PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY IN PRIVATE COLLEGES OF KASHMIR DIVISION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to gain an insight into students’ perception about the service quality of private colleges in Kashmir Division. Just like other service sectors educational sector is also evaluated for the quality of service offered. This paper is aimed to discuss the perception of quality of service of students in colleges of private colleges in Kashmir Division and willingness to put more efforts to improve it. It considers five dimensions of service quality (SERVQUAL model) given by Parasuraman et al. (1988), i.e. assurance, empathy, reliability, tangibility and responsiveness. Findings show that there is significant degree of optimism towards dimensions of service quality i.e. Reliability, Assurance Responsiveness and Empathy but while considering Tangibility variable, it was having an insignificant relation with student contentment. The universe of the study includes seven private colleges among the private hospitals of Kashmir division and sample size taken to conduct the research is 358 students. The questionnaire of tested instrument comprising of 22 statements was administered to the customers of the private colleges which includes students (graduating and post graduating students) belonging to various colleges and the departments. The sampling technique is stratified random sampling as sample was chosen on the basis of courses, semesters and departments of the students of these private hospitals of Kashmir Division. The results showed that students were not happy with Prompt Careers service and placements provided by these colleges. And also the dimension of tangibility was showing a low score so students were not satisfied by the service-scape/physical facilities (classrooms, gardens, play-ground, computer labs, parking area, open area on the campus, etc.) of colleges. The colleges should work towards keeping up to marks the various tangible things like sports facilities with modern equipment, the library facilities, the laboratory facilities/computer facilities.

Keywords: Colleges, Service Quality (SQ), SERVQUAL, Satisfaction, Tangibility

INTRODUCTION

A service is any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another which is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership to anything. Services offered by service providers cannot be seen & touched, as they are intangible activities. Service Quality is nothing but the difference between the service expectation & services easily received by the customer. Customer has certain expectation about the service. If the customer experiences the same service as they expect then this difference will be Zero and we say that the service quality is very good. Higher the difference of above equation lower will be the service quality. The customer perception is influenced by various factors, which may result
in change in service quality as well. Quality of service is a broad term that is used in both customer care evaluations and in technological evaluations. In both applications, the quality of service has to do with measuring the incidence of errors within a process that result in the creation of issues for an end user which is a customer. The goal of any quality of service evaluation is to minimize the incidence of issues and the error rates that may result in customer dissatisfaction. In terms of customer care, service quality, is often measured in terms of concerns that have a direct impact on the experience of the customer. From this perspective, only concern that produce a negative effect on the goods and services received by the customer come under scrutiny. In present world scenario every organisation may it be a service or manufacturing, the intangibles associated with their products defines the fate of the organisation in the long run. These intangibles are nothing but the services being offered along with the core product. To deliver in consonance with the customer expectations the employees of the business organizations need to be provided an environment that helps them to deliver to the desired levels of the concerned. The private Colleges play an important role in developing human resources, the economy and society of Kashmir. These colleges are acting as an agent which is producing of qualified human resources. So to their Quality of Service is at most important. That is why the components of service quality like Assurance - Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence., Empathy that is Caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers., Reliability which we know is the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately., Responsiveness which means willingness to help customers and provide prompt service., Tangibles which reveals appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials, measuring is vital for the private colleges of Jammu and Kashmir.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Berry et al.(1988), service quality has become a great differentiator and the most powerful competitive weapon which many leading service organizations possess. Delivering superior service by maintaining high quality is a prerequisite for success (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Pereda et.al (2007) while studying service quality in Higher Education revealed that four factors of service quality namely recognition, quality of instruction and interaction with faculty, sufficiency of resources, and aspects of physical quality are the most significant and important findings revealed that students are directly attached to their institution’s reputation.

