a new measurement tool. *International Journal of Public Sector Management, 23(2),* 105-123.

18. Helgesen, O. & Nesset, E. (2007), What accounts for students' loyalty? Some field study evidence. *International Journal of Educaiton Management, 21(2),* 126-143.

19. ISO, ISO 9004-2(1991): *International Standards, Quality Management and Quality System Elements-part 2: Guidelines for Services,* International Organization for Standardization, Geneva.

20. LaRose, R., & Whitten, P. (2000). Re-thinking instructional immediacy for web courses: A social cognitive exploration. *Communication Education, 49*, 320–338.

21. Low, L. (2000), Are college students satisfied? A National Analysis of Changing Expectations, Noel-Levitz lowa City, IA.

22. Navarro M. M., Iglesias M. P. & Torres P. R. (2005a), A new management element of universities: satisfaction with the courses offered. *International Journal of Educaiton Management*, *19(6)*, 505-526

23. Navarro M. M., Iglesias M. P. & Torres P. R. (2005b), Measuring customer satisfaction in summer courses. *Quality Assurance in Education*, *13(1)*, pp. 53-65

24. Parasuraman A., Zeithaml, V.A. & Berry, L.L. (1988), SERVQUAL: a multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality. *Journal of Retailing*, *64(1),* 12-40

25. Rost M. (n.d.), Generating students' motivation. Available online on www.longman.com/worldview accessed on April 21, 2010.

26. Schertzer, C.B. and Schertzer, S.M.B. (2004), Student satisfaction and retention: a conceptual model. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 14(1)*, 79-91.

27. Sobral, D, T. (2004), what kind of motivation drives medical students' learning quests? *Medical Education*, *38,* 950-957.

28. Spreng, R.A. & Singh, A.K. (1993), An empirical assessment of the SERVQUAL scale and the relationship between service quality and satisfaction, in Cravens, D.W. and Dickson, P. (Eds). *Proceedings of the 1993 American Marketing Association,* AMA, Chicago, IL,1-6.

29. Veloutsou, C., Lewis, J.W. and Paton, R.A. (2004), University selection: information requirements and importance. *International Journal of Educational Management, 18(3)*,160-71.

30. Navarro, M.M., Iglesias M. P. & Torres P. R. (2005), A new management element of universities: satisfaction with the offered courses. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *19(6)*, 505-526

31. Juillerat, S. & Schreiner L. A. (1996), The role of student satisfaction in assessment of institutional effectiveness. *Assessment Update*, *s*, 8-9

32. Shemwell, D. J., Yavas, U. & Bilgin, Z. (1998), Customer service provider relationship: an empirical test of a model of service quality, satisfaction and relationship oriented outcomes. *International Journal of Service Industry Management, 9(2)*, 155-168.