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AWARENESS OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The era has witnessed significant changes in the educational system in the society, like the increase in enrollment at all stages of education, a decline in dropout rate, a move towards gender parity, substantial increase in number of teachers in all types of educational institutions. The study aims to attain the objectives to study the extent of quality expectancy disconfirmation and to suggest measures for overall quality improvement of higher education. The study is specifically based on primary sources of data, which was collected by administering as well designed questionnaire prepared by the author to the officials at working at various administrative levels in the university education system. The reliability check for the items of the questionnaire was conducted with a group of 30 officials of Mekelle University on pilot run with the help of two methods namely (a) Combach's alpha (1951) and (b) Pearson Intern Correlation co- efficient. The dimensions of quality system of education along with their corresponding items (i.e, Attitude, Reliability, Tangibility, and Delivery) were identified on the basis of literature review and series of discussion with eminent professionals of commerce and management education along with some prominent alumni students.

KEYWORDS

Higher Education, Quality Assurance, Service Quality.

INTRODUCTION

The era has witnessed significant changes in the educational system in the society, like the increase in enrollment at all stages of education, a decline in dropout rate, a move towards gender parity, substantial increase in number of teachers in all types of educational institutions.

Higher education in the society is exposed to new challenges and expectations from its stakeholders following the deregulation of economy. Some of the issues may be that, higher education is wrapped in various forms of barriers ranging from academic barriers, financial barriers, capacity barriers, institutional barriers to quality barriers.

Therefore, how to improve quality of higher education is complex issue before the academicians and Government. Mansour et al.(1997) state the quality in higher education can be attained only when the quality assurance standards are adopted and implemented in educational system. Similarly, Bhat(2003) views that the use of Total Quality Management (TQM) principles in education will enable higher educational institutions to materialize its lofty mission.

CONCEPT OF QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The meaning of the term "quality" is hard to express. Mital (2000) view that quality possesses moral and emotional forces which makes it difficult to tie down or define. That is why Gravin (1988) states that quality has a variety of contradictory meanings and is usually a slippery concept. The term quality is used both in absolute and relative sense. In absolute sense quality means superior, costly, high status product that gives the use professional, social, prestige. While quality in relative sense is more relevant and comprehensive.

What is quality in education? It is still an unresolved debate (Merijaj & Bhat, 2005). Edwards (2000) view that quality in education does exist but it is difficult to measure. Quality in education may refer to inputs (number of teachers, amount of teachers training, number of textbooks, process (amount of direct instructional times, extent of active learning), output, (test scores, graduation rates) and outcomes (performance in subsequent employment). Moreover, it includes attaining specified targets and objectives, securing institutional and programme reputation and extent of change influenced in students knowledge, attitudes, values, and behavior or a complete theory or ideology of acquisition and application of learning (Adams, 1998). Somewhat similar view of quality in education has been given Green and Harvey (1993). They view quality in terms of five constructs exceptional, consistency, fit for the purposes, value for money, and transformative: while Gronroos (1984) classified quality both on the basis of this definition, the meaning of quality gets enlarged. Therefore, quality in education is one that satisfies and exceeds the customer's satisfaction both technically and functionally.

PLAYERS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Players or Stakeholders or customers are the individuals or the groups of individuals whose interest are linked with the manufacturing or service organizations. According to Kotler customers in the manufacturing and the service organization have different orientation. Manufacturing organizations are typically uni-dimensional production oriented system and customers in such organization are ordinarily identifiable. Under service organizations especially in higher education, who is/are the customers is relatively complex to identify and what is the exact number of customers is yet inconclusive (Meiraj, 2005).

Vroeijenstgn (2001) comments that in higher education there is no clear indication whether customer is institution, the student, the future employer or the society. Tribes (1998) says that customers of higher education are several: (a) the student themselves (b) their parents (c) their future employers and (d) the society at large. Dahlgaard and Norgaard (1998) opine that there are at least three types of customers for higher education- students, employers and society. Madu et al. (1994) talks about three types of customers for academics- input customers, transformation customers and output customers. Students are input customers, teaching and other administrative staff are transformative customers and society, employers are the output customers. Dahlgaard and Madsen (1998) opine that there are internal and external customers to education and some customers in one situation are internal to education and some in other situations as external. Thus, on the basis of literature review, customers of education include: (a) Faculty, (b) Administrative Staff, (C) Student and (d) Employer. The former two are internal groups of customers (associated inside with the service organization i.e. educational institute. While, the latter two are external group of customers associated with the education institute outsidersly.

