Perceptions of PhD Students Regarding The Quality of Educational Services of Romania

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Abstract

This paper aimed to identify and analyze the perception of Romanian PhD students on the quality of higher education services by proposing to identify, based on data collected through an online survey and SERVPERF model, the most important features of higher education services in the PhD students view. PhD students consider it important in education, both equipped classrooms, seminars, laboratories and libraries, as well as matters relating to teaching, relationships with teachers and university secretary. This research can be extended to another aimed at analyzing the perception of teachers and administrative staff from Romanian universities on service quality, because only the study of all those involved in higher education process can outline the most appropriate model for the Romanian universities.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyze students' perceptions of the doctoral cycle, the quality of higher education and identifying with SERVPERF model, the most important features of higher education services, according to the PhD students. To achieve our goals was necessary to define quality, perception, education services and describe the SERVPERF model. The concept of quality is used in all fields, and education is no exception to this rule, especially university education. In his view Korka “quality education is defined as a set of characteristics of a study program and its provider which meet stakeholders' expectations” (Korka et al, 2009, p. 17). Parasuraman et al., (1985, p. 42)

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defined the concept of quality as a comparison between expectations and performance, while Wang and Shieh, (2006, p. 195) quality is the difference between customer expectations and perceptions about the services and activities provided by the company. Quality of service can be defined as “the result of the comparison between what the consumer wanted from your company and what you received, or measure the service provided meets consumer expectations. (Cetină, 2009, p. 33). Quality of service is recognized as a key performance measurement for excellence in education and as a major strategic variable for universities as providers of services to increase market share (Donaldson & Runciman, 1995), with effects lasting for the institution and for the students it serves. According to the dictionary of psychology, perception is “a complex psychological behavior that relates to a particular reference frame, developed in our personal and social boundaries” (Sillamy, 1996). Perception is a complex process of extracting and processing information, a “psychological important variable influencing consumer behavior” (Cătoiu & Teodorescu, 2002, p. 58). Consumer perception is formed based on the performance of the company, in which quality, service at the time of purchase (Firdaus, 2005). Educational services is a consistent and coherent overall educational components that constitute a national system or network, providing solving society's members and/or meet the needs, interests, desires, individually or collectively searches. SERVPERF model was developed in 1992 by Cronin and Taylor. Because of the controversy SERVQUAL instrument, they proposed a more direct assessment of service quality. The new approach, developed as a measuring instrument was called SERVPERF. This model, as used SERVQUAL approach based attributes measuring only perceptions of customers about the services provided by the organization. But compared to SERVQUAL, SERVPERF instrument only measures customer service experiences, no expectations. Based on the empirical analysis and discussion of some theoretical, Cronin and Taylor (1994) believes that the model for measuring quality and customer satisfaction based on performance only instrument that measures (SERVPERF model) has explanatory power and validity more than theory-based models and tools not confirming expectations (SERVQUAL class models). Moreover, Cronin and Taylor (1994) believe that “the perception of a high performance really means high quality services.” From a mathematical perspective, SERVPERF model can be described as follows: 

\[ SQ_i = \sum_{j=1}^{k} P_{ij} \]

where \( SQ_i \) = perception of service quality for individual \( i \);  
\( k \) = the number of service attributes and dimensions;  
\( P_{ij} \) = the individual’s perception regarding the performance of the service attribute \( j \). (Khan, 2007)

The research objectives were pursued knowledge of several aspects of perception PhD students on the quality of higher education in Romania:

O1. Analysis of student perceptions of higher education services;  
O2. Identification of the teaching-learning service;  
O3. Identification of the learning environment (library, Secretariat, canteen, accommodation);  
O4. Identify the most important features of the university educational services using SERVPERF model.  

The research hypotheses are formulated as an anticipation of the responses on the issues investigated:

H1. Light of the results of a previous qualitative research on perceptions of students at all levels of education on the quality of higher education we expected that PhD students will have a less favorable perception regarding the quality of higher education;  
H2. Problem areas of the teaching-learning process could be: teachers do not consult with students regarding the conduct of courses and provision of feedback from them;  
H3. Weak points concerning the learning environment, particularly the Secretariat would be: schedule secretariat of the faculty and staff of the secretariat responsiveness to student feedback;  
H4. The literature credibility is considered the most important feature.
2. Research methodology

This research follows the usual phases of research namely the preliminary design phase and implementation phase (Cătoiu et al, 2009). After choosing sources of information necessary to proceed to completion of new steps that consider the definition of variables, their classification, choice of scales used to measure variables, the choice of research instruments used. The variable takes into account their design to reflect the issues investigated and is consistent with trends in the field of literature. This research operates several categories of variables: basic variables (main considerations underlying the choice of a university continuing education, income source studies), descriptive variables (university enrolling respondents, age, gender, school education), situational variables (the financial situation of respondents), independent variables (level of education), dependent variables (perception of quality) (Pariza Manea and Cetină 2012). Data were collected online during March-April 2013 at the state university in Romania. The research instrument used was a questionnaire. It “is a formalized set of questions designed to generate the data necessary for the implementation of the objectives of marketing research” (Cătoiu et al, 2009). The 22 questions of the questionnaire (closed, dichotomous, trichotomy and multihotomice) covered all possibilities. The scale used was 5 levels Likert’s scale, where 1 on the scale means “very dissatisfied” and 5 means “very satisfied”.

