



ASSESSING THE SATISFACTION OF STUDENTS STUDYING AT ADAMAWA STATE POLYTECHNIC, YOLA

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Abstract

The customer satisfaction has been interpreted by several scholars in the past. We do not criticize or apprise anyone. However, there is one common motivating factor in understanding customer satisfaction of any group or organization; that it can help in bringing up the performance. We strongly favor that there do exist a trade-off between customer satisfaction and productivity. For the students of Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola, the expectations are huge and a number of them are even beyond the reach of the management to fulfill. Therefore, it is imperative to understand their expectations first and then perceptions. Therefore, we have used one of the most renowned techniques; SERVQUAL, to understand the gaps between expectations and perceptions. Also, it helped us distinguish tangible and intangible needs of the students. During the interviews, we clearly realized that a majority of them are comparing the polytechnic with institutions that are outside the country and are independent for over 100 years and are part of countries which are fully developed. Therefore, it is meaningless to compare with these institutions at this stage at least in terms of infrastructure and other tangible developments. However, there were a number of issues which the researchers clearly understand as the issues of management and can be handled and controlled with proper governance. Some of the issues, such as "escalation free fee structure", "conducting exams on time", "and providing necessary help on time" are basic issues which students have highlighted under reliability. Therefore, it will be very nice to see if a large sample has a similar opinion and then Polytechnic management has to make significant changes even if requires some investment. Also, the responses highlighted in the quantitative analysis brought some very trivial issues, such as drug addiction, thefts, late admissions and admissions of non-qualified students, inexperienced lecturers, etc. These issues are very much in control of the management to handle. However, some new policies, decisions have to be taken by the management to rectify these issues. Overall, as a researcher on the study, we would strongly recommend that small positive steps if taken on continuous basis will lead to monumental changes for the polytechnic. It is understandable that the Polytechnic faces a tough financial situation. The only task for the management is to validate that the things highlighted by a group of few students is actually at large throughout the institute. Adamawa State Polytechnic has to come up with a plan to handle the issues raised in this study. Based on the seriousness of the issues and available funds, the issues have to be prioritized.

Keywords:

Expectation, Perception, service quality, satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The Polytechnic, as other institutions has a number of issues and among all those issues; the issue of student's satisfaction & high number of non-accredited program are the ones which the management deserves immediate attention.

The institute has twenty accredited programs out of the fifty-nine programs offered (excluding consultancy and Preliminary programs). The researchers seek to assess the satisfaction of the students studying across all departments for both accredited and non-accredited programs. The satisfaction levels are assessed using SERVQUAL (Service Quality), one of the most popular techniques in assessing service quality gaps.

The data are collected through structured and unstructured interviews with students and lecturers. In case of students, they are asked to rate their expectations on a number of services and products should be offered by the polytechnics in general and then their perception on the similar services and products offered by Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola are captured through the surveys.

Further, the students and Lecturers participated in a number of unstructured interviews which will lead to qualitative analysis which can help the management draw more meaningful understanding of the entire situation at the polytechnic.

Aim and objectives of the study

The research aims to help the management to make strategic changes in the overall functioning of the polytechnic and improve on the already built reputation in the state and country at large. The problem discussed in this research has been an old problem faced by the polytechnic for more than a decade and would like to correct it to a certain degree through this research study.

- Assess the satisfaction of the existing students with the polytechnic on all 5 elements covered in the SERVQUAL study.
- Identify pain areas and suggest the best possible solutions to improve the satisfaction of the students.
- Identify issues from lecturers' perspective.

Strategic & Administrative Importance

The research work will strategically help the polytechnic correct/change some of the existing policies related with the administration. The management may wish to review some of its decisions, such as starting late evening classes, make-shift accommodation for students who gets late home while studying, to and fro transportation from a few important areas, construction of new facility areas, and a dedicated placements department to help the students in getting recruited to their preferred area of profession; introduction of Polytechnics' new "code of conduct", to manage drug addiction, theft issues, dressing code among others.

