Service Quality and Students' Satisfaction in Tertiary Institutions in Ogun State
(A Study of Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro)

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Abstract

This study examined the assessment of service quality in tertiary education service. The study was aimed to determine the relationship between service reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibility and students' satisfaction in tertiary institution. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. A structured questionnaire was chosen as the research instrument to collect the data. The population of the study is eighty hundred and forty three (843) academic staff of The Federal Polytechnic Ilaro, and sample size of two hundred and seventy (270) staff were selected for the study using Taro Yamane sample size determinator. The hypotheses formulated for this study were tested using multiple linear regression analysis through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings of the study revealed that the explanatory variables which includes reliability, assurance, empathy, responsiveness and tangibility have positive relationship with students' satisfaction. Also, the findings shows that the variables are statistically significant at 5% level of significance. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the management should train its staff on the importance of offering reliable service to the students which will in turn lead to students' satisfaction and boost their academic performance.

Keywords: Assurance, Empathy, Reliability, Responsiveness, Students' satisfaction

Introduction

In order to succeed in today's competitive higher education sector, service quality is of essence to any institution of higher learning (Sandhu & Bala, 2011). In view of this, higher education institutions must assess the quality of their services since outstanding service quality can provide them with competitive advantage (Onditi & Onditi, 2017). If the higher education institutions provide quality service which meet or exceed that expectations of their students, their services will be evaluated as high quality service and if not, the services will be judged as poor (Zammuto, Keaveneu & O'Connor, 1996).

Customer satisfaction is a very important element in the formation of customers' desires for future purchase (Lai, Yusof & Chew, 2011). In addition to that, satisfied customers will probably talk to others about their good experience which is regarded as positive word of mouth. This practice is common in the Middle Eastern cultures, where the social life has been shaped in a way that social communication with other people improves the society (Jamal & Naser, 2002). This is also generally practice in other societies before purchasing or experiencing a product or service.

There are many stakeholders of educational institutions ranging from internal to external stakeholders. Out of all these, students are considered to be one of the most important stakeholders.

Service quality is one of the management quality instrument models that have attracted the attention of researchers and practitioners in the field of management. It has been studied from various angles and at different levels of analysis, from the small, basic and simple organisations to the larger, more advanced and sophisticated ones. Doing so is necessary as to indicate research gaps that need to be filled by other studies. Over the last thirty years, much literature has been written in the service marketing arena. Most of the research done has paid attention to the dimensionalities of service quality across industries, cultures and organisations. Some measurements and scales have been developed in order to measure the quality (Al-Otaibi, Yusof & Ismail, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

Student satisfaction is a major challenge for higher education institutions and as Arambewela and Hall (2009) posit, it is also the major source of competitive advantage and the student satisfaction leads to student attraction, retention and the spread of positive word of mouth communication by satisfied students. Abdullah (2006) states that higher

education institutions have to incorporate student satisfaction as an important component of their management in addition to their core business of teaching and research. Therefore, students are not seen as participants in the process of higher education but as customers or consumers of the process. This research is to assess the student's satisfaction about the overall quality of services they are receiving from their schools management. Measuring service quality is also important to enhance the overall quality of education in the institutions. Schools management have only focus on improving education quality.

Despite the efforts provided by the management to provide its service, there is still evidence of challenges on quality of the services as a result of non-reliability of management on the student, lack of responsiveness of the management to student, failure of the management to give assurance to the student, lack of empathy of the management to the student and failure to use decent tangibles. This research will give an insight for the government schools management to improve their individual services in order to compete the private sector. As in government sector, schools are usually deprived of luxury infrastructure and other supporting staff to facilitate the students.

The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of service quality on student satisfaction in tertiary institutions in Ogun State with special reference to The Federal Polytechnic Ilaro. However, specific objectives of this study are to:

- determine the positive relationship between reliability and Student satisfaction
- ascertain the relationship between responsiveness and Student satisfaction
- evaluate the positive relationship between assurance and Student satisfaction
- find out the relationship between empathy and Student satisfaction
- investigate the relationship between tangibles and Student satisfaction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

Concept of Service Quality

The concept of service can be defined as an intangible product that cannot be owned or stored, but it comes to an existence at the time and place it is delivered for consumption. Service quality is the extent to which a service meets or exceeds the expectations of customers (Jain, Sinha, & De, 2010).

The service quality in the field of education and higher learning particularly is not only essential and important, but it is also an important parameter of educational excellence. It has been found that positive perceptions of service quality has a significant influence on student satisfaction and thus satisfied student would attract more students through word-of-mouth communications (Alves &Raposo, 2010).

