

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

INSTITUTIONS IN DELHI/NCR : A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Education industry has seen a lot of changes in terms of higher education in the past few years. Education was thought of a basis to uplift people and build the future of a nation, now a days it has become more market oriented in terms of the services provided. Gone are the days when traditional set ups for higher education were the only option. With the private sector popping up, there is no dearth of universities or educational institutions providing higher education with the highest standard of services. There is a drastic shift in the institutions providing higher education. The higher education sector has direct bearing on society for its growth and socio-economic growth of the country. The government bodies monitor the functions of the higher education institutions with a view to ensure high quality is delivered. Yet it falls short of attaining the global level excellence. This paper basically reviews the literature related to quality of services being provided in the higher education institutions within the region of Delhi/NCR. The study of this literature will lead us to find the key variables that influence service quality.

Keywords: Service Quality, Higher Education, SERVQUAL, Indian Education system

I. INTRODUCTION

In its real sense, if we see, higher education is a service or a blessing for any nation which fulfills the need to learn, to acquire knowledge, skills and expertise thereby benefiting the individual, an organization as well as the country. It provides the acumen and the aptitude to an individual to understand, comprehend and analyze things and situations and workout the smartest solutions to them.

With the times ahead, there is a lot of pressure for higher education to produce students who are globally accepted and challenging (Heck & Johnsrud, 2000). The quality of services in this sector has to be enhanced at any cost. Student satisfaction is one dimension which is often used to measure the quality. There are limited number of state funded institutions and high eligibility criteria and tough entrance tests led to mushrooming of private institutions in the country. Now, students have a wide range of options to choose from which of the institution to pursue the course of their interest. As the students bear the expenditure of education they deserve to get the best quality education so that could make their own ways in life and career. Therefore, quality has become a competitive weapon for institutions to serve and attract their primary stakeholders.

II. OBJECTIVES

1. To review the literature on “Quality Assurance in Higher Educational Institutions in Delhi/NCR”.
2. To explore the key variables which affect the service quality provided by Higher Educational Institutions in Delhi/NCR

III. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study will help us in the following things:

1. Knowing the key variables that influence the service quality, the institute authorities can take measures towards improving the teaching pedagogy, infrastructure and other facilities in order to enhance their competitive benchmarks.
2. It will pave our way for further studies that can be carried out to analyze various tangible and intangible facilities to understand long term implications of service quality improvement efforts.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many service attributes developed over a period of time by various authors. Different dimensions of service quality cater to the needs of different industries. In this paper, we focus on the higher education sector and study the literature concerned with the service quality dimensions pertaining to it in order to find out the key variables influencing the quality of services provided by the higher education institutes in the region of Delhi/NCR. However, there are some similarities on the chosen dimensions. Many authors have developed models for service quality dimensions pertaining to higher education. The studied literature is enlisted.

Gronroos (1983) in his study of the various service quality dimensions has distinguished between "technical quality" (what is delivered) and "functional quality" (how it is delivered). The author has a strong belief that the "functional quality" is actually very important to perceptions of service quality.

Lehtinen (1983) views service quality in terms of "process quality" and "output quality". Process quality is judged by the customer during service. Output quality is judged by the customer after the service is performed. With all forms of classification and sub-classification to service process, the ultimate aim is to satisfy customer for long term association.

Parasuraman, et al. (1988) developed “SERVQUAL” model to measure quality in service sector. Parasuraman, et al. (1988) defined service quality as, difference between perception of experience and expectation. SERVQUAL basically configures the gap where the quality improvement is required (Ho and Wearn, 1996; Parasuraman, et al., 1988; Abdullah 2005, 2006). The major dimensions considered for measuring service quality gap in SERVQUAL scale was

- (a) Tangibility: Physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel
- (b) Reliability: Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
- (c) Responsiveness: Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service
- (d) Assurance: Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence

(e) Empathy: Caring, individualized attention the organization provides to its customers

Cronin and Taylor (1992) proposed an improved version of service quality measurement model known as Service Performance (SERVPERF). The main factors that create satisfaction with service quality are the customer liking and buying power. The customer can tolerate the variation in the performance of an organization to some extent but after a limit customer feel dissatisfied. This tolerance band is known as „Zone of Tolerance“.

