Impact of Perceived Service Quality on Students' Satisfaction

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Abstract
The contribution of services to the world economy is rapidly growing ever before which forces the marketers to focus on delighting the customers with the extended high quality service offers. Globalization paved a way to increase competition and the quality concerns all over the word. Service quality and customer satisfaction are the two different constructs which are researched persistently since the past and still remains with their prominence. Nowadays, most of the universities in Sri Lanka started to realize the importance of perceived service quality and the satisfaction of students in the higher education with the emergence of new private universities and other higher education institutions. This research aimed to investigate the impact of students' perceived service quality and their satisfaction. The data collected from the students through the issuance of questionnaires which used the five point Likert scale as the measurement scale. The result revealed that there is a significant positive correlation between students' perceived service quality and their satisfaction. Moreover, all the service quality dimensions expose a significant positive correlation with students' satisfaction where the empathy and responsiveness are the most influencing dimensions on satisfaction.
Keywords: Perceived Service Quality, Service Quality Dimensions, Students' Satisfaction, SERVQUAL

1. Background of the study

No matter whether the country is developed or developing, the contribution of the service sector in the economy is higher than ever before when compare it with other sectors. The current business environment is highly competitive. Delivering outstanding quality and ensuring customer satisfaction are seen as a major impetus in nurturing an organisation's long-term survival (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Marketing of services are not that much easier as the marketing of products since it has its special characteristics. The complex nature of services, coupled with the growing eminence of service sector has increased the need for better service quality (Arasli et al., 2005). According to Zeithmal et al. (1996), organizations' failure in realizing the customer expectations is one of the major reasons they underperform in their respective industry.

Satisfaction is another widely researched construct that focuses on the customers' overall satisfaction with the service provider (Bitner and Hubert, 1994). Service quality and satisfaction are the two core concepts that are at the crux of marketing theory and practice (Spreng and Mackoy, 1996). The key to sustainable competitive advantage lies in delivering high quality that will in turn result in satisfied customers (Shemwell et al., 1998) as well as the success and survival in the competitive environment (Wang et al., 2003). Therefore, service quality and customer satisfaction are the ultimate goals of service providers (Sureshchandar, 2002). Customer satisfaction and loyalty, as a consequence of high quality, provides long term survival and success (Robledo, 2001). In order to survive and have long-term relationships with customers, understanding them, meeting their expectations and being different from rivals are very much important.

Knowledgeable citizens are the pillars who design the innovative plans for the development of any country. Thus, the education has become an important cornerstone on which most of the countries building upon. A developing country like Sri Lanka also started to focus more on education. Even though there is a free education system, it wasn't give expected output since some students were dropped their primary education. Therefore, the Sri Lankan government introduced compulsory education act in 1998 which enforces compulsory education for children aged five to fourteen.

Moreover, developing Sri Lanka as a knowledge hub in Asia is a key development strategy of the government for which it focuses on restructuring the education and knowledge systems. Consequently, government gave permission to the emergence of some private universities in order to create opportunity for the students who failed to get the admission in the government universities and who have the intention to move to other foreign countries for their higher studies. Furthermore, colleges and some other higher education institutions are also providing tertiary education. All these create an intense competition in the higher education sector where the existing Universities want to excel more than the past. The need for quality assurance and accreditation in Sri Lankan universities is widely felt and the University Grants Commission developed a Quality Assurance framework to maintain the uniformity and ensure the quality among the universities (Peiris, 2006). As the students have a lot of choices in the selection of institutions, most of the government universities have started to focus on positioning themselves through high quality services.

As Bell and Shieff (1990) stated, Universities must also become more knowledgeable about the marketplace in order to deliver high quality education that will satisfy students. Besides, the quality of service

will affect the sustainability of an organization (Canic and McCarthy, 2000). Therefore, everyone realize the need for investigation in this area however most of the researches are done in the developed countries. In developing countries, regarding the students' perception of service quality is generally focused the students in private institutions and universities and not much in public or government universities. Therefore, this research is focus on the investigation of the relationship between students' perceived service quality and their satisfaction.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Service Quality

The quality of the service delivered to a customer is a key factor in the services marketing since of the services have its' special characteristics. Service quality is the foundation of service marketing firms. There are a number of researchers who studied about the service quality services of different industries in the market such as banking (Sureshchandar et al., 2002; Olorunniwo and Hsu, 2006; Arasli et al, 2005;Ganguli and Roy, 2011; Bloemer et al., 1998), mobile communication (Mokhtar et al, 2011) and retail department store (Sivadas and Baker- Prewitt, 2000). This indicates the considerable attention given to service quality in the marketing literature by both practitioners and academic researchers in recent years (Caruana, 2002). Obviously this shows that service quality is crucial to the success of any business organization as the construct affects customer satisfaction, repeat purchase behaviour, and ultimately, an organization's profitability (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003).

