



Architecture Students' Satisfaction in Iraqi Private Universities: TIU-S in Focus

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ABSTRACT

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The importance of service quality is undeniable. For years, numerous marketing professionals have researched its direct and indirect impacts on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Academics have proposed empathy, responsiveness, assurance, reliability, and tangibles as the primary drivers of service quality, university-related physical items or resources (technologic apparatus, smartboards, air conditioners, garden facilities, sports facilities, computer laboratories, etc.). The capacity of a service provider to offer essential service or acceptable and trustworthy responses to a student's demands or questions is referred to as reliability. This research aimed to benchmark the service quality dimensions of the architectural engineering department compared to other departments at Tishk International University-Sulaimani, Iraq. A quantitative research method has been applied. To do this, we have used ServQual and asked those questions to more than 100 students from architectural engineering, civil engineering, and business management departments. The data were analysed, and the results were initially analysed through regression analysis, and the obtained standardised weights of the regression analysis have been used for benchmarking after being normalised. The results show that the architectural engineering department delivered the best service quality compared to civil engineering and the business management department.

1. INTRODUCTION

Private education institutions are emerging all around the world day-to-day. Further, the students of these institutions are paying much more than they do in public education institutions. Thus, students would like to select a university where they can get better services in exchange for the payment. In this research, we have studied the impact of service quality on the students' satisfaction.

The significance of service quality is not in question. Many experts in the marketing field of study have been looking into its direct and indirect effects on consumer satisfaction and loyalty for years [1]. In order to increase organisational effectiveness, managers must pay close attention to the quality of services given in the workplace, which directly impacts customer perception. Businesses need contented consumers and loyal customers that want to maintain their relationship with their existing organisations for long-term business efficiency and success [2].

Service quality boosts productivity in the workplace and gives businesses a competitive edge in the marketplace [3]. On the other hand, it favours customers' perceptions and leads to satisfaction from satisfying their expectations [4]. Furthermore, customer interaction with staff influences customers' perceptions of quality service [5]. Grönroos [6] states that service quality is determined by both anticipated and observed service. Hence, to conform to the customers' expectations, which are students of private institutions in this research, universities must conduct a survey questionnaire to understand

their demands regarding service quality.

In this research, we have studied the impact of service quality determinants, developed by Parasuraman and Zeithaml [7], on the students' satisfaction. Scholars have suggested that empathy, responsiveness, assurance, reliability, and tangibles as the main determinants of service quality; tangibles – are the physical equipment or materials covering university education (technical and technological equipment, smartboards, air conditioners, garden facilities, sports facilities, computer labs...etc.). Reliability refers to a service provider's capacity to provide essential service or adequate and trustworthy answers to a student's demands or inquiries. E.g. lecturing is expected every time each lecturer has an error-free record of students' grades, payments...etc. Responsiveness – how eager academic and administrative staff to provide efficient education and administrative performance. Assurance – providing confidence to students (polite and trustworthy behaviours). Empathy – understanding students' needs, providing personal care to academic and administrative staff, and behaving proactively in case of any risk during the education process.

More studies investigated the service quality and the students' satisfaction in higher education [8-10]. Several dimensions have been gathered under a questionnaire by the scholars and used in various services fields. Besides, no studies evaluate the education quality by investigating the quality of classes, cafeteria, accounting, student affairs, dean of students, department management, and overall university facilities in private universities in Iraq. This study conducted SERVQUAL to approximately 100 students from architectural

engineering, business, management, and civil engineering departments at Tishk International University-Sulaimani, Iraq. First, the results have been analysed by regression analysis. Then, as next, the architectural engineering department was benchmarked with other departments through service quality perceptions in all those departments. Finally, based on the results, some strategic advice has been given—ease of Use.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Service quality

Service quality can be defined as the ability to understand what customers expect and meet these expectations as long as the choice opportunities increase in the modern world and competitive markets [11]. This may be the only way for a service to be among the customer's choice alternatives. On the other hand, it is challenging to say that there is a complete consortium regarding the service quality and dimensions [12].

For example, when discussing service quality, Parasuraman et al. [13] defined it as "richness, reliability, responsiveness, competence, civility, trust, security, access, communication, and customer understanding." After that, Parasuraman and Zeithaml [7] created the ServQual scale, the most well-known and used in many fields today, and divided its dimensions into five main parts: 'empathy, responsiveness, assurance, reliability, and tangibles'.

The difference between students' expectations and real experiences is described as service quality in higher education [14, 15]. SERVQUAL has been utilised in the traditional learning environment to measure service quality [16]. The tendency to use SERVQUAL in educational settings is strong [17, 18].