Ho and Wearn (1996) adopted the methodology of developing 5 gaps in the Higher education industry stated „Gap1-Customers' expectations and management's perceptions of customers' expectations, Gap 2-management's perceptions of customers' expectations and service quality specifications, Gap3-Service quality specifications and service delivery, Gap4-Service delivery and external communications to customers, Gap5-Customers' expectations and perceived service“. The importance of stakeholders is also highlighted since it is essential to keep in mind the internal stakeholders (students, staff, teachers, administration) informed and manage the external stakeholders (government bodies, other institutions). Ho and Wearn developed a new service quality measurement model by the name of Higher Education Total Quality Management Model of Excellence (HETQMEX). The main purpose of its development is to achieve a level of quality in the higher education institution. The satisfaction of customer is the most important factor which could be achieved by the TQM methods and proper implementation of model in Higher Education Institution. For the implementation of HETQMEX it is essential that the institution should train the faculties and also make sure that entire institution body act as one team.

For further development of the Service Quality Measurement Models for HEI, in 2006, Abdullah developed model to measure specifically the quality in higher education institutions. The researcher has determined specific factors to measure service quality relying on the fact that students are the main customers of the service. It is an empirical study; reliability and validity test have been conducted to develop the model (Abdullah 2005, 2006). According to the Abdullah the previous research on the perception of consumers is not covering all aspects. As stated by Abdullah (2006) the findings of previous researchers relied on six dimensions i.e. „non-academic aspects, academic aspects, reputation, access, programme issues and understanding“. By consulting the previous literature, it is very important for the institution to differentiate among the important dimensions which directly affect the service quality. Even the adoption of specific dimension may attract the student, since direct contact of the student to the institution does make a difference.

Voon (2006) developed the model. It is the art of the service provider to represent their organization in the market in a way to attract more customers by institutions activities, structure or programmes offered. However, the service oriented organization tries to keep an eye on their customers and process according to their expectations and perceptions. In 2006, Voon integrated the idea of applying Market orientation in the service industry, by creating a SERVMO (Service Market Orientation) model. Since market orientation is all about the customer wants and needs, customers are the reason of the existence of the organization. Understanding what is in the heart of customers is the key to success. Customer's perception and expectations of the company makes the business. They are the true judges of any business and their feedback is the parameter of knowing where a company stands in the market. Market orientation has been defined as the essential requirement of an organization. Since every employee in the organization must realize the sensitivity of the consumer wants that is

the reason that Voon in 2006 developed a Service Driven Market Orientation Model (SERVMO). According to Voon, SERVMO is „the set of beliefs, behaviors and cross functional process that seriously focus on comprehensive understanding, disseminating as well as satisfying the current and future need of the target customers, for service excellence“. Market oriented methods have proven to be essential for many businesses.

According to Landrum, et al. (2008) the important variable related to ISS are System Quality (SyQ), Information Quality (IQ), Use, User Satisfaction, Individual Impact and Organizational Impact“. Usually Service Quality is a dependent variable and the six variables are independent on SQ. However these variables depict the performance, the attitude and behavior of the consumers. Later on Landrum, et al. (2008) developed a User Information Satisfaction (UIS) model relying on three variables namely „staff service quality, quality of user developed applications and user self sufficiency“. Basically Landrum, et al. (2008) replaced the term „users“ by users“ involvement“ in the research on ISS variable and „usefulness“ was also included in the list of variables.

