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Quality of Services and Satisfaction among Students in Private Higher Education Institutes in India

SONIA VATTA AND MOHIT BHATARA

Abstract:

This study is an effort to examine the relationship between service quality and student satisfaction. Today, we can see the mushroom growth of private colleges and universities in all parts of India. If we concentrate on the main objective of providing these services, it looks that it is more a profession to earn money than providing quality. Big industrialists with or without educational background are successfully running most of the private educational institutes. Beside industrialists, lots of political people have also entered into this field. But future of all these institutes purely depends on the quality of services offered.

KEY-WORDS:

quality, service, satisfaction, students, education

INTRODUCTION

We can see now-a-days that the education is being commercialized and the students are being considered as customers. A lot of educational institutes are being opened and quality of education and student satisfaction is a big question. The satisfaction of students depends upon the quality of services provided by the private institutes. If quality is poor, the survival of private institutes will not be possible for long time. Few years ago UGC has cancelled recognition of few private universities in India and even the Supreme Court has supported UGC in this matter. Parasuraman's service quality framework, SERVQUAL is used to measure the quality in service sector. The SERVQUAL was based on ten determinants of quality. But in 1988, Parasuraman's SERVQUAL model was reduced to five determinants only which is called as RATER. The determinants of quality to be covered by RATER are as mentioned below:

1. Reliability
2. Assurance
3. Tangibility
4. Empathy
5. Responsiveness

Literature Review

Student Satisfaction:

According to Kotler and Clarke (1987) the satisfaction is defined as the state felt by a person who has experience performance or an outcome that fulfills his expectations. The expectations may come before entering into the higher education. So it is important to examine the expectations of students before entering into the higher education. In contrary Carey, Cambiano, De Vore (2002) believes that satisfaction actually covers issues of students' perceptions and experiences during the college years. It is not good to consider students as Customers, but now-a-days the market scenario is like this only. Most of the private institutes consider students as their customers.

Service Quality:

The service quality is basically judged on the basis of satisfaction of consumers that how they think and take the services. The satisfaction of consumers depends on quality of services they receive (Afzal et al. 2010). Generally, there are three main aspects of the students that need to be satisfied with respect to the services. These has been labeled as Requisite encounters which make the students to fulfill their study obligations; Acceptable encounters which students acknowledge as being desirable but not essential during their course of study and an encounter of a practical or utilitarian nature (Oldfield and Baron, 2000). As per Razavi et al. (2012) there is a strong relationship between service quality and satisfaction.

The Technical/Functional Quality framework and the SERVQUAL model are two most important perspectives of service quality according to Lassar, Manolis and Winsor (2000) which are of use in education sector.

Objectives of Study

1. To examine the relationship between service quality determinants and student satisfaction.
2. To check the critical issues, which are important for satisfaction of students.

Research Methodology

This study was adopted from Parasuraman's model. The overall satisfaction is the dependent variable in this study which is measured by the overall service quality in the private higher education institutes. And the independent variable in this study is service quality in higher education that measures the level of satisfaction with service performance. This variable consists of five determinants i.e. reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: To know the relationship between service quality determinants and satisfaction among the students in private higher education institutes.

Research Question 2: To determine the critical issues in service quality that contribute most to the satisfaction of the students.

Sample Size

For our research purpose, the data from 300 students of private higher education institutes in Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, UP, MP etc. has been collected. The questionnaire method has been adopted. The questionnaire was consisted of:

1. Demographic Factor
2. Service Quality
3. Satisfaction of Students

The demographic factor covers gender, age, ethnicity and year or semester in which students study.

The SPSS software has been used to analyze the data. Likert scale ranging from 1 to 6 was used for the variables. The collected data was analyzed to find out the results.

Findings

Out of 300 students, 172(57.33%) were male students and 128(42.67%) were female students. The calculated mean age was 21 years. This is as shown below:

Variables	Frequency	%age
Male Students	172	57.33%
Female Students	128	42.67%
Age in Years		
18-19	51	15.3%
19-20	26	7.8%
20-21	150	45%
21-22	19	5.7%
22-23	22	6.6%
23-24	32	9.6%

□The ethnic distribution of students is as shown below:

Ethnic	Frequency	% age
U.P.	59	17.7
M.P.	56	16.8
Punjab	43	12.9
H.P.	59	17.7
J& K	51	15.3
Others	32	9.6

The respondents were students of their graduation degree.

Year	Frequency	%age
2 nd	160	54
3 rd	140	46

Statistics of Variables

The dependent variable in this study is student satisfaction which consists of four items, while the independent variable service quality consists of five determinants, starting with tangibility which contains 17 items, assurance contains 8 items, reliability contains 5 items, while responsiveness and empathy contain 4 items each, in total 38 items.

