

Assessing Service Quality of B-Schools in Kerala

¹Arundev P. R., ²Prof. Dr. Siby Zacharias

¹Research Scholar,² Research Guide,

School of Management and Business Studies, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala, India

Email – ¹arundevpr@gmail.com, ²sibyzac@gmail.com,

Abstract: *The service quality of Business schools in Kerala was assessed. The five dimensions of service quality in higher education sector as per SERVQUAL scale (tangibles, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and reliability) were analysed. The gap between the expectation of students about the services provided by B-Schools and the perception about the service received is measured. Totally 300 samples were collected from the students studying in different B-Schools in Kerala. It is found out that there exists service quality gap in all dimensions, especially in connection with humane related factors. This study will benefit Business Schools in Kerala by assessing the gaps in different service quality dimensions.*

Key Words: *Service Quality, SERVQUAL, Expectation, Perception, Higher Education.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Assuring the quality of service has become mandatory in higher educational institutions across the world as a result of increase in the competition to attract students. Service quality has become vital factors which determine the success of the institution on long term basis. This study intends to measure expectations and perceptions of students to determine their satisfaction of service quality provided at different B-Schools in Kerala. The service quality measurement concept has become a subject which attracts the attention of many researchers (1);(2);(3);(4);(5);(6); (7); (8);. An institution's process and outcome will be having an effect on the judgment of students about the quality of service provided by the institution. The process includes how the major service customers are being treated in the service encounter and the outcome is the actual results that have been experienced by the customers (9). The students will interact with the institution on daily basis and they are experiencing the varying degree of service. The higher education institutions are trying to become more student-centric, thus the perception of students regarding the experience of higher education has become progressively important. (10) ;(11)

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

The service quality concept can be defined as an intangible product which cannot be owned or stored, but it comes to the existence at the time and place where it is delivered for the consumption. Quality in general terms and service quality particularly accepted as complex as well as multi-dimensional in nature.(12). The service quality scale, SERVQUAL is based on the difference between the expectation and performance; (13). He finds ten dimensions to measure service quality and developed a conceptual model for service quality. The dimensions are these dimensions are reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding/knowing the customer, and tangibles.

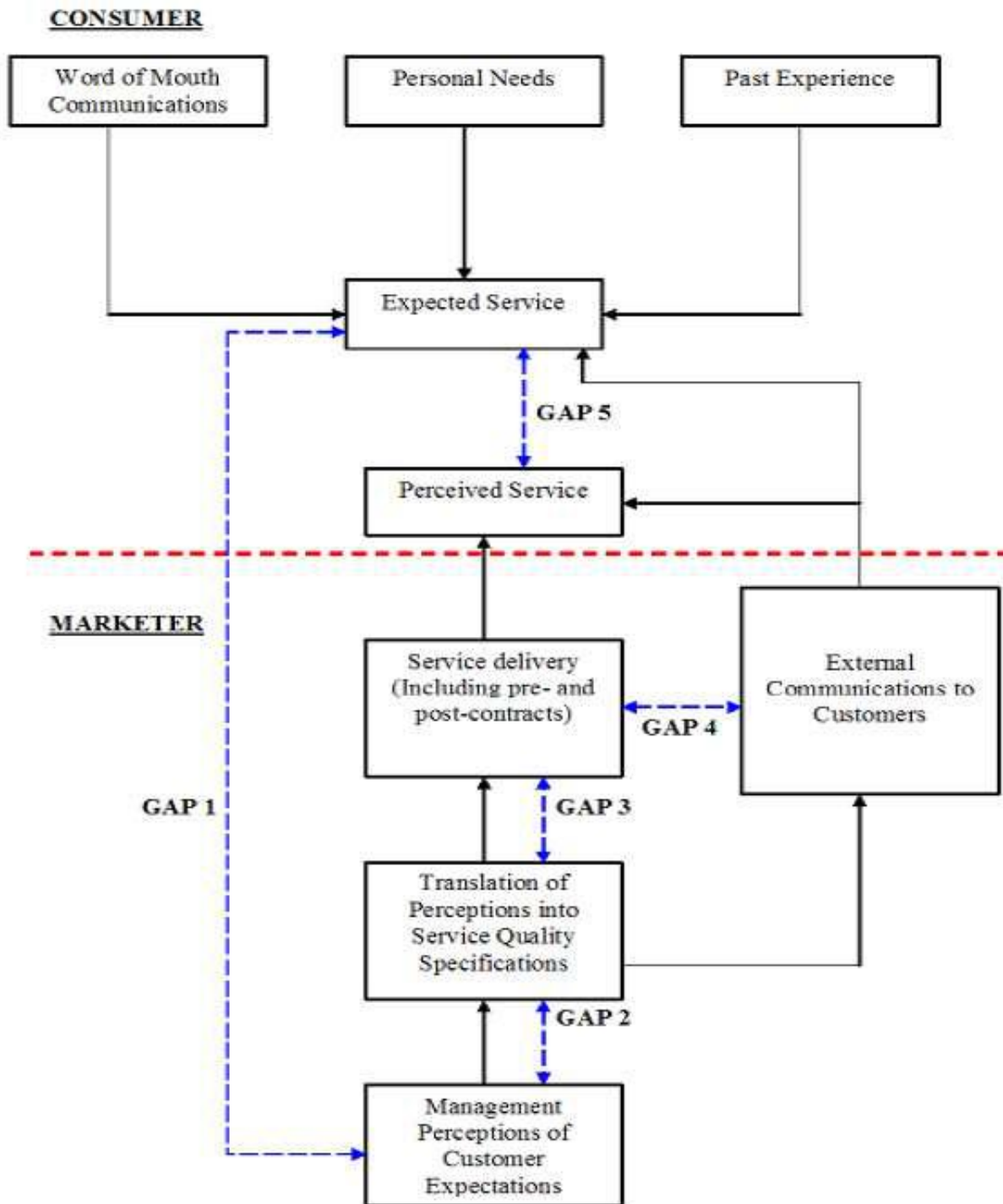
Service quality is the perception of customers, derived from the comparison of their feeling about what a service organization should offer which is a result of their expectations and the perception about the actual performance of the actual service received from the organization (14)