Administratively, qualitative interviews from Lecturers and students will help the polytechnic to get the areas where it (polytechnic) has been spending more resources and time but with minimal marginal benefit. These areas can be slightly ignored and freed resources can be utilized to focus on demanding and trivial issues.

SERVQUAL Findings:

The analysis of students' satisfaction at the Polytechnic is done using a popular performance measurement technique called SERVQUAL. It is a multiple item scale for measuring perception and expectations of the targeted respondents on a number of service quality dimensions. Using 22-item instrument, SERVQUAL technique helps in identifying gaps in the service quality. A large sample of 55 interviews is used to collect data for the SERVQUAL analysis. The data is collected through online survey hosted on Survey Monkey, one of the largest surveys hosting company. The data collected through the survey forms the basis of SERVQUAL findings.

The 22-point SERVQUAL instrument covers a number of service dimensions to quantify, compare and analyze the difference in the students' expectations and perceptions on service quality. A rating scale of 1 to 7 is used to understand students' agreement with the service.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework of this study is anchored on the SERVQUAL model, which conceptualizes service quality as a multidimensional construct comprising Reliability, Assurance, Tangibility, Empathy, and Responsiveness. These five dimensions are treated as independent variables influencing Perceived Service Quality, which in turn affects Student Satisfaction. (Hassan, S., Shamsudin, M. F., & Mustapha, I. 2020).

In this framework, the SERVQUAL dimensions collectively and individually influence students' perceptions of service quality within the Polytechnic. Perceived Service Quality acts as a mediating variable that translates service encounters into overall satisfaction judgments.

General Dimensions of Service Quality (SERVQUAL)

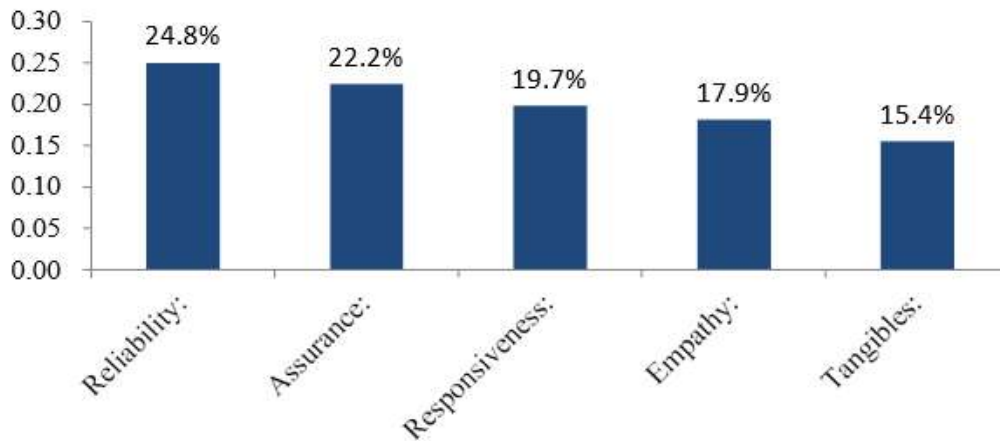
On a generic basis, the students were asked to rate the importance of service quality dimensions, such as *tangibles*, *assurance*, *responsiveness*, *reliability*, and *empathy* in the beginning of the survey. The students quoted different weights for each service dimension making sure that the total should add up to 100. It helped the researchers in quantifying the importance of each dimension against the other dimensions. This also helps to compare the results of the same dimensions when asked in a different way through the 22 statements asked in the second part of the survey. To improve the understanding of the students on each service dimension, the attributes of each service dimension was highlighted in the survey:

Tangibles: It accounts for physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel.

Reliability: It is the ability of the firm to conduct the promised service dependably and accurately. **Responsiveness:** Willingness of the polytechnic to help students and provide prompt service. **Assurance** (including competence, courtesy, credibility and security): It constitutes the knowledge and ability of the staff to inspire trust and confidence.

Empathy (including access, communication, understanding the students): The individualized attention given by the polytechnic to the students.

(Adapted from Parasurman A, Zeithaml Valerie A, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992)

Figure 1. The average scores are illustrated below:

General Dimensions of Service Quality (Contd...)

