

IMPROVING SERVICE QUALITY GAP THROUGH CUSTOMER
SATISFACTION IN SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

HANIYEH FATTAHI

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To my beloved husband, Yousef, thank you for always being there for me and encouraging me to be the best that I can be. I dedicate this thesis to my lovely parent. I hope that this achievement will complete the dream that you had for me all those many years ago when you chose me to give the best education you could.

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ABSTRACT

Customer satisfaction and service quality are important concepts to academic researchers studying consumer evaluations and to practitioners as a means of creating competitive advantages and customer loyalty. The aim of this study was improving service quality gap through customer satisfaction in SPS unit in UTM. Service quality gaps are the difference between customer expectation and customer perception. Measuring gaps are the first step in enhancing customer satisfaction. SPS as a service provider, meets a big challenge in satisfy a large number of students as the number of students increase every year. There is a significant gap in the entire dimension in service quality model for SPS. The method that used for investigating service quality gap was revised SERVQUAL model. This model includes five dimensions, tangible, systemization, service core, social responsibility and human element. The data collection instrument was questionnaire. The question's of questionnaire was according to factor of revised SERVQUAL model. The result indicated that there are significant gap among dimensions of this model. Service core dimension has biggest gap among other dimensions, systemization is afterward the big gap with short difference. In general, there is low customer satisfaction among student because of gaps in service quality gap. Proposed model after finding gaps and offered solution to minimize the service quality gap. Increase number of staff, training student and staff, increase working time and increase service capacity upgrade are solution to minimize the gaps in SPS.

ABSTRAK

Kepuasan pelanggan dan kualiti perkhidmatan adalah konsep-konsep penting kepada penyelidik akademik dalam mengkaji penilaian pengguna dan kepada pengamal-pengamal sebagai satu cara meningkatkan kelebihan kompetitif dan kesetiaan pelanggan. Tujuan kajian ini ialah memperbaiki jurang kualiti perkhidmatan melalui kepuasan pelanggan di unit SPS, UTM. Jurang kualiti perkhidmatan merupakan perbezaan di antara jangkaan pelanggan dan persepsi pelanggan. Pengukuran jurang-jurang ini menjadi perkara pertama bagi meningkatkan kepuasan pelanggan. Sebagai penyedia perkhidmatan, SPS menghadapi cabaran besar untuk memberi kepuasan kepada kebanyakan pelajar kerana jumlah pelajar bertambah setiap tahun. Wujud jurang yang signifikan pada dimensi keseluruhan model kualiti perkhidmatan kepada SPS. Kaedah yang telah digunakan bagi mengkaji jurang kualiti perkhidmatan ialah model SERVQUAL yang telah disemak. Model ini mengandungi lima dimensi: nyata, sistematis, perkhidmatan teras, tanggungjawab sosial dan elemen kemanusiaan. Instrumen pengumpulan data ialah soal selidik. Soalan-soalan yang diberi adalah berdasarkan model SERVQUAL yang telah disemak. Dimensi perkhidmatan teras mempunyai jurang terbesar berbanding dimensi yang lain, diikuti sistematis yang mempunyai jurang yang besar dengan perbezaan yang pendek. Secara umumnya, wujud kepuasan pelanggan yang rendah dikalangan pelajar kerana jurang-jurang di dalam kualiti perkhidmatan. Model ini telah dicadangkan selepas mengenalpasti jurang-jurang dan mengesyorkan penyelesaian bagi mengurangkan jurang kualiti perkhidmatan. Penambahan staf, memberi latihan kepada para pelajar dan staf, peningkatan waktu perkhidmatan serta penambahbaikan kapasiti perkhidmatan adalah antara perkara yang boleh membantu mengurangkan jurang-jurang tersebut di SPS.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SPS	School of Graduate Studies
UTM	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
SQ	Service Quality
CS	Customer Satisfaction
SQG	Service Quality Gap

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

New managerial methods explain quality as the customer satisfaction. For that reason all the organizations have to recognize the high quality and quick service offering obstacles and solve them (Ghasemi, kazemi and Esfahani, 2012). During the past few decades service quality has become a major area of attention to practitioners, managers and researchers owing to its strong impact on customer satisfaction, business performance, customer loyalty, profitability and lower costs (Guru, 2003).

