

EVALUATION OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES QUALITY AT THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION IN UNIVERSITY OF GARMIAN BASED ON SERVQUAL MODEL

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ABSTRACT

For developing a system of higher education it is necessary to improve the educational services quality. Evaluation of educational service quality from the students' points of view is one of the important steps for improving the services quality. Considering the importance of educational services quality this study aimed to evaluate the quality of educational services from the viewpoints of students in college of education-university of Garmian based on SERVQUAL model.

This study was a descriptive cross sectional study and carried out at the college of education-University of Garmian in academic year 2016-2017. The population consisted of all students studying at different departments in college of education (N=1918) Sample consist of 148 students selected randomly by use of Moragan table's and regarding the limitations of research. For collecting data the standard SERVQUAL questionnaire including two parts of demographic information and the five dimensions of service quality was used. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics tests t-test and one-way ANOVA.

Summary of the results showed that there was a negative gap in Reliability, Responsiveness and Assurance dimensions. Also there is a positive gap in Tangibles and empathy dimensions. Results also showed that there was no significant difference according to gender or year of study. according to research results and given negative gaps in some dimensions of educational services quality, it is recommended that some actions such as providing training workshops for faculty members, consultants and staff should be taken and student-centered view should be taken into account in educational planning.

Keywords: Quality, Education, college of education, Students, SERVQUAL Model.

INTRODUCTION:

Recently, the socio-economic crises, increasing number of college students, and sub-standard level of knowledge and performance of graduates have created new challenges for educational systems. Growth and development in each society, among other things, depend on high-quality education. Teacher-training universities and centers play a vital roles to this end, since they are in charge of training educational experts who will be responsible for the critical duty of education.

One of the influential factors in success and development of educational systems, including universities, is the quality of services. In fact, higher-quality services distinguish a university from the peers (Enayati, Zamani, & Nasirpoor-Deravi, 2013). It is an effective strategy for survival of universities and higher education centers (Wang, 2004). Consequently, continuous improvement in quality of educational services seems necessary (Saghaeianh, Rassoul-Noorossana et al., 2008).

Since introduction of quality concept, has been variously defined. The most applicable one defines quality as consumer's wants based on his/her perception and expectation (West, 2001; Sharma & Gadenne, 2001). The pioneering organizations are aware of the role customers play in productivity and profitability of their businesses. Customers, recipients of services, compare the quality of services they receive with their perceived or expected quality (Lim & Tang, 2000). Gronroos (2001) defines the service quality as difference between customer's perceived and expected quality. Parasuraman et al, complement the above definition as follows: "Perception reflects the customer's appraisal of services quality, while expectations represent customer's want, that is their feeling about what service providers should render"(cited in Heydari, 2015). In educational centers and universities, educational quality is defined as "teaching superiority", "educational added value", "suitability of educational results and experience for utilization", "conformity of educational results with planed goals, specifications, and requirements", or "satisfying customers' educational expectations or even exceed their expectations" (cited in Hemati & Hemati, 2013).

The first step to elevate the quality in each organization is to assess service quality. This assessment enables the managing body to prevent quality deterioration and boost organizational performance by more efficient allocation of limited available resources (Enayati, Novinfar et al., 2011). The gap of service quality is usually observed in organizations which do not concentrate on identifying and satisfying customers' needs and expectations. As a result, decision and policy makers are incapable of determining the priorities in order to be accountable for customers' expectations. This results in quality gap (Bakhshi et al., 2011). A fundamental step is to determine the extent of the gap to decide on procedures needed to minimize it based on the perception of service recipients (Bahreini et al., 2011).

There are numerous studies dealing with different scales used to evaluate the quality of services which facilitate the selection and application of proper evaluation tools. Some researchers used one-dimensional scales to measure the quality of services, but such kind of scales are not appropriate for multi-dimensional concepts (Kavosi, Rahimi et al., 2014).

SERVQUAL is one of the recent models used by researchers to measure service quality. This model incorporates a multi-dimensional perspective to investigate the gap between customer's expectation and perception and to determine service quality (Tofighi et al., 2011). The model, introduced by Parasuraman et al. in 1980s, measures the customer's perceptions and expectations on five different dimensions. Perception concerns the existing condition and expectation relates how it should be. These dimensions are as follows:

Tangibles: Physical environment is equipped with necessary facilities and equipment to render proper services.