Mean of student satisfaction was (4.09 on a 6-point scale) followed by service quality with an overall mean of 4.01 (on a 6-point scale). The minimum score for student satisfaction is 1 and maximum score is 6. For each determinant, assurance scores the highest (4.46 on a 6-point scale), followed by responsiveness (4.16 on a 6-point scale), reliability (3.92 on a 6-point scale), tangibility and empathy (3.90 on a 6-point scale). As it is shown that the mean for quality of services is 4.09, which can be perceived as students in these higher education institutes are actually somewhat satisfied with overall service quality.

Description Statistics of Measure

Variable Type	Variable Name	N	No. of Items	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Actual Mean
Dependent Y	Student Satisfaction	300	4	1	6	4.09
Independent Service Quality						
X1	Tangibility	300	17	2.36	6	3.90
X2	Assurance	300	08	1.78	6	4.46
X3	Reliability	300	05	1.72	6	3.92
X4	Responsiveness	300	04	1.65	6	4.16
X5	Empathy	300	04	1.64	6	3.90
	Overall Service Quality		38	1.83	6	4.01

The results as shown in table below indicate that the item "Friendly Lecturers" under independent variables has the highest mean score, while the item "Adequacy of Computers provided in the Labs" under the independent variables has the lowest mean score, which mean that the highest satisfaction towards the services is related to the assurance of services and the lowest satisfaction is related to the tangibility of services. For the dependent variable (student satisfaction), the item "I am satisfied with my decision to attend this Institute" score the highest while "If I have a choice to do it again, I still will enroll here", score the lowest.

	Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
	Service Quality		
	Tangibility		
1	Facilities in Class Rooms	4.32	0.99
2	Appearance of Lecturers	4.76	1.00
3	Cleanliness	3.65	1.38
4	Adequacy of Computers in Labs	3.28	1.28
5	Up-to-datedness of Computers	3.39	1.39
6	Up to date Library	4.31	0.99
7	Up-to-datedness of Curriculum	3.81	1.03
8	Infrastructure	4.53	0.90
9	Hygiene Conditions	4.13	1.05
10	Sitting arrangement in Class Rooms	4.44	0.86
11	Access to Internet	3.92	1.18
12	Hostel Facility	4.53	0.90
13	Parks and Greenery	4.13	1.05
14	Parking	4.43	0.87
15	Transport Facility	4.53	0.90
16	Course Choice	3.39	1.39
17	Culture of Institute	4.76	1.00
	Assurance		
18	Academic Credentials of Lecturers	4.78	1.00
19	Research Efficiency of Lecturers		
20	Communication Skills of Staff	4.31	0.99
21	Technical Skills of Staff	4.02	1.11
22	Health and Safety Measures	4.59	0.88
23	Staff Knowledge on Rules and Policies	4.77	0.92
24	Friendly Lecturers	4.79	0.96
25	Friendly Staff	4.02	1.11
	Reliability		
26	Odd hours Assistance	3.90	1.30
27	Exams on Time	4.31	0.99
28	Results on Time	4.02	1.11
29	Record Keeping	3.88	1.16
30	Regularity and Punctuality of Staff	3.92	1.81
	Responsiveness		
31	Availability of Lecturers to assist Students	3.81	1.03
32	Availability of Personal to assist Students	3.93	1.17
33	Capacity of Lecturers to solve Students Problems	4.02	1.11
34	Capacity of Staff to solve Students Problems	3.65	1.38
	Empathy		
35	Access to Study Rooms as per Students Comforts	4.13	1.05
36	Access to Computers as per Students Comforts	3.90	1.30
37	Lecturers pay individual attention to Students	3.85	1.25
38	Lecturers Support to Students	4.46	1.07
	Student Satisfaction	3.55	1.23
1	I am satisfied with my decision to attend	4.36	0.99

Reliability of the Study

Reliability coefficients of all variables represent all determinants of service quality. In past research done by Mahiah, S. et al. (2006), supports this study which means that these instruments are quite reliable. The tangibility determinant for this study is (0.909) as compared with Mahiah's study which is (0.851), assurance is 0.889(0.917), reliability is 0.878(0.889), responsiveness is 0.857(0.919) and empathy is 0.887 (0.886).