Service quality can essentially be categorised as an activity where production and facilities significantly take place concurrently [19]. It is complicated for the customer to estimate the quality of facilities due to the lack of physical evidence related to service quality. Private universities must be worried about the quality of their education and the quality of the service surrounding the tangible product. Service quality evaluation is based on customer satisfaction or customer expectation, which considers how well the delivered service level corresponds [20]. In addition, meeting or agreeing on the customer consumption is key to preserving the service quality image. To improve service quality, some steps should be applied first to recognise quality determinants, such as the quality of classes and labs. Step two, it is very important to emphasise the types of complaints and record the complements of the customers. Those factors become a frequent change for the future of service strategy Berry, Zeithaml & Parasuraman had used this method.

These technical results of the production process practice match the service's involved performance. Although usually, the consumer will be able to visit the university in most cases, before the study, a service organisation cannot hide behind brand names. Therefore, the organisation sharing information and sometimes the local image of an office or organisational unit is most important to present service quality [21].

Vests investigation and theoretical research have been published from the perspective of service quality, and many researchers emphasise education quality and its determining factors. However, in the case of private universities (Architecture department), very primitive research is applied

[22]. Ashraf et al. [22] pointed out that short or long-term objects must be reached. Therefore, a long-term national vision is essential. However, most university departments do not have such a vision. His target was stated: "*Improving the curriculum incessantly and teaching quality, as well as resource environment, upgrading skill and proficiency, assessment methods and learning those factors address the determinant quality education in universities. Student-lecturer interaction and enhancement challenges must be considered through appropriate quality assurance to determine quality. From the viewpoint of consumer behaviour, student behaviour can positively be considered. However, student performance may not be calculated as an ultimate consumption product.*"

Regarding consumer assessment of service quality Parasuraman and Zeithaml [7] addressed a tool consisting of the statements related to assessing consumer perception, and the research resulted in two stages of the process from the responded organisation. In the first stage, the ability number of items was reduced based on reliability and discrimination. The scale and form's dimensionality depends on its component's abilities in stage two. In the beginning, the dimension was 22, but because of overlapping some dimensions, the actual number was reduced to 5, which is shown in the list below [7]:

1. **TANGIBLES**-Physical facilities, equipment, employees, and communication materials should all look good.
2. **RELIABILITY**-Ability to provide a dependable and precise service as promised
3. **RESPONSIVENESS**-Willingness to assist clients and deliver quick service
4. **ASSURANCE**-Employees' courtesy and competence, as well as their ability to transmit faith and credibility
5. **EMPATHY**-The firm's consumers receive caring, individualised attention.

Higher education and private universities have provided excellent service quality to study. While higher education frequently occupant administrative and supporting service areas in ways similar to typical.

The business and service businesses differ from the academic/instructional field. The academic areas of higher education are set apart from the idea of academic independence in typical service business processes. In addition, creating a private institution-wide implementation of regulations and practices is similar to the concept of shared governance, which is more difficult since each private institution of higher education has its regulation and structural model. This research emphasises service quality in education management, such as in undergraduate and graduate programs in public universities and general regulations and supplementary functions (e.g. accommodation, Administrator, Financial Aid, foot Facilities, etc.). Other education organisations (private universities and online-only institutions) will face similar problems concerning service quality. The variance between the observations of the tangible service encounter and expected from a service encounter is measured by SERVQUAL [7]. The researcher named this the diversification model and operationalised it as Service Quality (Q), Perception (P) Expectation (E). The classic importance/performance model is the most suitable means of assessing service quality in education.

The literature recommends that recent quality improvements in higher education must be motivated. From the 1990s, the rise in TQM efforts, student competition and operational funds increased due to difficulties of the financial situation in higher education. Irmayani, et al. [23] stated that competition for funding, resources, and students should be increased and

motivators to improve education quality. The economic conditions affect higher education standards toward industry-style competition [24]. In the 1990s, funding formulas were changed, students became 'savvier' and discriminating, and non-governmental institute sources became more selective [25].

2.2 Customer satisfaction

Most researchers pay attention to consumer satisfaction and service quality in an inclusive diversity of disciplines. There is a strong link between conceptions and customer trustworthiness [26, 27]. Parasuraman claims that the media cannot distinguish between these two constructs – however, he focuses on the important models to measure customer satisfaction and the causal ordering of these two structures [28, 29]. Consumer registered the ServQual measuring satisfaction and expectation [7, 13, 30].

Present visions interestingly find the challenge of measuring satisfaction: when students were asked about the start of their educational experience and previous expectations, the gap between opportunities and performance had predictive power. Nonetheless, the gap model proved satisfactory in predicting overall satisfaction when students were offered to attend a short course after the semester [31].