The gap between the customer's expectation about the quality of service and the perceived quality of actual service received can be explained in the gap model. As per this model, the expectations of customers are the disconfirmation and the customer makes a comparison of experience he had before the service consumption with the experience after the service consumption. Based on this comparison of pre-consumption and post-consumption experience, the satisfaction or dissatisfaction towards a specific service will be formed.

The Gaps Model

Customer expectations are the standard reference points that the customer brought to the service experience by the customer and the customer perception is depends on the actual service experience. The gap model specifies 5 gaps that is the shortfall between expectation of service and the perception of actual service delivered. Customer expectations need to be clearly understood and the gap should be identified from a customer perspective (15). The gap model identifies 5 gaps that are the shortfalls between expectation of service levels and the perception of actual service delivery (1)

Figure No: 1- GAP Model



Source: Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985: 44)

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

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

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

Gap 3 - The difference between the customer service quality specifications and the actual service delivered by the marketer.

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

Gap 5 - The difference between the customers' perceived service and expected service.

This study evaluates the gap 5 service quality in Kerala B –School context. Gap 5 is the difference between the customers' actual expectation of service quality and the perception of what the customers received as service quality. According to the SERVQUAL model developed (13), customer expectations and perceptions in educational contexts are, to a great extent, influenced by tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

In this study following dimensions (13) of service quality will be studied.

- *Tangibles*: Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials
- *Reliability*: Ability to dependably and accurately perform the promised service
- *Responsiveness*: Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service
- *Assurance*: Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust & confidence
- *Empathy*: Caring, individualized attention that the firm provides its customers

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY :

The study aims at find out the service quality gap between expected service by the customer and the perception about the quality of service received. The samples are students studying for MBA course in different Business Schools in Kerala. Sample size is 300. Systematic sampling method is used as the method of sampling. Questionnaire Survey method is used for the study. The present questionnaires with Likert scale had been distributed to the systematically selected samples and get it filled from them by the researcher. The study is exploratory in nature. Data collected from primary as well as secondary sources.

Measurement and Instrument

SERVQUAL survey includes two sections. Customer Service Expectation and the Customer Service Perception of the service actually received will be measured. A five point Likert scale was used (5= Strongly Agree, 4= Agree. 3= Neutral, 2= Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree. In service expectation section, the extend of respondents belief in the characteristics of an ideal B-School described in the statement and asked them to mark their responses. And in the perceptions session, the respondents were asked to indicate their extent to which the B-school possesses the characteristics described in the statement. They survey was composes of five dimensions.

