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Service Quality in UAE Higher Education Institutions (HEIs): A Comparative Analysis in Students' Perspective

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Abstract

The education service can be described as a high contact, consumer, and people-based service. With the changes in customer education and the job market, the market for unconventional courses is increasing. So no marketer can afford to ignore these markets. As the education service is intangible, inseparable, and perishable, certain implications exist for marketing. 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.

Keywords: Service Quality, Higher Education Institutions, Core Service Quality.

Introduction

Marketing of education services is gaining momentum with the entry of private institutions and foreign institutions offering modern courses, changes in people's attitude towards education and the changing scope for the different courses being offered. The technological changes and the shrinking global boundaries have increased the significance of marketing for education services. The education service can be described as a high contact, consumer, and people-based service. With the changes in customer education and the job market, the market for unconventional courses is increasing. So no marketer can afford to ignore these markets. As the education service is intangible, inseparable, and perishable, certain implications exist for marketing. The students considered as customers in the market need to be satisfied with the offering. The word of mouth promotion in positive terms will only be influenced by the service quality of the institutions.

Importance of Services Marketing in Education Services

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 every country 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.

Need for the Study

The services offered by the institutions should satisfy the customers. The primary aim of any service organization is to establish the customer's 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 quality is the service quality variables that are essential to the competition market.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are confined

1. To study the service quality in HEIs;
2. To evaluate the service quality gap

Research Design of the Study

The followed research design of the present study is finely descriptive in nature because of the following reasons: (i) the study tries to explain the characteristics of the students and their level of perception and expectation on the service quality of HEIs; (ii) the study has its own confined objectives and pre-determined methodology to fulfill the objectives.

Sampling Framework of the Study

One hundred students each belonging from three groups

1. Public Universities- Group I
2. Private Universities- Group II
3. Foreign Partnership Institutions- Group III

The students' perspective on the service quality in HEIs have been collected from the sampled students. The purposive sampling was adopted to select the number of students for the present study. Hence, the included sample size came to 300 students comprising of three groups.

Response Rate among the Samples

The response rate on the questionnaire given to the students is 59 percent to a total of 300 students. Hence, the final sample of 177 students is included to process the data.

Collection of Data

The present study highly depends on the primary data collected from the institutions and students studying at various institutes. A separate questionnaire was prepared to collect the data from the students. It consists of two important parts. The first part includes the profile of the students, whereas the second part covers the students' view on core service quality at the institutes.

The relevant variables are drawn from the review of previous studies. A pre-test was conducted among 25 students to evaluate the questionnaire related to them. Based on the feedback, certain additions, deletions, and corrections have been carried out to prepare the final draft of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to collect the data from them.

Service Quality in Higher Educational Institutes

Quality is one of the competitive priorities which have migrated from the literate of manufacturing strategy to the services arena. The definitions of quality has evolved from 'quality is excellence' to 'quality is value' to 'quality is conformance to specification' to 'quality is meeting and or exceeding customers' expectations (Reeves and Bednar, 1994)¹

1. Reeves, C.A., and Bednar, D., (1994), "Defining quality: alternatives and implications", *Academy of Higher Educational Review*, 19(3), pp.419-445.

. Parasuraman et al., (1988)² Referred to the core service quality dimensions are five, namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, and empathy. The measurement of service quality was mentioned by Parasuraman et al., (1985)³ Cronin and Taylor, 1992⁴, Teas, 1993⁵. The core service quality in education is an extension of original core service quality factors in the education sector (Ewell, 1993⁶; Brigham, 1994⁷ and Gupta and Chen, 1995)⁸. The identified dimensions are the same five service quality factors with a different meaning.

The assurance indicates the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence (Quelch and Ash, 1994)⁹.

The responsiveness describes the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service (Coate, 1990)¹⁰. The empathy shows the caring, individual attention the institution providers 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 Oakland, 1994¹¹; Horine et al., 1993)¹². The variables related to core service quality of higher educational institutes have been identified with the help of reviews (Gatfield et al., 1999¹³; McNay, 1997)¹⁴.

Core Service Quality in Management Institutions

The core service quality in educational institutions is drawn from the review of previous studies. In total, 22 variables have been identified. The students are asked to rate these 22 variables at two-dimension, namely expectation, and perception. The Likert's five-point scale was used to measure the level of expectation and perception of each variable in core service quality (CSQ). 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 1.

2. Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. and Berry, L., (1988), "SERVQUAL: A multi item scale for measuring consumer perception of service quality", *Journal of Retailing*, 64(Spring), pp.12-40.

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Table 1 The Expectation of Variables in Core Service Quality (CSQ) in HEIs

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.	Sincere interest in solving problems	3.8041	3.4026	3.1144	3.2676*
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 as they promised since 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 HEIs

The score of 22 variables in core service quality in HEIs 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 2.

Table 2 Important Core Service Quality Factors (CSQFs) in HEIs

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 its Eigen values are 4.1785 and 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 3

Table 3 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 first 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 4

Table 4 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 HEIs

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 5.

Table 5 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 in the negative, which indicates the level of perception on CSQFs is not up to level of expectation among the students in the case of all three groups of institutions. The higher negative service quality gap is identified in the case of Group III institutions than the Group I & 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 significant at the five percent level.

Conclusion

The core service quality in management institutes has been examined with the help of 22 variables. The highly expected core service quality variables among the students in group-I institutions are individual attention and provision of service as they promised, whereas, among the students in group II institutions, these are prompt service to students and promise to do something by a certain time. Among the students in group III institutions, these are modern equipment

and prompt service to students. Regarding the level of expectation on core service quality variables, the significant difference among the three groups of students has been noticed in case of 14 variables out of 22 core service quality variables.

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. Regarding the level of expectation on core service quality factors, the significant difference between the three groups of students has been noticed in the case of reliability, empathy, and responsiveness. The overall expectation on core service quality is higher among the students in group I institutes than group II and III institutes.

The highly perceived core service quality factors among the students in group I institutes are reliability and empathy, whereas, among the students in group II institutes, these are reliability and responsiveness. Among the students in group III institutes, these are assurance and reliability. Regarding the level of expectation on core service quality factors, the significant difference between the three groups of students has been noticed in the case of reliability, empathy, responsiveness, and tangibles. The overall perception of core service quality is higher among the students in the group I institutes than in group II and III institutes.

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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