Customer satisfaction and Service quality are important concepts to academic researchers studying consumer evaluations and to practitioners as a means of creating competitive advantages and customer loyalty. Many industries are paying greater attention to customer satisfaction and service quality, for reasons such as increased deregulation and competition (Ghasemi, kazemi and Esfahani, 2012).

Satisfaction from service quality is frequently evaluated in terms of functional quality and technical quality (Gronroos, 1984). Regularly, customers do not have lot information about the technical phases of a service; therefore, functional quality becomes the main aspect from which to form perceptions of quality of service. Service quality may be described as customer perception of how well a service assembles or go over's their expectations. Service quality can be determined

in terms of customer expectation, customer perception, and customer attitude and customer satisfaction.

Providing excellent customer satisfaction and high service quality is the significant matter and challenge meeting the current service industry (Hung, 2003). Customer satisfaction and service quality have been for this latest year's important topic both for the researches in the field of marketing and for the academic world (Ueno, 2010). The notice directed to these two theories, customer satisfaction and service quality is mainly due to the harsh competition among private businesses on the market, in addition to the pressure of biased factors and of the population, over organizations in the field of public administration (Ghasemi, Kazemi and Esfahani, 2012).

The competitive advantages are to deliver high-quality services, services that in switch will cause the customer satisfaction (Sureshchandar, 2002). The quick competition and development of quality of service, in both developing and developed countries has made this very significant for organizations to determine and estimate the service quality meets (Brown and Bitner, 2007).

For a company to gain competitive benefit it must use knowledge to gather information on market requires and exchange it between organizations for the aim of increase the service quality. Managers and researchers succeed for find out details about components of service quality in their organization of clear reasons of customer satisfaction, enhance profitability etc.

Higher education is attentive pressure to improve value in its activities (Heck & Johnsrud, 2000). The present rule for increasing educational value is to use attempt on continuous development, to concentrate on stakeholder profits, and to increase student's satisfaction. Student agreement is often used to measure educational quality, where the capability to address tactical needs is of major importance (Cheng, 1990). Education's quality can be defined to be specific by the extent to which students' expectations and needs be satisfied(Tan and Kek 2004).

A variety of models and concepts have been expanded to determine student satisfaction. The present survey builds on the SERVQUAL instrument.

The issue of service quality is very wealthy in background of definitions, measurement issue and models. Numerous investigators explored the subjects with varying views and using different methods. SERVQUAL method foundation on two theories: expectations and perceptions are two dimensions and measured on service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985).

This model shows the service organization's efficient activities that impress the quality perception. In addition, the model illustrates the interplay between these activities and also recognizes the linkages between the main activities of the service marketer or organization which are pertinent to delivery of the satisfactory level of quality of service. The links are described as discrepancies or gaps: a gap represents major obstacles to achieving a satisfactory stage of service quality" (Shahin, 2010).

Parasuraman suggested that the quality of service is a function of the variations between performance and expectation beside the dimensions of quality (Parasuraman, 1985). They developed a quality of service model based on the gap analysis (Figure1). The gaps contain (Seth and Deshmaukh, 2005):

Gap 1: The first gap is between consumer expectations and management perceptions of consumer expectations. This gap points the difference between management's perceptions and consumers' expectations of service quality.

