

Assessing Gaps in Expected and Delivered Service Quality of Higher Educational Institutions: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

Improving student satisfaction and educational performance in higher education requires evaluating gaps between expected and provided service quality. When it comes to the standard of instruction, facilities, support services, and the entire educational process, students frequently have high expectations. The perceptions of students and the reputation of the school may suffer when these expectations are not fulfilled. Institutions can use the several models, which gauges service quality along multiple dimensions such as tangibles, certainty, responsiveness, and empathy, to evaluate these gaps. Data about student expectations and actual experiences can be gathered with the aid of surveys and feedback systems. Disparities between expected and delivered services can be identified to help institutions identify areas that require improvement. Strategic planning, infrastructure spending, teacher development, and improved student support services are all necessary to close these disparities. Services must be continuously adjusted and monitored in order to meet the changing demands of students. Higher education institutions may create a more favourable learning environment, increase student retention, and keep their competitive advantage in the education market by bridging these gaps. Sample of 210 students of higher education institutes were surveyed to assess the gaps in expected and delivered service quality of higher educational institutions and found that there is significant difference between expected and delivered service quality of higher educational institutions

Keywords: Service quality, Educational performance, Expectations and Student satisfaction, Gaps, Strategic planning, Student retention.

Introduction

Understanding student expectations and contrasting them with real experiences are two key steps in the multifaceted process of evaluating gaps in higher education institutions' expected and provided service quality. The "evaluation of service quality" in higher education has grown in importance, according to Camilleri (2021), especially in the post-COVID-19 environment. Students' expectations for online learning environments and support services were raised by the pandemic, which exposed significant gaps in the quality of services provided. It showed that there was a discernible difference in the perception of service quality since institutions frequently found it difficult to match the new requirement for strong digital

infrastructure and student support systems. It showed how quickly higher education institutions must adjust to shifting conditions and keep improving the services they provide in order to satisfy changing demands from students.

In order to describe service quality as a whole, Latif et al. (2019) defined important dimensions such tangibility, reliability, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy. Institutions frequently fell short in areas like "responsiveness" and "reliability," failing to deliver timely and consistent services. Students became dissatisfied because they often did not receive the timely feedback, trustworthy information, and encouraging academic environments that they expected. In order to close identified gaps through targeted changes, they underlined the need for higher education institutions to routinely assess the quality of their services using structured models. Institutions can bridge the gaps and improve overall service quality by concentrating on these important factors and matching their services more closely to student expectations.

Demir et al. (2021) examined the discrepancies in the quality of services expected and provided in the higher education sector, with a special emphasis on online meeting platforms. The "reliability" of these platforms was a notable disparity. Although teachers and students expected a flawless and uninterrupted experience, lessons were frequently interrupted by regular technical difficulties and connectivity concerns. This disparity made it clear that in order to live up to customer expectations, reliable infrastructure and improved technical assistance were required. Moreover, they showed that the "responsiveness" of the assistance services was deficient. Users anticipated prompt support when they encountered technical issues, yet insufficient answers and delays were frequent, which left them frustrated and less satisfied. The "assurance" that the institutions offered was likewise insufficient. Users' trust in the platforms was damaged by worries about data privacy and security breaches, even though they expected a private and secure environment for their online activities. Finally, there was not enough "empathy" displayed by service providers. There is a need for more individualised and attentive help because users felt that their particular requirements and concerns were not sufficiently addressed. Overall, these gaps highlighted how crucial it is to continuously assess and improve the quality of e-services in order to meet the changing demands of the higher education community.

Literature Review

The impact of institution reputation and service quality on student satisfaction and loyalty was assessed by Chandra et al. (2019). In higher education institutions, it was revealed that there were notable discrepancies in the level of services provided compared to what was expected. Students have high standards for the calibre of services, including campus amenities, academic resources, and administrative support. Nevertheless, there was frequently a lack of contentment with the actual service delivery. They emphasised that a key factor in determining student happiness was "service quality". Students were less satisfied and committed to institutions that did not live up to expectations. Poor administrative services, limited academic resources, and inadequate infrastructure were the main causes of this imbalance. Resolving these disparities necessitated a methodical approach to enhancing service quality, with an emphasis on matching the provided services with the expectations of the pupils.