The students of Adamawa State Polytechnic have clearly pointed out that *reliability* is the most important factor in the service delivery for them. A majority of the courses are not accredited and the management considers that the concern of the students is justified as the Polytechnic has a number of non-accredited programs diluting students' confidence in the study at the Polytechnic. Also, most of the programs run by the polytechnic are professional courses which make the students more conscious about reliability of the program as they directly lead to employment after the course. Therefore, students have expressed higher expectations in the reliability index.

Assurance has also been rated very highly by the students among the other service dimensions. The students demand assurance from the polytechnic management on both the academic courses and their usefulness in the employment. A lot of students' study in the polytechnic to acquire skills that can immediately help them secure a job after the completion of the course. Therefore, a high rating on assurance is justified.

Responsiveness is also rated high on the index. The students concern for responsiveness is reasonable as it facilitates the students in completing the program effectively and in the timely manner.

The results pointed out that *tangibles*' is not a very important dimension for the students as they have rated the dimension lowest among all other dimensions. A number of students in the polytechnic are concerned about the success of their enrolled program than the tangibles benefit from the Polytechnic. Also, the students understand that the country's overall infrastructure is weak but growing.

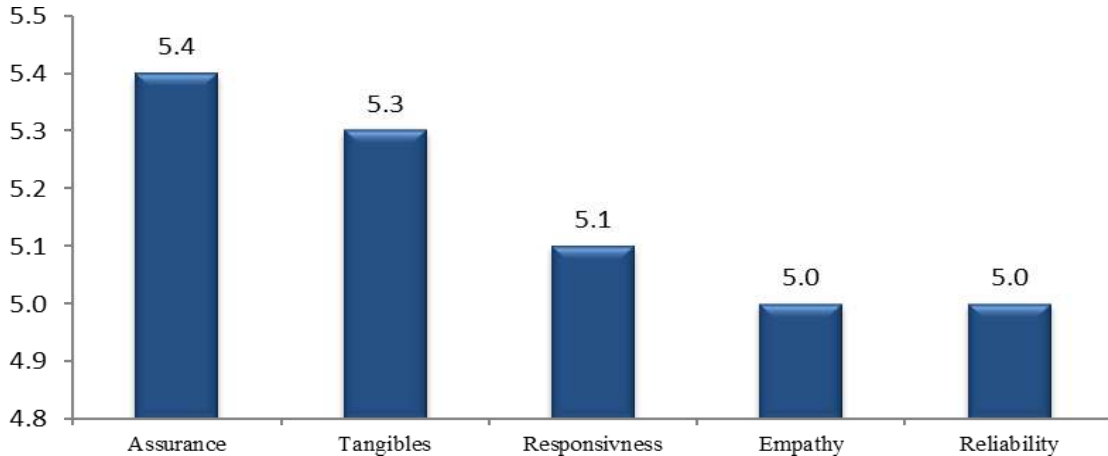
Therefore, the expectations are lower on the building and other tangible attributes.

Empathy is also another dimension which is not rated higher by the students. There can be multiple reasons for this response. Some of the students expect that the polytechnic knows the ground issues and therefore the expectations are slightly lower. On the contrary, (Ladhari, R. 2008) highlights that people rate their expectations lower on certain service dimensions if those are met. A number of students might also think that the polytechnic is giving attention to the students especially the lecturers who are expected to know each student performance in the class.

Expectations Scores

All the students were asked 22 statements on expectations in the beginning of the survey. This was important to understand the expectations of the students from the polytechnic in general so that the quality of service from the Adamawa State Polytechnic can be benchmarked. The graph highlighted below show the results of this section:

Figure 2: Dimension weights



The expectations of the polytechnic students are consistent across all the service dimensions. The students rated all the dimensions in the range of 5.0 to 5.4. "Assurance" has been rated as the top most service dimension by the students. Being a professional institution, students do expect assurance from the polytechnic on a number of aspects such as job prospects, international quality standards, quality of education, etc. All these elements will shape the future of each of the student at the Polytechnic. Therefore, high expectations on this dimension are understandable.

