SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSIONS AND STUDENTS SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

The current research paper aims to discuss threefold of service quality and students satisfaction. First is to shed light on the concepts of service quality and student satisfaction. Second is to examine the major dimensions of service quality in higher education. Third is to propose conceptual model to investigate the relationship between service quality dimensions and students satisfaction in Jordanian higher education. The article is based on analyze literature and providing guidelines to researchers on how to identify the most important service quality dimensions for higher education setting. Suggestions for future research are made and limitations highlighted.

Keywords: SERVQUAL; service quality; customer satisfaction; higher education; Jordan.

1. Introduction

Service industries play an increasingly important role in the economies of all countries. In the world of global competition, qualifying service a key for success and many experts agree that the most powerful competitive trend shaping marketing and business strategy is service quality (Firdaus, 2006a).

The higher education sector is considered as an intangible service, as the sector possesses all the unique characteristics of services (DeShields et al., 2005). Higher Education (HE) is one of the most important service sectors in modern business. Moreover, higher education institutions (HEIs) are highly consumer-oriented service business targeted to develop relationships and provide imperative service quality (Gronroos, 1994).

Measurements of service quality in the higher educational institutions are still underdeveloped because that its measurements almost adopted from examine different industries (Marimuthu and Ismail, 2012). The assurance of service quality in the field of higher education (HE) has received escalating attention from both researchers and academicians during the last two decades, this attention is due to the key role that quality education system play in articulating a framework for providing qualified, highly skilled and well trained manpower for the markets (Tahar, 2008). In order to determine a service

organization' deficiencies which lead to improvements, the organization has one direction which is measuring service quality and customer satisfaction (Durvasula, 2011). Without studying the service quality, Jordanian universities will not be able to identify the level of students' satisfaction about the services that a university provided (Othman, 2008). Higher education service quality measurement continues to be a complicated and difficult issue where most evaluations of higher education quality have primarily focused on using tangible criteria (Hadikoemoro, 2001). Therefore, there is a need to adopt techniques that measure (HE) service quality and customer's satisfaction.

The Jordanian economy is categorized as a trade and services' economy. According to CIA (2010), services sector in Jordan contribute 76% of the gross domestic product (GDP) and 77.4% of the workforce. The tertiary sector is considered the bulk of the economy (about 70 % of the country's GDP). Thus, Jordanian' higher education sector is required to adopt the techniques that help in measuring the quality of its services and the satisfaction level of its customers. Private universities play important role in producing professionals of human resource on national level. Source of funding is the key feature to distinct between public and private universities. Public universities get most of their fund from public, but private universities getting most of their fund from student fees (Arokiasamy et al., 2007).

Demand for university education has grown rapidly in the past ten years. A Jordanian private university has seen an increased demand for higher education with enrolments growing at an annual rate of 18 percent from 38,642 to 66,894 between the years 2000/2001 and 2010/2011. Therefore, the number of students in Jordan is increasing at noticeable rate. It is feared that this may affect the quality of education services rendered, and in turn impact student satisfaction negatively.

This study aims to fill the gap through investigating student satisfaction of service quality provided by Jordanian private universities and it will try to explain how different dimensions of service quality can affect students' satisfaction within Jordanian private universities setting. This study also attempts to develop a conceptual framework that tackles students perceptions towards the provided service quality through providing an examination for several services quality constructs in the context of Jordanian private higher education institutions; will provide more comprehensive understanding of students' satisfaction of service quality.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Customer (Students) Satisfaction

According to Tan et al., (2010) "customers always have the feeling of being wanted and appreciated without needing to make such a request, therefore, their perceptions on service quality are truly important and becoming more essential to the service industry" (p.1014). The perception of customers on service quality is important because it could provide the management with valuable information about to the improvement of customer satisfaction (Seymour, 1992).

Students are the consumers for institutions of higher education, therefore, identify the satisfaction level of students is a significant factor to survive in the environment of competitive market, while the increased level of students dissatisfaction will lead to drop-out of the institution (Kerlin, 2000).