The students can be motivated or inspired from both academic performance as well as the administrative efficiency of their institution. Ahmed and Nawaz (2010) mentioned that service quality is a key performance measure in educational excellence and is a main strategic variable for universities to create a strong perception in consumer's mind.

Service Quality Dimensions

The main concern with the dimensions of service quality is usually the range of areas which should be included. Cronin and Taylor (1994) state that customers should be the determinants of service quality dimensions rather than the management r the academic staff of the respective institution of higher education. Parasuraman et al (1990) proposed five dimensions of service quality as follows;

1. **Tangibles**: The equipment, physical facilities and appearance of personnel.
2. **Empathy**: The provision of caring and individualized attention to customers.
3. **Reliability**: The ability to perform the desired service dependably, accurately and consistently.
4. **Responsiveness**: The willingness to provide prompt service and help customers.
5. **Assurance**: Employees courtesy, knowledge and ability to convey trust and confidence.

Student Satisfaction

Conceptualization of the satisfaction construct can be distinguished in terms of the specific transaction or the specific brand (Onditi & Wechuli, 2017). Oliver (1980) argues that transaction – brand specific limits satisfaction to a specific occasion but the cumulative customer satisfaction refers to the overall evaluation based on a number of purchase and consumption experiences of a service over time. Anderson et al (1994) stated that customer satisfaction can be viewed as a function all the previous transactions and specific transactions. According to Hom (2002), researchers are facing a challenge in creating a standard definition for the concept of student satisfaction and therefore there is a need for a customer satisfaction theory to be selected and modified so that it can explain the meaning of student satisfaction. Satisfaction can be defined as a state felt by a person who has experienced performance or an outcome that fulfill his or her expectations and it perceives performance (Kotler & Clarice , 1987). Satisfaction is also defined by Malik, Danish and Usman (2010) as the intentional performance that results in one's contentment.

The concept of satisfaction in the context of higher education focuses on the student community. Oliver and Desarbo (1989) define student satisfaction as the favorability of a student's subjective assessment of the numerous outcomes and experiences related with education and being shaped continually and repeated experiences in campus life. Student satisfaction is also the short term attitude that results from the evaluation of their experience with the education service received. Institutions of Higher Education tend to be concerned with student satisfaction due to its impact on student motivation, recruitment of new students and retention of existing students.

Students are the key customers of higher education institutions (Illias, Hassan, Rahman &Yasoa, 2008) stated that student satisfaction is built continuously with experiences on campus during their study period. Student satisfaction is crucial since satisfied students could end up going back to their previous institutions for further studies or to enroll for new courses (Helgesen & Nesset, 2007). In view of this, higher education institutions should make every effort towards meeting and exceeding the expectations of their students in order to ensure the sustainability of their operations (Anderson et al, 1994).

Relationship between academic services and students satisfaction

Parasuraman et al., (1985) identified ten determinants of service quality that could be generalized to any type of service. The ten determinants are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, credibility, security, communication and understanding. These ten determinants are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, credibility, security, communication and understanding. These ten determinants were re- grouped by Parasuraman et al (1990) to form the well-known five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model and they are Tangibility, Assurance, Empathy, Reliability and Responsiveness. The implication is that to achieve student satisfaction higher education institutions must focus on every aspect of the students experience at the institutions must focus on every aspect of the students' experience at the institution (Asaduzzama, Moyazzem & Mahabubur, 2013).

Khan, Ahmed, and Nawaz (2011) found that responsiveness, empathy and reliability are also significantly related to service quality; similarly, reliability and empathy were also found with positive relationship with customer satisfaction but according to them, responsiveness was not significantly related to customer satisfaction. Likewise, service quality is significantly related to customer satisfaction (Agbor, 2011) concludes in his findings. Furthermore, previous research indicates that there is a significant relationship between dimensions of service quality i.e. Reliability, Assurance, Responsiveness and Empathy with satisfaction of the customers while, Tangible was having an insignificant relation with student satisfaction. Khan et al. (2011) have also observed that higher the level of students' satisfaction greater will be their willingness to put great efforts towards their studies.

2.2 Theoretical Review

The GAPS Model of Service Quality

Zeithaml, Bitnerand Gremler (2006) say that customer expectations are standards or reference points that customers bring into the service experience, whereas customer perceptions are subjective assessments of actual service experiences. The Gap Model draws a comparison between the qualities of a service that a customer expects to receive with the actual level of perceived service performance. The distinction between the disconfirmation paradigm, as it is called in customer satisfaction literature and the Gap Model in the service quality literature, has been highlighted in Iacobucci, Ostromand Grayson (1995). The Gap Model identifies five gaps where there may be a shortfall between expectation of service levels and perception of actual service delivery (Koni, Zainal & Ibrahim, 2013).