The appearance of *tangibles* high up in the table suggested that the student expectations are significantly high on the physical aspects and infrastructure of the institutions as well. The Polytechnic has made several improvements in the past which has significantly improved the look and feel of the campus-many are ongoing. Therefore, we might see a small gap in tangibles when we compare with the perceptions.

Responsiveness, *empathy*, and *reliability* has been rated lower at 5 and 5.1. The students' expectations on these aspects are lower. There can be a number of reasons for this development. Either, the students' requirement has been met well on these fronts or they know that it is difficult for the institutions to score high on these elements due to lack of government support and country's overall limited resources and infrastructure.

Also, it has been quoted by experts that the expectations get lower when the needs are being met in those particular areas (Ladhari, R. 2008). Therefore, there can be a mix of reasons for this response from the students.

Gap scores

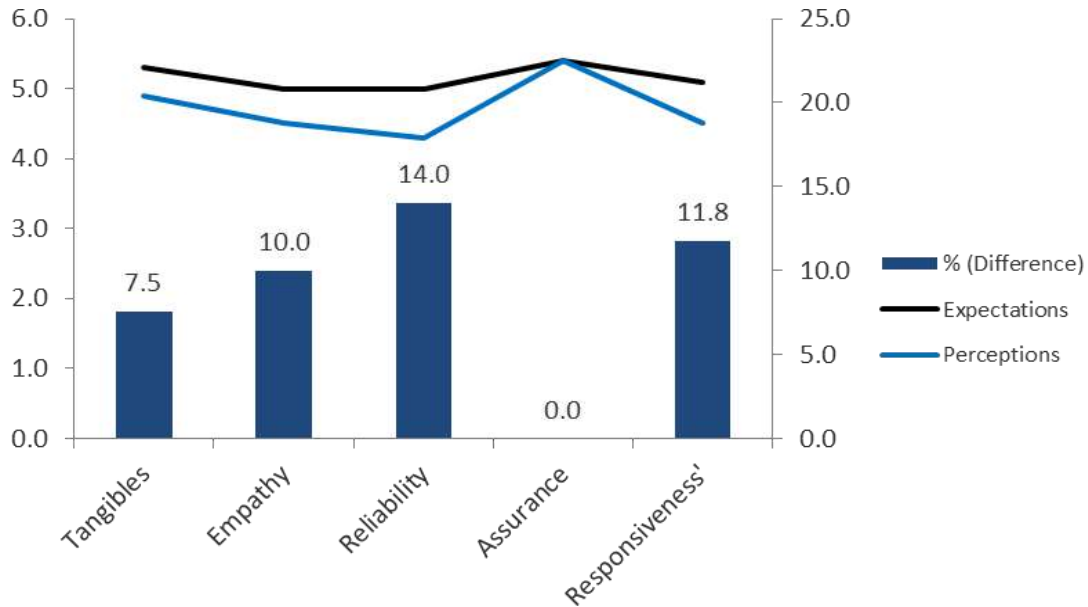
The gap scores are calculated using the GAP model (Parasuraman et al.1985). When we subtract the expectation scores from the perception scores, it gives us the difference (also called gap). According to (Salomi and Miguel 2005), SERVQUAL is a way to assess customer

satisfaction as a result of the difference between expectations and performance. It was developed through studies carried out in the service sectors such as retail banking, credit card services, electrical appliances repair and maintenance services, and long-distance telephone services. The following equations were identified by (Cronin et al., 2000), in their study:

$$\text{SERVQUAL} = \text{Performance} - \text{Expectations} \quad \text{SERVPERF} = \text{Performance}$$

In the expectations and perceptions, the results are highlighted below:

Figure 3: Average percentage gap breakdown by dimensions



Adamawa State Polytechnic students have expressed mixed feeling for the institution. Although, they have clearly highlighted that their expectations on the top-quality element, *reliability* are not met adequately whereas *Assurance*, another service quality element rated higher by the students on the expectations, has been met adequately as shown in the figure above.

