

Training Service Quality and its Effects on Student Satisfaction: Case of a Vietnam University

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Abstract

This research attempts to evaluate training service quality and its effects on student satisfaction in an educational organization in Vietnam. The study applies SERVQUAL model and uses data collected from the questionnaire survey with 105 responses to test the effects of training service quality on student satisfaction. As a result, five variables (including Empathy, Assurance, Tangibles, Reliability and Responsiveness) have influential relationship with student satisfaction in the linear regression analysis. The paper also gives some recommendation for the University to improve its training quality and to enhance student satisfaction level.

Keywords: Training Service Quality, Student Satisfaction, Service Quality, Vietnam

1. Research background

Generally, the higher education sector has been increasingly recognized as an intangibly dominant service as the sector possesses all the unique characteristics of services (DeShields, Kara and Kaynak, 2005). The higher education sector has also faced reduced subsidies and intense global competition. In response, the sector has shifted its focus to market-oriented marketing mechanisms as many other service industries. The higher education sector needs to continue striving deliver a high quality of service and satisfying its participating customers to achieve sustainability in a competitive service environment (DeShields et al., 2005).

In Vietnam, the total budget spent in education in 2015 was VND 224,826 billion, approximately 20 percentage of total expense of National Budget (Hoang, 2015). That is a huge investment in education. However, education quality has been increasingly received attention from the society as well as academics and students themselves. With the situation of a huge number of students going overseas for study and domestically fierce competition among universities in Vietnam, it is necessary for universities to focus on how to deliver higher quality training service and to better satisfy students.

Many authors have researched on the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in different sectors such as pharmaceutical sector, banking sector (Hafeez, 2012), service sector etc. Besides, there are plenty of models of customer satisfaction being created and developed through theoretical researches. Such researches refer to facets

influencing on customer satisfaction such as service quality, price, customer expectation, brand image, customer features, etc.

In Vietnam, there are studies of customer satisfaction in varied sectors such as in telecommunications (mobile phone), agriculture, supermarket, etc. (Cong and Thuy, 2007). These studies have figured out the models as well as the facets directly and indirectly influencing on customer satisfaction. These researches are implemented in different areas (mobile phone, aquiculture, and supermarket). But there are few researches in higher education. This paper studies training service quality and its effects on student satisfaction in a Vietnam university.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definitions of service quality and customer satisfaction

Service quality is a concept that has considerable interest and debate in the research literature because of the difficulties in both defining it and measuring it with no overall consensus emerging on either (Wisniewski, 2001). There are a number of different "definitions" as to what is meant by service quality. One that is commonly used defines service quality as the extent to which a service meets customers' needs or expectations (Lewis and Mitchell, 1990; Dotchin and Oakland, 1994). Service quality can thus be defined as the difference between customer expectations of service and perceived service. If expectations are greater than performance, then perceived quality is less than satisfactory and hence customer dissatisfaction occurs (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985).

Quality in a service organization is a measure of the range to which the service delivered meets the customer's expectations. Quality in higher education has been identified by Harvey and Knight (1996). They suggested that quality reflects exceptional, consistency, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformative. Grönroos (1984) held that service quality is made up of three dimensions "the technical quality of the outcome", "the functional quality of the encounter" and "the company corporate image".

Parasuraman et al. (1985) defined perceived service quality as a form of attitude, related to but not equivalent to satisfaction, resulting from a comparison of expectations with perceptions of performance. He and his partners conceptualized service quality using a disconfirmation model that assesses customer's expectations and perceptions, with development and subsequent refinement in 1988 and 1991 of the SERVQUAL instrumentation (Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml, 1991).

The big challenge for today's service relays on the excellent service quality and high customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction refers to the customer's overall evaluation of the performance of a service. At the time the customer reaches or exceeds the expectative and satisfaction, he or she can become a loyal customer but it always depends on the personal experience and perception of quality (Yu et al., 2005).

Satisfaction can be considered as a state felt by a person who has experience performance or an outcome that fulfill his/her expectation. Satisfaction is a function of relative level of expectations and perceives performance. The expectation may go as far as before the students even enter the higher education, suggesting that it is important to the researchers

to determine first what the students expect before entering the university (Beerli Palacio, Díaz Meneses and Pérez Pérez, 2002).

Students should be considered as primary customers and educational institutions should focus on student-centered education (Qureshi, Shaukat and Hijazi, 2010). In consequence, consumers' satisfaction is nearly the most notable concern of service organizations. Students as customers always have some expectations from universities and when these expectations are met, they grew more satisfied and loyal towards the institute (Juillerat and Schreiner, 1996).