Zeithaml (1998) argued that perceived quality could be defined as the consumer's judgment about an entity's overall experience or superiority. Ismail et al. (2009) suggested that perceived quality is a general overall appraisal of service. Cronin and Taylor (1992) stated that perceived quality should be conceptualized as "similar to an attitude" approach. Moreover, perceived quality is defined as the difference between customer expectation and customer perception towards service performance (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Bolton and Drew, 1991).

Zeithaml et al., (1990) suggest the gap model of service quality which measures the gap between expectation and perception of a customer. Customer expectations are standards or reference points that customers bring into the service experience, whereas customer perceptions are subjective assessments of actual service experience (Zeithaml, 2011). Customers form expectations prior to their encounter with the bank and they develop perceptions during the service delivery process and subsequently they compare their perceptions to their expectations in evaluating the outcome of the service encounter (Bloemer, 1998).

Perceived service quality is not a unidimensional concept, but a multidimensional relevant to the context (Zeithaml, et al, 2011; Rust and Oliver, 1994; Lewis and Booms, 1983). Gronroos (1984) suggested a service quality model with dimensions, namely technical quality, functional quality and corporate image. Likewise, Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991) presented a model with three dimensions of service quality i.e. physical, interactive and corporate quality. SERVQUAL model was introduced by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) which comprises with 22 item scale which are grouped into five dimensions specifically reliability (ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately), responsiveness (willingness of staff to help customers and provide prompt service), assurance (employees' knowledge and courtesy and their ability to inspire trust and confidence), empathy (providing individual attention and care to customers) and tangibles (appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and written materials). This model has widely applied many researchers across the service industry.

2.2 Customer Satisfaction

Satisfaction is a term which is well known and frequently used term in day-to-day life, even though, defining satisfaction is not easier as such. Oliver (1997) said, Satisfaction is the consumer's fulfilment response and it is a judgement that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provides a pleasurable level of consumption related fulfilment. In other words, Satisfaction is a consumer evaluation of a product or service in terms of whether the product or service has met the customers' needs and expectations. Failure to meet the needs and expectations is assumed to result in dissatisfaction with the product or service.

Johnson et al. (2001) explained customer satisfaction is also considered as a perspective cumulative satisfaction, perspective that means it is the overall experience of the customer with the product or service delivered. Customer satisfaction is an important contributor which guarantees a company's long-term profitability, customer retention, and loyalty (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003; Sureshchandar et al., 2002). Thus, the successful delivery of customer satisfaction is an essential determinant for an organization's survival and long-term profitability (Bolton and Drew, 1991; Morgan, Anderson, and Mittal, 2005).

2.3 Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Many researchers use Service Quality and satisfaction interchangeably, these two are fundamentally different in terms of their underlying causes and outcomes (Parasuraman, 1994). Service quality specifically focuses on the dimension of service where satisfaction is a broader concept which incorporates perceived service quality as a component. An empirical test of Cronin and Taylor (1992) investigated that service quality can be seen as a

determinant of customer satisfaction which in turn influences the purchase intention of the customers.