The students have expressed deep concern on "*reliability*" as a service quality dimension. The gap reported in reliability is 14% which is highest among all the other dimensions. The students have highlighted concerns on the *reliability* of the software offered by the institution. (As highlighted by the students for statement, "Adamawa State Polytechnic students can download a number of software services free of cost at the click of a button from the online portal of the polytechnic"). Some of the other main statements where the gap has been significantly higher are "Adamawa State Polytechnic has a consistent process of admissions with escalation free fees structure and entry requirements do not change overnight" and "Adamawa State polytechnic conducts all programs in a timely manner and adhere to all important dates and schedules as promised to the students". The students have also raised concern over the reliability of exam schedules and other important program dates.

Responsiveness' is another very important service quality dimension where the gap has been significantly higher. Yola has been very slow on a number of aspects related with responsiveness. Statements such as, "The administrative services of Adamawa State Polytechnic are prompt and highly responsive. "Students can change their accommodation

place, class, or can avail other administrative services without any hassle in a quick time" have received very low scores. It clearly shows that there are administrative issues leading to dissatisfaction of students. Although, students have highlighted that the institution have been successful in maintaining students' record (as highlighted in statement, "Adamawa State Polytechnic keeps student's record accurate, up-to-date, and conveniently accessible to students even from a remote location") and giving them remote access using latest software. It shows that the Polytechnic is not so responsive to technology to that extent, which prompted the students queries on Administration not being real-time responsive to their requirements.

The negative gap of 10% in *empathy* as a service dimension is also an area of concern. One of the major points where the gap scores have been significantly higher is the financial support to the students from the institution. There was a significant gap of 38% on one of empathy statement, "Adamawa State Polytechnic award scholarships to the needy students, and keep low fees levels and provide financial aid to students".

There are a number of students at the Polytechnic who hails from small villages expecting scholarships as they come from economically weaker families. However, the polytechnic has not been able to consistently award scholarships to needy students which have diluted students' confidence in the institution's financial aid programs.

The respondent reported gap in service dimension, *tangibles* at 7.5%. Some of the important areas where the gaps were significant include: infrastructure of the institution, variety and range of programs, student's health & safety, and accounting standards. Students have raised concerns in building and infrastructure of the institution. Also, the students have pointed out that the institution

does not have a wide range of courses, which is area of concern for the students.

Qualitative Analysis: Lecturers "Perspective" Funding

One pressing issue which has been highlighted repeatedly by the staff across all major departments are given funds in form of running-cost directly as one of the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE's) requirements. The management has complained of some staff of funds misappropriation, hence to be controlled by the school Deans. However, majority cited this issue as purely lack of funds - may be/not.

The lecturers claim that most of the departments are over booked and have more than the stipulated student's strength in each course; but the management has not complemented this with adequate funding for the departments and excess load compensation to them (staff). They claim that the management has enough money to substantiate the issue. However, the management claims another side of the story that the polytechnic is in crisis and needs more government funding. They are allocating proportionately to the departments controlled at the various schools.

Grossly off beam Student-Teacher ratio

Almost, all the students and Staff complained that the classes for every course are over-crowded and are accommodating students more than the number stipulated in the institution guidelines. The Staff clearly complained that they find it difficult to focus on every student. A number of them even cited (I don't even know how many are there and who they are. I just come and teach and I know that I can't even think of talking to each one of them as it would

probably take me weeks to just say hello to each of them individually) that we do not end up meeting all the students during the entire course.

Online Library Missing

The staff strongly condemned the management for not creating an online library which they have been promising for years. The staff demanded some software which gets free licenses with old applications which often break while working. They complained that the management shows that it is working towards the problem.

Thefts

There have been numerous cases of burglaries across the institute. Some of the staff even reported that their staff rooms were mobbed. These activities are more prevalent at night - Laptops, Desktop computers, Armored cables, Fans in classrooms, food stuff of students even Handsets and wears are items of high patronage by the thieves. The measures taken by the management of recent has reduced theft cases.

Infrastructure

The lecturers also complained that some of the polytechnic buildings are due for renovation. For over 2 decades, the building has not been renovated. The classes are small and students are many. The management has been adding additional benches in the classrooms and beds in the existing hostel rooms which is making the life of the students even more difficult. Its worthy of note that many infrastructural constructions are on-going-there might be improvement at later end.