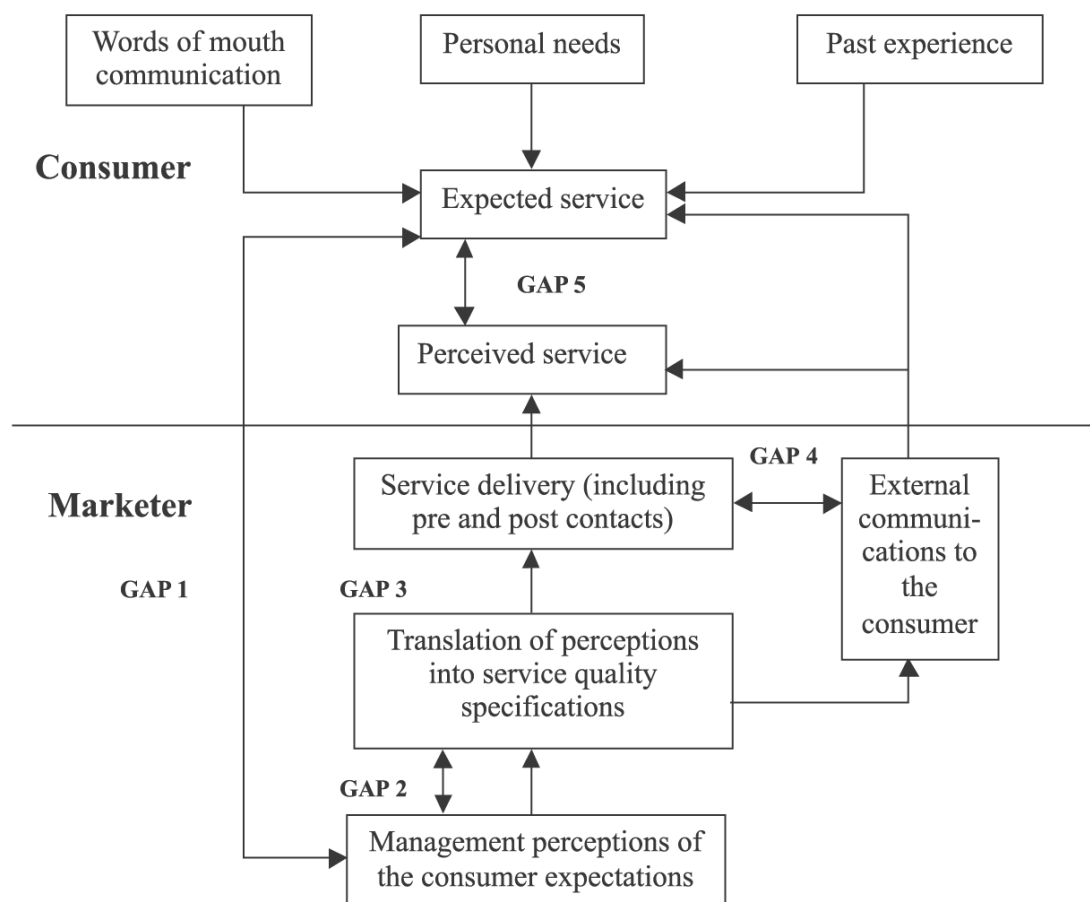
Gap 2: The second gap is between management perceptions of customer expectation and service quality specifications. This gap shows the difference between service quality specifications and management's perceptions of consumer's expectations.

Gap 3: The third gap is between service quality specifications and service actually delivered.

This gap addresses the difference between service quality specifications and service actually delivered

Gap 4: The fourth gap is between service delivery and what is communicated to customers about the service. This gap shows the difference between service delivery and the communications to consumers about service delivery

Gap 5: The fifth gap is between the customer's perceptions of service quality and their expectations of service quality. This gap addresses the difference between consumer's expectation and perceived service. This gap depends on size and direction of the four gaps associated with the delivery of service quality on the marketer's side.



Source: Parasuraman *et al.* (1985)

Figure 1.1 Service quality gaps model by Parasuraman

According to this model, the SERVQUAL is for measuring Gap 5 (Parasuraman, 1988). Parasuraman declared ten factors for evaluating quality of service (including accessibility, courtesy, responsiveness, reliability, credibility,

security, tangible, understanding and communication the customer) (Parasuraman, 1985).

