Assessment of quality of education a non-governmental university via SERVQUAL model

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to evaluate the quality of services of postgraduate school in a non-governmental university “Islamic Azad University-Khorasgan Branch”, to measure students’ views toward current level and expected level of quality. The design was a gap study via of descriptive-survey method. The standard questionnaire “ServQual”, emphasizing on measuring the gap between level of current and Expected quality. The results showed significant difference between students' expectations and current level of quality of services in responsiveness dimension of quality. The other variables were ranked in this order, Empathy, Assurance, Tangibility and the confidence in service quality.

1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, all types of organizations are in search of attaining a desirable quality. This issue is of greater importance in serving organizations such as the universities and other higher education institutes (Yarmohammadian, Haeri, 2003; Yarmohammadian, 2004; Yarmohammadian, Bahrami & Foroughi Abari, 2008). While all types of universities have considerably been developed, students' needs have become much more complex and drastically changed and the universities have tried to provide various services increasingly (Brysland & Curry, 2001; Box & Kacker, 1998; Foroughi Abari, Yarmohammadian & Toroqi, 2004; Karathanos & Karathanos, 2005; Mosadegh Rad & Yarmohammadian, 2006; Yarmohammadian, Haeri, 2003; Yarmohammadian, Bahrami & Foroughi Abari, 2008). Some universities, in this mode of competition, distance themselves from others. One of the best methods to take the advantage of this competition in such an atmosphere is to present various services with high quality. High service quality leads to the students' satisfaction and loyalty, more registrations and maintenance, promotion of benefits and functioning, even in financial affairs.

The universities and higher education institutes face some challenges to promote instructional services. These challenges include the attempts to promote functioning and structural reforms to provide high quality instructions and train qualified graduates for the society. Accordingly, these organizations are in search of high quality instructional methods and clear needed strategies in order to attain standards and pre-planned goals (Arasli, Mehtap-
2. Research background

The subject of quality in physical products has a long history; however, it does not enjoy much precedence in services. Services have the characteristics of being untouchable, non-congenial and the simultaneity of production and consumption. These characteristics have made differences in the realm of definitions for services and goods qualities. There is no clear definition for the quality of services and different researchers have presented various definitions, some of them believe that the quality of the perceived services is the result of the assessment of the clients’ expectations and perceived services. Service quality is a stable criterion that indicates how the presented services’ correspond with the clients’ expectations. They defined service quality as the presentation of services in a way much better than what the client expects (Gaglianoo & Hathcot, 1994; Jabonoun & Al tamimi, 2003; Kang & Bradley. 2002).

Researches on service quality assessment has mainly been concerned with the question that how the expectations of the clients had been met and the correspondence between the services offered and clients’ expectations was taken as a criterion. Despite general agreement concerning a definition, it can be said that the comprehensive and mostly accepted definition of service quality definition belongs to Parasuraman, et al (1985). According to this definition, service quality is somehow related to the satisfaction but not equal to that in a sense that it is attained via the difference between the clients’ expectations from the services and his real perception of service attaining. Some of quality researchers (Brocato & Potocki, 1996; Cponin & Taylor, 1992; Nitecki, 1998; Lewis, 1991; Gronroos, 1984) believe that service quality can only be measured by the functioning of the services and it is not necessary to evaluate clients’ expectations. They presented a model called Seropof. They believed that the concept of service quality can only be measured by perception without any regards for expectations (Saleh & Ryan, 1991; Saravanon & Roak, 2007; Yarmohammadian et al, 2009).

Parasoraman et al in their studies (1985; 1991; 1994) identified 10 dimensions for the identification of service quality: facilities, reliability, responsibility, communication, credit, security, qualification, politeness, understanding of the client, and availability. Later, in a research in 1988 they summarized these into five dimensions:

1) Facilities: physical facilities, organization accommodations and staff appearances  
2) Reliability: the ability to perform services precisely and reliably  
3) Responsibility: disposition to quickly serve the clients  
4) Guarantee: knowledge and politeness of the staff and their ability to produce reliability and assurance  
5) Sympathy: personal attention to each client

3. Research method

The research method is descriptive-survey which has been selected on the basis of the nature of this research. The population of this research includes all the graduate school students of the Islamic Azad University, Khorasgan branch (IAUK, 2009) who entered the university from 2005 to 2010. They amount to 1200 people from whom 92 were sampled based on volume assessment sample formula. The instrument was the standard Servqual-Parasuraman questionnaire which was designed on the basis of Lickert’s five scale and distributed among the participants (Parasuraman,A.,Zeithaml, V.,and Berry,L.L.,1985;1991; 1994). To analyse the data, SPSS software was used at the two levels of descriptive and inferential statistics. At the level of descriptive statistics, frequency, percentage,
mean and standard deviation were used and at the level of inferential statistics dependent t-test, ANOVA and multivariate MANOVA were used to investigate the hypotheses of this research and the students’ opinions and demographic questions.