According to the research, there were discrepancies in expectations at the start of the course versus predictions remembered at the end of the encounter. The sheer amount of the event detracts from the re-creation of previous expectations.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research aimed to benchmark the service quality of the architectural engineering department compared with the business, management, and civil engineering departments from the empathy, responsiveness, assurance, reliability, and tangibles points of view. To do this, we have gathered data from students asking service quality of the department based on the survey questionnaire of Parasuraman et al. [32]. The researchers attempted to survey the whole population of the newly-established institution using these three departments. As a result, nearly all of the students in these departments took part in the survey, and we could gather more than 100 responses to meet the qualitative study sample size criterion. As described in the literature, each major sub-group in the populace should receive 100 samples, while minor sub-groups should receive 20 to 50 samples [33, 34].

The results initially have been evaluated by proposing regression analysis, and in this way, the standardised weights of each service quality determinant have been obtained. Secondly, the results regression analysis has normalised and integrated the benchmarking process. Finally, students' average evaluation for each dimension has been multiplied by the normalised weights, and benchmarking of the process has been finalised.

3.1 Data analysis

In this section, we have analysed the data collected from students. Analysis has been proposed by regression analysis. However, before proposing regression analysis, the reliability of the questionnaire has been tested. Cronbach's Alpha has tested the reliability analysis in IBM SPSS 23. The results of

the analysis are shown in Table 1.

Each dimension should have a dependability value greater than 0.7, according to Cronbach's Alpha criteria. As a result, the troubling group of questions can be deemed a solid construct. In Table 1, it can be seen that each dimension has a Cronbach's Alpha value greater than 0.7. As a result, it can be stated that the dimensions of the service quality survey questionnaire were trustworthy enough to warrant further investigation.

Then, we offered regression analysis to evaluate the impact of each service quality factor on students' satisfaction in the concerned department as shown in Table 2.

The analysis results show that service quality dimensions have explained 80 per cent of the overall students' satisfaction in their departments. Further, it can be revealed that tangibles (0.316), assurance (0.311), and empathy (0.258) dimensions were the top impacting dimensions of the students' satisfaction and reliability (0.174), and the responsiveness (0.101) have been secondarily important determinants of the students' satisfaction. After, we normalised the weights of the regression analysis for the further process of benchmarking. The results of normalisation are shown in Table 3.

Given in Table 3, normalised weights are ready to run the benchmarking process. First, weights have been normalised by dividing each standardised weight by the total sum. Then, as the next step, the benchmarking process was run.

In benchmarking, the normalised weights have been multiplied by each department's service quality dimensions. Therefore, there were some marks for each department. The results show which department provides the best service quality compared to others as shown in Table 4.

For example, the benchmarking calculation of the architectural engineering department has been proposed through;

Mean of empathy + responsiveness + assurance + reliability + tangibles in Arch. Dept. * Normalized weight of each dimension.

Further, the results have been concerted out of five to out of 100 through;

$(\text{Results of architectural engineering department} * 100) / 5$.

All results have been calculated and shown in Figure 1.

The results show us that the architectural engineering department obtained 78, the business management department obtained 66, and the civil engineering department obtained a point out of 100 in service quality of the department. Therefore, with these results, the architectural engineering department has been considered the best service provider department than the business management and civil engineering departments.

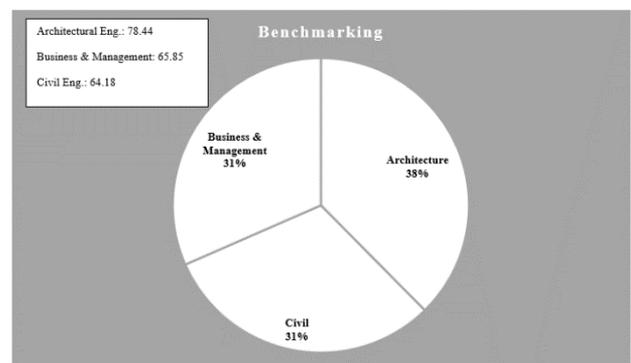


Figure 1. Benchmarking results

The architecture department got more empathy (students' care and individualised attention) in the survey results than other departments. So this is an indication of how important to provide the students with necessary care beyond normal education and lectures. This indicates that architectural

education's nature may assist this cooperation and collaboration between students and instructors. Because architecture education combines several practical and theoretical courses that make students and instructors work closely together and more socially connected compared to other disciplines.

