

Service Quality in Higher Education: A Review

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Abstract: Higher education is of considerable significance, as it not only enables students to pursue a better future, but also for countries to compete in the global market by improving their economic and social position. Higher education is typically provided at different levels by public and private universities, where students can receive guidance for education and research. However, at present, with increased number of higher education institutions and lack of quality education in most them is of great concern. This scenario exerts pressure on governments and managements of private and public sector institutions to implement advanced methodologies and compete with global education systems. Nevertheless, the fact that providing higher education is just a service, is generally neglected. Hence, there is a need to evaluate and ensure service quality in higher education. This paper aims to review the existing studies and emphasize on the significance and further direction of service quality in higher education.

Keywords: Education, Higher education, Service quality, SERVQUAL, SERVPERF, HETQMEX, HEdPERF, HEISQUAL, HiEdQUAL.

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is changing globally since the past twenty years because of demographic shifts, globalization, technological revolution, and deregulation. Different levels of higher education vary with regards to infrastructure, pedagogy, faculty, and students' placement. It is the obligation of public and private higher educational institutions to train students adequately and transform them into valuable resources.

Several researchers have used their perspectives to define quality of service. Parasuraman et al. [1] defined service quality as the comparative evaluation of service delivery and service outcome processes, and proposed five dimensions, namely, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

II. SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSIONS

Research is being conducted to determine the adequate dimensions for the quality of service provided in higher education. The variables to be incorporated in the questionnaire must be determined while developing the measurements of quality in service. Hence, the important elements of service quality dimensions are considered in the survey. Many researchers have used consumers' satisfaction to formulate the dimensions of quality in service and they found that dimensions of service quality in higher education must be influenced by parents and students, and not by university faculty and management [2], [3]. Parasuraman et al. [1] discussed the five dimensions of service quality. Assurance is the capability of evoking confidence, trust, and belief; responsiveness is the willingness to help and serve customers promptly; reliability is the capability to execute the required service consistently and dependably; empathy refers to the personal care and protection offered to students; and tangibles refer to personnel, infrastructure, and equipment. Ramaiyah et al. [4] studied different dimensions to determine the differences and similarities of service quality dimensions. The studied dimensions were academic services and facilities, healthy and competitive educational environment, campus life, interaction with peers, co-curriculum, proportion of students, location, student quality, social life and religious atmosphere. The authors found that each dimension was acceptable with qualitative and quantitative justifications. Service quality dimensions vary according to various factors, such as customers, research objectives, institutions, situations, environment, and time. Hanaysha et al. [3] stated that students' satisfaction has a great influence on quality of service. Responsiveness has a greater effect on students' satisfaction followed by reliability and assurance. Schindler et al. [5] reviewed fifty indicators of service quality and proposed four indicators, namely, student performance, instructional performance, student support, and administrative support. These parameters are used to identify students' requirements and satisfaction with university's provision of quality. The researchers stated that the quality is purposeful, transformative, exceptional, and accountable. Educational and non-educational services provided by universities show a greater impact on service quality. Provision of online plot forms increases student's enrollments [6]. The national student

survey conducted in United Kingdom concluded that universities, organizations, and management plays an important role in determination of students' satisfaction followed by teaching quality and academic support [7].

III. SERVICE QUALITY MODELS AND MEASUREMENT

Higher educational institutions come under the ambit of a service-oriented sector and hence it is vital for such organizations to provide quality services and thereby progress [2]. Based on the present scenario of competitive world, higher education institutions should provide excellence in their services. Quality education provides better learning opportunities to students [4]. Services provided by institutions are considered of high quality if the expectations of students and parents are met [2]. Therefore, maintaining service quality is important for institutions because it influences students' enrollment. The first service quality model developed by [8] measured perceived quality using qualitative methods. In this model, he used technical quality and corporate image as service quality dimensions. Services delivered to consumers constitute technical quality and the manner in which such services are provided constitute functional quality [9].

Gap analysis and service performance measures are the two most typically employed methods for assessing quality of service. The prototype of gap analysis was proposed by Parasuraman et al. [1]. Gap analysis was framed based on quality as per customers' point of view as well as gap between customers' assumptions and administration perception. Service performance measures are an alternative method, under which two types of performance measures, namely soft and hard, are discussed. Soft measures of service quality are implemented by talking to customers, employees and relevant people. Soft measures of service quality are done by conducting customer satisfaction surveys and internal performance analysis. Hard measures of service quality include activities and performance characteristics that can be counted, timed, or measured through audits [10].

The above-mentioned methods focus on qualitative research more than quantitative research, which is tested empirically and psychometrically. Parasuraman et al. [1] built a model called service quality (SERVQUAL) comprising five different parameters along with 22 items, which was presented on a Likert scale (7 point). SERVQUAL is a globally accepted instrument and it is used as a base for developing other quality instruments. SERVQUAL used in different organizations include wholesale & retail sectors and banking. SERVQUAL estimates quality of service by subtracting customer expectations' from perception score with respect to the instrument's 22 items. Cronin and Taylor [11] suggested performance-based method called service performance (SERVPERF), which measured the construct of service quality on a seven-point scale [9]. Team work, education, training, commitment, and leadership are some of the dimensions that are used in a Higher Education Total Quality Management Excellence (HETQMEX) model to evaluate service quality. SERVQUAL was merged into the HETQMEX model by Ho and Wearn [12]. Pariseu and McDanniel [13] compared expectations and perceptions between faculty members and undergraduate students. SERVQUAL instrument is frequently used in higher education to assess quality of service [14]. Majority of studies conducted on higher education quality of service focused on students' point of view and such studies did not consider the perspectives of parents, academic staff, and administrative staff. Few investigators have evaluated service quality based on teaching process and administrative services [15].

