

# Service Quality Provided by Higher Education Institutions in Somalia and Its Impact on Student Satisfaction

Ali Yassin Sheikh Ali, Senior lecturer  
Faculty of Economics and Social Science, Department of public Administration  
SIMAD University, Mogadishu, Somalia  
(profali@hotmail.com)

Abdirisaaq Ibrahim Mohamed  
Faculty of Business and Accountancy, SIMAD University  
E-mail: cabdirisaaq73@gmail.com

## Abstract

This study attempts to examine the relationship between service quality dimensions (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) and students' satisfaction. Furthermore, this study is also examining critical factors in service quality dimensions (tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, assurance and empathy) that contribute most to the satisfaction of the students. The study employed both purposive and stratified sampling technique by using a set of questionnaire that was distributed 120 undergraduate students in three of the universities in Mogadishu (SIMAD, MUQDISHO and BANADIR). However the study found that there is a positive significant relationship between service quality dimensions and students' satisfaction. The study also found that Empathy has significant relationship with student's satisfaction in the students' perception of service quality rendered by their universities. Finally the study concludes that assessing level of satisfaction and continuous improvements of the quality of services that universities of Mogadishu provide to their students will help management and other staff of these universities to reach organizational success.

**Keywords:** Service quality, Student satisfaction, higher education, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, Mogadishu

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive environment, it is becoming more difficult for universities to enhance and maintain a competitive advantage in their own target markets (Cubillo-Pinilla *et al.*, 2009). It is suggested that factors that enable educational institutions to attract and retain students should be studied seriously as many options are opened to them (Markovic, 2005). Thus, searching for new and creative ways to attract, encourage and maintain stronger relationships with students is vital for each higher education institution to have a competitive edge in the future. Besides, during the last two decades, measuring service quality in higher education has become increasingly important for attracting and retaining tuition-based returns (Angell *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, it is vital for higher education institutions to actively monitor the quality of services and safeguard the interests of stakeholders through the fulfillment of their real needs and wants. (Zeshan, 2010; Al-alak, 2009).

Service quality spreads from business to education. Many higher education institutions have been stimulated and influenced by service quality both for teaching and administrative support functions. Since the primary customers of universities are the students (Wallace, 1999). Thus, without students to teach there is no business for higher education institutions or service to provide. In UK to validate the status of students as the customer, on behalf of the UK government, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) introduces a National Student Survey aiming at final year students, seeking their views on a number of aspects of course teaching, assessment and support provided by their universities. The survey assumes that students are, inter alia, customers of the higher education institution at which they enrolled (HEFCE, 2003 as quoted by Douglas, et.al, 2008).

In the context of education, satisfaction of existing students towards the university's services would transfer a positive impact to the public and this will make the university acquire a competitive advantage (DiDomenico and Bonnici, 1996). The service quality of education in business institutes/universities is of immense importance especially it matters due to increased in the competition between the business institutes/universities. Gronroos (1984) and Kotler (1985) said that the universities were increasingly engaging their self to measure the service quality in a professional way prevailing among the service marketing specialists.

Due to an increasingly competitive and dynamic educational environment, as well as numerous challenges, universities are becoming more aware of the importance of student satisfaction (Usman, 2010; Altbach, 1998; Arambewela and Hall, 2009). Hence, Focusing on student satisfaction not only enables universities to re-engineer their organizations to adapt to student needs, but also allows them to develop a system for continuously monitoring how effectively they meet or exceed student needs (O'Neill, 2003). Wiers-Jenssen et al. (2002), in a recent review of student satisfaction studies, also highlight the complexity of the concept in the higher education

context. Within the service-quality literature, a dominant paradigm exists with the definition of quality focused on the consumer (Robinson, 1999). This is not the case in the educational quality literature (Clewes, 2003).

In Africa, many studies have been done in relation to quality of education. One of these studies was done by Bornman (2004) on programme review guidelines for quality assurance in higher education in South Africa. The research included an investigation into national and international quality assurance models and the procedures, techniques and strategies relating to quality assurance and quality enhancement.

In Somalia, after the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, all educational institutions in the country were destroyed by the fighting factions, and since then Somalia has a country without any formal programmed of education. Although the last two decades the country has no effective government that monitor the quality of education in higher institutions on the other hand fortnightly there was increasing number of private universities since 1990, according to our best knowledge there is no study that focus the impact of service quality provided by these institutions on student's satisfaction. Thus, this is the main purpose of this study.

Service quality (SQ) is defined as a focused evaluation that reflects the customer's perception of specific dimensions of services provided Zeithaml and Bitner (2003). According to Parasuraman et al (1988) Service quality has been defined as a consumer attitude reflecting the perceived overall superiority and excellence in the process and outcome of a service provider. The above two definitions looked two different aspects in terms of defining service quality, while the first focus on that the service quality or reflects the customer perception on dimensions of service quality. On the other hand the second definition looks the importance of customer attitude of how perceived overall service quality is superior and excellence in terms of the process and outcome of a service provider.

