Evaluating Service Quality of Higher Institutions in Oyo State

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Abstract: *In any given Academic Institutions of higher learning, a number of services are usually being provided. These services comprise of: Academic Services: Teaching, Research and Library Services; Administrative Services: Admission, Examination and Records, Students' Affairs, Students' Accounts, etc.; Environmental and Maintenance Services: Cleaning of Surroundings and Classrooms, Provision and Cleaning of Toiletry, Provision and Repairing of Furniture, etc. and Auxiliary Services: Health Services, Transportation, Canteen Services, Laundry, etc. There is no doubt that only key services are being carried out by campus management while part of the Environmental Services and Auxiliary Services are being contracted out. Whatever the situations are, the campus management and other participants in the provision of services within the campus always strive to give value in such critical services area to the students so as to prevent students' unrest within the campus which may arise as a result of poor quality of services. Therefore it becomes a responsibility on the part of the campus management and other stakeholders in service provision and delivery to meet the students' expectation which may differ from students' perception of the various services quality and thereby creating a gap that must be filled. This paper presents the results of using adapted SERVQUAL approach across a range of campus services. The results of the studies and the contribution of the SERQUAL to service development and continuous improvement within the campus are discussed.*
KeyWords: *Quality, Higher Institutions, Services, Education*

I.   Introduction:

In the commercial cycle, customers' satisfaction and loyalty, which are secured through high quality products and services that must meet customers' needs and provide value for money paid, are vital for survival of such organization in a competitive environment. Most academic institutions of higher learning have also come to realize this, especially with the rate at which several private academic institutions of higher learning are springing up in the country. Radical changes proposed by some of the orthodox academic institutions in Nigeria vis-à-vis the threat the private academic institutions of higher learning has necessitated a change in the way to plan and deliver best values through their various services within the campus.

On the campus, campus management and private operators of services are often doggedly involved in gaining an understanding of the needs of students, their expectations and priorities through opinion survey of the students, complaint of the students' union government and observations of campus community members on how to improve the quality of services being rendered. These approaches often ended up in collecting data on students' perceptions of services – measuring what the students think about the services they are receiving and not what they expect about the quality of the services being delivered to them. Without adequate information on both perception and expectation; then such feedback from students' opinion survey or observation can be highly misleading from a policy and operational perspective (Skelcher, 1992).

II.   Theoretical Framework

Many definitions exist for service quality (SERVQUAL), but one of the definitions that have considerable support is the Servqual model developed by Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1991) which stresses that customers assess service quality by comparing their expectations of service (SE) with their perception of services (SP) received. Service quality should be aimed at the needs of the consumer, present and future. The service quality occurs when service expectations (SE) are met or exceeded, but otherwise service gap exists. What make this to be so is the volatility of demand being placed on the service production system; which often arises as a result of the distinguishing attributes of service. Some of these attributes are about the facts that:

  i.   Services can not be stored; so it is difficult to use inventory to smooth out demand.
 ii.   Customers interact directly with the service production system with diverse needs.
iii.   Demand for services is directly influenced by customers' behaviour.

SE: SERVICE EXPECTATION
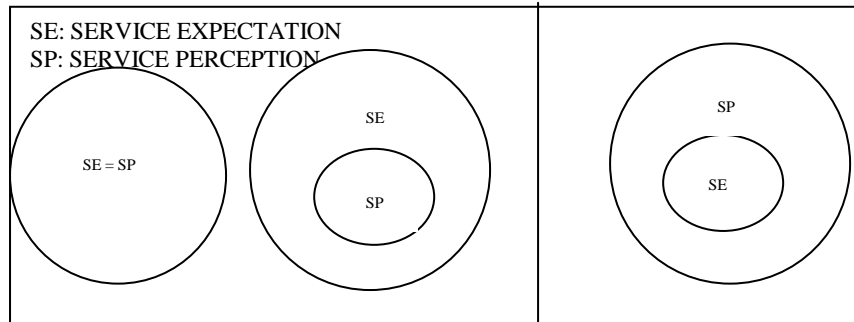SP: SERVICE PERCEPTION

SE = SP

SE

SP

SP

SE

Fig 1: Service quality

In measuring whether a service gap exist or not, the model relied on the weight assigned to each of the attributes for various aspect of the quality being measured. In 1985, Berry, Zeithaml and Parasuraman identified 10 general attributes or determinants of service quality which were used in a study that led to the following conclusions as reported by Heizer and Render (1999):

i. Consumers' perceptions of service quality result from a comparison of their before – service expectation with their actual service experience.
ii. Quality perceptions are derived from the service process as well as from the service outcome.
iii. Service quality is of two types; normal and exceptional.

