

Higher Educational Service Quality and Students' Satisfaction in Zanzibar. A Comprehensive Review.

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Abstract: *The objective of this review is to render all available constructive literature about students' satisfaction with a sound theoretical and empirical background. Data were collected from refereed journals and conference papers, and are constructively analyzed from different point of views to filter a sound background for future studies. The first section of the paper discuss students' satisfaction, satisfaction models and frameworks used by previous researchers around the world and second section explain the empirical findings of previous studies in real world context.*

This study found out that Service quality in higher learning institutions is a multi – dimensional construct and there is no consensus among authors on the dimensions or the best model that should be used evaluate service quality in institutions of higher learning. Although In the studies reviewed, the SERVQUAL instrument has been used the most in the measurement of service quality.

Keywords: Higher education, service quality, student's satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is the education at a college or university level is perceived as one of most important instruments for individual social and economic development of a nation [1]. [2] states that higher education is a service industry and that service quality is a critical determinant of the success of higher learning institutions. The primary purpose of higher education is creation of knowledge and dissemination for the development of world through innovation and creativity [3]. In order to succeed in today's competitive higher education sector, service quality is of essence to any institution of higher learning [4,5] Hence, higher education institutions are increasingly recognizing and are placing greater emphasis on meeting the expectations and needs of their customers, that is, the students [6]. Most of the well-established high learning institutions focus highly on strategic issues like providing excellent customer services. It is important because by doing so they would be able to make and build good relationships with clients which are actually very important in determining their future in the industry [7].

Zanzibar forms part of the United Republic of Tanzania. With respect to education, [8] stated that quality is a multidimensional concept, embracing all functions and activities of education system, including teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community, academic environment; taking into account national cultural values and circumstances and international dimensions such as exchange of knowledge, interactive networking, mobility of teachers and students, and international research projects. These goals of education can

be fully attained if quality delivery is rendered in higher education in Zanzibar. Zanzibar like other countries of the world recognizes education as the major instrument for effecting national development. Education is a critical for social, economic and political development of Zanzibar. In education sector quality has become one of the key components to serve and to attract students, the primary customers [9-11]. Higher education of good quality is critical for Zanzibar to become globally competitive.

2. MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

The main objective of this paper was to explore from the empirical literature review, the studies done on service quality and students' satisfaction in higher learning institutions. The ultimate goal was to come up with service quality variables mostly used to assess university students' satisfaction. The analysis from the empirical literature review provided the justification for conducting the study. The empirical literature review also helped to recommend the variables to be used in assessing students' satisfaction in higher learning institutions in Zanzibar.

Specifically, this paper was guided by the following specific objectives:-

- To identify the service quality models used for assessing students' satisfaction in higher learning institutions;
- To review published studies on service quality and students' satisfaction in higher learning institutions;
- To identify the variables used for assessing university students' satisfaction; and

- To recommend service quality variables for assessing university students' satisfaction

3. METHODOLOGY

This is a conceptual paper based on empirical literature review and the findings of relevant published articles found online. The search for articles was done in all data bases including 'Internet Search', document review and observation. The study consulted different sources on the Internet and documents in hand (obtained from the field during data collected process) to establish evidence, facts and identify gaps that the researcher hoped to be filled in by the findings of the study under scrutiny. Where possible the websites of the specific resources were visited, for example website of some journals which only put materials in html format rather than pdf or documents. The reviewed literatures are mostly available on the Internet.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Theoretical perspectives

There are a notable numbers of approaches to measure service quality but four main approaches have become most popular for measuring service quality. The most popular one is SERQUAL model which was developed by Parasuraman et al. This measurement compares the level of perception against expectation. Another one is simpler and straight forward which just measure on the current level of performance, known as SERPERF developed by Cronin and Taylor, The Hierarchical service quality model was proposed by Brady and Cronin [12] and the fourth, HEdPERF become successful in measuring the service quality of higher education, developed by Firdaus Abudullah.