3. Method

All the indicators were built from the literature, thus the instrument which used to collect the data has its content validity. Indicators of service quality were developed based on the SERVQUAL model proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) which is widely used by most of the researchers and still it has its' validity (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Carman, 1990; Bolton and Drew, 1991). Following is the conceptualization of this research.
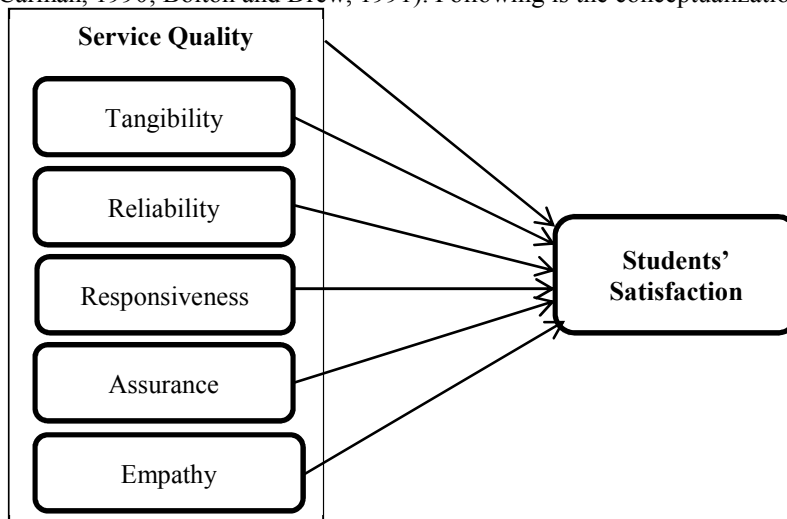

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

To test the relationship between the constructs the following hypotheses were formulated.
H1: There is a positive correlation between Students' perceived service quality and their Satisfaction
H2: There is a positive correlation between tangibility and Students' Satisfaction
H3: There is a positive correlation between reliability and Students' Satisfaction
H4: There is a positive correlation between responsiveness and Students' Satisfaction
H5: There is a positive correlation between assurance and Students' Satisfaction
H6: There is a positive correlation between empathy and Students' Satisfaction

The sample is selected from the population of students using stratified sampling method. Students are stratified based on their respective departments. Total 200 questionnaires were issued to the students among which 150 were returned and 120 questionnaires were usable for the further research. Five point Likert scale was used to measure the Service quality and students' satisfaction ranging from 1- strongly disagree to 5- Strongly Agree. The following table shows the decision rule of this research.

Table 1: Decision rule of descriptive analysis

Range	Decision Attributes
$1 \leq Xi \leq 2.5$	Low level of Service Quality/ Satisfaction
$2.5 < Xi \leq 3.5$	Moderate level of Service Quality/ Satisfaction
$3.5 < Xi \leq 5$	High level of Service Quality/ Satisfaction

Barlett's test of sphericity (BTS = 151.965, p< 0.000) was significant at 0.000 and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO = 0.506) where Kaiser (1974) recommends accepting the values greater than 0.5 as acceptable. These results indicated that the data set was very appropriate for conducting further analysis. As the consideration of reliability of the measurement is a must (Hair et al., 2010), this research measured the Cronbach alpha value which shows the internal consistency of the instrument (Andy, 2009). It is indicated that the Cronbach alpha of service quality was 0.895 and for students' satisfaction 0.890 which showed that all estimations of Cornbach alpha was above 0.8 can be acceptable as per Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) and Carmines and Zeller (1979). Therefore, it is revealed that the service quality and students' satisfaction have good internal consistency. The following table shows the individual alpha value.

4. Data analysis

4.1 Descriptive analysis

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of variables. The mean value of Perceived service quality was 3.46 with the standard deviation of 0.656 where the mean value of students' satisfaction was 3.58 with the

standard deviation of 0.953.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Perceived Service Quality	3.46	.656
Students' Satisfaction	3.58	.953

(Source: Survey data)

As per the table 3, 52% of the respondents perceived the service quality in high level while 39% perceived the service quality in moderate level, and remaining 09% perceived the service quality in lower level. With regard to satisfaction 53% of the respondents showed higher level of satisfaction and 34% moderately satisfied and latter 13% indicated lower level of satisfaction.

Table 3: Levels of Service quality and Students' satisfaction

Levels	Service Quality		Satisfaction	
	n	%	n	%
Lower	11	09	15	13
Moderate	47	39	41	34
Higher	62	52	64	53

(Source: Survey data)

4.2 Correlation analysis

The below table depicts the correlation between the perceived service quality and students' satisfaction. Pearson correlation shows the r- value of 0.601and it is significant at 0.001. As the r- value is greater than 0.5, it is obvious that there is a strong positive relationship between students' perceived service quality and students' satisfaction.