Customer expectations need to be properly understood to successfully manage them and service gaps should be identified from a customer's perspective (Miremadi, Gbalamkari & Sadeh, 2011).

The five gaps of service quality shown in Figure 1 are briefly enunciated as follows:

a. Gap 1 is the difference between the actual expectation of customers and what the service marketer perceived as expectation of customers.

b. Gap 2 is the difference between marketer perception of customer expectations and the translation of those perceptions into service quality specifications.

c. Gap 3 is the difference between the customer service quality specifications and the actual service delivered by the marketer.

d. Gap 4 is the difference between the actual service delivery and what is communicated to the customer.

e. Gap 5 is the difference between the customer's perceived service and expected service.

2.3 Empirical Review

Afshan (2018) investigate the Service Quality Dimensions and Students' Satisfaction: A study of Saudi Arabian Private Higher Education Institutions. Students' satisfaction and their intentions are recognized as rather important aspects in higher education institution's strategy in a competitive private higher education sector. However, what drives students' satisfaction and retention is the service quality, and this quality comes from the combination of excellent learning and non-learning process. Building on service quality dimension literature, this study aims to investigate the antecedents of students' intention to choose and stay with private higher education institutes. Through an adapted questionnaire survey, students' response was measured on a 5-point likert scale. The results suggested that perceived service quality is positively correlated to satisfaction; perceived service quality and satisfaction are positively correlated to students' retention.

Atif (2018) examined the assessment of Service Quality in Public Secondary Schools of Punjab based on ServQual Quality Determinants. Service quality is very much neglected thing in the government sector schools as the government monitoring bodies as well as the school management only focus on improving "education quality". So, there is need to assess the gap between student's satisfaction and schools management performance about the overall service quality provided in the institutions and identify the strong areas to maintain and weak areas to improve the service quality. Survey based quantitative research approach was used to empirically test the theoretical framework. Primary data was collected from a sample of 100 students based in Okara, Punjab, Pakistan. A structured questionnaire is designed comprising formal, objective, valid and unbiased questions to collect the data. Statistical methods are used for data analysis to refine results and finding conclusions. The results reveal that the most satisfied factors or in other words school strengths are the "reliability" (accuracy of service) and 'assurance' (competence of teachers) factors. And weak areas are tangibles and empathy with a sufficient focus on responsiveness (library staff response).The study is unique for and highly value adding in a way that it has empirically tested the generalizability of ServQual quality determinants theory. In addition, it has also revealed the role of school management to improve their service performance and enhancing students' satisfaction. Furthermore, this study will serve as foundational study for further researches in this concern.

Ada, Baysal and Erkan (2017), examined the evaluation of Service Quality in Higher Education: Marmara and Niğde Omer Halisdemir Universities Department of Education Students, the purpose of this research is to evaluate the quality service in higher education in Marmara and Niğde Omer Halisdemir Universities' department of education students. This study was prepared using a screening model from quantitative research methods. The sample of this research comprised 886 university students attending the higher education institutions mentioned. The Scale of Service Quality in Higher Education Institutions is composed a data collection tool consisting of 28 items and 6 factors. The data of this research were collected during the 2016-2017 academic year. Gender, grade, university, and academic success were utilized in this study as personal variables. In the results of this study, the considerations of girls were higher than males regarding the academic position and institutional image. In addition, the perceptions of 3rd grade students were higher than those of 4th grade students according to academic position, institutional image, offered diploma programs, and physical opportunities. On the other hand, the academic success of university students was increased regarding all factors and total scores.

Chui, Ahmad, Bassim and Zaimi (2016) studied Evaluation of Service Quality of Private Higher Education using Service Improvement Matrix. In the quest for academic excellence, the government of Malaysia is very concerned

about the quality of higher education institutions. Higher education is increasingly recognized as a service industry, and this puts a greater emphasis on meeting the expectations and needs of its participating customers who are the students. Using gap analysis, it examined whether there are any service gaps in the individual service quality attributes. Five specified dimensions, namely tangibles, empathy, assurance, reliability and responsiveness at the educational institution, were examined. Data was collected from respondents using a well-structured questionnaire designed and adapted for the provision of educational services in line with SERVQUAL dimension scale. To achieve this, students as respondents were surveyed on their expected and perceived service quality rendered to them and their opinions garnered on whether service quality has had any effect on their satisfaction. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed to students who had enrolled at the educational institution. Using service gap analysis, the findings indicated negative gaps for empathy and assurance dimensions. With the aid of service improvement matrix (SIM), satisfaction based on service perception and importance based on service expectation were plotted on a two-dimensional grid. This allowed for service improvement decisions to be made such as service improvements that are both necessary (low satisfaction ratings) and important for students (high importance ratings). Service strategies are recommended to managers to improve service quality and promote student satisfaction.