These ten factors are collapsed and simplified into five factors. These five dimensions are stated as follows (Shahin, 2010).

- 1) Tangible (facilities, physical, appearance and equipments of personnel).
- 2) Reliability (Ability to perform the promised s accurately and service dependably).
- 3) Responsiveness. (Willingness to help customers and provide service for prompt)
- 4) Assurance (including credibility, competence, courtesy and courtesy of employees and security knowledge and their ability to inspire trust and confidence).
- 5) Empathy (including communication, access, understanding the customer).

SERVQUAL has been the object of controversies and criticism (Asubonteng, 1996, Buttle, 1996). The service quality gap models can be criticized on both conceptual grounds and methodological (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). Teas (1993) questioned the validity of perception expectation gap with conceptual and operational problems in the definition of the expectation Brown et al. (1993) raised psychometric concerns regarding the use of difference score and felt that the gap model would display poor reliability, because expectation and perception could be positively correlated. These criticisms made researchers to define a more accurate model which include more details. Another reference model that tries to conceptualize the dimensions of service quality from the customers' perspective is the model suggested by G.S. Sureshchandar (2002) who considers that the defining dimensions of the service quality from the customers' perspective are those presented in the following:

Dimension 1: Tangible aspects of the service

It refers to the tangible aspects of service delivery, aspects that are not related to human factor and which are not made up of: what the surrounding in which the service delivery takes place, looks like ease and accessibility in the building, accessibility to the utilities in the building, the existence and/or the way in which the

materials necessary for the service delivery are presented-proper forms and petitions, information and descriptive material.

Dimension 2: Systematization of providing the service

It refers to aspects made up of procedures, proceeding standards and system that systemize the process of service delivery.

Dimension 3: Service core

It refers to content of effective elements provided by the system and is made of the features of all the things of the service offers.

Dimension 4: Social responsibility

It refers to those aspects that contribute to the ethical and moral feature of the organization via-its client as well as towards the members of the community in general.

Dimension 5: Human element of service delivery

It refers to all aspects related to human factors.

1.2 Problem Background

This section includes an explanation of the motivation for the research through a thorough examination into the problem background. Researchers have referred a positive relationship between customers' satisfaction and the qualities of service provided (Ghasemi, Kazemi and Esfahani, 2012).

This is often believed that getting better service performance is a precursor for gaining a reasonable advantage and increasing both the short- and long-term productivity of any organization. Service quality has been sighted as a determinant of customer satisfaction. Different scopes of service quality have been regarded by various researchers.

Customer satisfaction has turned out to be a vital concern for organizations and companies in their efforts to improve service quality and product, and keep customer loyalty within an extremely competitive marketplace.

The gap between the service that the service and the customer expect that is really distributed is what Parasuraman described as the “service quality gap” (Parasuraman, 1990).

The main reason gap analysis is important to firms is the fact that gaps between customer expectations and customer experiences lead to customer dissatisfaction. Consequently, measuring gaps are the first step in enhancing customer satisfaction. Additionally, competitive advantages can be achieved by exceeding customer expectations. Gap analysis is the technique utilized to determine where firms exceed or fall below customer expectations.

Quality and satisfaction are motivating forces in the commerce community. As institutions of the higher educational slog for competitive high service quality and advantage, the evaluation of the educational quality of service is vital to supply the motivation and to provide feedback on the efficiency of educational implementation and plans (Tan and Kek 2004).

Numerous businesses acknowledged that their continued profitability depended on customer loyalty and satisfaction, which, in sequence, resulted from the

perception of consumer of value received. Because of an effort to gain market share, businesses concentrate exceeding their customer's expectations (Berry, 1995).

Exceeding student's expectation does not happen automatically, it should be managed carefully by providing services in institutional. In order to efficiently manage the service quality, management should first determine a comprehensive understanding of students' expectations and their needs. Higher education staff should formulate a specific service proposition—they can prepare a proposal about how they can choose to serve students, and implement it during a strategy of “student-friendly” policies, procedures, and practices (Tan and Kek 2004).