4.1.2 The GAPS Model of Service Quality

The GAPS Model of Service quality was first developed by [13] and it has served as a framework for research in services marketing for over two decades. The Model is based on the expectation- confirmation theory [14] and it illustrates how customers assess quality, taking into account quality offered by firms and the quality perceived by users after the service consumption.

The GAPS model aims to identify the possible causes for a gap between expected quality and perceived quality. The model conceptualizes key concepts, strategies and decisions which are essential for the quality offer according to a sequence which starts from the consumer, identifies the necessary actions for the firm to plan and offer a service and goes back to the consumer for the comparison between expectations and perceptions.

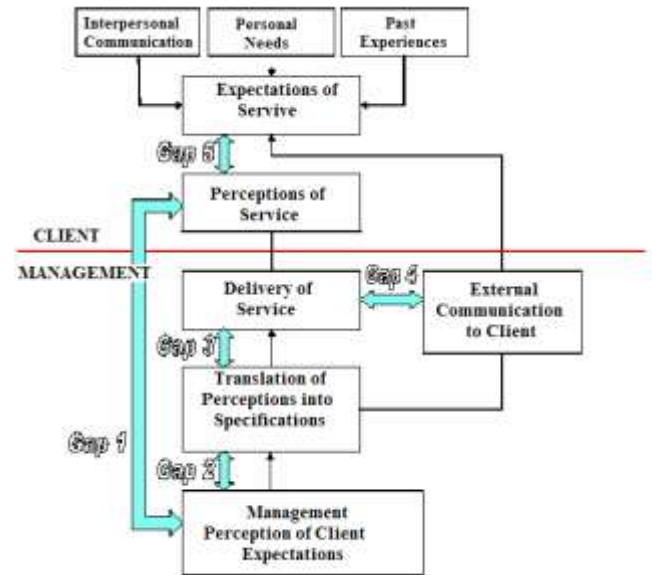


Figure 2.1 illustrates the GAPS Model
Source: Adopted from [13]

The GAPS model in figure 2.1 outlines five service quality gaps as follows:-

- GAP 1: It is first gap in service quality and it occurs when the management of a firm fails to accurately identify customer expectations. It is also referred to as the knowledge gap.
- GAP 2: It is known as the design gap and it is measured to the management's perception of customer expectations. This gap depends on the management's belief that quality is important as well as the resources available for the provision of that service.
- GAP 3: It represents the variation in service design and services delivery. It is referred to as the performance gap. Since individuals perform the service, performance will depend on the skill level or the level of training of the individual providing the service.
- GAP 4: It is known as the communications gap since it is the difference between what is promised to customer explicitly or implicitly and what is actually being delivered. Over – promising is usually responsible for this gap.
- GAP 5: It is the total accommodation of variations in gaps to it and it represents the difference between the customer expectations and the perceived service.

According to [13] consumers evaluate perceived service along five quality dimensions namely:

1. Reliability – The ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
2. Responsiveness - The willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service.

3. Assurance - The employee knowledge and courtesy and the ability of the firm and its employees to inspire trust and confidence in its customers.
4. Empathy - The caring, individualized attention the firm provides to its customers.
5. Tangibles – The appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials.

Each time they experience a service, consumers evaluate the service quality by judging the experience based on the five dimensions [13].

4.1.3 The Hierarchical Service quality Model

The Hierarchical service quality model was proposed by [12] and it is a comprehensive, multi-level construct that consists of three primary elements known as interaction quality, physical environment quality and outcome quality.

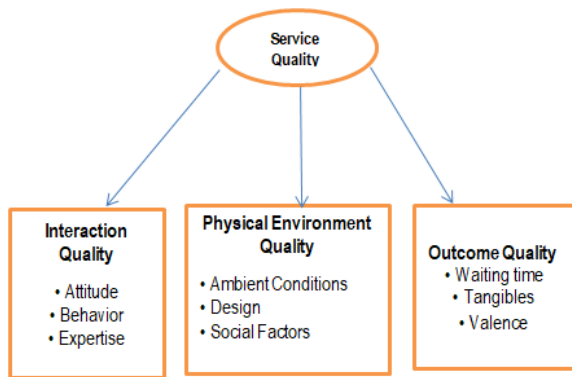


Figure 2.2 illustrates the Hierarchical service quality model.

