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Students' Perceived Service Quality and Satisfaction Vis-à-vis Educational Diversity: An Empirical Study

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Abstract:
Higher education is undergoing a metamorphic change in the present era facing tremendous competitive pressure coupled with vigorous challenges and problems. Institutes catering higher education, therefore, gear to absorb these issues and revamp infrastructure, course curriculum, industry academia interface and exploring opportunities to offer doctoral and post doctoral program, etc. This is vital for attracting and retaining potential students and addressing their career oriented issues pragmatically. The present paper makes an attempt to gauge students' perception of service quality of the institutes they attend and the level of satisfaction on the institutes as a whole. Students having diverse educational backgrounds are deemed to be a major factor in this study and how this educational diversity impacts on perceived service quality and satisfaction is a subject matter of investigation too in this paper.

Keywords: Service quality, Educational diversity, Students' satisfaction, SERVQUAL

1. Introduction

Higher educational Institutes are increasingly facing cut throat competition amid metamorphic change in higher education. Therefore, problems and prospects are continuously getting redefined under varied demands of the stakeholders of the system. Indeed globalization has unleashed a new regime of higher education where both challenges and opportunities have global perspective. In fact, these changes lead the institutes to remodel different dimensions of higher education to combat the ever changing scenario of the academia (Heck & Johnsrud, 2000). Furthermore, the institutes are in constant endeavor to receive feedbacks from various stakeholders in order to keep track of the performances and identifying measures to uplift the standard of the institutes. Students, a major stakeholders of the academic system are given due emphasis compared to others as students' perception of service quality and satisfaction are two important dimensions to guide and shape the future course of the development of the institutes(Annamdevula and Bellamkonda, 2012). This is imperative as students are more informed about the global status of higher education, especially the management education by the grace of global advertising and promotions via internet and social media.

Educational diversity of the students is a major component to affect the evaluation of the service quality and develop a favorable and unfavorable perception of the institutes. The present paper takes educational background of the students as a major variable and undertakes an empirical research relating to the impact of educational diversity over perceived service quality and satisfactions of the students. Needless to mention, educational diversity is operationally defined as the varied educational backgrounds, students possess and that prompt them to choose career oriented higher education to bolster their careers. Management education in this regard attracts students of varied backgrounds unlike the specialized academic programs such as science, arts and commerce. Management education is primarily interdisciplinary in nature covering different areas of specialized education. Students get a holistic view of all specialized disciplines and utilize them to enhance their knowledge base and find application in solving management problems. Management problems in most of the situations have multi-dimensional factors and students, therefore, should have all round knowledge base to address these problems satisfactorily (Banerjee, 2013). For example, a student having economics background confronts a challenge of employee behaviors in an organization must know to extract right inputs from the behavioral science and use them to address the problems to the satisfaction of the organization. This is how, management education teaches a student having arts background to develop an understanding over other disciplines in the same way students of other backgrounds get an opportunity to develop a flair over new disciplines.

1.1. Management Institutes Facing New Challenges and Opportunities: A Brief Overview
There has been an unprecedented proliferation of the management institutes in recent times. Moreover, internationalization of the management education prompts them to rethink and rediscover different facets guiding the course of business education. The following challenges can be noted in view of opening up of the management education across the globe.

1.1.1. Challenge 1: Infrastructure
It encompasses building, classrooms, library facility, computer labs, electrical and water supply, cafeteria, open space, playground and other recreational facilities. Education can not thrive on the water tight environment. Management Education cannot blossom without ample supports defining the infrastructure of the institutes.

1.1.2. Challenge 2: Course Curriculum
This is deemed to be an important facet of management education. This must be up to date and must compete with the course curriculum offered by the institutes of repute in both national and international fronts.

1.1.3. Challenge 3: Scope of Specialization
Management education has general as well as specialized areas. General area encompasses study of organizational behavior, economics, quantitative technique, corporate social responsibility, business communication, whereas specialized areas include marketing, finance, human resources, systems and operations, tourism, health care management, etc. Most of the institutes find opportunities for various specializations so that it can draw attention of students having varied educational backgrounds.

1.1.4. Challenge 4: Industry Academia Interface
Management education must be industry oriented. Again, it cannot ignore the requirement of the society. Therefore, establishing an effective link connecting institute, industry and society is a major challenge to the academia.

1.1.5. Challenge 5: Placement of the Students
Whatsoever is the quality of the education and the infrastructure, all attempts to re-engineer its program would be foiled if the students are not given placements after completion of the education. Periodic arrangement of campus interviews and provision for summer internship are necessary to continue the inflow of students in number to the institutes.

1.1.6. Challenge 6: Qualified Faculty
A good institute is recognized by the quality of its teachers. A qualified teacher can only produce a quality student provided there is a match between the education given and the education perceived in the real sense. Institutes face many challenges to pull qualified faculties in different positions. There has always been a demand for good teachers for different B schools. Teachers must have suitable degrees and excellence in their educational performance, relevant experience, particularly at senior levels and most importantly, teaching flairs and understanding to meet the academic requirements of the students.