Customer satisfaction is an ambiguous concept as satisfaction differs from one consumer to another and from product to another (Munteanu et al., 2010). A variety of definitions about customer satisfaction are, the most popular definition is the comparison between customer expectations and perceptions regarding the actual service encounter (Hoffman and Bateson, 1997). According to Kotler (1991) satisfaction is the post-purchase consumer' evaluation of products or service compared to the expectations before purchase. Aydin et al., (2005) described customer satisfaction as an output that result from the customer's pre-purchase comparison of expected performance with the perceived actual performance and cost of purchasing (Aydin et al., 2005).

In addition, customer satisfaction is defined as an emotional positive response results from subjective individual's evaluation of his or her situation (Kondou, 1999). Zeithaml et al., (2008) explain that comparing between consumer expectations and perceptions is based on what marketers refer to as the expectancy disconfirmation model, simply if consumers' perceptions meet their expectations, they will eventually become satisfied and their expectations are confirmed. Furthermore, consumers evaluate service quality positively when the gap between their perceptions of institutes performance and the desired expectations is small or does not exist, where higher consumer' satisfaction will occur if the consumer found that the perceived performance exceeds his expectations (Khodayari and Khodayari, 2011).

Munteanu (2010) explains that measuring customer satisfaction can provide an indicator for organizations about how successful they actually are in providing products to the market, where that the satisfaction of consumer is an important differentiator of marketing strategy and depends largely on the degree to which a product supplied by an organization meets or surpasses customer expectation. Satisfaction is becoming an important key factor for the survival of educational institutions such as "universities" (Marzo-Navarro et al., 2005a). Navarro et al., (2005) argued that students' satisfaction leads to student' intent to return to university, and support the university to increase its number of students. Similar to the perceived service quality, customer satisfaction is a complex and multi-dimensional concept, in which the general consumer' satisfaction characteristics can be applicable to the case of higher education service (Hartman and Schmidt, 1995). A number of previous studies (Brown and Mazzarol, 2009; Chitty and Soutar, 2004; Martensen et al., 2000) have used and adapt the European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI) model in the context of higher education. But, the result of those studies could not replicate the original model in the context of higher education, thus this suggests that higher education sector needs to reexamine and develop a new model (Sultan and Wong, 2010).

2.2 *Service Quality*

Today's organizations are highly striving to provide high standard service quality to their customers, deliver and assess the performance of the service provided to consumers, therefore, customers perception towards provided services is crucial for organizations success (Mukesh et al., 2009). Many different definitions related to the actual meaning of service quality were presented in the literature. For example, Oakland (1993) defined service quality as the extent to which a service meets customer's needs or expectations. Hoffman and Bateson (1997) defined service quality as an attitude shaped by a long-term overall evaluation of a service performance. Accordingly, service quality can be defined as discrepancy between consumer service expectation and the perceived service, if the expectations were greater than the performance, the consumer satisfaction will not occur (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Service quality focuses on satisfying consumers' needs during the service process, where the customers shape their perceptions about the delivered service (Kong and Muthusamy, 2011).

Over the last three decade researchers attempted to define general dimensions of quality in particular those related to services (Jain et al., 2011). Service quality scale (SERVQUAL) is a multi-items scale consists of ten dimensions developed by (Parasuraman et al., 1985); targeted to evaluate consumer perception towards service quality. Parasuraman et al., (1991) revised the original SERVQUAL scale into five dimensions which are: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. Adding up, Carman (1990) proposed seven dimensions to measure service quality. While Mels et al., (1997) concluded two dimensions to measure service quality. Furthermore, Cronin and Taylor (1992) concluded that service quality is multidimensional rather than one-dimensional.

Some authors have classified service quality into two categories which are technical and functional (Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988, 1991). Recently, researchers interested in service quality conceptualized service quality as multidimensional and hierarchical construct (Dagger et al., 2007). As a result many researchers suggested that the proper dimensions to measure service quality are specific to the situation (Holdford and Patkar, 2003).

In the same vein, Al-allak and Bekhet (2011) conducted an exploratory study which reviewed significant models used to measure service quality such as SERVQUAL, SERVPERF, and the Human-Societal Element (HSE) model, they found that the SERVQUAL modified models did not reflect the real dimensions of service quality that affect customer's satisfaction, thus they suggested that more service quality dimensions should be introduced in any future models targeted to measure the quality of services.