Reliability: Ability to render promised services safely and exactly to meet customer's expectations.

Accountability: Willingness and desire of employees to help the customers and provide instant services.

Assurance: Employees' knowledge and competence, and their ability in creating trust and assurance.

Empathy: Specific care and attention of employees in an organization to convince the customers that they are very important to the organization, and the employees do their best to understand and meet their needs (Abbasi et al., 2013).

SERVQUAL has been used by many universities in different countries to evaluate the quality of their services. Kek and Tan (2004) in Singapore showed that the greatest gap in quality of educational services is related to assurance. Hall and Arambewela (2006) in Australia discovered a significant difference between SERVQUAL aspects and university-students' satisfaction. Tangibles formed the most prominent aspect in students' point of view. Barnes (2007) studied the Chinese students' perceptions and expectations of educational services. He found a negative gap in every aspect of education services quality, i.e. students were dissatisfied with quality of all aspects of educational services. In Malesia, Hishamuddin et al., (2008) conducted a similar study and concluded that there are positive and significant relationships between five aspects of SERVQUAL and

students' satisfaction. The highest gaps were found in empathy, assurance, tangibles, accountability and reliability, respectively.

Sahin (2011) studied three universities in Ankara, Turkey. Results indicated that students were not satisfied with the quality of educational services. The highest gap was observed in tangibles. Richard and Adams (2013) evaluated the quality of educational services in the United States. The students rated the educational services they received as dissatisfactory. Zafiroopoulos (2014) evaluated the quality of services at a high education institute in Greece. They found a significant difference between perception and expectation of employees and students regarding the quality of educational services. There was a gap between the existing and required quality based on students' perception. Ghalavandi et al. (2017) investigated the quality of educational services at Urimia University, using SERVQUAL model and higher-education students' opinions. The results indicated significant differences between such perceived and expected aspects as tangibles, reliability, accountability, assurance and empathy. Students' expectations exceeded their perceived quality and they were satisfied with none of the quality aspects.

Since students at teacher training centers and universities will be in charge of important duty of educating the society, they need to acquire the required knowledge and skills to fulfil their duty in the educational system. This is more important in developing countries which try to achieve social and economic goals to enter global arena. Iraqi Kurdistan is no exception, as well. Garmian University is one of the independent universities in this region which has been growing and developing since its establishment. Whenever needed, studies were conducted and adjustments were made in science and research areas of the university, but no study was devoted to the quality of rendered services. Based on the above, we intend to evaluate the quality of educational services rendered to students at educational science department of Garmian University, using SERVQUAL model.

METHODOLOGY:

The present study is descriptive and cross-sectional study. The population includes all BA students at the college of education at University of Garmian in the academic year 2016-2017 (1918 students). Sample consisted of 148 students who were randomly selected, based on Morgan Table. The descriptive data of the sample group are reported in table 1.

Data were collected in two steps. Firstly, the theoretical bases and relevant literature were collected using library sources, articles, books and Internet. Then field-study, using SERVQUAL questionnaire of educational services, was conducted to collect the quantitative research data.

There are different versions of standard SERVQUAL questionnaire of educational quality with different number of items. The version used in the present study included 26 items organized in two sections of existing and desired (expected) condition based on Likert Scale with five different valuation scores varying from 1 (very little) to 5 (very much). This questionnaire measures the educational quality in five aspects of tangibles (q.1-q.4), reliability (q.5-q.10), accountability (q.11-q.15), empathy (q.16-q.21), validity and assurance (q.21-q.26) scored based on a 7 degree Likert Scale. Subtraction of total scores assigned to existing condition from expected ones yield the educational gap. If positive, it refers to a satisfaction degree exceeding students' expectations. A negative one refers to a quality gap, i.e. the level of rendered educational services is lower than students' expectation. If the subtraction results in zero, there is no gap and rendered educational services meet the expectations. It should be mentioned that in the present study, the cut off line is set on 3, based on experts' opinions and literature.