Kotler et al. (2009, p.120) define satisfaction as 'a person's feeling of pleasure that result from comparing a product's perceived performance (or outcome) to their expectation'. Kotler and Clarke (1987) define satisfaction as a state felt by a person who has experience performance or an outcome that fulfill his or her expectation. In this study the term service quality is adopted as defined by Zeithaml and Bitner (2003). Also student satisfaction is adopted as defined by Kotler et al. (2009, p.120).

With the increasing number of higher education institutions in Mogadishu, universities are competing to attract more students. To achieve this goal, the universities are competing to provide the students with all possible satisfaction means through providing efficient services; therefore this study aims to investigate the impact of service quality provided by higher education institutions in Mogadishu on student's satisfaction.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted through correlation and descriptive research design. Correlation is research design where researchers determine whether or not, and to what extent an association exists between two or more paired and quantifiable variables. Correlation also used for collecting data from two quantifiable variables from the same group of subjects and compare how they vary (Oso & Onen 2005). Correlation appropriate for studies where two or more characteristics from the same group are compared or explanation of how characteristics vary together because it provides rigorous and replicable procedure for understanding relationships. This research design will enable the researchers to determine to what degree a relationship exists between quantifiable variables.

The target population was consist of all students from SIMAD, Mogadishu and Benadir Universities specially those who are studying three faculties, which are faculty of Business and Accountancy, Economics and Computer since because all the above three universities provide these three faculties to their students. Also some of them provide other faculties. The study will focus on students who are in the last year because these students are more familiar the quality of service of their universities compared with those who are in the first, second and the third year. The reason we select the above three universities is that because they are the most effective universities in Mogadishu in terms of popularity and number of students they educate. And they also have good reputation in the high education industry in Somalia.

The sample that was used in this study consists of 120 students selected from the selected faculties and universities. This sample size is based on findings from the literature because our target population is very large so the choice of this sample size is guided by literature on the maximum and minimum practical sample size of not less than thirty (30) subjects per group category for any statistical test (Saunders et al, 2009, p, 243). The sample was divided into the above universities as equal amount.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data have been collected through questionnaire distributed randomly on students in three universities in Mogadishu. A sample 120 questionnaire were distributed only 92 of them were responded. This gives the researchers a response rate of 77 percent.

### 3.1 Demographic Profile

Based on table 1 below it shows the demographic data of respondents. In this study, the demographic variables

were contained four questions; Gender, Age, Status and Faculty were asked to the respondents. In this research 62 of the respondents are male with a percentage of (67.4%) and 30 respondents are female with a percentage of (32.6). Respondents who are aged between 19-25 years old are 68 (73.9%), those who are between 26-30 are 18 and contribute (19.6%) of the respondents, those who are aged between 31-35 years old are 4 with a percentage of (4.3%), and those who are aged 36 years old and above are 2 with a percentage of (2.2%).

For the result of students program or the faculty they are studying, it shows that the majority of respondents were studying faculty of Business and Accountancy and contribute a percentage of (67.4%), followed by faculty of Economics with a percentage of (13%), faculty of Computer Science (12%) and Other faculties with a percentage of (7.6%). Also the result showed that 28 (30.4%) of respondents were married and 64 (69.6%) of the respondents were single.

Based on the above findings, in conclusion the analysis indicated that the majority of students were males (67.4%) in comparison with the number of female students (32.6%). This is because the majority of women who are living in Mogadishu are not involving at the side of education while they are contributing more at the side business, thus gender balance in the field of high education is still not exist.

Students who are studying in Mogadishu universities according to their age, 73.9% are between 19-25 years old. This implies that people are not willing to learn as their age become old. Is there a relationship between the age and attending class? The answer of this question is left to future researchers.

The faculty of Business and Accountancy is the major faculty that Mogadishu students prefer to study by scoring 67.4%. This means that the only potential available vacancies that most students feel they can get in job market are those related business and accounting. Also some researchers may argue that first thing students consider when they are choosing the faculty to join is the interest or hobby that a student have. Although this argument can be valid it needs to ensure its validity so we suggest to the future researchers to make a research about this issue.

**Table 1: Demographic Data of respondents**

| Demographics                    | Categories               | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender                          | Male                     | 62        | 67.4           |
|                                 | Female                   | 30        | 32.6           |
| Age                             | 19-25 years              | 68        | 73.9           |
|                                 | 26-30 years              | 18        | 19.6           |
|                                 | 31-35 years              | 4         | 4.3            |
|                                 | 36 years/above           | 2         | 2.2            |
|                                 | Married                  | 28        | 30.4           |
| Status                          | Single                   | 64        | 69.6           |
|                                 | Business and Accountancy | 62        | 67.4           |
| Which faculty are you studying? | Economics                | 12        | 13             |
|                                 | Computer Science         | 11        | 12             |
|                                 | Other                    | 7         | 7.6            |

### 3.2. SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSIONS AND STUDENT SATISFACTION

This study intended to investigate the level of student satisfaction on service quality provided by major universities in Mogadishu. The main purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between service quality dimensions (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) and students' satisfaction.