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha levels of each dimension

	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	N of Items			
	0.920	0.921	6			
Empathy		Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
	Q1	18.6061	27.79	0.755	0.644	0.908
	Q2	18.4015	28.39	0.724	0.609	0.912
	Q3	18.3333	27.94	0.803	0.689	0.901
	Q4	18.2348	29.46	0.736	0.628	0.910
	Q5	18.3561	28.36	0.815	0.753	0.900
	Q6	18.3333	27.90	0.802	0.735	0.901
	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	N of Items			
	0.929	0.929	5			
Responsiveness		Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
	Q7	14.1579	20.07	0.780	0.645	0.919
	Q8	14.3158	19.56	0.821	0.719	0.911
	Q9	14.4211	19.38	0.830	0.715	0.909
	Q10	14.3383	19.58	0.845	0.730	0.906
	Q11	14.2556	20.20	0.785	0.661	0.917
	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	N of Items			
	0.892	0.892	3			
Assurance		Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
	Q12	7.3209	6.039	0.731	0.535	0.895
	Q13	7.1119	5.709	0.809	0.681	0.828
	Q14	7.1791	5.336	0.828	0.702	0.811
	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	N of Items			
	0.911	0.911	4			
Reliability		Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
	Q15	10.5224	11.18	0.830	0.703	0.874
	Q16	10.4478	11.66	0.794	0.646	0.887
	Q17	10.2090	11.98	0.781	0.616	0.891
	Q18	10.3507	11.83	0.791	0.648	0.888
	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	N of Items			
	0.903	0.902	5			
Tangibles		Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
	Q19	14.5191	19.59	0.752	0.640	0.882
	Q20	14.5191	18.85	0.783	0.665	0.875
	Q21	14.5344	18.75	0.798	0.684	0.872
	Q22	14.2824	18.98	0.793	0.704	0.873
	Q23	14.2672	20.38	0.660	0.544	0.901
	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	N of Items			
	0.934	0.935	4			
Student Satisfaction		Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
	Q24	10.8333	13.48	0.831	0.701	0.918
	Q25	10.9561	13.54	0.845	0.735	0.914
	Q26	10.9649	12.90	0.869	0.770	0.905
	Q27	10.9825	12.56	0.837	0.720	0.917

Table 2. Regression analysis results

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.40	0.187		2.18	0.03
Empathy	0.30	0.110	0.258	2.81	0.00
Responsiveness	0.12	0.111	0.107	1.08	0.28
Assurance	0.34	0.108	0.311	3.14	0.00
Reliability	0.19	0.118	0.174	1.68	0.09
Tangibles	0.36	0.088	0.316	4.14	0.00

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

Table 3. Normalised weights for benchmarking

	Un-normalized Standard weights	Normalized Standard weights
Empathy	0.258	0.221
Responsiveness	0.107	0.091
Assurance	0.311	0.267
Reliability	0.174	0.149
Tangibles	0.316	0.271
Total Weights	1.166	1.000

Table 4. Anova descriptive results

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Empathy	Business Management	35	3.4095	1.00760
	Civil Engineering	31	3.3790	1.12543
	Architectural Engineering	68	3.9412	0.98654
	Total	134	3.6723	1.05390
Responsive-ness	Business Management	35	3.3657	1.00292
	Civil Engineering	30	3.0700	1.23320
	Architectural Engineering	68	3.8794	1.02514
	Total	133	3.5617	1.11523
Assurance	Business Management	35	3.2095	1.24482
	Civil Engineering	31	3.1290	1.23432
	Architectural Engineering	68	3.9804	0.99398
	Total	134	3.5821	1.18448
Reliability	Business Management	34	3.2588	1.08380
	Civil Engineering	31	2.7855	1.02625
	Architectural Engineering	68	3.8618	1.02054
	Total	133	3.4568	1.12342
Tangibles	Business Management	34	3.2735	1.05574
	Civil Engineering	30	3.4300	1.01341
	Architectural Engineering	68	3.8971	1.08861
	Total	132	3.6303	1.09242

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to compare architectural engineering service quality dimensions to investigate the department's strong and weak points. The results show that the architectural engineering department's empathy, responsiveness, assurance, reliability, and tangibles were better than the other departments. Based on these results, it can be revealed that the lecturers and the administration of the department show a good level of empathy to the problems of the students, behave responsive to solving the problems of the students, have good knowledge of lecturing and knowledge delivery, and using state of the art technologies inside the classes for lecturing.

The determinants of the service quality in this research contained only the ones of ServQual. Further research can include career opportunities, the employment rate in the field...etc. dimensions for more technical aspects of the department. Another topic for future study may be 'the character of architectural education,' to see how new pedagogical approaches and technology to suit this education to provide architecture students with greater satisfaction.

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