2.3 *Service Quality in Higher Education*

Compared to the commercial sector, researches on service quality in higher education sector are still a new endeavor (Sultan and Wong, 2010). Some past researchers concluded that the

SERVQUAL model is suitable for assessing higher educational performance (Soutar and McNeil, 1996; Quinn, et al., 2009; Gallifa, and Batalle, 2010).

Other studies make a relationship between factors of SERVQUAL and satisfaction. For example, Al-Allak and Bekhet, (2011) found that there is a positive significant relationship between assurance, reliability and students' satisfaction, and those two dimensions were the most important dimensions of service quality. Ahmed et al., (2010) concluded that tangibles, assurance and empathy are significantly related to students' satisfaction, while tangible, responsiveness and assurance factors are significantly associated with students' motivation. Tahar (2008) used Information resources with SERVQUAL measure to assess students' expectation and perception toward service quality delivered by School of Graduate Studies, and found that the responsiveness dimension of service quality considered by the post graduate students is the most important dimension out of the six dimension of service quality. Arambewela and Hall (2006) found that the tangibles construct and have the greatest impact on their overall students' satisfaction.

In the context of other service quality models, Vaughan and Wooduffe (2011) applied a new model for disabled, service user-specific service quality ARCHSECRET compared to a modified SERVQUAL model. In order to assess service quality in the context of disabled students within higher education institutions practically, they found that ARCHSECRET is more reliable and valid and has better predictive power to assess the disabled students' experience in higher education institutions. Sultan and Wong (2010) examined SERVQUAL and SERVPERF in the sector of higher education related to dimensionalities and scale of service quality, and found that it is necessary to direct much attention to the higher education sector. Salvador-Ferrer (2010) studied SERVQUAL vs. ESQS in context of universities' services, He found that ESQS provide a more accurate analysis of service quality in university and perhaps it can adapt better in the context of the university services. Helgesen and Nesset (2011) investigated whether LibQUAL+TM can account for student's loyalty to the library of an institution of higher education or not. They concluded that the three of LibQUAL dimensions (information control, effect of service and library as a place) explain 85% of the variation in student loyalty in the context of higher education institution.

Based on the literature review, the following research framework and hypothesis has been formulated:
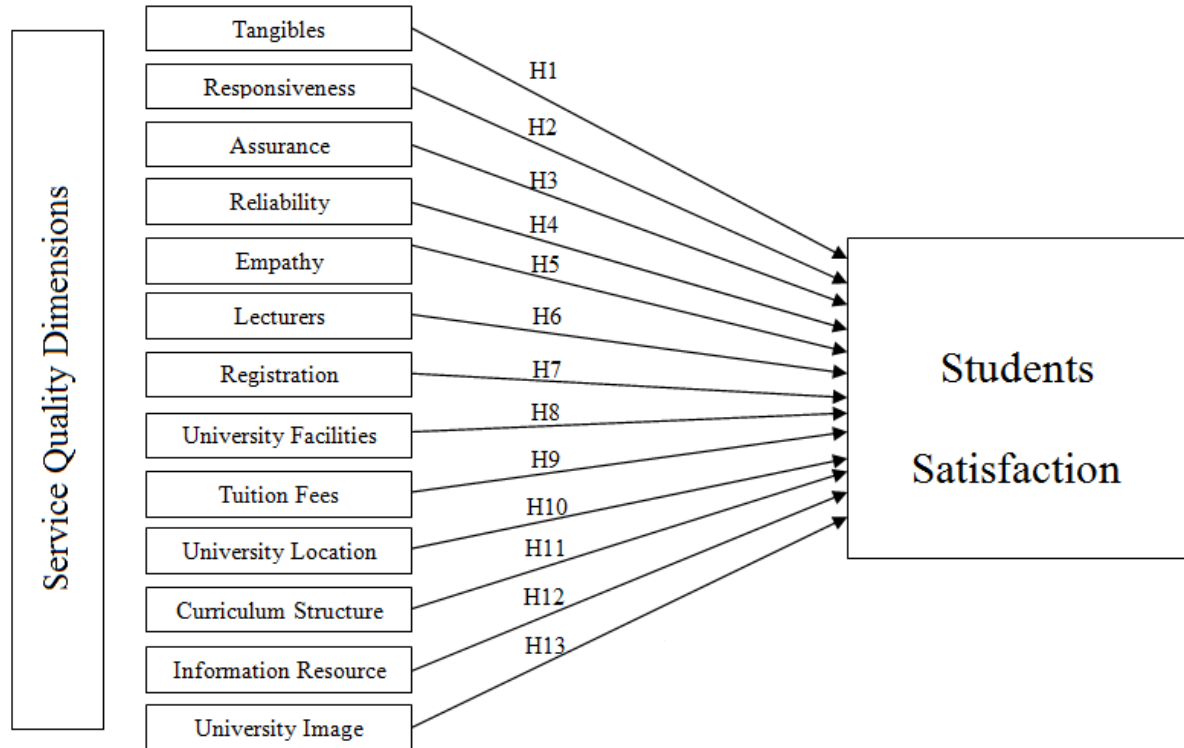
Figure 2.1: Theoretical Framework