Qualitative Analysis: Students-perspective non-qualified students

A lot of students highlighted that the institute crowd comprise a number of non-qualified students who have managed to enter the polytechnic with entry qualifications that they could not defend, wasting a lot of time in getting these students up to the mark and often they do fail at the end of assessment. It clearly leads to dilution in the effort of the Lectures to teach qualified and intelligent deserving students.

Late admissions

It has been observed that several students suddenly show up in the classes. Generally, these students are late admissions recruited in the 2nd half of the course. These students' further make things complicated as they haven't studied from the beginning and often request lecturers to explain things over and over again. In the end, a number of these students fail. The management clearly knows this phenomenon but has ignored due to pressure for quest of admission. They are concerned about getting the admission fee.

Inexperienced Lecturers

A number of students complained about the ability of some Lecturers to teach. They often get stuck in contradicting statements. Often, they have not been successful in answering students' questions due to their lack of ability on the subject matter. These cases have been observed by the entire class but students inform that they often remain quite as they think that the management will not act and moreover if the Lecture will get to know then he/she will deduct the marks in the final exams.

Drug Addiction

Drug addiction is rampant among the students and some staff. Lecturers often ignore and walk-away from such students without taking serious actions. The management if as a policy can trace the students who get the drugs inside the campus, but no enough commitment on ground yet.

Management is called to take decisive measures to curtail this criminal act.

Conclusion

The overall findings from the SERVQUAL exercise suggested that the gaps between the expectations and perceptions are not very significant. The Adamawa State Polytechnic has the opportunity to improve on a number of quality issues to improve the students' satisfaction levels. One of the most interesting developments of this analysis suggested that the students in accredited department are not really concerned about the non-accreditation of the courses but the otherwise.

In fact, the overall results suggested that the satisfaction of the students on this aspect has been more than the expectations (as per statement, "Adamawa State Polytechnic has most of its programs accredited and recognized by the government which means students graduating from the polytechnic have strong trust and confidence in the diploma/degree awarded by the polytechnic"). This might be an important development for the management. Reviewing the results of this task, the management might need to rethink their strategy as the students have shifted their concern from "lack of programs" to "lack of accredited programs" which means that the students expect that the polytechnic should work towards accrediting more programs giving them better recognition. Students and Lecturers both expect that the institute should not lack on technology and issues such as online library and updated software should be heard and resolved.

The students are also concerned about the IT services especially the software. The Polytechnic has to find solution to this problem as early as possible as technology is changing at a drastic pace across the world and educational institutions are expected to adopt them first so that the students do not feel uncomfortable when they see the same technology at their work place.

There are clear issues on managing things properly. Some of the issues such as drug addiction can be immediately brought to end to change the image of the institute.

Therefore, with little funds within the budgets, this can be achieved with a few tough disciplinary actions as well as certain good policies and decisions.

The management can rely on the results as the students answered the SERVQUAL questionnaire without highlighting any type of personal information. Also, some of the students used computers in the ICT Centre and their smart phones without using their login information to ensure that the identity of the students is kept confidential. All this was done to ensure that the responses are not skewed and are in agreement with the real situation at the Polytechnic.

Recommendation

- I. More effort to accredit courses that are not accredited.
- II. Develop students' portal to standard.

- III. Speedy completion of E-library for at the desk modern/recent academic resources.
- IV. Running-cost to the Heads of Department directly and their activities be monitored.
- V. Management to introduce financial aid to the poor and needy students and keep fees lower.
- VI. Provide transportation to and fro for students of identified areas at a subsidized rate.
- VII. Staff excess work load be compensated accordingly to keep their moral high.
- VIII. More surveillance on the activities of thieves, drug pushers/addicts and terrorist actives on campus.
- IX. Additional classrooms, hostels common-rooms and recreational facilities should be given more attention.
- X. Measures be taken to check the entry qualification of the students as many cannot not measure up with their paper qualification.
- XI. Number of students admitted should be reduced to a manageable size. Inexperience lectures be checked and called to order.

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