In order to close the gaps between the expected and provided service quality, Sunder and Antony (2018) stressed the necessity of process optimisation and continual improvement. They found that a lot of institutions had trouble keeping up a constant level of service quality because of ineffective operations and a lack of established protocols. Through the application of Lean Six Sigma principles, organisations can improve service delivery, minimise waste, and streamline processes. The "Lean Six Sigma framework" sought to reduce unpredictability and raise the general standard of services offered to pupils. In order to guarantee that institutions could regularly meet or surpass students' expectations, this strategy was essential in resolving the gaps between what was actually provided and what the students expected.

The effect of accreditation on higher education institutions' quality and excellence was examined by Kumar et al. (2020). It was revealed that accreditation was essential for establishing guidelines for the calibre of services provided and guaranteeing that establishments met strict requirements. Accredited schools had a higher probability than non-accredited ones of providing services that either met or beyond the expectations of their students. The process of accreditation entailed a thorough assessment of a number of factors, such as academic offerings, faculty credentials, facilities, and administrative effectiveness. They did note, however, that several certified schools continued to have service quality gaps as a result of complacency or a lack of measures for ongoing improvement. Institutions have to pursue continuous quality improvement

initiatives in addition to certification in order to close these gaps. In the end, this would result in increased student happiness and loyalty by upholding the "quality and excellence" that accreditation sought to guarantee.

Critical gaps exist between the expected and delivered service quality in higher education, as assessed by Glewwe and Muralidharan (2016) the differences in educational achievements in developing nations. They revealed that "poor infrastructure" and "inadequate funding" were serious obstacles to educational institutions' ability to meet the demands of their pupils. Ali et al. (2024) focused on how student loyalty and satisfaction in higher education are influenced by "perceived service quality". They found that "university switching costs" were a major factor in students' decisions to stay or go from a particular university. They showed that when students thought the quality of the services they received was excellent, they were more satisfied and loyal, which made them less likely to switch. But discrepancies between the quality of services expected and received frequently resulted in discontent, which had a detrimental effect on students' loyalty.

According to Bendermacher et al. (2017), there was a considerable impact on the alignment between the expected and delivered service quality when there was a strong quality culture in place. Through stakeholder engagement and continuous improvement processes, institutions with developed quality cultures were better able to meet the expectations of their students. "Unravelling quality culture" required, they said, an awareness of the intricate interactions between a number of variables, including faculty involvement, institutional policies, and leadership dedication. They revealed enduring inadequacies in the provision of educational services despite efforts to improve quality. The "determinants of education quality" were examined by Akareem and Hossain (2016), who provided important information about the differences between "expected and delivered service quality" in higher education. For a number of reasons, this difference is especially noticeable in India. When enrolling in university, students frequently have high expectations for a well-rounded education that combines theoretical knowledge and practical abilities. However, because of out-of-date curricula, poor infrastructure, and inadequate faculty training, these expectations are typically not met.

In order to evaluate the quality of educational services provided in higher education, Galeeva (2016) explored the implementation and adaptation of the "SERVQUAL" model. They emphasised how critical it is to comprehend and quantify the discrepancies in service quality between what is expected and what is actually provided. Utilising the SERVQUAL paradigm in the setting of Indian universities led to notable differences in "tangibles," "reliability," "responsiveness," "assurance," and "empathy." Modern facilities, accurate and speedy administrative procedures, quick answers to their questions, competent staff, and compassionate interactions were frequently requested by students. Annamdevula and Bellamkonda (2016) highlighted the mediating function of student satisfaction while examining the relationship between service quality and student loyalty. This correlation was notably noticeable in Indian universities. Students' satisfaction levels rose when they thought their schools provided excellent services, and this in turn encouraged loyalty. Nonetheless, this dynamic was weakened by discrepancies in the quality of services provided and expected. High-quality instruction, sufficient support services, and a positive learning atmosphere were frequently anticipated by Indian students.

The differences between theory and practice in inclusive teacher education were examined by Sharma and Mullick (2020). In India, especially when it came to inclusive education, higher education establishments had a difficult time closing these gaps. Frameworks frequently stressed the value of accessible practices, inclusive practices, and customised instruction for a variety of student populations. Nevertheless, there was often a lack of actual application of these ideas. Though they frequently found insufficient resources, inadequate support, and inadequate training for instructors, students expected inclusive environments that catered to their individual needs. To successfully accommodate students with disabilities, for example, many institutions lacked the specialised people and equipment required, even in spite of policies that promoted inclusivity.