Eventually for development of SERVCESS, Landrum, et al. considered the following variables namely „Service Quality (SQ), Information Quality (IQ), User Involvement and System Quality (SyQ)“. The methodology adopted by Landrum, et al. to develop SERVCESS, is that questions were prepared considering the 22 items of SERVQUAL and the six components of ISS. The questionnaire forms were given to Army Corps of Engineers information research centers.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper integrates the literature, theories and models available on the area of interest. Moderate amount of literature review was carried out in the study in order to identify the key variables of service quality and its measurement techniques specifically pertaining to the higher education sector. A lot of literature and their authors have attempted to define and measure the quality of services but it is not easy to arrive at a single conclusion. The issue is still debatable because every author has his own thought process and research gaps. Out of many instruments designed and validated by different researcher and scholars, available to measure service quality, a few instrument achieved desirable validity and this research would be based on that instrument and scale.

Following are the key variables found out by various authors in their studies and the models:

- Gronroos (1988) his study included factors- Professionalism and skill, Attitudes and behavior, Access and flexibility, Reliability and trustworthiness, Recovery, Reputation and credibility
- Parasuraman and Berry, 1991; Zeithmal et al, 1990 –their study included the factors-Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance & Empathy which popularly are known as Service Quality Model (SERVQUAL).
- Cronin and Taylor, 1992- his study included-Tangibles, Performance Only, Service, Reliability, Quality Performance Model, Responsiveness (SERVPERF), Assurance, Empathy.
- Carney (1994) - the key variables according to his study were- Student Qualification (Academic), Student Qualities (Personal), Faculty-Student Interaction, Quality Instruction (Faculty), Variety of Courses, Academic Reputation, Class Size, Career Preparation, Athletic Programs, Student Activities

(Social Life), Community Service, Facilities and Equipment, Location, Physical Appearance (Campus), On Campus Residence, Friendly and Caring Atmosphere, Religious Atmosphere, Safe Campus and Cost/Financial Aid

- Owlia and Aspinwall (1996)- their study categorized factors in the following manner:
Tangibles: Sufficient equipment/facilities, modern equipment/facilities, ease of access, visually appealing environment, support services (accommodation, sports)
Competence: Sufficient (academic) staff, theoretical knowledge, qualifications; practical knowledge, up to date, teaching expertise, communication.
Attitude: Understanding student's need, willingness to help, availability for guidance and advisory, giving personal attention, emotion, courtesy.
Content: Relevance of curriculum to the future jobs of students, effectiveness, containing primary knowledge skills, completeness, use of computer, communication skills and team working, flexibility of knowledge, being cross-disciplinary
Delivery: Effective presentation, sequencing, timeliness, consistency, fairness of examinations; feedback from students, encouraging students
- Ho and Wearn, 1996, they developed a model - Higher education TQM model of excellence (HETQMEX), according to which the factors were- Leadership, Commitment, Total customer satisfaction, Total involvement, Training education, Ownership of problem, Reward and recognition, Error prevention and Teamwork.
- Firdaus Abdullah (2006)- Higher education performance model (HEdPERF) Academic aspect, Non academic aspect-Reputation, Access, Programme issue, Understanding
- Voon (2006):- came up with the Service driven market variables orientation model (SERVMO), the variables of service quality in it were- Customer Orientation, Competitor Orientation, Inter-Functional Orientation, Performance Orientation, Employee Orientation, Long term Orientation.
- Landrum et. al. (2008); developed Service quality and information system success model (SERVCESS) which focused on the following dimensions-Service Quality, Information Quality, System Quality, Users Involvement

An extensive review of literature of service quality related models and theories suggested by various authors was conducted to identify various key variables of service quality dimensions pertaining to higher education sector. Analysis of various service quality related theories and hypothesis could allow researchers to see what really works for them so that they can prioritize their service processes accordingly. Thus, they could allocate their institution's resources to improve these practices in order to get the best results. Researchers could also use the results of these studies as the guidance to explore various related hypothesis in more detail and improve the accuracy for further research.

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