Table 4: Correlation between Service quality and students' Satisfaction

Variables		Service Quality	Satisfaction
Service Quality	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.601	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2- tailed)

The table 5 illustrates the relationship between service quality dimensions and students' satisfaction. It reveals that all the service quality dimensions have significant positive correlation (p value > 0.05) with customer satisfaction. Empathy shows highest correlation (0.66) with students' satisfaction followed by responsiveness (0.530) reliability (0.483), assurance (0.470) and tangibles (0.417).

Table 5: Correlation between Service quality dimensions and students' Satisfaction

Dimensions and Variable		Tangibles	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy	Satisfaction
Tangibles	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
Reliability	Pearson Correlation	.720	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000					
Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	.630	.835	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000				
Assurance	Pearson Correlation	.421	.701	.765	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000			
Empathy	Pearson Correlation	.533	.669	.763	.661	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		
Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.417	.483	.530	.470	.660	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
According to Table 6, the regression equation is,
Where,

$$SS = 0.561 + 0.872 \, SQ$$

SS: Students' Satisfaction
SQ: Service Quality

The b value of the equation, the gradient of the regression is 0.872 which is significant at 1% (sig. t=0. 000). As indicated by adjusted R^2, 35.5% of the variance of Satisfaction of Students is explained by their perceived service quality with the standard beta of 0.601. The F value is 59.903 is significantly explained by 36.1% of the variance of students' satisfaction.

Table 6: Summary of Regression, ANOVA and Coefficient analysis

R	0.601 (a)
R^2	0.361
Adjusted R^2	0.355
Standard Error of the estimate	0.765
R^2 change	0.361
F	59.903
Sig. F	0.000
Sum of squares	35.053
B Constant	0.561
B SQ	0.872
Standardized coefficient- Beta	0.601
T	7.740
Sig. T	0.000

a predictors: (constant) Service Quality

4.3 Hypothesis Testing
A hypothesis is a reasonable assumption which is being tested in the study. The hypotheses were tested using the results of Pearson's Product Movement Correlation Analysis and the results of regression analysis. The alternative hypothesis were concerned with positive relationship (HA >0), two tail test was used in the correlation analysis.

H1: There is a positive correlation between Students' perceived service quality and their Satisfaction
According to the result of Pearson's Product Movement Correlation analysis between Students' perceived service quality and their Satisfaction, the correlation coefficient was 0.601, which was significant at the p- value of 1% (sig.t 0.000). As per result of simple regression analysis between these two variables, the regression coefficient (b) was 0.872 which was significant at 1% (sig. t 0.000). As per both tests, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted since r>0, b>0. Thus, the data support the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between students' perceived service quality and their Satisfaction.

H2: There is a positive correlation between Tangibility and Students' Satisfaction
In line with the result of Pearson's Product Movement Correlation analysis between Tangibility and Students'

Satisfaction, the correlation coefficient was 0.417, which was significant at the p- value of 1% (sig.t 0.000). The simple regression analysis between these two variables revealed that the regression coefficient (b) was 0.604 which is significant at 1% (sig. t 0.000). As per both tests, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted since r > 0, b > 0. Accordingly, the data support the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between Tangibility and Students' Satisfaction.

H3: There is a positive correlation between Reliability and Students' Satisfaction
The Pearson's Product Movement Correlation analysis showed that the correlation coefficient between reliability and Students' Satisfaction was 0.483 which was significant at the p- value of 1% (sig.t 0.000) and the beta value 0.588 which was significant at the p- value of 1%. These two tests revealed that there is a positive correlation between Reliability and Students' Satisfaction where the null hypothesis was rejected.

H4: There is a positive correlation between Responsiveness and Students' Satisfaction
The findings showed that the correlation coefficient of Pearson's product movement correlation between Responsiveness and Students' Satisfaction was 0.530, which is significant at 1% (sig. t 0.000). The regression coefficient between these two variables was 0.686 that is also significant at 1%. Accordingly, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted which means there is a positive correlation between Responsiveness and Students' Satisfaction.

H5:   There is a positive correlation between Assurance and Students' Satisfaction
The correlation coefficient between Assurance and Students' Satisfaction was 0.470 with the significant t value 0.000 and the regression coefficient was 0.557 and that is also significant at 1%. In accordance with both tests, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted since r > 0, b > 0. Therefore, it was proved that there is a positive correlation between Assurance and Students' Satisfaction.