Two objectives were the reason carried out this study. First objective was to examine the relationship between service quality dimensions (tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, empathy and overall service quality) and students satisfaction. Second objective focused which factor(s) of service quality dimensions contribute(s) most to student satisfaction. The following table shows that the Reliability has the strongest relationship ( $r=0.649$ ), followed by Empathy ( $r=0.605$ ), Responsiveness ( $r=0.567$ ), Assurance ( $r=0.547$ ), Tangibility ( $r=0.503$ ).

This research examines the relationship that exists between independent and dependent variables. To determine the relationship amongst the variables, person correlations were run. Theoretically, between the variables there could be a perfect positive correlation between two variables, which is represented by 1.0(plus 1), or a perfect negative correlation which would -1.0(minus 1), whereas correlation might range between -1.0 and +1.0, the researchers conducted this research to know if any correlation found between two variables is significant or not (i.e.; if it has occurred solely by chance or if there is a high probability of its actual existence). As for the information, a significance of  $p=0.005$  is the general accepted conventional level in social science research. This implies that 95 times of out 100, the researchers can be sure that there is a true or significance correlation between variables, and there is only 5% chance that the relationship does not truly exist.

**Table 2: Correlation results between the dependent variable and Independent variable**

| Dimension      |                     | Student Satisfaction |
|----------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Tangibility    | Pearson Correlation | .503**               |
|                | Sig. (2-tailed)     | 0.000                |
|                | N                   | 92                   |
| Reliability    | Pearson Correlation | .649**               |
|                | Sig. (2-tailed)     | 0.000                |
|                | N                   | 92                   |
| Responsiveness | Pearson Correlation | .567**               |
|                | Sig. (2-tailed)     | 0.000                |
|                | N                   | 92                   |
| Assurance      | Pearson Correlation | .547**               |
|                | Sig. (2-tailed)     | 0.000                |
|                | N                   | 92                   |
| Empathy        | Pearson Correlation | .605**               |
|                | Sig. (2-tailed)     | 0.000                |
|                | N                   | 92                   |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

#### 4. DISCUSSIONS

The main purpose of this research was to determine if there is any significant relationship between service quality dimensions (tangibility, reliability, assurance, and empathy) and student satisfaction. The research findings indicate the five dimensions of service quality have strong and significant relationship with students' satisfaction.

Among the five dimension measured, reliability is the strongest dimension correlated with customer satisfaction which means that the more the higher learning institution cares about the students in the institution, the more satisfied the student will be. The finding of the present study is consistent with the results of previous studies in terms of the direction of the relationship (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988; Sureshchandar et al., 2002; Azman et al., 2009; Ravichandran et al., 2010; Rahim et al., 2010)

The study also shows that empathy has significant relationship with student's satisfaction in the students' perception of service quality rendered by their universities. The finding indicates that personal care and individualized attention to the students are two important factors impacting students' satisfaction. In the same way, the current study shows that there is a significant relationship between tangibles and students' satisfaction perceptions. The possible explanation of this finding is that students appreciate the provision of equipment, teaching materials, and other physical evidences by university staff.

Also, responsiveness seems to have a significant relationship with the student's satisfaction in the students' perception of service quality rendered by the faculty. It is a prerequisite for administrative staff and lecturers to be able to respond and answer the students' query with a high degree of reliability and consistency.

The results of this study are similar to other studies such as; Babakus and Boller, (1992); Cheng and Tam, (1997); Clewes, (2003); Guolla, (1999); Landrum, Prybutok, Zhang, and Peak, (2009); Markovic, (2005), Alalak (2009). The findings of the measurement among the five dimensions of service quality identified some important implications. It provides a useful direction to management and practitioners to know that 'reliability' and 'empathy' are perceived as important by the students in term of students' satisfaction from the faculty and the administrative staff.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

From the above findings, correlation analysis concludes that the independent variables which are service quality dimensions (Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy) are significantly related to students' satisfaction. This study had presented the findings collected from the respondents, Based on data gathered, the correlation analysis indicates that all five independent variable were significantly to the dependent variable.

The results of this research can be helpful for the university to evaluate different aspects of the services that provided for the students in terms of their decision according to their gender, races or even between the culture to ensure further improvement of quality university services quality that attain the requirements and needs of students and their expectations has a significant relationship with student satisfaction.

As a result, the findings of this research will help the building contractors and management of the university to provide its students' with better service in future, and increase the number of undergraduate students that are considered vital for the future success and organizational performance.

Finally, the research finding presented here contributes to the existing knowledge of service quality and customer satisfaction both theoretically and practically. The result shown in the study demonstrates the importance of all elements in service quality (SQ) in assuring the student's satisfaction (SS). The result from the research provides opportunities for university management to improve the weaknesses in the services offered to the student thus ensuring that the quality of services provided to the student is at the highest level and student get optimal satisfaction when studying in the particular higher learning institution. We hope that this research would stimulate more research attention on how SQ could help higher learning institution in delivering better satisfaction to students and at the same time, expand the research framework by examining and identifying various moderators and mediators that could enhance the existing relationship between SQ and SS.

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