From the above conclusion, like it has been stated before that where SE>= SP then the service quality is met in the hand of the customers but where SE<SP there is quality problem that must be met by bridging the quality gap that exist through building a total quality management that will constantly inspect some service points – like cashier stations in the bursary, screening stations in the admission office, etc.

The SERVQUAL model is constructed for each of the service areas in an organization, specifying the attributes of interest for each and simply ask the customers to express their opinion on their before and after service quality received by rating each issues raised under each attributes of service quality. This can be illustrated with the aid of collapsing tree as shown below.

Harvesting customers responses on the instrument given to them will lead the organization to have information on service quality gaps which may help the managers to identify where performance improvement can best be targeted; where the gap scores are negative, it shows that more resources need to be deployed to such area but where the gap scores are positive, then expectations are not just being met but exceeded, therefore the managers should note that resources are not being wisely
(economically) deployed to such stations and must be redeployed to stations that are under performing unit/station tactically. And lastly information on levels of customers can help the management to best know what customers actually expect from particular service stations. As shown in fig 2, service quality score for staff is positive (1) but staff responsiveness and competence scores are negative, then managers need to turn on their search light for solutions on these attributes and initiate improvement program on staff rate of responsiveness and competence that customers want. In the same vein, facility score is negative; how facility respond to demand being placed on it is a major concern, likewise its security and tangibility of service being produced from it must be improved upon. Combining the mathematical evidences of the model with four stages of service firm competitiveness of Chase, Aquilano and Jacobs (1998), the management will be able to know whether a particular service station is moving along the quality objectives of the firm or not to place the organization right in the hands of customers in a competitive world class serve delivery.
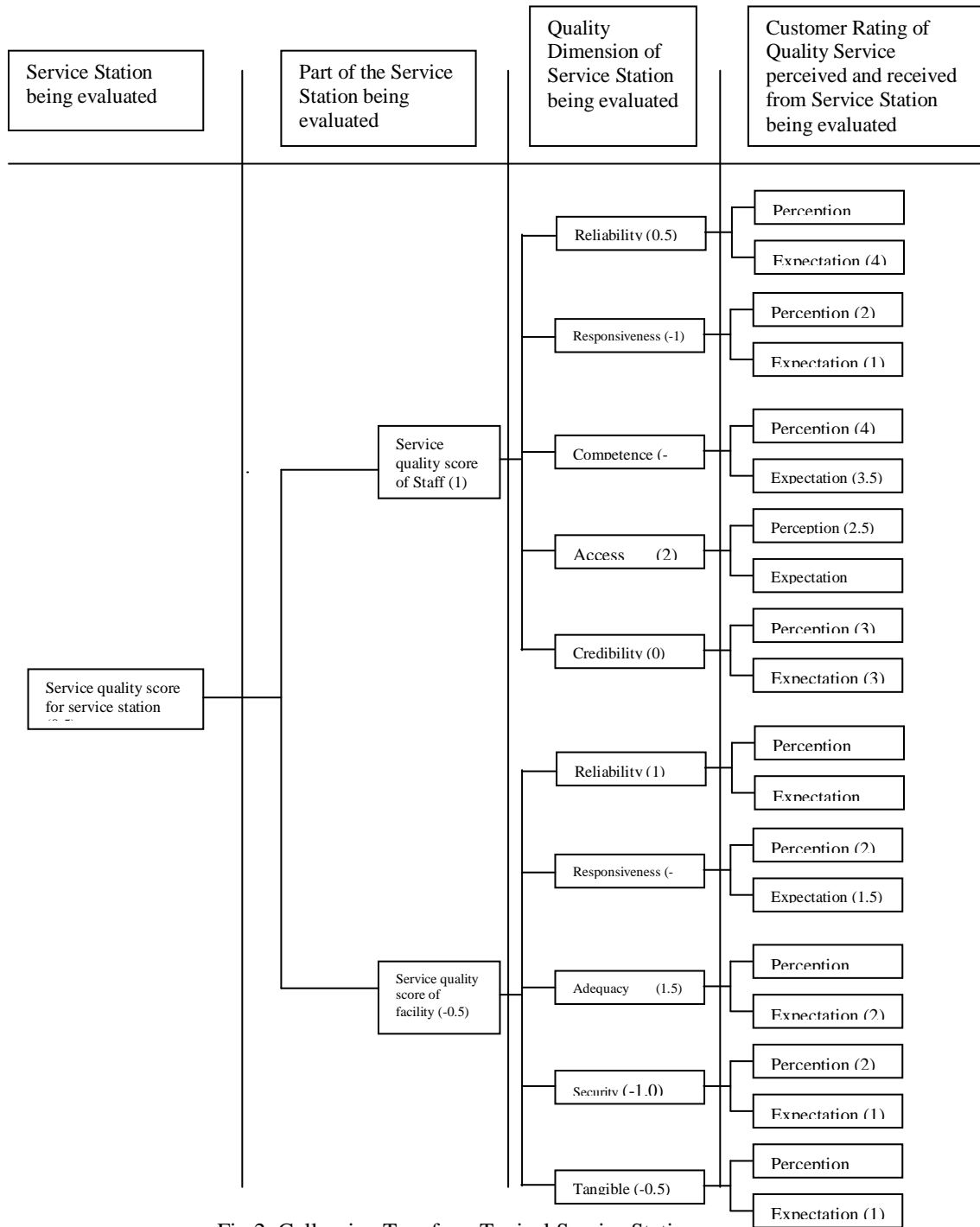
Service Station being evaluated	Part of the Service Station being evaluated	Quality Dimension of Service Station being evaluated	Customer Rating of Quality Service perceived and received from Service Station being evaluated