Khodayari and Khodayari [15] developed SERVQUAL model to measure the perceptions and expectations of perceived quality by framing two questionnaires consisting of 22 questions using five factors (reliability, empathy, assurance, responsiveness, tangibility) which are important for students. Annamdevula and Bellamkonda [14] assessed quality of service in higher education by identifying the determinants. The researchers framed the higher education quality (HiEdQUAL) method comprising 27 variables, which were summarized under five factors, namely, support services, campus infrastructure, academic facilities, administrative services, and teaching and course content. The study found a significant relationship among factors, which had a positive and substantial impact on the overall quality of services, as comprehended by the pupils. In order to know customer satisfaction, evaluating service quality with evaluation parameters is necessary [16]. Calvo [17] compared perceived quality between public and private universities using modified SERVQUAL method. Icli and Anil [18] evaluated quality of service in MBA program through the HiEdQUAL method. The researchers identified five factors, namely, support services, career opportunities, administrative staff support, library facilities, and academic excellence, as the key dimensions of service quality. Shaari [19] estimated service quality of off-campus higher education program with respect to the student satisfaction regarding facilities provided by the universities. There is a genuine need to compare services provided to mainstream and off-campus programs to improve excellence in higher education. Green [20] measured assumptions and perceptions of students and teaching faculty and determined satisfaction of students and teaching staff in South African higher education institutes by using SERVQUAL model comprising of different parameters, such as general attitude, visual aspects, human factors, commitment to serve, and physical and academic facilities. Garg [21] measured gap between the perceptions and

expectations of students belonging to higher education institutes by using SERVQUAL model. Teeroovengadam et al. [22] developed the higher education service quality (HESQUAL) method consisting of administrative support, core-educational quality, physical environment, support facilities, and transformative quality. These were considered as the primary evaluating factors for quality with nine sub-dimensions comprising of 48 variables. Adinegara and Putra [23] used an easy and quick method of Importance Performance Tool (IPA) to identify the learners' perception about the quality of services during their course of study. This method consists of seven attributes of 28 statements, which are summarized under five factors, namely, general aspects, classrooms, laboratory services, library facilities, and academic provisions. The Wi-Fi availability and collection of books in the library are the two attributes with the largest gap. Abdullah [24] framed the Higher Education Performance (HEdPERF) scale, to evaluate academic components as well as total service environment [2]. Mondal [25] used LeBlanc and Nguyen questionnaire and proposed 31 items to find out the differences between public and private colleges regarding the learners' perception of quality of service. He used t-test and Levene's test to determine the difference in equality of variances between the independent sample groups. Abbas [26] developed a novel method, HEISQUAL, to measure service quality based on students' skill development, safety and security, employment quality, supportive managerial staff, infrastructure and facilities, curriculum, and teachers' profile. The main advantage of this method is that it covers both operational and technical features of service quality.

IV. SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTIONS BY STUDENTS AND PARENTS

In education service sector, students are considered as primary consumers. Students' satisfaction depends on the facilities and teaching mechanisms provided by universities. Hence, it is important to consider the students' perception as a key determinant for evaluating quality of service. Educational organizations must know the perceptions of parents to improve performance. There is a gap between students' perceptions and students' expectations [15]. Students' perception changes according to class, age, and department [27]. According to Jalali et al. [28], perceptions of students about academic activities are more significant than about non academic activities. Compared to public universities, private universities are a step ahead in adopting the changes according to current requirements [16]. According to a survey conducted by Green [20] in South African Universities, both students and faculty were dissatisfied with the service quality. It is important to provide study rooms, adequate infrastructure, and technical support [21]. Noman and Kour [29] stated that parents perceived high quality teaching and good academic performance along with high moral values and excellent support for extracurricular activities. Dicker et al. [30] demonstrated that relationship with academic staff and teaching and learning were the important factors perceived by students across different groups. The quantitative study of Baliyan and Moorad [31] revealed significant dissimilarities in students' perceptions about training efficacy between university institutions and non-university institutions. Students engaged in university institutions were found to be more effective learners than those engaged in non-university institutions. According to parents' perceptions, significant difference was found in the quality of e-learning provided by public and private education institutions [32]. However, in terms of overall service quality, perceptions of students differ from perceptions of parents [33]. Although a majority of studies conducted on higher education service quality employ the dimensional framework, the multi-dimensionality of service quality cannot be ignored. It is important for universities to know the problems faced by students and analyze the reasons of students' unwillingness to enroll [34]. Hence, it is important to establish regulatory bodies, such as national quality assurance councils, to frame and implement the guidelines for evaluating service excellence in higher education as well as to conduct further research to improve students' and parents' satisfaction [6].

V. CONCLUSION

Education is a service sector and students are considered as principal consumers. Higher education is crucial for the social and economic growth of students, resulting in the nation's development. Globalization has caused a rise in stipulation for high quality of higher education amongst students as well as parents. Private and public institutions should maintain the requisite standards according to the present global scenario. It is important to evaluate quality of services provided by institutions by considering the cumulative effect of all dimensions on delivering services. Most of the studies have used SERVQUAL method to analyze service quality. HEdPERF and HiEdQUAL are specially designed to evaluate quality of service in higher education. Several studies demonstrated that service quality is evaluated only by considering students' satisfaction. Novel methods for evaluating excellence in service must be developed by considering the perspectives of parents, faculty as well as administrative staff. Additionally, it is necessary to evaluate the parameters of quality in higher education for students using off-campus programs.

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