H6:   There is a positive correlation between Empathy and Students' Satisfaction
As it is depicted in the data the correlation coefficient of Pearson's Product Movement Correlation analysis between Empathy and Students' Satisfaction was 0.660, which was significant at the p- value of 1% (sig.t 0.000), where the r > 0. Moreover, the regression analysis between these two variables, the regression coefficient (b) was 0.751 which is significant at 1% (sig. t 0.000). It also satisfied the requirement that b > 0 which made a room for rejection of null hypothesis. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis was accepted and it was evidenced that there is a positive correlation between Empathy and Students' Satisfaction.

Table 7: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesized Path	R	R2	Beta	Sig.	Result
Hypothesis:1 Service Quality → Students' Satisfaction	0.601	0.361	0.872	0.000	Supported
Hypothesis:2 Tangibility → Students' Satisfaction	0.417	0.174	0.604	0.000	Supported
Hypothesis:3 Reliability → Students' Satisfaction	0.483	0.233	0.588	0.000	Supported
Hypothesis:4 Responsiveness → Students' Satisfaction	0.530	0.281	0.686	0.000	Supported
Hypothesis:5 Assurance → Students' Satisfaction	0.470	0.220	0.557	0.000	Supported
Hypothesis:6 Empathy→ Students' Satisfaction	0.660	0.436	0.751	0.000	Supported

(Source: Survey Data)

As it is shown in the above table, the entire alternative hypotheses were supported by the results where the null hypotheses were rejected.

5. Conclusion & Recommendation

The results revealed that there was a positive correlation between students' perceived service quality and their satisfaction which means an increase in the students' perceived service quality leads to increase in their satisfaction. The overall mean value of students' perceived service quality 3.46 with the standard deviation 0.656 which indicate that students' perceived service quality was in the moderate level. Since the tangibility such as the campus appearance, interior and exterior facilities can be improved like other universities in Sri Lanka. Yet, considering the levels of service quality, out 120 students, 62 were indicate a high level of service quality where 47 and 11 indicate medium and low level of service quality respectively. It is obvious that nearly 52% of

respondents were accepting the higher level of service quality.

The overall mean value of students' satisfaction 3.58 with the standard deviation of 0.953 specifies high level of students' satisfaction. In other words, Students are highly satisfied with the service provided by the university. Moreover, out of 120, 64 students, that mean 53% were highly satisfied with the service provided by the campus. 34% of the respondents showed moderate level of satisfaction and the remaining 13% with lower level of satisfaction.

Service quality dimensions viz. tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy also indicate a significant positive correlation with students' satisfaction. Further, Empathy has more impact (0.66) on students' satisfaction followed by responsiveness (0.530), reliability (0.483), assurance (0.470), and tangibility (0.417).

The research reveals a significant positive correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction which is consistent with the past researches (Bloemer et al. 1999; Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000; Vanniarajan & Gurunathan, 2009). Further, Ham and Hayduk (2003) have confirmed that, there is a positive correlation between students' perceived service quality and their satisfaction in the higher educational settings. Therefore, more emphasis should be given to these concepts even in the higher education sector since students' perceived service quality is the important antecedent (Rust & Oliver, 1994; Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000) that helps to improve the students' satisfaction. As all the dimensions demonstrate a significant positive correlation, the campus should continuously improve the service quality. While there is a severe competition, just satisfying the customer is not sufficient to any organization. As Sureshchandar et al., (2002) stated, the absolute gains of a quality revolution come only from customer delight, which again to a very great extent depends on the customer's perceptions of overall service quality. Empathy and responsiveness revealed higher correlation (r> 0.5) with satisfaction. Hence, the university can delight the students via upgrading these dimensions identically giving more individual attention to the students, providing prompt services to them and show the willingness of staff to help them. However, quality improvement initiatives by the management should not just focus on improvement of customer satisfaction but also target on improvement of the overall service quality.

6. Limitations and Future research

This research only focused on higher education sector and also adopted SERVQUAL model of Parasuraman et al. (1988) as the instrument for the measurement of service quality. Other than higher education sector, the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction can be studied in other service industries. A comparative study in between government and private universities will give more intuition to the service providers and researchers. Researches which focus on other countries with different economies and cultures may give more insights in this topic.

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