Physical and Academic Services – in the first dimension, the physical facilities as well as the ability of the service provider to accurately and reliably fulfil the service which is promised will be measured. The statements used encompass attributes of *Tangibles and Reliability* (16).

Commitment to serve –in the second dimension, the willingness to help the customer and offer prompt service will be measured. These statements used encompass the attributes of *Responsiveness* (16)

Human Factors – in the third dimension, the provision of caring, individual attention to customers will be measured. These statements used encompass the attributes of *Empathy* (16).

Visual Aspects – in the fourth dimension the appearance of equipment, personnel and communication materials. The statements used encompass the attributes of *Tangibles* (16)

General Attitudes – in the fifth dimension the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence. The statements used encompass the attributes of *Assurance* (16).

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

Table No: 1- Respondents Profile

Description	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Gender			
Male	154	51	100
Female	146	49	
Year of Study			
1 st Year	150	50	100
2 nd Year	150	50	
Resident Status			

Urban	95	32	100
Rural	99	33	
Semi Urban	106	35	

Source: Primary Data

Table No: 2- SERVQUAL Index

Dimensions	Score
Physical and Academic Services	-1.108
Commitment to Serve	-2.020
Human Factors	-2.855
Visual Aspects	-1.063
General Attitudes	-1.630
Overall SERVQUAL	-1.7352

Source: Primary Data

Figure No: 2- Service Quality Gap

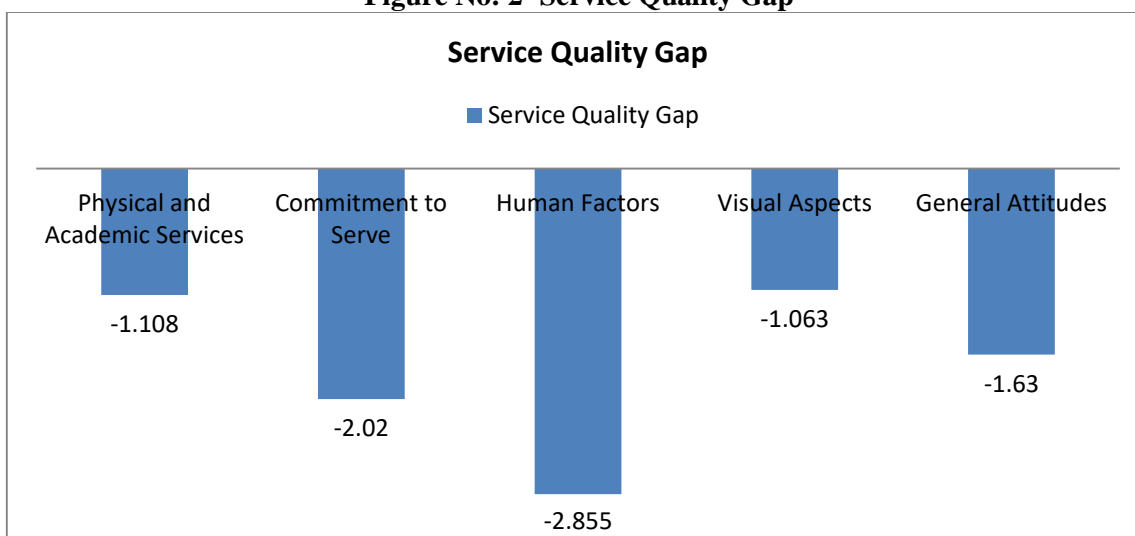


Figure No: 3- Over all Service Quality Gap



The overall Service quality gap -1.7352, It means there is a considerable gap between the quality expectation of the students and the perception about the service quality. The Quality expectation is more than the quality perception. Detailed discussion about each dimension follows.

Physical and Academic Services Gap

In the analysis of this dimension it is found that there is gap between the expectation and perception in connection with Physical and Academic Services. When comparing with other dimensions. The gap is comparatively less. The overall average gap score found to be -1.108. This gap needs to be addressed, because the analysis proves that the actual service delivery is not up to the expectation of the students. It proves that there is deficiency in physical facilities as well as the ability of the service provider to accurately and reliably fulfil the service which is promised.