Cook (1997) shows a study that was performed on a group of nursing students, in a global sample of 182 students from a British university. The students identified the following factors as drivers of a good quality: a) academic staff factors, b) study factors (library and private study facilities, computer access, and an atmosphere conducive to study), c) general welfare factors, d) practice factors, and e) extra-curricular activity factors. He concluded that the most representative factor that influences the service perception is the interaction between academic staff and students, and did not mention explicitly the importance in the way the administrative staff communicates with students and teachers.

Mostafa (2007) presented a technical study based on a sample of 508 students from four private universities in Egypt, using the SERVQUAL tool combined with Importance-Performance (IP) analysis for measuring service quality. His approach is highly focused on the students’ perceptions and he performed a factor analysis in which he concluded that the five dimensions proposed by the SERVQUAL instrument are not met. Instead, he obtained three factors or quality dimensions: (1) actual service-oriented procedures associated with student registration, fee payment, and enrolment, (2) university’s staff and their service orientation toward the student body, (3) physical evidence and the importance of the physical service environment.

Shaari (2014) while studying the service quality in Malaysian higher education, discuss service quality issues in off campus program offered by one of the centre of a university of Malaysia. The study concluded that service quality in higher education for off campus students or adult learners is equally important as in mainstream system. For service satisfaction of adult learners, the dimension of responsiveness, tangibility and empathy were recorded as a crucial element. Further, the study also
revealed that, majority of the students obtained the information of the program through friends. In this present era of technology and communication, it is very important for educational institutions to keep on updating their services because negative word-of-mouth could tarnish overall image of the program, organization and the brand.

Maria Tsinidou, et.al (2010) while evaluating the factors that determine quality in higher education highlighted that besides other thing quality of infrastructure for teaching and laboratories, subsidized catering and accommodation services are important for the majority of students. Also the availability of textbooks and journals is the main factor influencing the quality according to students.

Ford et.al (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, programme 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, programme issues, others, physical aspects and choice influences.

Malik (2010) highlighted the impact of service quality on student’s satisfaction in Higher Education Institutes and the results show that students are satisfied with services of Tangibility, Assurance, Reliability and Empathy but not much satisfied with parking facilities, computer labs, cafeteria services, complaint handling system.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study attempts to identify the quality of work life prevalent in the Private hospitals of Kashmir Division. The study has been undertaken with the following specific objectives.

1. To examine the nature of Quality of Work Life (QWL) prevalent in the Private hospitals of Kashmir Division across various dimensions.
2. To suggest on the basis of the results of the study measures aimed at improving quality of work life in the Private hospitals of Kashmir Division.

HYPOTHESIS

In consonance with the aforesaid objectives the hypothesis which has been framed for verification and confirmation is

1. H1= Empathy prevalent in the Private colleges of Kashmir Division is fairly good (if the mean score in the Seven point scale has a mean score above 3.5 only then it is accepted).
2. H2= Responsiveness prevalent in the Private colleges of Kashmir Division is fairly good (if the mean score in the Seven point scale has a mean score above 3.5 only then it is accepted).
3. H3= Tangibility prevalent in the Private colleges of Kashmir Division is fairly good (if the mean score in the seven point scale has a mean score above 3.5 only then it is accepted).
4. H4= Reliability prevalent in the Private colleges of Kashmir Division is fairly good (if the mean score in the seven point scale has a mean score above 3.5 only then it is accepted).
5. H5= Assurance prevalent in the Private colleges of Kashmir Division is fairly good (if the mean score in the seven point scale has a mean score above 3.5 only then it is accepted).

With a view to achieve the aforesaid objectives and test the above mentioned hypothesis both primary and secondary data has been used. The primary data has been collected through a multi-stage stratified random sampling design by administering a well designed and pretested questionnaire to the sample respondents. The secondary data has been obtained from the records of the hospitals, journals, books, newspapers, past researches done in the field, the other relevant sources. While secondary data has been helpful significantly, the primary data has been mainly used in this study.
SAMPLE

The study covered a sample of around Three hundred fifty eight (358) students selected through stratified random sampling. The technique of stratified random sampling was used to determine service quality. The sample consisted of seven private colleges in Kashmir division out of various private colleges of Kashmir division, these are as following:

1. Iqbal Institute of Technology and Management (IITM), Hyderpora, Srinagar.
2. SM Iqbal Business School SMIBS, Srinagar
3. CASET Institute of Computer Science, Srinagar
4. Sem College of Computer Science, Humhama
5. Max-Well College of Computer Science, Pulwama
6. Sopore Law College, Sopore, Kashmir
7. Kashmir Law College, Nowshera, Srinagar

Further due care was taken to select sample on the basis of department, course and Semester of the students of these private hospitals of Kashmir Division.