3. Results and discussion

At the doctoral studies I had a total of 165 valid questionnaires from 190 questionnaires sent to completion. Data are as of the total respondents 72 are men, i.e. 43.6% and 93 women, i.e. 56.4%. PhD entrance way was as follows: 86.3% were admitted after an entrance examination, 5.9% based on the file, the remaining 7.8% based on interview or essay. 84.3% of all students come from urban areas, while in rural areas only 15.7% of the students surveyed come. It can be seen that urban people are more interested to continue their studies, one reason being near the city of residence of the great universities. Small percentage of those in rural areas indicates that they have adequate financial support, in other words, lack of money. Students interviewed are degree in the following fields: 56.9% economics, 15.7% technical, 5.9% socio-humanistic, science 17.7% and 3.9% in other areas. The frequented PhD field can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. PhD fields repartition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PhD field</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Natural sciences</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering sciences</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>60.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanistic and Arts sciences</td>
<td>5.9</td>
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</table>

To achieve the first objective, to identify students' perceptions of the doctoral cycle higher education services is necessary to analyze the questionnaire responses both in the learning environment (equipping classrooms, library, photocopying, etc.) and teaching - learning in terms of learning environment, the question was: How would you rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 means very dissatisfied, 5 means very satisfied) the learning environment provided by the university in the study? Responses were: nearly half of those surveyed, i.e. 49%, have given the note 4 to equip classrooms, laboratories and seminar, a large percentage, i.e. 25.5%, granting note 3 to this. Very satisfied were students of library services, 39.2% granting note 5. The same note 5 was giving by 29.4% for the computer network. In contrast, awarded note 1, 15% on the accessibility aspect working materials (consumables, reagents) and 7.8% provided infrastructure (research equipment, software). Percentages above means that students are satisfied with the learning environment provided by the university where they study. Regarding the work of teachers, the question was: How would you rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 means very dissatisfied, 5 means very satisfied) teaching held by teachers in the university study? The responses were as follows: 58.8% gave note 4 to “courses that the objectives are clear” and 37.3% gave note 5 to “appearance during the lecture there on the dialogue with the students taught”. “Teachers can answer any questions about the topics discussed in class” - 33.3% gave note 5, while 3.9% gave note 1. “Fairness evaluation progress reports”, 41.2% gave note 5, while 2% gave note 1. “Deadlines set for the
assessment of progress are met” - 39.2% gave note 5 and 2% gave note 1. 68.6% gave note 5 to the aspect of “scientific performance of the doctoral coordinator” and 54.9% gave note 5 to “involvement of the doctoral coordinator in completing the thesis”. These percentages mean that in terms of work performed teachers students at the doctoral cycle are very satisfied with their work. The only drawback is that it is supported by commission counsel. This may be due to the fact that PhD students do not require guidance only support committee before submitting progress reports, but not during the academic year. However this is insignificant percentage for 5.9%. Looking at the data above us can see that the perception of PhD students on higher education services in Romania is more favorable than unfavorable confuting thus the first hypothesis. Regarding the second hypothesis, 7.8% were very dissatisfied with the aspect “Teachers shall consult with students regarding the conduct of the course”, while 31% gave very satisfied. A percentage of 37% of respondents gave note 5 for the aspect of “providing feedback to the work done” while 5.9% of students were very unhappy paying note 1. All this refutes the hypothesis that the two issues were mentioned above are areas deficient of learning-teaching. Secretariat activity is very important in an institution of higher education, so we analyzed the students' perception on this issue. Thus 19.6% of students were satisfied with the program secretariat daily. A 23.5% are very satisfied with the courtesy of staff to students, but they are very dissatisfied with their responsiveness to their suggestions at a rate of 19.6%. Regarding the means of communication with students, they are very dissatisfied at a rate of 16%. However analyzing confirm the third hypothesis, that the program secretariat and that his staff is responsive to student feedback can be considered points deficient in the learning environment. The American scholars Berry and Parasuraman, (1991) proposed five key elements for quality of services, namely:

Credibility - the ability to deliver the promised service reliably and accurately;

Tangibility - is the tangible parts of a service to be as attractive (lecture and seminar, neatly dressed staff, modern equipment); Maximum liability of the providers expressed through openness and willingness to respond to consumer demands (in our case, students); Courtesy characterized by politeness, respect, consideration and friendship. You can fall: Courtesy secretarial staff to students; Understanding the specific needs of consumer involvement, dedication, care, ability to pay attention to each client individually, in our case is not about students. However analyzing using SERVPERF model described above, we concluded that the most important feature of higher education services, according to the PhD student is credibility with a score of 4.29. This confirms the literature hypothesis that the credibility is the most important feature of the service. The order of hierarchy scores are found in Table 2.

Table 2. Hierarchy scores of the services features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational services characteristics</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the specific needs of the consumer</td>
<td>4.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum liability of the providers</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>3.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangibility</td>
<td>3.46</td>
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4. Conclusions

From this research can draw the following conclusions: Romanian students to cycle doctoral studies in Romania perceive more favorable than unfavorable to the quality of higher education. They assessed as important in education, so equipping classrooms, seminar, laboratories and libraries, as well as matters relating to teaching, relationships with teachers and university secretariat. Due to the Bologna system more and more students come to the third cycle doctoral studies at an early age, immediately after undergraduate and master. Thus, 41.2% of the respondents were between 25 to 28 years, only 19.6% having more than 39 years. They believe that the scientific title of PhD eases access to a successful career. A significant number of respondents are university teachers enrolling in this case to obtain the title of doctor is a necessity for academic career. It can be seen that a significant proportion of PhD students have a job, especially those studying for a fee. Thus, 80% living on wages, 11.8% of the
stock, the rest having income from other sources. This research can be extended to another aimed at analyzing the perception of teachers and administrative staff of the Romanian universities on service quality, because only the study of all those involved in university education can outline the most appropriate model for universities in Romania.

References