Variable Type	Variable Name	No. of Items	Actual Test (alpha)	Mahiah S.
Dependent Y	Student Satisfaction	04	0.835	
Independent Service Quality				
X1	Tangibility	17	0.909	0.851
X2	Assurance	08	0.889	0.917
X3	Reliability	05	0.878	0.889
X4	Responsiveness	04	0.857	0.919
X5	Empathy	04	0.887	0.886

Relationship among Service Quality Determinants and Satisfaction of Students

The results indicate that there is significant and positive relationship between tangibility, responsiveness, assurance, reliability empathy and overall service quality to students' satisfaction. From the output it has been noticed that, empathy has the strongest relationship with satisfaction followed by assurance, tangibility, responsiveness and reliability. The relationship between tangibility and student satisfaction is $r=0.592$ meaning that tangibility has a moderate relationship towards satisfaction similar with assurance ($r=0.610$), reliability ($r=0.578$) and responsiveness ($r=0.565$). Only empathy showed a stronger relationship with satisfaction. The relationship between overall service quality and students' satisfaction is 0.663 meaning that the relationship is stronger than moderate. Furthermore, the results indicate that all the determinants are highly correlated and very significant with one another. Therefore, it has been proved that the service quality determinants (tangibility, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and empathy) have a significant relationship with satisfaction. Mahiah (2006) has also proved that tangibility, empathy, reliability, responsiveness and assurance are highly correlated and very significant with one another.

Variable Type	Y
Dependent Y=Satisfaction	Satisfaction
Independent	
X1=Tangibility	0.592
X2=Assurance	0.610
X3=Reliability	0.578
X4=Responsiveness	0.565
X5=Empathy	0.650
X6=Overall Service Quality	0.663

Critical Issues in Service Quality

The results show that $R^2=0.485$ (adjusted $R^2=0.56$), meaning that 48.5% of the variance in students' satisfaction are explained by the five determinants provided in the output. The F statistics produced ($F=32.104$) is significant at the 0.000. From this result, it is proved that tangibility (unstandardized coefficients B is 0.185 at sign. T = 0.114), responsiveness (unstandardized coefficients B is -0.004 at sign. T= 0.972) and reliability (unstandardized coefficients B is -0.151 at sign. T= 0.244) are not significantly related with satisfaction. From results, it is also apparent that two quality determinants (empathy and assurance) are consistently more significant than the other determinants (tangibility, responsiveness and reliability). It means empathy and assurance are two critical issues that contribute most to students' satisfaction. So, the quality determinants, empathy (unstandardized coefficients B is 0.499 at sign. T=0.000) and assurance (unstandardized coefficients B is 0.416 at sign. T= 0.011) are significantly related with satisfaction.

Discussion

The Research Question 1 indicates that five service qualities (tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, assurance and empathy) and overall service quality has strong relationship with students' satisfaction. The result is similar with the findings by Bigne et al. (2003) Ham and Hayduk (2003) and that found there is a positive relationship between service quality and student satisfaction. In the study, empathy ($r=0.650$) has the strongest relationship followed by assurance ($r=0.610$), tangibility ($r=0.592$), reliability ($r=0.578$) and responsiveness ($r=0.565$). In addition, the relationship between overall service quality and students' satisfaction is 0.663, means that the relationship is stronger than moderate. The results show that tangibility has a stronger relationship with satisfaction than reliability and responsiveness. This result brings the researchers back to what Umbach and Porter (2002) have been stressing on earlier. Smith and Ennew (2001) also agreed upon this and as per them, the services and facilities will have a direct and indirect effect on the evaluation of higher education institutes. It is found that, although all the determinants of service quality are important but assurance is found to be one of the most important determinants (Perisau and McDaniel, 1997). Consistent with what has been depicted by Soutar and McNeil (2003) in their research, stating that although all determinants of service quality are actually useful in explaining student's satisfaction, but it does not mean that all determinants are significant. It has been proved that assurance is one of the determinants which have strong relationship with satisfaction

The results show that empathy plays a crucial and an influential role towards satisfaction because empathy is defined as "being able to communicate with care and understanding through the interpersonal skills of the staff. It has been proved that empathy is that determinant of service quality which is significant with satisfaction, but this study is actually supported strongly by one of the studies given by Maushart (2003) as he found that when student shows a high satisfaction with their college experience, it is due to the formal and informal contact with their lecturer. It is understandable to the reason that why the contact with the lecturers seems to play an important role as according to Clewes (2003) the process of teaching and learning is actually the central part to students' evaluation of service quality. It could have an effect towards students' evaluation on satisfaction. In this study, the Research Question 2 indicates that assurance (unstandardized coefficients B is 0.416 at sign. $T=0.011$) and empathy (unstandardized coefficients B is 0.499 at sign. $T=0.000$) are significantly related with satisfaction and are critical issues that contribute most to the satisfaction of the students.

Conclusion

From the results, it is clear that service quality has significant positive relationship with student satisfaction. Thus, it is confirmed that by improving the service quality, the students' satisfaction can be improved and that is the priority of the private higher education institutes due to the fact that they have to compete for their survival. It is important to notice that two determinants of service quality that is empathy and assurance are the most critical issues in explaining students' satisfaction. Whatever will be done to increase empathy and assurance in service quality therefore will help the students to give better evaluation to their satisfaction.

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