H1: There is a significant relationship between tangibles and students satisfaction within Jordanian universities.

H2: There is a significant relationship between empathy and students satisfaction within Jordanian universities.

H3: There is a significant relationship between reliability and students satisfaction within Jordanian universities.

H4: There is a significant relationship between assurance and students satisfaction within Jordanian universities.

H5: There is a significant relationship between responsiveness and students satisfaction within Jordanian universities.

H6: There is a significant relationship between lecturers and students satisfaction within Jordanian universities.

H7: There is a significant relationship between university facilities and students satisfaction within Jordanian universities.

H8: There is a significant relationship between tuition fees and students satisfaction within Jordanian universities.

H9: There is a significant relationship between university location and students satisfaction within Jordanian universities.

H10: There is a significant relationship between curriculum structure and students satisfaction within Jordanian universities.

H11: There is a significant relationship between registration and students satisfaction within Jordanian universities.

H12: There is a significant relationship between information resources and students satisfaction within Jordanian universities.

H13: There is a significant relationship between university image and students satisfaction within Jordanian universities.

2.4 *Studied Variables on Literature Review*

Previous researchers have been suggested to introduce tuition fees construct in service quality models to assess the student perception about the service they received (Gruber et al., 2010; Zeithaml et al., 2008). Williams and Cappuccini-Ansfield (2007) state that introduce of tuition fees will force universities to act as a provider of a service and be more responsive to students needs. Rolfe (2002, p. 171) emphasized that introduce of tuition fees could change the students' view to education from a recipient for a free service into a consumer for the education service. Gruber et al., (2010) mentioned that "maintain that fee-paying students may expect value for money and behave more like consumers" (p. 106).

Gruber et al., (2010) explained that universities are expected to providing excellent learning environments for its students further to provides a well-supported lecturers, and appropriate support services. Arambewela & Hall (2008) concluded that The Education construct (lecturers) shows that good access to lecturers and quality of teaching and the feedback from lecturers are perceived to be the most important factors that effects on satisfaction of students, where the lecturers are the primary contact of the students for both academic and

non academic issues. Regarding to curriculum structure Tsinidou et al., (2010) explained that student value on experience is connecting with market demand directly. Further, students believe that "elective modules are quite important since they provide the opportunity to customize their studies and get an insight into areas of specialization as early as possible" (p.242). Md. Zabid and Harun (2004) concluded that four factors which are programme issues, physical, fees and others explained 16.2% of the relationship between perceived service quality and students' satisfaction. Information resources could be an important factor of service quality for the higher educational environment (Tyran, 2006).