Reliability (0.5)
  Percention
  Expectation (4)

Responsiveness (-1)
  Percention (2)
  Expectation (1)

Service quality score of Staff (1)

Competence (-
  Percention (4)
  Expectation (3.5)

Access (2)
  Perception (2.5)
  Expectation

Credibility (0)
  Percention (3)
  Expectation (3)

Service quality score for service station

Reliability (1)
  Percention
  Expectation

Responsiveness (-
  Percention (2)
  Expectation (1.5)

Service quality score of facility (-0.5)

Adequacy (1.5)
  Percention
  Expectation (2)

Security (-1.0)
  Perception (2)
  Expectation (1)

Tangible (-0.5)
  Percention
  Expectation (1)

Fig 2: Collapsing Tree for a Typical Service Station

Table 1: Four Stages of Firm Competitiveness with SERVQUAL Mathematical Evidences

STAGE	ATTRIBUTE	QUALITY MEASURES	MATHEMATICAL EVIDENCE
Available for service	Operation is reactive at best	Subsidiary to cost; highly variable	SE<SP
Journeyman	Uninspired operation fashion	Meets some customer expectations	SE=SP
Distinctive Competence Achieved	Sustained reputation for meeting customer expectations	Meets or exceeds customer expectation	SE>=SP
World Class Service Delivery	Excellence, expand customer expectations to level its competitors can not fill, innovation packed and superior capacity for service delivery	Raises customer expectations, seeks challenges, improve continuously	SE>SP

Source: Four stages of Service Firm Competitiveness of Chase, Acquilano and Jacobs modified with mathematical evidence of SERVQUAL model

In conclusion, service quality is essentially determined by what the customer wants and is ready, willing and able to pay for. Applying the conclusion of the SERVQUAL to any service station, will help the management to know and measure various dimensions of the quality sought that are being achieved so as to initiate and monitor some improvement measures that will not only sustain the organisation's reputation but move it into world class service delivery.