TOOLS

The instrument namely SERQUAL developed by Parsuraman et.al (1988) was administered to the customers (students) to determine service quality (SQ) being offered by the employees in these private colleges. The pretested instrument comprising of 22 statements besides few more questions were added that were developed from the insights from literature. These dimensions of service quality include the following:

1. Empathy, it refers to the level of caring and individual attention provided to customers. Researchers have proven that empathy in terms of customer relationship with service providers is an influential factor on customer satisfaction. It focuses on customer’s specific needs.

2. Responsiveness, it means enthusiasm or readiness of service provider to help customers and provide timely services.
3. Tangibility, this refers to physical amenities including equipments and employees. It is seem ambience plays a vital role in service delivery.

4. Reliability, this refers to perform service with precision and unvaryingly effectively. Researchers have shown customer satisfaction is high when service delivered by the service provider reflects consistency and honesty.

5. Assurance, this refers to employees/teachers to build trust and confidence among the students.

**FINDING/RESULT**

Respondent’s opinion or feeling shall be sought in this particular case as how they perceive the teaching facility being offered to them and the perception of the role of non teaching staff at the time of result, admission and other allied support being offered to them. The respondents shall have to answer all the statements on a seven point scale (1-7), ranging from strongly disagree, generally disagree, slightly disagree to strongly agree. The statistical tools used to measure SQ of respondents/Students were mean ,Standard deviation and percentages. Mean is a very important measure of central tendency which helps in comparison of factors. The standard deviation gives very important and useful information about the spread of data and enables us to measure the accuracy of central tendency mean).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S NO</th>
<th>Components of QWL</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>ST DEV</th>
<th>RANK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tangibility</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Assurance</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Overall Service Quality (SQ)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>4.22</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.60</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seven point scale (1-7)

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Generally Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4=Neither Agree Nor Disagree 5=Slightly Agree 6=Generally Agree 7=Strongly Agree

It can be summarized that the students of the Private colleges of Kashmir Division are scoring average on every Component of Service Quality except in case of Tangibility. Table(1) reflects that the students of the Private colleges of Kashmir Division are having high value in Assurance as it ranks 1st with mean score of 4.92 and SD of 1.20 reflects that a level of satisfactions. This followed by Empathy with a mean of 4.86 and SD of 1.94 as it shows the level of caring and individual attention provided to
the students. The dimension which ranks third is Reliability with a mean of 4.56 and SD of 1.26, reflects that students satisfaction is high as service delivered by the colleges is having consistency and honesty. Responsiveness ranks 4th scoring a mean of 3.98 and SD of 1.88 reflects that provide timely services are provided by the colleges. Tangibility ranks 5th mean score of 2.78 and standard deviation of 1.76 which is a below average score overall. This reflects that physical facilities including equipments and overall physical environment issues are not dealt in a meaningful way by the management of the Private colleges of Kashmir Division.

1. H1=Accepted that is Empathy prevalent in the Private colleges of Kashmir Division is fairly good (if the mean score in the Seven point scale has a mean score above 3.5 only then it is accepted).
2. H2= Accepted that is Responsiveness prevalent in the Private colleges of Kashmir Division is fairly good (if the mean score in the Seven point scale has a mean score above 3.5 only then it is accepted).
3. H3= Rejected that is Tangibility prevalent in the Private colleges of Kashmir Division is fairly good (if the mean score in the Seven point scale has a mean score above 3.5 only then it is accepted).
4. H4= Accepted that is Reliability prevalent in the Private colleges of Kashmir Division is fairly good (if the mean score in the Seven point scale has a mean score above 3.5 only then it is accepted).
5. H5=Accepted that is Assurance prevalent in the Private colleges of Kashmir Division is fairly good (if the mean score in the Seven point scale has a mean score above 3.5 only then it is accepted).