Conceptual Model

The researcher offered a conceptual model constructed based on literature review representing the relationship between customer patronage and service quality as;

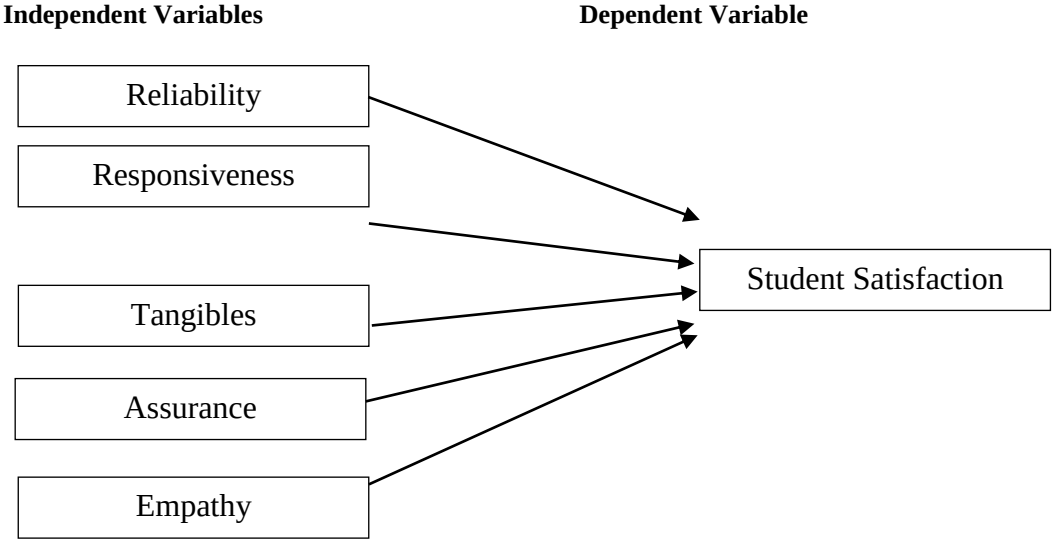


Fig. 1: Conceptual Model

Source: Researcher's Self-Construct, 2022

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive research design. The research population comprises students in the School of Engineering, Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro. The available data shows that the number of students in the School is eight hundred and forty three (843) (Registry, 2022).

The sample size for the study is determined from the total population by adopting the Taro Yamane (1964) formula.

Whereby $\mathbf{n} = \frac{N}{1 + n(e)^2}$

Key Interpretations:

n = The desired sample size.

N = The size of the population of interest

e = Limit of error tolerance which the researcher assumed to be 5% = 0.05

We therefore have:

$$\mathbf{n} = \frac{N}{1 + n(e)^2} = \frac{843}{1 + 843(0.05)^2}$$

$$= \frac{843}{1 + 843(0.0025)} = \frac{843}{3.1} = 270 \text{ sample size}$$

The researcher obtained a sample size of two hundred and seventy (270) respondents from the population study of 843 staff.

A structured questionnaire was utilized for gathering the required data from the respondents of the study. The research instrument was validated using content validity and expert opinion while the reliability was achieved using Cronbach alpha test. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics while the hypotheses were tested using linear regression analysis with the aid of SPSS version 23.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.916	25

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2022

The Cronbach alpha reliability result in table 1 shows the result of the reliability test of the responses of the respondents to the returned questionnaire, the result shows the Cronbach alpha value of 0.916 which indicates that the respondents responses is highly reliable.

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.681[a]	.463	.452	.47954

a. Predictors: (Constant), Tangibles, Responsiveness, Empathy, Assurance, Reliability

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2022

The table 2 shows the R square with the value of .463% which indicates that 46.3% variation in students' satisfaction is caused by the explanatory variables which includes reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance and tangibles. Also, the adjusted R square indicates that after adjusting the degree of freedom, the explanatory variables can still explain 45.2% variation in students' satisfaction.