Objective

1. To assess the gaps in expected and delivered service quality of higher educational institutions.

Methodology

Sample of 210 students of higher education institutes were surveyed to assess the gaps in expected and delivered service quality of higher educational institutions. The primary data of this study was collected through “random sampling and survey method.” Comparative mean and independent t-test was applied to analyze and evaluate the data to get the end results.

Findings

Basic details of the respondent are represented by the table below in which it is found that in total 210 respondents 53.3% are male and rest 46.7% are female in which 37.1% are below 21 yrs of age, 43.4% are from the age group 21-28 yrs and rest 19.5% are above 28 years of age. 32.9% of them are doing graduation, 26.7% are post-graduation, 28.1% are doing professional courses and rest are doing some other courses.

Table 1 Basic Details of the Respondents

Variable	Respondent	Total Percentage
Gender		
Male	112	53.3
Female	98	46.7
Total	210	100
Age profile		
Below 21 yrs	78	37.1
21-28 yrs	91	43.4
Above 28 yrs	41	19.5
Total	210	100
Courses		
Graduation	69	32.9
Post graduation	56	26.7
Professional courses	59	28.1
Others	26	12.4
Total	210	100

Table 2 Gaps in expected and delivered service quality

Assess the gaps in service quality	Comparative mean		t value	Mean diff.	Sig.
	Expected	Delivered			
Guaranteeing student's long-term success	4.17	3.61	2.57	0.56	0.01
Support academic and professional development of students	4.03	3.59	2.03	0.44	0.04
Cultivating a culture of excellence, accountability, and responsiveness	4.26	3.70	2.51	0.56	0.01
Utilization of technology to improve communication	4.27	3.64	3.18	0.63	0.00
Expedite procedures to offer more support	4.22	3.72	2.38	0.50	0.02
Emphasizing improved faculty training programs	4.09	3.70	1.97	0.39	0.05
Solid infrastructure development	3.91	3.32	2.69	0.59	0.01
Inclusive environments that catered to individual needs	4.12	3.53	2.56	0.59	0.01
Successful accommodation of students with disabilities	4.00	3.49	2.27	0.51	0.02
Well-rounded education that combines theoretical knowledge and practical abilities	4.11	3.08	6.47	1.03	0.00

Table 2 assess and compares the gaps in expected and delivered service quality of higher educational institutions. Higher mean values are given to expected service qualities in comparison to delivered services such as Guaranteeing student's long-term success (4.17), Support academic and professional development of students (4.03), Cultivating a culture of excellence, accountability, and responsiveness (4.26) and Utilization of technology to improve communication (4.27) all are showing higher mean values in comparison to delivered services. The respondents expect Expedite procedures to offer more support with mean value 4.22, Emphasizing improved faculty training programs (4.09), Solid infrastructure development (3.91), Inclusive environments that catered to individual needs (4.12), Successful accommodation of students with disabilities (4.00) and Well-rounded education that combines theoretical knowledge and practical abilities with mean value 4.11 where lower mean values are given to all the services of higher educational institutions. The results of Independent Samples Test which was applied to assess and compares the gaps in expected and delivered service quality of higher educational institutions shows that there is significant difference between expected and delivered services as the value under Sig. column is below 0.05.

Conclusion

The analysis of the discrepancies between the quality of services expected and provided in higher education institutions provides important information about the areas where these organisations need to improve. The analysis emphasises the requirement of matching institutional offers with students' needs and ambitions by highlighting gaps between the services that students expect and what is actually supplied. Inadequacies in support services, teacher engagement, administrative efficiency, and infrastructure are among the main results. Institutions must take a student-centric strategy to close these gaps, emphasising improved faculty training programmes, solid infrastructure development, ongoing feedback systems, and efficient administrative procedures. Higher education institutions may greatly improve the whole student experience, which will increase satisfaction, improve academic performance, and improve the institution's reputation by giving priority to these areas. In addition, minimising service quality gaps can be greatly aided by utilising technology to improve communication, expedite procedures, and offer more support. Additionally, institutions have to make sure that their strategic plans are dynamic, updated on a regular basis, and reviewed in light of changing industry trends and student needs. In conclusion, all parties involved in higher education institutions must work together to close the quality gap between the services provided and what is expected. These institutions can meet and beyond the expectations of their students, guaranteeing their long-term success and their ability to support their academic and professional development, by cultivating a culture of excellence, accountability, and responsiveness.

The study was conducted to assess and compare the gaps in expected and delivered service quality of higher educational institutions and found that there is significant difference between expected and delivered service quality of higher educational institutions.

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