2.2 Researches on service quality in higher education sector

Many industries are paying greater attention to service quality and customer satisfaction for reasons such as increased competition. Service quality is defined similarly as a comparative function between consumer expectations and actual service performance (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Customer's perceptions of satisfaction are usually dependent on the factors of quality, facilities, and service that the company offers, resulting in loyal customers and favorable word of mouth exchanges (Prayukvong et al., 2007).

Berry and Parasuraman (1991) identified some principal dimensions customers use to judge service: tangibles such as the physical appearance of the building, personnel, and materials; and intangibles such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. In a face-to-face customer service interaction, such as purchasing a meal at a restaurant, tangibles like the overall appearance of the service environment and employees and the quality of the product purchased, play the most significant a role in the customer's perception of the experience.

The most important product of educational institutions is a qualified and satisfied student. Students' satisfaction surveys are important in ascertaining whether colleges and universities are fulfilling their mission. Satisfied students are more likely to be committed and continue their studies (as measured by a higher retention rate) than unsatisfied students, who are likely to be less willing to regularly attend classes, and are more likely to quit their studies. The institutions can gain student satisfaction through delivery of excellent service values and this is an integral part in securing a sustainable competitive advantage in today's international educational market. A population of satisfied student will bring continuous advantages for the universities through positive word of mouth communication and provide a better position for them in dealing with other competitors. Being driven to engage in commercial rivalry, they have to be cautious with not only about the quality of education they provide to their graduates with enough social principles in terms of abilities and talents, but also with how students feel about their learning experience in this universities (Munteanu et al., 2010).

According to Wachtel (1998) the students' rate their course instructors' performance and his methodology of teaching as the prime indicators in their educational development and successful completion of their studies because higher the intellectual ability of the instructor the better will be the students' evaluation and consequently more will be the reliability on the teaching staff (Sproule, 2000).

The students are greatly influenced by the educational activities their teacher or instructor coordinates for them. Shevlin et al., (2000) stated that the teachers who teach with punctuality, accuracy, reasonability, and logical approach in a student friendly manner are more popular (Elliott and Shin, 2002). Students level of satisfaction increases by working with those course instructors and lecturers who properly handle the assignments, projects, exams and facilitate students' logical reasoning and aptitude development (Denson, Loveday and Dalton, 2010).

The literature review has shown that numerous studies used the SERVQUAL instrument to measure service quality in higher education. Zeshan et al. assessed service quality among eight business schools in Pakistan showing that the students perceived low quality in all five dimensions of service quality (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) in all institutes (Zeshan, Afridi and Khan, 2010). Hasan studied service quality in private higher education institutions and found that five dimensions and overall service quality had a significant relationship (Hasan et al., 2009).

Study by Pariseau and McDaniel (1997) described that assurance and reliability has been identified as the most important factors suggesting that students are most concern with the knowledge, courtesy and ability to inspire trust and confidence, which is part of the assurance dimension.

Nevertheless, there are studies that have a different opinion on the importance of tangibility dimension in service quality. Smith and Ennew (2001) outlined an interesting aspect in his research toward the SERVQUAL in higher education. He highlighted that there is difficult aspect in the choice of satisfaction perception of customer between the affective dissatisfaction and the technical functionality. For example, the particular facility consumed by the students could be judged according to how reliable they are (technical functionality) or according to their ages, appearances, courtesy, and empathy (affective). The perfect reliable facility, which is not up to date, but are capable of carrying out the task, may still be negatively rated if the users expect the university to provide up to date facility. He also showed that there were specific supportive items known as unimportant aspect and the university facilities, which students consume such as cafeterias and residential accommodation that will directly and indirectly have a significant impact on the evaluation of the university.

Additionally, LeBlanc and Nguyen (1997) has shown that perceived value is derived mainly from price/quality, a factor that is closely tied to the business school's capacity to offer sufficient services to students and convince them that they are receiving quality services in exchange for what they give by means of their tuition fees.

While Ford, Joseph and Joseph (1999) go a little bit more specific on the services in their study about service quality by comparing the importance score of service quality in higher education for the New Zealand student sample and the United States sample. They found that for the New Zealand sample, academic reputation has been ranked as the first followed by career opportunities, program issues, cost/time, physical aspects, location and others while for the USA sample, it was found that the first rank is academic reputation, cost/time, program issues, others, physical aspects and choice influences.

Earlier researches on service quality in higher education also often emphasized academic more than administration, concentrating on effective course delivery mechanisms and the quality of the courses, and teaching (Athiyaman, 1997; Cheong Cheng and Ming Tam, 1997; Soutar and McNeil, 1996).

2.3 Research framework and hypotheses

After considering different researches on service quality, the author observes that SERVQUAL is the most appropriate method to apply in this paper. Therefore, the author decides to use SERVQUAL model and its five dimensions to conduct surveys and researches in the study of higher education service quality. The author formulates following hypotheses to test the effects of each service quality dimension on student satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): There is a positive relationship between reliability and student satisfaction.