Content-validity of the questionnaire is reviewed and attested by Parasuraman, the SERVQUAL expert, as well as others. For example, Galavandi et al. (2017) reported the Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha=0.74$ for total reliability of the questionnaire.

This questionnaire was not translated into Kurdish, consequently a team of experts at Garmian University translated it into Kurdish. Then, to make sure of its face validity, we presented the title and goals of the study along with the Kurdish version of the questionnaire to a group of five psychology professors at Garmian University. After their approval, the final version of the questionnaire was prepared. A sample consisting of 50 students participated to investigate its validity and reliability. Cronbach's Alpha was used to calculate its reliability, and a correlation coefficient of 0.73 was obtained. As a whole, the results approved the reliability and validity of final Kurdish version of the questionnaire. Then, on several occasions, the students took the final version of the questionnaire in groups. To observe ethics, the goals of the study and its importance was explained thorough answering of questions. After oral consent of students, the privacy of information was guaranteed. After data collection, SPSS-22 software was used to provide the descriptive (mean, and standard deviation), and inferential (bound-T, and Freedman) statistics.

RESULTS:

From 215 distributed questionnaires, 67 were distorted or incomplete and only 148 questionnaires were accepted (answering percentage was 68.83). The demographic information of participants are presented in table 1. Five aspects of the questionnaire were also analyzed. The relevant results can be found in table 2.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants

	Gender			Residence		Total
	Male	female	total	Dormitory located	Non-dormitory located	
First stage Students	21	17	38	21	17	38
Second stage students	18	23	41	22	19	41
Third stage student	16	24	40	23	17	40
Fourth stage students	13	16	29	15	14	29
Total	68	80	148	81	67	148

Based on the above table, 54.1% of participants (80 people) were female and 45.9% (68 people) were male. 54.7% (81 people) lived at the dormitory, and 45.3% (67 people) did not live at the dorms. 25.7% (38 people) were freshmen, 27.7 (41 people) were sophomore, 27% (40 people) were junior, and the remaining 19.6% (29 people) were senior students.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of expected and perceived score and resultant gap in quality of educational services

Dimensions	Perceptions		Expectations		Gaps
	M	SD	M	SD	
Tangibles	13.95	1.72	12.10	1.96	1.84
Reliability	20.85	3.43	21.75	2.64	-0.90
Responsiveness	15.64	1.78	17.60	2.41	-1.97
Empathy	20.29	3.03	19.60	3.10	0.68
Assurance	14.4	1.26	15.86	1.89	-1.45
Total Score	85.14	4.19	86.94	4.30	-1.79

It is evident in table 1 that there are negative gaps in reliability, accountability, and assurance aspects, and there are positive gaps in tangibles, and empathy. The greatest negative gap (-1.97) was in accountability, and greatest positive gap in empathy. The overall results show that educational services did not meet students' expectations. To investigate the overall quality of services based on gender and residence, t-test was used to study the gap between the expectations and perceptions. The relevant results are presented in table 3.

Table 3: T-test results for impact of gender on evaluation of educational services

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		Independent Samples Test		
		F	Sig	T	Df	Sig
Gap*Gender		0.69	0.41	0.11	146	0.90
Gap*Residence	Equal variances assumed	125.557	0.00	-1.00	146	0.31
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.93	76.10	0.35

Based on results obtained from comparison of means, no meaningful difference was observed between male and female students ($t=0.11, p=0.90 > 0.05$). The student living at dormitories evaluated the services more negatively, but the difference between dormitory and non-dormitory students was not statistically significant ($t=-0.93, p=0.35 > 0.05$).

The overall gap in quality of educational services was studied based on the years spent at university with assumption of identical variations via Levene's Test ($p=0.87 > 0.05$). One-way ANOVA was used to analyze the variances. The results are represented in table 4.

Table 4: Results of ANOVA test to study the gap in quality of educational services based on years of study

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
						Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig
Between Groups	157.88	3	52.63	1.58	.19	.22	3	144	0.88
Within Groups	4788.03	144	33.25						
Total	4945.91	147							

Based on the analysis of variances (F=1.58), no meaningful difference was observed based on the years they spent at the university (p=0.19>0.05).