Determining quality of service in institutions higher education's keep on being a competent and uncomfortable effort. “Although there have been numerous studies and continuous efforts on the part of many institutions to improve the quality of their services, much of this improvement has been driven by regional and national accrediting agencies using tangible quality measures. As a result, much of the focus on service quality measurement has been on technical quality inputs and occasionally on student outputs, rather than on student satisfaction” (Darlene & Bunda, 1991).

System of education as a service provider section has to provide a state to improve societies in the social, cultural, economical, and educational developments. In a case study of UTM, the students will be the core customers and their satisfaction will be an important task in growing human resources and providing them for various sections.

UTM holds the vision of sustaining a good relationship with students, reducing the distant relationship between the student and UTM and further ensure quality services are provided. SPS provides services like as promotion, registration, consultation, application and continuous guidance to all postgraduate students. It is equipped with skillful non-academic and academic staff to provide to all require of the students to ensure a smooth and easy environment during their study in UTM university.

SPS as a service provider, meets a big challenge in satisfy a large number of students as the number of students increase every year. There is a significant gap in the entire dimension in service quality model for SPS. Furthermore, SPS needs to increase customers' satisfaction to decrease service quality gap score. The aim of this study is to investigate the service quality gap in the SPS office in UTM university and reduce the gap score through customer satisfaction.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions are:

1. What is the service quality gap in SPS?
2. How improve service quality gap for SPS?
3. How to develop service quality model for SPS in order to improve service quality gap model?
4. How to evaluate proposed model?

1.4 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are to examine and minimize the level of service quality gap through customer satisfaction.

The aim of this study is to determine:

1. To investigate the service quality gap in SPS
2. To analyze the existing service quality in order to improve the service quality gap in SPS
3. To propose an improvement model of service quality gap for SPS
4. To evaluate the proposed model

1.5 Scope of Study

In this study, the scope is as follows:

This study will be identified, analysis, and Improving Service Quality Gap through Customer satisfaction and expectation in SPS office in UTM university. The responders' of this research are local and international student.

1.6 Significance of Study

The significance of evaluating student satisfaction with university services has changed beyond theoretical discussion. “The consequences of increased competition among higher education institutions, diminished state funding, mounting attention by governing bodies on institutional accountability, and changes in student body demographics have all contributed to an atmosphere of growing public scrutiny of institutions of higher education” (Watty, 2006).

In an era of decreasing state budgets and increasing competition for resources, this study will allow UTM university to assess the potential impact the gap in the service quality of student services areas may have on the student's enrollment intentions; and therefore, implement changes or processes that influence favourable intentions.

In their study of the effects of quality, value and customer satisfaction, Cronin, Brady, and Hult conclude that perceptions of quality have a direct impact on behavioral intentions (Cronin, Brady and Hult, 2000). Understanding how students perceive the quality of services at the UTM university will provide administrators with information regarding how to influence a student's decision to remain enrolled at the institution.

This study provides the UTM with an opportunity to analyze perceived service quality. This differs from the college's current approach of examining a student's perception of a specific transaction or activity that the student has encountered.

Campus administrators will be able to evaluate the perceived service quality and whether or not additional work is needed to address student perceptions related to these areas. Additionally, the findings from these student services offices could serve as a model for other offices on campus to follow. This research study is significant because the findings present an opportunity to other section in UTM use this finding and improve their services to student.

1.7 Summary

This chapter presents the background of the research, problem background for UTM SPS office, research objective, scope and significance of the study. Chapter 2 will provide a review of the literature. Chapter 3 will describe the methods used in the study, the survey instrument, the research design, and the procedures used to obtain the research data. Chapter 4 will present an analysis of the data. Chapter 5 will contain a summary of the findings discussion, proposed and evaluate model. Chapter 6 summary and achievement, and recommendations of the study.

In general, this study explained service quality gap through customer satisfaction for SPS office in UTM.

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