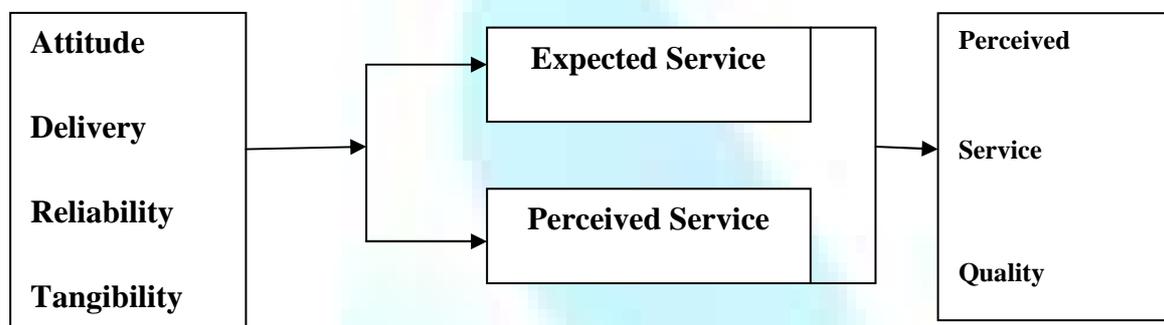
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A service is an activity or benefit that one party can offer to another, which is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership anything. Its production may or may not be tied to the physical product (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders and Wang, 1999). Literature of service sector overwhelmingly unfolded that quality of service is very difficult to measure especially in case of pure service like education. This is because service quality is determined by consumer satisfaction. Understandably, consumer satisfaction is an affective, feeling based and subjective. While, service quality is a cognitive, evaluative and objective concept (Dabhalkar, 1995 and Shemwell, Yavas and Bilgin, 1998). In service sector the expectancy disconfirmation model or its variants remain one of the most widely discussed and tested approaches in measuring consumer satisfaction (Arambewala, 2003; Belton et al, 1994; Spreng et al, 1996; Oliver, 1996; Parasuraman et al, 1994 and 1986; Tse et al, 1990; Oliver 1980). The model indicates that customer satisfaction is based on the observational and perceptual agreement of service with expectations, and disconfirmation is the gap between expectational standards of service and perceived service (Parasuraman, et al, 1991 and 1998), Gronroos (1984, 1982) advocated and examined service quality on functional and technical constructs. The functional constructs relate to attitude, style, empathy, willingness to help, behavior etc of service provider and technical constructs deal with the skill, expertise, ability, knowledge, qualification and communication of service provider. Therefore any measurement criterion used for service quality must incorporate both technical and functional aspects. To this effect many models and approaches were examined.

However, measurement of service quality on the basis of expectancy disconfirmation model advocated by the Parasuraman et al (1985, 1991, and 1994) through SERQUAL attained an overwhelming adaptability and acceptability in service quality measurement literature. Under this model, Parasuraman et al, (1989, 1991) provided ten dimensions of service quality which latter they reduced to five. They include reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. This is because customers do not perceive quality on uni-dimensional concept i.e. customers assessment of quality include perceptions of multiple factors. And accordingly, the present study is more or less based upon this model with some modifications relevant to the context of education.

The model was applied to the higher education where expectations of administrative staff are the perceptual services which administrative personnel expect during the course of his work. The expectations may vary from one employee to another employee depending upon their degree of knowledge, cultural background etc. the standards act as basis for comparing expected performance with actual performance to quantify the degree of service quality gap (Fig.A).

FIG. A: MODEL OF SERVICE QUALITY



In order to measure service quality, various variables/items/dimensions were identified on the basis of literature review. The variables/items and dimensions used for this study were drawn from the post theoretical and empirical research of Dahgaard et al, (1998), Mahmood (2001), Jain (2002), Nawar (2003), Sahney et al, (2003, 2004), Haque (2004), Halford (2005) etc. The dimensions identified are as under:

1. Attitude (behavior, respect, customer understanding, moral values of service employee/organization).
2. Delivery (availability of customized services).
3. Reliability (consistency of performance and dependability upon service employee/organization).
4. Tangibility (appearance and condition of physical facilities, equipment etc.).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to attain the following objectives:

1. To study the extent of quality management expectancy disconfirmation.
2. To suggest measures for overall quality improvement of higher education.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study is confined to the internal stakeholders of management departments in Ethiopian Universities.