Overall Perception of QWL 1

From the above discussion it can be revealed that the students the Private colleges of Kashmir Division are average satisfied with the SQ prevalent in the Private colleges of Kashmir Division as overall Service Quality (SQ) scores a mean of 4.22 and an SD of 1.60.

Suggestions and conclusion:

The Service Quality has utter importance in every work organization and so is in the case of Educational Sector. The improvement in Service Quality leads to multiplier effects in the Private Colleges of Kashmir Division as it will have a positive effect towards overall customer satisfaction and customer loyalty towards the organization. Thus better Service Quality will improve efficiency in delivering better services towards customers which will leads to effective achievement of organizational goal. From this study it was found that Tangibility ranks lowest, thus it indicates that the service-scape/ physical facilities (classrooms, gardens, play ground, computer labs, parking area,
open area on the campus, etc) of university are not perceived better by the students. The other parameter of the college such as, sports facilities with modern equipment are not good. The library facilities and services are not excellent and also the college does not have wide range of books, references and periodicals in my area of studies. The laboratory facilities/computer facilities are not been perceived being up to date by the students. The management should work towards renovation of the classrooms so that the classrooms are clean at all times and well ventilated. The management should look that proper cleanliness should be maintained in the bathrooms and toilets. Responsiveness which is ranked 4th in the list reveals that this dimension of service quality is in an average standard like the parameter which the management should look to improve such as responding in a willingness manner so to help the students, runs excellent and Up-to-date website which keeps the students well informed about various services, Prompt Careers service and placements should be provided to the students, feedback about student progress, also show readiness to student’s requests. Reliability ranks 3rd this refers to perform service with precision and unvaryingly effectively. Researchers have shown customer satisfaction is high when service delivered by the service provider reflects consistency and honesty. The result showed the overall tutorials provided by the teachers are excellent. Whenever students have problems, those are dealt with effectively and teachers complete the course syllabus on time and administration offices keep error-free (accurate) and retrievable records. Empathy ranks 2nd, it refers to the level of caring and individual attention provided to customers. Researchers have proven that empathy in terms of customer relationship with service providers is an influential factor on customer satisfaction. It focuses on customer’s specific needs and these private colleges are having a good score of this dimension of service quality. In all the five variables the Assurance ranks 1st which explains that the teachers allocate sufficient time for consultation, the academic program run by the college is reputable. The teachers are highly educated in their respective fields and have knowledge of course. The Student always feels safe in the learning environment of the campus. The teaching and non teaching-staff respect rule of confidentiality towards students. The assessment and the grading by the teachers are fair. At the end we can conclude that the management should improve Service quality in these Private colleges of Kashmir Division as the overall mean is good but not excellent in the scale of 1 to 7, as it scores only 4.22 as we know high score of service quality (SQ) is must for institutions to continue to attract and retain customer which in our case are students and sustainability of institutions in the long run.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Anything that suits the individual they take interest and cooperate in accordance. The cooperation and interest of respondents posed a serious problem in few cases as research was based on exclusive survey. The respondents that are the Students many times lacked interests in filling the questionnaire and even sometimes doubted credibility of researcher. The students sometimes had to fill the questionnaire in front of their teachers which sometimes makes a bias in the responses. The respondents were a bit afraid in filling the questionnaire and reluctant to answer few of the responses. Thus it forms a sort of limitation in the study.

FUTURE STUDY

The study comprised of students from only seven private colleges of Kashmir province. The study should have been more extensive (we should have studies more colleges of the state). The aspects left could be worth exploring in the future researches.

REFERENCES