DISCUSSION:

The present study aimed to evaluate the quality of educational services rendered to students at college of Education in University of Garmian. The results indicated a negative gap between the overall evaluation scores assigned to the quality of educational services. This shows that students were not satisfied with services rendered at this department.

Although the obtained negative gap reflects the need for total revision and adjustment of educational services at educational science department of Garmian University, the close inspection of each aspect of the questionnaire reveals that there are positive gaps in tangibles and empathy, and we have been witnessed negative ones in reliability, accountability and assurance. This approves that in reliability aspect, educational science department acted poorer than students' expectations. The negative gap in accountability indicated students' dissatisfaction of employees' willingness to help and supply services. Ultimately, negative gap in assurance meant employees of educational science department did not have enough knowledge and capability to win students' faith.

Anyway, the positive gap in tangibles showed that facilities, equipment, physical appearance of employees and communication devices in the department satisfied the students and they even exceeded their expectations. The positive gap in empathy also showed that students' expectations were completely met and they were happy with individual care and attention in the department. They believed that employees understood them and they were regarded as worthy by the department.

There were not found any similar studies in Iraq and Kurdistan which make comparison possible, but similar studies in other countries yielded similar results. In most of these studies, the level of students' expectation exceed their perception of quality creating a negative gap in educational services (Sahin, 2011; Galavangi, 2017; Tan & Kek, 2004; Arambewela & Hall, 2006; Barnes, 2007).

The results of the study can be justified in shade of increasing competition between universities in rendering services, awareness, communication, and widespread use of advertisement by universities. Our results indicate that they are still distant from the desirable and ideal conditions. The negative gap indicates that the university should try to improve the quality of educational services. The university authorities need to be aware of students' wants, and they should continually try to improve the processes to satisfy their students.

The negative gap in such aspects as reliability, accountability, and assurance are in line with some other studies. For example Tan and Kek (), studying Singaporean universities, observed the greatest gap in assurance aspect. Richard et al. () also found a negative gap in assurance and accountability of American universities. Kavosi et al. () found the greatest negative gaps in accountability and assurance aspects, as well.

Our results, indicating a positive gaps in tangibles and empathy, contradicts with some of the studies in literature. E.g. Sahin (2011), studying Turkish universities, found the greatest gap in tangibles. Heydari (2015) also observed the greatest gaps in tangibles and empathy. However, Foropon et al. (2013) reported a positive empathy gap, and there are studies which reported the lowest negative gaps in these two aspects. E.g. Kavosi et al (2014) reported the smallest gap in empathy. Moja et al. (2014) in Bosnia reported the greatest gap in assurance and the smallest gap in tangibles, consistent with our results. Simultaneous positive gaps in empathy and tangibles is seldom reported in the literature.

It seems that socio-cultural factors and the condition of Iraqi Kurdistan have greatest impact on present study. This region became autonomous less than 10 years ago and started its growth and development ever since. It has been in conflict with the central government for many years. This may have reduced students' expectations creating a positive gap in empathy. Garmian is a newly-established university equipped with latest technologies in buildings, facilities, and dormitories. This plays an undeniable role of students' satisfaction with tangibles.

Based on the Ministry of Science's survey in Kurdistan, Garmian received the highest score in student satisfaction.

No differences were observed in assessment of educational services based on the gender or years spent at university. These are in accordance with Tofighi et al. (2011), Rasoolabadi et al. (2013), Ghalavand et al. (2017), and Gorji et al. (2013).

As a whole, we can declare that despite positive gaps, the observed negative gaps reflect a higher expectation of students from educational services at the university. Research shows that students' dissatisfaction with the quality of educational services they receive affect their educational performance. The level of acquisition and development is higher in satisfied students than dissatisfied ones (Rasoulabadi et al., 2013). This confirms that every university should pay attention to student's satisfaction in order to achieve their pre-defined goals. Such measures as holding workshops to boost the technical and communicational skills of university members and employees seem compulsory.

Present study suffered from such limitations as sampling from only one department which make generalization for our results impossible. Similar studies in other departments and universities make comparison and concluding more feasible.

Hereby, we thank Professor Ezidin Jom'e Darvish, the head of College of education at University of Garmian, and all students who participated in our study.

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