METHODOLOGY

The study is specifically based on primary sources of data, which was collected by administering as well designed questionnaire prepared by the author to **the officials at working at various administrative levels in the university education system**. The reliability check for the items of the questionnaire was conducted with the methods namely (a) Combach's alpha (1951) and (b) Pearson Intern Correlation co- efficient. The reliability of items of questionnaire through Combach's alpha (1951) was 0.96 and Pearson inters correlation co efficient for all the dimensions and items of questionnaire with the aggregate and independent values resulted highly positive. The questionnaire was spread over 22 items consisting of four dimensions. The dimensions of quality system of education along with their corresponding items were identified on the basis of literature review and series of discussion with eminent professionals of commerce and management education along with some prominent alumni students. For electing information from the primary stakeholder of business education, **30 officials from the administrative staff of Mekelle University** were asked to rate the degree of quality of education offered to them at administrative level on five points likert's scale with a varying scores from 1-5 as under:

Scale Score:

- 1= Poor
- 2=Un-Satisfactory
- 3=Satisfactory
- 4=Good
- 5=Very Good

Statistically the corresponding score of each item would usually range from 1 to 5. Where means score 1 indicates extremely poor quality of service thereby requires total improvement on almost all the spheres and mean score 5 shows a distinctive quality of which is practically rare to see. The mean score 2 depicts un-satisfactory state of service that requires keen attention from management for further improvement. The mean score of 3 refers to satisfactory quality of service. However, the same needs proper attention for further improvement. The mean score 4 indicates good quality of service that also has good scope for further.

ATTITUDE

The dimension attitudes evaluates service quality of higher education on the basis of functional constructs of service provider (Gronroos, 1984). Attitude examines service quality of employee in view of his behavioural service traits i.e. how service provider acts during the service delivery in terms of his nature, style, empathy, etc. under this dimensions, seven items namely, problem understanding attitude of superior, problem solving attitude of superior, ethics and values of superior, customer understanding by superior, inter-personal and cordial relation with superior, sharing and exchange of information by superior, monitoring and evaluation by superior. For all items the mean score for actual satisfaction has ranged between 2.76 to 3.06. While aggregate actual mean score has not remained less than expected mean score indicating a very high mean score service quality gap by (-1.05). This service quality on the basis of functional constructs appears mainly due to lack of problem solving attitude of superiors. (-1.44), poor ethics and values of superior, (-1.24), non sharing and exchange of information by superior (-1.47) and lack of monitoring and evolution by superior (-0.67). The actual mean score for all these variables have remained unsatisfactory (Table No. 1).

TABLE NO. 1: SERVICE QUALITY GAP ANALYSIS UNDER HIGHER EDUCATION FOR DIMENSION ATTITUDE

Sl.No.	Statements	Actual Mean Score	Expected Mean Score	Service Quality Gap*	Standard Deviation
1	2	3	4	5	
1	Problem understanding attitude of superiors	3.06	4.20	1.4	0.94
2	Problem solving attitude of superiors	2.86	4.30	-1.44	0.89
3	Ethics and values of superiors	2.76	4.00	-1.24	0.89
4	Customers understanding by superiors	3.03	3.20	-0.17	1.06
5	Interpersonal and cordial relation with superior	3.00	4.20	-1.20	0.98
6	Sharing and exchange of information by superior	2.93	4.40	-1.47	0.78
7	Monitoring and evaluation by superior	2.93	3.60	-0.67	1.01
	Aggregate Mean Score	2.93	3.98	-1.05	0.77

*Service: Quality Gap=Actual Mean Score - Expected Mean Score

DELIVERY

The dimension delivery incorporates the customized service support provided by the service organization or employers to their customers to enable them to perform their tasks effectively and efficiently. Customers generally expect some amount of usual or normal services from their services provider. They may include training and development programmes for administrative staff, administrative work culture, involvement of administrative staff in decision making, freedom in work, awareness of rules and regulations by superior. The empirical finding reveal that overall actual mean score 3.20 of the dimension is far below than the aggregate expected mean score 3.82 indicating a wide mean score service quality gap (-0.62). This seems mainly due to the lack of training facilities and programmes for administrative staff (-2.67) and non-involvement of customers in decision making (-1.17) (Table No.2)

TABLE NO. 2: SERVICE QUALITY GAP ANALYSIS UNDER HIGHER EDUCATION FOR DIMENSION DELIVERY

Sl.No.	Statements	Actual Mean Score	Expected Mean Score	Service Quality Gap*	Standard Deviation
1	2	3	4	5	
1	Awareness of rules and regulations by superior.	2.96	4.20	-1.24	1.20
2	Training and Development programmes for administrative staff.	4.83	4.50	-2.67	1.14
3	Administrative work culture.	3.06	4.00	-0.94	1.08
4	Involvement and administrative staff decision making.	2.23	3.40	-1.17	1.10
5	Freedom in work	2.96	3.00	1.04	.099
	Aggregate Mean Score	3.20	3.82	-0.62	1.19

*Service: Quality Gap=Actual Mean Score - Expected Mean Score

RELIABILITY

Reliability shows the customers dependability and trust on the service employee and organization. Reliability indicated how far service organization or employee withstand upon the trust and confidence of customers. The dimension was on examined with the help of three variables- clearly defined policies and norms of institution, adherence to policies and norms of the institution and adherence to commitments by institutions. The statistical analysis of field data shows that actual mean score of the dimension ranged between 2.23 to 3.03. The aggregate expected mean score 4.33 of dimension is much above than the overall actual mean score 2.74 by mean score, (-1.59) implying a wider service quality. The service quality gap for the dimension appears due to lack of practical use of policies and norms of the institution. (-2.27) (Table No.3).