Reliability here means accurate fulfillment of the training service and keeping services promise.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): There is a positive relationship between assurance and student satisfaction.

Assurance in education means knowledge and courtesy of employees (including lecturers and staff) and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. According to Sadek (2010), assurance means the polite and friendly staff, interior comfort, eases of access to information and knowledgeable and experienced management team.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): There is a positive relationship between tangibles and student satisfaction.

That means there is a positive relationship between physical facilities, equipment, employee appearance, and teaching materials and student satisfaction.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): There is a positive relationship between empathy and student satisfaction.

Empathy is defined empathy as the caring and individual attention the university provides its students (Parasuraman et al., 1985). It involves giving customers individual attention and employees who understand the needs of their customers and convenience business hours. There are several ways that empathy can be provided: knowing the students's name, his preferences, and his needs. Many small companies use this ability to provide customized services as a competitive advantage over the larger firms (Zeithaml et al., 2006).

Hypothesis 5 (H5): There is a positive relationship between responsiveness and student satisfaction.

Responsiveness is the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service (Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler, 2006). This dimension is concerned with dealing with the students' requests, questions, and complaints promptly and attentively. It is also involves understanding needs and wants of the students, convenient operating hours, individual attention given by the staff, attention to problems.

3. Research Method:

A questionnaire was developed based on SERVQUAL model with some small modifications for the questionnaire to be suitable with education field. The structure of the questionnaire survey includes three parts: Part 1 with demographic information, Part 2: service quality (based on five SERVQUAL dimensions), Part 3: Student experiences and expectations. A five-point Likert-type scale was applied to measure items used in the questionnaire developed for this study.

A self-administrated questionnaire survey was created to collect empirical data from undergraduate students in the University in Hanoi. Firstly, an online survey was created and sent to mail addresses of each class. Secondly, hardcopies of the questionnaire were distributed to classes for students at the end of lessons. A sample of 150 students was expected to involving in the data collection process. Finally, 105 respondents from students (including 84 online surveys and 21 printed surveys) were returned, which represents about 70% response rate.

4. Research results

105 respondents were received which represents about 70% response rate. This is a high rate of response for the survey. Most of respondents are at the age of 19 to 23 years old (63.8 %) and being at the third to senior years (8 to 9 semesters - 35.2 %) at the university. 25.7 per cent of students are male and 74.3 per cent are female students.

The purpose of reliability analysis is to test the reliability of the elements and scale consistent with the questions provided. In this study Cronbach's α is used to test the reliability of factors to be used to test the hypotheses.

Table 1: Reliability Test with Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of factors

Factor	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Reliability	5	0.881
Responsiveness	4	0.870
Assurance	4	.874
Empathy	5	0.894
Tangible	5	.867
Satisfaction	5	0.824

From this table, all Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of each dimension are bigger than 0.7. Then data are continued to be used to test hypotheses with correlation analysis and linear regression.

Exploratory Factor Analysis was done for this research. All factor loadings of items were bigger than 0.5. So, all the items will be used for further analysis. In addition to that, KMO and Bartlett's test was also used with the results in Table 2 and Table 3 below:

Table 2: The appropriateness test of independent variables of service quality

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.918
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2017.924
	Df	325
	Sig.	.000

KMO = 0.918, that means conducting factor analysis of independent factors is appropriate. Sig. (Bartlett's Test) = 0.000 (<0.05) proves that observed variables have correlation in whole scale.

Table 3: The appropriateness test of dependent variables of service quality

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.879
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	372.763
	Df	10
	Sig.	.000

Similarly, KMO = 0.879, that means conducting factor analysis of dependent factors is appropriate. Sig. (Bartlett's Test) = 0.000 (<0.05) proves that observed variables have correlation in whole scale.

The correlation analysis was conducted and the result showed that there were high correlation coefficients among the five perceived service quality dimensions and there are significant correlations between the customer satisfaction and all service quality dimensions.

Regression analysis was conducted with summarized result in Table 4. Adjusted R-square value of .53 indicates that 53 per cent of the variance in student satisfaction can be explained by five variables of training quality including Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy and Tangible.

Table 4: Linear coefficients of independent variables in regression analysis

	Beta	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
RELIABILITY	.136	.012	.305	1.300
RESPONSIVENESS	.066	.000	.343	1.748
ASSURANCE	.110	.000	.266	2.247
EMPATHY	.155	.027	.300	1.642
TANGIBLE	.537	.013	.504	1.017

a. Dependent Variable: Student Satisfaction

Table 4 shows the significant impact on student satisfaction of all the five factors of training service quality with beta coefficient of each independent variable, its significant level (all of them are less than 0.05) and appropriate values of Tolerance (> 0.0001) and VIF (<10).