III.   Research Methodology:

i.The Study Area: The Ibarapa zone of Oyo State comprises three local government areas (Ibarapa East, Ibarapa Central and Ibarapa North Local Government Areas). The region has three higher institutions: Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo, Lanlate Campus, The Polytechnic, Ibadan, Adeseun Ogundoyin Campus, Eruwa and College of Agriculture, Igboora. The students' density from all these institutions is well above ten thousand. . Ibarapa, as one of the regions in Oyo State, Nigeria, is bounded in the North by Iseyin, Kajola and Iwajowa Local Government Areas and in the South by Ogun State, in the East by Ibadan metropolitan city and West by Benin Republic.

ii.Data Collection: Data for the study was derived from primary sources obtained with the aid of well structured questionnaires administered on students from each of the institutions. Data collected were responses on before and after getting admitted into their institution of their choice on staff and facility for: teaching, library, students account, screening point for admission and environmental services. Likewise data on gender, educational status/level, measured by the number of years spent in schools and their department. Random sampling method was employed in selecting 80 students from each of the three campuses.

iii.Method of Data Analysis: Descriptive and inferential methods were used to analyse the data collected. The descriptive method includes the use of bar chart, pie chart, and tables The t-statistic, Pearson Correlation were used to ascertain the statistical significance of the variables in the specified model.

iv.Model Specification: Service Perceived and Expected Model

QM: SE >= SP

QG: SE<SP

Where QM = Quality Met

QG= Quality Gap

SE = Service Expected

SP = Service Perceived

IV.   Results And Discussions
a.   Biographic characteristics of Respondents:

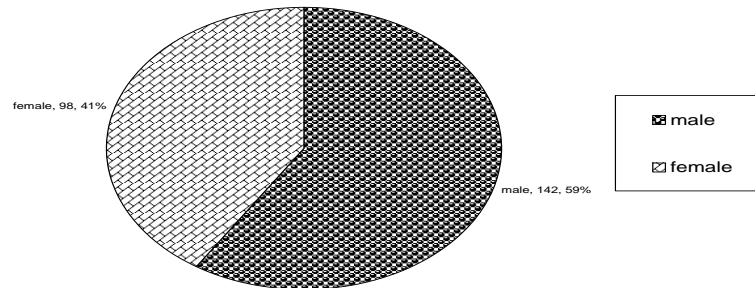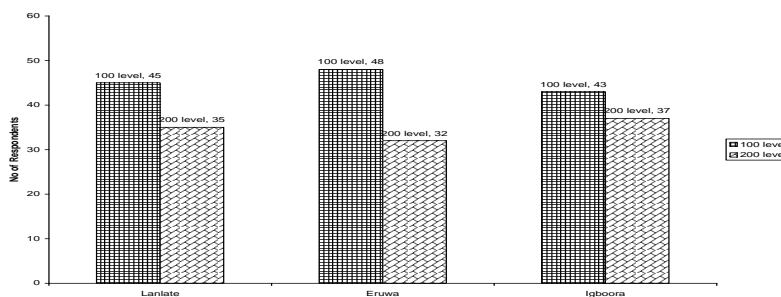**Fig 3: Pie Chart on Gender Analysis of Respondents**

fig 3 presents the distribution of respondents according to gender. Out of two hundred and fifty respondents, ninety eight (41%) were female while others are males. This shows that the majority of the respondents were male students..

Fig 4: Bar Chart of Respondents Campus by Campus

As shown in fig 4, more than half of the respondents are 100 level students from each of the campuses. From Eruwa campus, 48 respondents are in their 100 level, 45 respondents are in their 100 level at Lanlate and 43 respondents are in their 100 level at Igboora

Fig 5: Analysis of Service Quality Scores
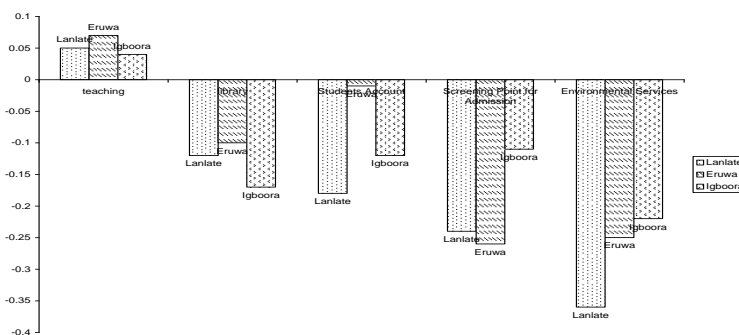
From fig 5, only teaching services quality score is positive from the responses in each of the campuses. Responses on service quality score are found to be negative for other services in all the three campuses. This means that services within these institutions are available only but not meeting the needs of the students except teaching services that are not just meeting some students needs but have distinctive competence to exceed the students' needs.