Sample volume was calculated according to the following formula:

\[
N = \frac{Nt^2PQ}{(N-1)d^2+t^2PQ} = \frac{1200X(1.69)^2X0.93X0.07}{1199X(0.05)^2+(1.69)^2X0.93X0.007} = 92
\]

3.1. 3.7.1. The validity of the Questionnaire

The face and content validity of this questionnaire was assessed by consulting experts, the supervisor and the advisor. The questionnaire has construct validity because it is based on Servqual model with all its dimensions included.

3.2. 3.7.2. The reliability of the questionnaire

The reliability was estimated via Cronbach alpha (perceptions 96% and expectations 93%) by SPSS software.

4. Results

Table 1. Mean comparisons of expectations and perceptions in the dimension of Guarantee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>expectations</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.807</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceptions</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.721</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

According to the results shown in table 1 the observed \( t \) is significant at <0.01, therefore there is a significant difference between the students’ expectations and perceptions in the dimension of guarantee.

Table 2. Mean comparisons of expectations and perceptions in the dimension of Accountability

<table>
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<th>mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
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<th>P</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>expectations</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>0.828</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceptions</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>0.829</td>
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The results shown in table 2 the observed \( t \) is significant at <0.01, therefore there is a significant difference between the students’ expectations and perceptions in the dimension of accountability.

Table 3. Mean comparisons of expectations and perceptions in the dimension of Empathy

<table>
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<th>Standard deviation</th>
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<th>P</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>expectations</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.702</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceptions</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>0.712</td>
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According to the results of table 3 the observed \( t \) is significant at <0.01, therefore there is a significant difference between the students’ expectations and perceptions in the dimension of Empathy.
Table 4. Mean comparisons of expectations and perceptions in the dimension of Assurance

<table>
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<th>mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
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<th>P</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>expectations</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.748</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceptions</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>0.704</td>
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The results shown in Table 4 the observed $t$ is significant at $<0.01$, therefore there is a significant difference between the students’ expectations and perceptions in the dimension of assurance.

Table 5. Mean comparisons of expectations and perceptions in the dimension of Tangibles

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<th>mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>expectations</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.737</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>0.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>perceptions</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>0.754</td>
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According to the results shown in Table 5 the observed $t$ is significant at $<0.01$, therefore there is a significant difference between the students’ expectations and perceptions in the dimension of guarantee.

5. Conclusion and suggestions

The aim of this research was to assess the quality of the Post Graduate Studies functioning (service quality) of the Islamic Azad University, Khorasgan Branch from the post graduate students viewpoints (expectations, desired conditions and present perceptions) by applying ServQual model. The participants included all post graduate students who had entered the university from 2005 and the instrument was the standard Servqual questionnaire with five dimensions (guarantee, sympathy, facilities, responsibility and reliance). The reliability of the instrument was measured by Cronbach alpha (perceptions 0.96 and expectations 0.93). Data analysis was conducted at the two levels of descriptive and inferential statistics. The data analysis of the students’ expectations and perceptions in the dimension of guarantee which was related to the first hypothesis showed that it was significant at $p<0.05$, thus this comparison revealed a difference and the highest mean score of the expectation responses belonged to the professors sufficient expert knowledge and the lowest related to the students' perceptions concerning their readiness for future jobs and occupations according to the education they have received.

6. The applicable suggestions of the research

It is now possible to provide some suggestions according to the findings of this research and also the related literature. These suggestions include two sections of application and research.

Based on the general findings of the research and in order to continuously improve the process of service quality it is necessary to repeat this research every year to examine the changes in expectations and perceptions of the students and identify new needs and trends. Concerning the guarantee dimension of the expectations and perceptions of the students, the first hypothesis, and according to the results the professors must allocate some extra times to respond to the students’ questions and prepare them for their future professions by providing theoretical and practical instructions to meet the needs of the students.
7. Conclusion

After conducting the Servqual model, it was revealed that service quality functioning of the Islamic Azad University, Khorasgan Branch in the five dimensions was slightly above the mean and that there is a negative gap between the perception of the present situation and expectations (the ideal situation) from the viewpoints of the students.

References