Table 3: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	45.451	5	9.090	39.530	.000[b]
	Residual	52.660	229	.230		
	Total	98.111	234			

a. Dependent Variable: Students' Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Tangibles, Responsiveness, Empathy, Assurance, Reliability

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2022

The F statistic result in table 3 reveals the overall significance of the model, the probability value of 0.000 which is below the level of significance indicate that we reject null hypothesis and conclude that service quality has a significant effect on students' satisfaction.

Table 4: Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.290	.108		2.687	.008
	Reliability	.255	.081	.277	3.135	.002
	Responsiveness	.337	.063	.359	5.383	.000
	Assurance	.242	.099	.182	2.438	.016
	Empathy	.223	.058	.251	3.822	.000
	Tangibles	.192	.067	.145	2.887	.004

a. Dependent Variable: Students' Satisfaction

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2022

The coefficient result in table 4 reveals the relationship between the variables which shows that reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles with 0.255, 0.337, 0.242, 0.223 and 0.192 respectively. The table further reveals the significance of the explanatory variables which was however used to test the hypotheses of the study. However, the T statistic rules states that once the probability value of the variable is greater than 0.05 which is the level of significance, we therefore accept null hypothesis and if otherwise, we reject null hypothesis and accept alternate hypothesis.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis One

***H_0**: There is no significant relationship between reliability and student satisfaction.*

Decision Rule: The coefficient result in table 4 shows that reliability with significance value of 0.002 is statistically significant which denote that we reject null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant positive relationship between reliability and student satisfaction.

Hypothesis Two

***H_0**: There is no significant relationship between responsiveness and student satisfaction*

Decision Rule: The coefficient result in table 4 shows that responsiveness with significance value of 0.000 is statistically significant which denote that we reject null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant positive relationship between responsiveness and student satisfaction.

Hypothesis Three

***H₀**: There is no significant relationship between assurance and student satisfaction*

Decision Rule: The coefficient result in table 4 shows assurance with significance value of 0.016 is statistically significant at 0.05 level of significance which denote that we reject null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant positive relationship between assurance and student satisfaction.

Hypothesis Four

***H₀**: There is no significant relationship between empathy and student satisfaction*

Decision Rule: The coefficient result in table 4 shows that empathy with significance value of 0.000 is statistically significant which denote that we reject null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant positive relationship between empathy and student satisfaction.

Hypothesis Five

***H₀**: There is no significant relationship between tangibility and student satisfaction*

Decision Rule: The coefficient result in table 4 shows assurance with significance value of 0.004 is statistically significant at 0.05 level of significance which denote that we reject null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant positive relationship between tangibility and student satisfaction.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the assessment of service quality on students' satisfaction in tertiary education with particular reference to The Federal Polytechnic Ilaro. The findings of the study revealed that the explanatory variables which include service reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles have a positive significant relationship with students' satisfaction in tertiary institution.

The findings of the study reveals that service reliability which was found to be statistically significant which indicates that there is a positive relationship between service reliability and students' satisfaction. Hence, the study concluded that service reliability has a significant effect on students' satisfaction in tertiary institution.

Also, the findings of the study reveals that service assurance of the staff have a positive relationship with students' satisfaction. Service assurance was also found to be statistically significant, the study concluded that service assurance has a significant effect on students' satisfaction. In addition, responsiveness was also statistically significant which indicates that a positive relationship exist among the variables. The study concluded that responsiveness has a significant effect on students' satisfaction.

Based on the findings, it was revealed that empathy is statistically significant with students' satisfaction, it also indicates that there is a positive relationship between empathy and students' satisfaction. Hence, the study concluded that empathy has a significant effect on students' satisfaction.

Finally, tangibles was also found to be statistically significant, which indicates that there is a positive relationship between service tangibility and students' satisfaction. Therefore, the study concluded that service tangibility has a significant effect on students' satisfaction.

6. Recommendations

In line with the objectives and findings of the study, the following recommendations are put forward:

- The management should train its staff on the importance of offering reliable service to the students which will in turn lead to students' satisfaction and boost their performance.
- The management should recruit more trained staffs who will provide highest level of quality service to their students so as to increase the students' ability to learn.
- The staff should be friendlier to students, encourage and give some educational advice to the students in order for the students to have the courage to walk up to them whenever the encounter any problem or challenges.

- The management of the institution should provide essential learning equipment and facilities so as the staff and students can have access to it whenever the need arise.
- Students should also cultivate the habit of communicating more with the staff of the institution so as to enable the staff know how to offer a quality service to them.

7. Limitations of the Study

The limitation in this study can be attributed to the population covered by this study. There are up to 7 faculties (Schools) in the institution, hence, this study recommends that future studies should take on a larger audience in order to improve the generalization of the findings of a study of this nature.

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