Source: Adapted from [12]

According to [12], Interaction quality deals with the experience that customers have with employees who provide the services and it is one of the factors that influence customer satisfaction. Attitude, Behaviors and expertise of the employee are sub- dimensions of the interaction quality. Physical environment quality includes the physical and social setting in which the institution operates such as buildings, cleanliness and availability of customer’s personal space. Ambient conditions, design and social factors as the sub- dimensions of the physical environment quality,[15]argues that the physical environment is crucial to customers because service delivery occurs in the physical environment where the design, production and delivery of the services are of value to customers. The interior and exterior of the physical environment can also create positive or negative experiences to customer [15].

Outcome quality refers to the outcome of the services performance and represents what the consumer

achieves from the service. The sub dimensions that contribute to outcome quality are waiting time, tangibles and valence which contribute to customer satisfaction. [16]argue that customers become dissatisfied with a service if they have to wait for a long time to be served. Many service firms also worry about customer queues as it may elicit negative perceptions on the quality of customer service [17]. Valence is the post consumption of the overall outcome regardless of evaluation of specific aspects of service quality. Customers form service quality perceptions by evaluating services performance at multiple lends and ultimately combine these evaluations to arrive at an overall service quality perception [12].

4.1.4 Service Performance and Higher Education Performance Models (SERVPERF and HEDPERF)

[18] 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”.

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 [19]. According to the Abdullah the previous research on the perception of consumers is not covering all aspects. As stated by [19] the findings of previous researchers relied on six dimensions i.e. “non-academic aspects, academic aspects, reputation, access, program 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.

The research conducted by Abdullah concluded that Customer-orientation is the important factor considered for service quality maintenance. Thus designing an instrument that is catering to a specific variable is more feasible. Abdullah developed “HEdPERF” (Higher education performance) model. He adopted a methodology where he verified factors relating to service quality from consumers’ i.e. students perspective. After the proper review of available literature, focused groups were included with constructed questionnaire and the survey was conducted through personal contact. Out of 6 institutions, 680 students were a part of the research [19]. Test of normality was conducted to avoid misrepresentation of data. Then factor analysis was

conducted to derive correlation among the dimensions. Conformity factor analysis was conducted to verify the level of relatedness of the dimensions to the service quality. To check the reliability of the model, the reliability analysis was performed. Once no errors were discovered and the dimensions were properly related, then the Validity test was conducted, which shows that the all the dimensions clearly define the purpose of study. Lastly the Multiple regression analysis was applied to check the impact of the six dimensions on the quality of services [19]. The findings were positive and it showed that the six dimensions do have an impact on the service quality management. However the limitations of the study is that the model is referring to only one industry, as well as the situations will always lead to positive result as the students might neglect it and misunderstand the concept.

4.2 Empirical Review

[20] analyzed the impact of the faculty of study on students' satisfaction with academic facilities in four private universities in Nigeria by using descriptive statistics and Kruskal Wallis Test. The findings revealed that students' satisfaction were significantly influenced by the faculty of study. [21] investigated the level of students' satisfaction with service delivery in federal universities in South-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria by using descriptive statistics and a single-mean population t-test. The study revealed that students were highly satisfied with educational, security, and medical services while they were not highly satisfied with library, hostel, transport and ICT services. [22] examined module II students' satisfaction from five public universities in Mombasa Kenya by using descriptive analysis. The study findings indicated that students' satisfaction with service for the five universities was highly influenced by three variables, namely: convenient hours of library, library welcoming staff and competence of lecturers. The same study revealed the students' dissatisfaction caused by lectures delivery mode and limited library resources.

Similarly, [23] studied SERVQUAL with an aim to investigate the dimensions of service quality among university learners in Kenya. The study revealed 4 major dimensions, 2 of which are already part of SERVQUAL and 2 are totally new. The four dimensions are: human elements reliability, human elements responsiveness, non-human elements and service blue print. The study found that there was a significant difference between public and private university in the service quality perception dimensions. According to the study, students in private universities were more satisfied compared to those in public universities.