1.2. Perceived Service Quality and Satisfaction of the Students: A Review
Students being the major stakeholders of the institutes constantly evaluate the teaching and other services offered by the institutes. Students' evaluation of the institute is of paramount importance in judging the performance of the same (Choudhury, 2015).Students before admission to the institute possess certain theoretical knowledge as well as some word of mouth conception of the institute they are going to attend. After admission, a student is used to compare different dimensions from theoretical and practical perspectives (Tan & Kek, 2004; Harvey & Green, 1993; Lawson, 1992; Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithmal, 1988). Misconception is not uncommon in students' evaluation, particularly when they find a terrific mismatch between what they expect and what they obtain. Even a dissatisfied student is botheration to the institute in the age of viral communication. Any information of disrepute of the institute spreads gigantically causing bottlenecks to the potential candidates who show interest in the institute. On the other hand, a satisfactory student acts as a missionary to convey the positive message about the institutes that catalyzes the will of the prospective students to enroll in the institutes in future. So academic entrepreneurs and administrators running management institutes must keep their eyes and ears open to monitor the students' attitude and feelings towards the institute. Upon finding any discrepancy in this regard, they must bridge it whole-heartedly to the advantage of the students.
Perception is a mental process. It is a dynamic concept too. It is guided by the expectation that acts as a standard or bottleneck during the perception process. Perception is an attitudinal manifestation. Positive perception means expectation merges with the reality. Negative perception means a gap between the two. Perception of service quality ranges between the two extremes. Students' perceived service quality is an important matter of research to the administrators and academic entrepreneurs because this determines a lot of the prospect of the institute. Survival of the institute is very much inclined to the development of the students' perception of service quality.
Satisfaction is a psychological variable. It is evaluated by the difference between the expectations and perceptions. Needless to mention, higher the difference between these two more is the level of dissatisfaction. Satisfaction is a continuum that varies with time. When satisfaction remains constant for a long period of time, it creates stability in the minds of the students.

2. Objectives of the Study

The present study attempts to address the following objectives:
    i.   To investigate the effect of educational background of the students on the perceived service quality by the institute.
    ii. To investigate the effect of educational background on the satisfaction level of the students.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Sample Design
The study is based on the management institutes located in Kolkata. The institutes, having AICTE approval and West Bengal University of Technology (WBUT) affiliation are chosen for the study. Samples are drawn randomly from these institutes from the pool of students having 8 point CGPA in the 3 rd semester MBA examinations. This sample size stands at 250.

3.2 Research Tools Used
For the purpose of data collection a modified questionnaire has been prepared in the light of SERVQUAL propounded by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988). A satisfaction questionnaire has also been developed. A 5 point Likert scale has been used in both the questionnaires. Reliability of the questionnaire has been measured making use of Cronbach's alpha test (table 1 &2).

3.3 Statistical Tools Used
Cronbach's alpha test and one way ANOVA. Statistical calculations and computations have been done with the help of SPSS statistical Package (version 20.0).

3.4 Research Hypotheses
Ha_0: There is no significant impact of educational background of the students on perceived service quality across service quality dimensions-tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.
Ha_1: There is a significant impact of educational background of the students on perceived service quality across service quality dimensions-tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.
Hb_0: There is no significant impact of educational background on the students' satisfaction.
Hb_1: There is a significant impact of educational background on the students' satisfaction.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Modified SERVQUAL	Cronbach's Alpha
Tangible	0.838
Reliability	0.833
Responsiveness	0.832
Assurance	0.821
Empathy	0.836

Table 1: Reliability statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha
Satisfaction questionnaire	.819

Table 2: Reliability statistics

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Tangible	Between Groups	3.934	3	1.311	3.500	.016
	Within Groups	92.167	246	.375		
	Total	96.100	249			
Reliability	Between Groups	4.058	3	1.353	3.474	.017
	Within Groups	95.773	246	.389		
	Total	99.831	249			
Responsiveness	Between Groups	4.589	3	1.530	3.696	.012
	Within Groups	101.826	246	.414		
	Total	106.415	249			
Assurance	Between Groups	5.432	3	1.811	4.759	.003
	Within Groups	93.609	246	.381		
	Total	99.042	249			
Empathy	Between Groups	4.375	3	1.458	4.063	.008
	Within Groups	88.302	246	.359		
	Total	92.678	249			

Table 3: ANOVA

Satisfaction					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6.814	3	2.27133	22.0667	.000
Within Groups	25.322	246	.10293		
Total	33.136	249			

Table 4: ANOVA

In table 3 p values for tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy dimensions are less than the significance level (0.5), so the null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted. The implication is that educational background of the students affects the perceived service quality of the students across tangible, reliability, responsiveness and empathy dimensions.
According to table 4, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted because the p value (0.00) is less than the significance level (α=0.05). It implies that difference in educational backgrounds of the students have significant impact on students' satisfaction.

5. Findings and Conclusions
Table 4 indicates the p values for tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy obtained from the students from varied backgrounds. F values for each variable distinctly suggests significant differences among different groups of students. Indeed educational background creates specific insights within a student's mind frame and generates a level of expectation. A student in general looks for getting admission in an institute that is supposed to cater different amenities helping the students to smoothly move along to get the desired degree. But, the students' expectation is not always fulfilled as he or she finds discrepancies in different facets determining the quality of the institutes and experience dissatisfaction. Engineering students, deemed to have more than average quality, visualize an institution more on facilities relating to laboratories, availability of teaching aids, well equipped libraries, etc. A general student might have a different view points judging the quality of the institutes. Therefore, perception of tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy are different to different categories of students. For example, reliability of the institute to an engineering student is justified by the facilities for the campus placements before completion of the course. In general, students having arts and commerce background yearns for getting opportunity in corporate sector where the institute efforts to promote them is treated as the responsiveness of the institute. Different categories of students interpret assurance of the institute from different ways. The earlier year performance of the students and placement bear an impression in the minds of the existing students and creates a varied degree of response among them. Empathy is also a factor that the students expect from the institutes. The students always expect the promise of the institutes to upgrade the tangibles in one hand and close co-ordination between industry and academia on the others. These two are related because recruiters seek for facilities in the institute to a great degree so that students are well honed and fulfill their requirements after recruitments. The interpretation of empathy also varies among students having various educational backgrounds. Therefore, this may be concluded that educational background exhibit varied impacts on different criteria determining the service quality of the institute. This yields to differential level of satisfaction to the students as well.

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