That means these five variables (Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy and Tangible) have influential relationship with dependent variable Student satisfaction with different level of impacts showing different values of Beta coefficient.

The positive value of Beta index ($\text{Beta} > 0$) means that independent variables positively influence on student satisfaction. Regression results show that all the five hypotheses of this research are tested and accepted. The results are in Table 5.

Table 5: testing results

Hypothesis	Content	Result
H1	There is a positive relationship between <i>Reliability</i> and <i>student</i> satisfaction.	Accepted
H2	There is a positive relationship between <i>Assurance</i> and <i>student</i> satisfaction.	Accepted
H3	There is a positive relationship between <i>Tangibles</i> and <i>student</i> satisfaction.	Accepted
H4	There is a positive relationship between <i>Empathy</i> and <i>student</i> satisfaction.	Accepted
H5	There is a positive relationship between <i>Responsiveness</i> and <i>student</i> satisfaction.	Accepted

5. Findings and discussions

Tangibles factor (H3) has remarkable relationship with student satisfaction. This consideration is based on the personal observations of students on the academic facilities, physical support during their learning time. A large proportion (44.76%) of student disagree that academic facilities are adequate to meet the professional and practices. Correspondingly, 45.71% of customers do not believe that campus facilities (including Wi-Fi, elevator) are well maintained. Accordingly, 35.24% of them complain that classes are not well prepared and organized (facilities, learning materials). However, 36.19% of them recognize the effort of the university in providing the needed literature to students such as books, journals, magazines, newspapers, etc. in English language. In general, student does not feel satisfied with the campus facilities. So, this area needs to be improved first to achieve higher student satisfaction.

Empathy (H4) has a second strong relationship with student satisfaction. This dimension includes the perceptions of student in context of the willingness to help of faculties, the convenient approach to faculties, and the fairness of faculties in treatment. Based on statistics results, 81.9% of students confirm that lecturers and academic faculties are willing to help

with their concerns. Similarly, 86.54% of them feel that lecturers are fair and unbiased in their treatment to students. Moreover, 55.24% of them feel neutral in case of lecturers and academic faculties understand their needs. That means most of students feel pleased with faculty performance but some are still unsatisfied because there is the differences between what students need and what faculties support.

In addition, assurance and reliability factors (H2 and H1) also have positive effects on student satisfaction. These factors include the viewpoints of students in context of the qualifications of lecturers, the reliability of academic curriculum and the possibility of the university and lecturers to deliver their promises to students. The majority of students (60.95%) indicate that lecturers have extensive knowledge of their subjects. Furthermore, only 26.92% of student claim that the university curriculum satisfies the requirements for professional development of student in future. Though to develop a practical curriculum of university level is not an easy task, it is important to set up a trust for student. The more they feel satisfied with their institutions, the more students feel secure about the future education.

The last factor having a correlation with student satisfaction is responsiveness (H5). This shows the students' judgments on intangibles elements such as the attitude and punctuality of faculties in supporting students as well as the regulations of institution. An important ratio (46.15%) shows that academic faculties solve students' problems at a promised time. Moreover, 47.63% of students agree that academic faculties show positive attitude in solving students' problems. Generally, the student satisfaction towards this dimension is acceptable (Mean = 3.1619).

Though all five influential factors have satisfactory mean indexes (> 3.0), the overall satisfaction of student is low (Mean = 2.8183). The data processing illustrates that only a fifth (25.71%) of students feel satisfied with their decisions to study at the university, whereas, 35.24% of them feel dissatisfied with their enrollment at the university and 39.43% of them deny recommending the university to friends or family members. With this level of student satisfaction, the University should pay more attention to improve these five factors relating to training service quality in order to increase the satisfaction level.

6. Conclusion

This paper tries to evaluate training service quality and its effects on student satisfaction in an educational organization in Vietnam. The analysis of data collected from a questionnaire survey with 105 responses showed that five variables of training service quality (including Empathy, Assurance, Tangibles, Reliability and Responsiveness) have influential relationship with student satisfaction. The University should improve its training quality to enhance student satisfaction level through improving these five factors with the priority given to factors having stronger effects to student satisfaction. So, Tangibles and Empathy should be the first two factors to improve. That means the University should focus more on improving their facilities like lecturing room, campus, internet, teaching materials and library, etc. to gain higher student satisfaction. Besides, Empathy dimension including the willingness to help of faculties and staff, the convenient approach to faculties and staff, and the fairness of faculties

in treatment also needs to pay attention to, in order to better meet student needs and gain their satisfaction.

Then, other three factors should be taken into account in the following order: Reliability, Assurance and Responsiveness.

A limitation of this study is moderate sample size, which includes a total of 105 questions for the survey. Further research should expand the sample size to ensure the representativeness of the research result. In addition, research could be done further by surveying students in other university to have deeper understanding about the issue.

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