Moreover, [24] revealed that students in private universities have close contact with lecturers compared to those in public universities in Kenya and this increases the level of the university students' satisfaction. Besides, [25] found that quality of lecturers, quality and availability of

resources and effective use of technology have significant influence on students' satisfaction in transnational higher education in United Arab Emirates. The study further revealed that there are significant differences of satisfactions at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. [26] studied service quality and student satisfaction in Malaysia using a case study of private higher education institutions. The findings indicated that the SERVQUAL dimensions of tangibility, responsiveness, assurance, reliability and empathy had a significant positive relationship with student satisfaction.

Also [27] explored service quality and its measurement for private higher education institutions in South Africa. A sample of 984 students was used and the SERVQUAL instrument used to collect service quality data. The findings of the study indicated that the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL instrument had a significant influence on the satisfaction and perception of service quality by students at the private higher education institutions. [25] investigated the impact of service and quality on customer satisfaction in higher education institution using a case study of Gomal University in Pakistan and a sample of 200 students. The study used the SERVQUAL instrument and findings showed significant and positive impacts of service quality dimensions on customer satisfaction which is consistent with the findings of previous studies.

Furthermore [28] studied service quality in higher education using Higher Education Commission of Pakistan Quality Assurance (HECPQA) framework. The results of the study indicated that the following 5 dimensions of higher education service quality have positive influence on learners' satisfaction: quality academic courses, learning environment, learners' assessment, feedback from the learners, and quality of academic faculty. [29] studies and validated a higher education quality service instrument called HiEduQual to measure the perceived service quality of learners in higher education institutions. Their study identified 23 items grouped in 6 service quality dimension including: Teaching, Administrative services, Academic facilities, Campus Infrastructure, Support services and Internationalization.

Besides, [30] employed the SERVQUAL model, developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988), in order to understand the main issues in higher education service quality among adult learners in two main learning centers in Malaysia. The researched concluded that three dimensions out of the five that constitute SERVQUAL were found as a crucial element for adult learners' service satisfaction. These dimensions are: responsiveness, tangibility and empathy. [31] has also used SERVQUAL to measure service quality in higher education in South Africa. In details, the study aimed at measuring perceptions and expectations of both learners and staff to define their satisfaction of service quality provided at Durban University of Technology. The findings

of the study revealed that on average, learners and staff had high expectations in tangibles, reliability, and assurance dimensions. Empathy and Responsiveness dimensions did not score high in this study.

Lastly, [32] examined the SERVPERF scale which was modified to fit the context of higher education with an aim to assess service quality during the Bologna Process and Higher Education reform in Serbia. The research findings revealed that learners perceived that the most important dimensions were: Assurance and Reliability, followed by Responsiveness and Empathy. The study also found that the perceptions of service quality dimensions and items change over a period of study and was not the same across gender.

5. FUTURE WORK

The paper recommends that a study be done to investigate the relationship between service quality and student satisfaction and offer suggestions that could be implemented to improve service quality in a competitive educational environment like Tanzania and Zanzibar in particular. Interview, questionnaires and observations will be used as a tool for data collections whereas SPSS, EViews, STRATA AND ANOVA will be used for data analysis and interpretations.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Service quality in higher learning institutions is a multi – dimensional construct and there is no consensus among authors on the dimensions or the best model that should be used evaluate service quality in institutions of higher learning. The existing literature on the service quality construct in higher education identifies many dimensions such as competence of staff, reputation of the institution, delivery styles by tutors and lecturers, reliability, tangibles, responsiveness, sufficiency of resources, administrative services, and attitude support services among others.

In the studies reviewed, the SERVQUAL instrument has been used the most in the measurement of service quality although newer models such as HEdPERF and HiEdQUAL were developed specifically for measuring service quality in the higher education sector. There is a need for SERVQUAL to be tested more in the Zanzibar higher education sector in order to validate it in a differed geographical area since it has mostly of been tested in Asian countries such as Malaysia, Japan and India.

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