Commitment to Serve Gap.

In the analysis of this dimension it is found that there is gap between expectation and perception in connection with Commitment to Serve. The overall average gap score found to be (-2.020). This is a considerable gap. The analysis proves that the actual service delivery is below the expectation of the students. It study proves that there is a deficiency in willingness to help the students and offer prompt service. As far as any institution is concerned, it is very important to create a perception in the minds of students that the institution is always ready to help the students and always there with the students with offering prompt service. So this gap needs to be addressed.

Human Factors Gap.

In the analysis of this dimension it is found that there is gap between expectation and perception in connection with the Human Factor. The overall average gap score found to be (-2.855). It is the highest gap compared to the other dimensions. The analysis proves that there is a wide and considerable gap between the human factor quality expected by the customers and the actual human factor quality perceived by the students. It is proved that there is a considerable deficiency in the provision of caring, individual attention to the students. Human factor is very important in any education institution context. The Human aspect need to be incorporated more into the B School context and this gap need to be addressed.

Visual Factor Gap

In the analysis of this dimension it is found that there is gap between the expectation and perception related to Visual aspect. The overall gap score found to be (-1.063). It is the smallest gap among other dimensions. Even though the gap is small compared to other dimensions, it is important that there exist a gap between the visual factor expected and perceived by the students. It is proved that there is a shortage in the appearance of equipment, personnel and communication materials.

General Attitudes Gap

In the analysis of this dimension it is found that there is a gap between the expectation and perception related to the General Attitude aspect. The overall gap score found to be (-1.630). It is the third largest gap among other dimensions. The analysis proved that there is a considerable gap in the general attitude expected by students towards the students from the institution and the perception of the same. It is found that there is a considerable deficiency in the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.

6. FINDINGS AND RECCOMONDATION :

It is found from the analysis that there is deficiency of service provided by the B Schools in Kerala in the student perception context. So that the students are dissatisfied with the service provided The gap is analysed, the gap means the difference between the expectation or the level of a particular aspect of quality needed by the students as far as they are concerned and the actual service quality perceived by the students or the feeling of the level of fulfilment of the expected service by the management and staff of the B School. Among the six dimensions constituting the overall service quality, the highest gap has contributed by the Human factors. Human factors more specifically means, the provision of caring and individual attention to the students by the human factors (teaching, non-teaching and other individuals in the institution). Here the provision of caring and individual attention and the humane touch provided by the B Schools are not up to the level expected by the students. There is a lack of care and individual attention to the students. The second highest gap has contributed by the commitment to serve dimension. Commitment to serve means, willingness to help the customer and offer prompt service. The found out gap explain that the commitment shown by the institutions and willingness to help offered by the institutions are not reaching the level expected by the customers. The commitment level and the level of willingness to help need to be increased. The dimension shown the third highest is General attitudes. General attitude explains the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence. It is found that a considerable gap exist in this dimension. The other two service quality dimensions which have shown a comparatively less gap are Physical and academic services as well as visual aspects. There is gap in these two dimensions, but gap is less compared to other dimensions. It is very clear that the humane aspects like provision of caring, individual attention, willingness to help, offer prompt service, knowledge and courtesy of employees, employees' ability to convey trust and confidence etc. are lacking more. The physical or non-humane

elements like physical facilities and visual factors like appearance of equipment, personnel and communication materials have less quality gap. Institutions are trying to increase the quality by improving the physical and visual facilities. At the same time which is more lacking is the humane factors. Business schools in Kerala should focus on reducing the gap between expectation and perception to zero level. Institutions should focus on improving the humane factors more than the non-human factors.

7. CONCLUSION:

The study assessed the service quality of Business Schools in Kerala and to find out whether there exists any service quality gap with regard to the services provided by Business Schools in Kerala. All five dimensions of service quality of higher education like physical and academic services, commitment to serve, human factors, visual factors, and general attitude have analysed. It is found out that there exists gap between expected services and the perception of services received. It is revealed that in connection with the human factors, there exist higher gap so that the dissatisfaction to the human factors are higher. And there exists lesser gap in connection with physical dimensions, so that the dissatisfaction is lesser. The Business Schools should focus in the efforts to reduce the quality gap especially in humane areas, so that in can have higher student satisfaction level.

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