Table 2: Analysis of Service Quality Scores

	Lanlate	Eruwa	Igboora
Teaching	0.05	0.07	0.04
Library	-0.12	-0.10	-0.17
Students Account	-0.18	-0.01	-0.12
Screening Point for Admission	-0.24	-0.26	-0.11
Environmental Services	-0.36	-0.25	-0.22

Source: Data from Research survey Instrument

From table 2 service quality score for teaching for all the campuses is positive but Eruwa campus has a high positive score than others. The library service quality is poor for all the campuses with Igboora having the greatest service quality gap. Lanlate has the highest negative service score for students Account and Environmental services, while Eruwa has small negative service quality for library and high negative score for screening points for Admission.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Service Quality Scores

Statistics	Lanlate	Eruwa	Igboora
Mean	-0.17	-0.11	-0.116
Variance	0.023	0.021	0.01

From table 3, the overall average service quality for Lanlate Campus is on the high side. The conclusion one can draw is that all the campuses are not meeting the students' expectations on campus.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Paired "t" Test

Statistics	Campus	Lanlate	Eruwa	Igboora
Pearson Correlation Paired "t", Critical value -2.776	Lanlate	1.00		
Pearson Correlation Paired "t", Critical value -2.776	Eruwa	0.864 -1.725	1.00	
Pearson Correlation Paired "t", Critical value -2.776	Igboora	0.861 -1.440	0.718 -0.132	1.00

At two tail level of significance, one can see that there is no difference in the service quality among the three campuses as shown by table 4 Pearson Correlation coefficient and Paired "t" values.

Summary, Recommendation and Conclusion: The study considered five services in the three campuses in Ibarapa Zone of Oyo State with eighty (80) respondents chosen at random from 100 and 200 level students of each of the campuses. Forty one percent of the respondents are male students while the remaining percentage of the respondents is female students. The mean score for service quality in each of the campuses shows that service expected from teaching in all the campuses are not just meeting some students' needs but exceeding them thereby increasing its reputation, and others services which have negative quality score shows that service gap exist in all the three campuses. This established the fact that these services are available to react to needs of students as they arise Also from the statistical test carried out, it was established that there is correlation in the quality of services provided in all the three campuses.

Based on the findings of this study, the campus management should put in place improvement methods that will ease the students' suffering during registration and payment of school fees by deploying staff and resources to faculty/school instead of concentrating these resources in one location within an office. The quality of the library services should also be worked upon to move the library services away from just available services to meeting the expectations of the students exceedingly with high touch of innovations. Sufficient measures should be put in place to improve on the environmental services in the campus through beautification, provision of adequate toiletry system, functioning environmental sanitation programs and many more that will improve the quality of life on the campus.

There is no doubt that service quality approach and service dimension approach is both conceptually attractive and operationally useful. It provides the campus management first hand information on the students expectations and hence on service gap. According to Wisniewski (2001), this approach offers cost effective way of ensuring that services remain customer focused and based on this study, campus management is enjoined to see students as the prerequisite for existence of academic institutions.

V.   Limitations and suggestions

There are few limitations in this study. First, out of two hundred and fifty respondents, ninety eight (41%) were female while others are males. This shows that the majority of the respondents were male students. A larger number of sample representatives would be better to give a more accurate result. Second, the gender of respondents in this study was not even. It would be good to repeat this study in future studies using a larger sample to validate the findings of this study. Besides that, comparative studies of all the tertiary institutions (College of Education, Polytechnic and University) in the state would also be recommended to have better understanding on the study subject and generalization of the results.

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