Gronroos (1984), and Lethinen and Lethinen (1982) identify organization image as an important indicator of quality. According to Gronroos Model of service quality Technical quality and functional quality will result in corporate image, therefore corporate image service quality mediate the relationship between image and student satisfaction, this model prove that image and service quality perception as drivers (antecedents) for customer satisfaction. In the same vein, Satisfaction and corporate image are mediating variables which can consider as drivers of student loyalty, Consequently, students' satisfaction with the service that university provide assumed to have a positive association with the image of the university (Helgesen and Nesset, 2011). Because that corporate image has an impact on customer' perceptions, thus a favorable and well-known corporate image is an asset for the organization (Kang and James, 2004).

Based on the discussion above and literature review, the table 2.1 shows the significant relationship of the study variables.

Table 2.1: Previous Studies Results on Service Quality Dimensions in Higher Education Context

Previous Studies of Significant (- , +) Relationships of The Studied Variables

Name	year	TA	EM	AS	RS	RL	TU	FA	LE	CU	IN	IM	LO	RG
Lethinen and Lethinen	*1982*											+		
Gronroos	*1984*											+		
Crompton and MacKay	*1989*	+	+	+	+	+								
Parasuraman et al.,	*1991*	+	+	+	+	+								
Kwan and Ng	*1999*	+								+				
Caruana et al.,	*2000*						+							
McDougall and Levesque	*2000*						+							
Johnson et al.,	*2001*	+	+	+	+	+	+					+		
Lien and Yu	*2001*						+							
Chiu	*2002*									+				
Palacio	*2002*											+		
Ham	*2003*	+	+	+	+	+								
Holdford and Patkar	*2003*	+			+									
Kao	*2003*						+							+
Brown	*2004*													+
Kang and James	*2004*	+	+	+	+	+						+		
Lagrosen et al.,	*2004*							NS		+				

Sohail and Shaikh	2004				+			+		+		+		
Tan and Kek	2004							+		+				
Zabid and Harun	2004						+			+				
Mai	2005											+		
Ott	2005						+							
Tyran	2006		+	+	+	+					+			
Kao	2007						NS			+		+		
Angell and Heffernan	2008						+							
Arambewela and Hall	2008								+			+		
Clemes	2008			+			+							
Kelso	2008							+						+
Tahar	2008	+	+	+	+	+					+			
Yang	2008	+	+			+								
Al-Alak	2009							+	+					
Liang and Zhang	2009						+							
Butt	2010							+	+	+				+
Duque and Weeks	2010								+	+		+		
Gruber et al.,	2010								-	+		-		

Letcher	2010								+	+	+			
Moro-Egido and Panades	2010						+			+				
Munteanu et al.,	2010									+				
Qureshi et al.,	2010				+	+						+		
Ramseook-Munhurrun et al.,	2010		+		+									
Salvador-Ferrer	2010	NS	+	+	+	NS								
Sri et al.,	2010		+		+			+						
Tsinidou et al.,	2010							+		+			+	
Usman	2010	+	+	+	+	+		+		+			+	
Zeshan st al.,	2010	+	+	+	+	+								
Sultan and Wong	2010											+		
Dapkevicius and Melnikas	2011						+							
Helgesen and Nesset	2011											+		
Kong and Muthusamy	2011											+		
Ikwuagwu	2011													+
Radder and Han	2011	+	+											
Sumaedi et al.,	2011						+							
Al-Alak and Alnaser	2012	+	+	+	NS	+								
Katircioglu et al.,	2012	+	+	+	+	+								
Tuan	2012	+	+	+	+	+	+	+						

3. Conclusion and Implications

The current paper seeks to achieve three major aspects of service quality and student satisfaction. First is to highlight on the concepts of service quality and student satisfaction. Second is to explore the major dimensions of service quality in higher education. Third is to propose theoretical framework to investigate the relationship between service quality dimensions and students satisfaction in Jordanian higher education. To achieve that, Emphasis on the conceptual and visionary aspects of service quality and students satisfaction, and analyze literature has been made.

While this study provides a number of contributions in term of conceptualization and literature for marketing research on higher education sector, The results indicated that there are eight critical variables needs further investigation and implementation in Jordanian higher education sector. Moreover, The service quality dimensions identified in this study would provides comprehensive picture of the relationship between service quality dimensions and students satisfaction which is assisting higher education institutions to develop suitable strategies aimed to build up their ability to cope the market challenges and demands.

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