TABLE NO. 3: SERVICE QUALITY GAP ANALYSIS UNDER HIGHER EDUCATION FOR DIMENSION RELIABILITY

Sl.No.	Statements	Actual Mean Score	Expected Mean Score	Service Quality Gap*	Standard Deviation
1	2	3	4	5	
1	Clearly defined policies and norms of institution.	2.96	4.50	-1.34	1.03
2	Adherence to policies and norms of the institutions.	3.03	4.30	-1.27	1.09
3	Adherence to commitments by institutions	2.23	4.33	-1.59	1.14
	Aggregate Mean Score	3.11	4.06	-0.95	0.85

*Service: Quality Gap=Actual Mean Score - Expected Mean Score

TANGIBILITY

Tangibility are the physical assets properties like building, furniture, furnishing, equipment, heating and cooling items etc, available and used during the course of service. Tangibles play a very significant role in the effective delivery of service and contribute overwhelmingly in raising employees interests towards the work. Adequate availability of tangibles is an essential ingredient in building institutional brand. (Mehmood,2000). And accordingly, higher education institutions mainly business schools are ranked besides other dimensions on the basis of tangibles (India Today, ranking of business schools 2004). The dimension, tangibility was evaluated with the help of six variables the condition and availability of physical facilities, (like furniture, buildings etc), condition and availability of equipment facilities, (Like computer, heating and cooling etc), space facility, salary and allowances, perquisites, cleanliness of work place. The aggregate actual mean score of this dimension is 3.11 which is far below than the expected aggregate mean score 4.06 showing a tangible service quality gap by mean score (-0.95). The tangible service quality gap seems significantly due to the poor and non-availability of equipment like computers etc., (-1.24), cleanness of workplace (-1.27). The mean score of the actual satisfaction of the overall dimension has ranged between 2.93 to 3.96 implying a very un-satisfactory feeling of respondents with respect to the dimension. (Table No.4)

TABLE NO. 4: SERVICE QUALITY GAP ANALYSIS UNDER HIGHER EDUCATION FOR DIMENSION TANGIBILITY

Sl.No.	Statements	Actual Mean Score	Expected Mean Score	Service Quality Gap*	Standard Deviation
1	2	3	4	5	
1	The condition and availability of physical facilities.	3.06	5.00	-1.94	0.98
2	Space facility available in the institution.	3.26	3.50	-0.26	1.17
3	Condition and availability of equipment.	2.96	4.20	-1.24	1.02
4	Perquisites admissible.	3.40	3.50	-0.10	1.10
5	Salary and allowance admissible.	3.06	4.00	-0.94	.087
6	Cleanness of work place	2.93	4.20	-1.27	.081
	Aggregate Mean Score	3.11	4.06	-0.95	0.85

*Service: Quality Gap=Actual Mean Score - Expected Mean Score

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The above analyses have shown that/for all the variables and dimensions the mean score of perceived satisfaction is for below than mean score of expectations implying huge service quality dissatisfaction. The variables for which service quality expectations are higher their corresponding satisfaction is low and service quality gap is wide referring to a whole sum dissatisfaction of sample respondents with the service system. In order to improve the service quality and the satisfaction of internal stakeholders with respect to higher education the following suggestions are put forth.

1. The superior in the administration must improve their attitudinal service delivery by understanding their customers properly. They should inculcate in themselves the real ethical and moral values and demonstrate true humanistic spirit in work environment towards their customers.
2. Participative work environment shall be created at the levels of administration to raise the motivation and belongingness of customers towards their service organs action and work.
3. Periodic training programme shall be arranged for all types of administrative staff members to train, improve and develop their knowledge and skill so that they perform tasks, duties effectively and efficiently.
4. Work culture in all aspects of administration shall be created through the use of TQM principles and enforcement of administrative rules and regulations. The workforce or customers in the administration should be made aware of then duties, rights and responsibilities and accordingly be held responsible for non performance of duties. This can be done through proper monitoring and evaluation of work performance.
5. Organizational vision and mission must be made known to every individual of the administration, so that everyone performs his duties in tune to the organizational vision.

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