

Students' Perception about Quality of Distance Education at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana

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Abstract

Student satisfaction assessment is vital in determining service quality at higher learning institutions. To remain competitive with other public and private higher education providers, it is important that the institution continuously acquire, maintain, build stronger relationships and assess the level of students' satisfaction with regards to distance education. With the increasing number of higher education institutions in Ghana, universities are competing to attract more students. To achieve this goal, the universities are competing to provide services that will increase students' satisfaction. This study measures the level of student satisfaction with current services offered by College of Distance Education (CoDE), University of Cape Coast and the relationship between service quality dimensions and students' satisfaction. The descriptive survey design was used for the research. Simple random sampling and self administered questionnaire were utilized to obtain data from 300 students of CoDE, UCC within Upper East Region. Frequency, percentages, Mean and Correlation techniques were used to examine the level of students' satisfaction and the relationship between students' satisfaction and service quality. Overall, students' satisfaction level was high and results indicate strong relationships between students' satisfaction and quality service delivered by CoDE, UCC.

Keywords: Service quality, higher education institutions, students' satisfaction.

1. Background of the study

The importance of customers has been highlighted by many researchers and academicians. Zairi (2000) said "Customers are the purpose of what we do and rather than them depending on us, we very much depend on them. The customer is not the source of a problem; we should not perhaps make a wish that customers should go away" because our future and our security will be put in jeopardy". That is the main reason why organizations today are focusing on customer satisfaction, loyalty and retention. The perception of quality is multilateral: quality means different things to different people (Gerson, 1993) and from the perspective of quality service dimensions (input, process and output) and from the perspective of the stakeholders, there are many views of quality (Reichheld, 1996). The coexistence of many understandings of quality in education sector is a justification for a plenty of quality management models.

Responding to the challenges to facilitate the individuals' participation in economic and social life, the educational organizations need to focus on the perspective of the learners and on the final result of learning process – *the successful learning*. More and more organizations emphasize on service quality due to its strategic role in enhancing competitiveness especially in the context of attracting new customers and enhancing relationship with existing customers (Hokanson, 1995). Marketing of education has become an area where universities in countries and across the world compete with each other to attract students from a wide range of foreign markets (Altbach, 1998; Arambewela & Hall, 2009). However, there has been a substantial growth in the service marketing literature, with service quality becoming a significant issue (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2002). Several studies have shown that university's environment affects students' academic achievement and satisfaction (Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005).

In the context of Ghana, majority of the studies have focused on the ways to improve the quality of service delivery (Asubonteng, McCleary, & Swan, 1996) unfortunately, no significant study has probed the issue of service quality and student satisfaction in distance education in Ghana. For example, Hanif, Muzammil et al. (2010) examine the use of balance scorecard to enhance accountability and performance in higher education institutions concluding that long-term vision through consistent performance evaluation is the key to enhance performance in higher education.

Therefore, it is essential to investigate the effect of service quality on student's perceptions.

This study mainly aims at understanding the differences in students' perception towards service quality rendered to them through the distance mode and explores the relationship between service quality and student satisfaction. The dimensions included in this variable are tangibility, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, and empathy.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Student Satisfaction and Service Quality

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- Janssen et al. (2002), in a 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).

Kotler et al., (2001) have mentioned that any business looking for success in today's marketplace must be customer- centered. It must deliver superior value to its target customer. They also added that companies must become adept in building customer relationships, not just building products and services. Hence, it can be seen that to satisfy the customer must be at the top of managers' agendas, if they want their companies to survive. Furthermore, for many universities, student satisfaction is an avenue through which competitive advantage can be gained (Kevin & Dooyoung, 2002). Therefore, satisfaction is not only dependent on the inanimate service environment and the service provider, but also on other consumers as well (Clewes, 2003).

The customer is the foundation of the business and keeps it in existence. A satisfied customer will repeat the purchase of the product / service and convey positive messages about it to another (Abu Hasan et al., 2008; Arambewela & Hall, 2009). In contrast, a dissatisfied customer is more likely to switch to an alternative product / service that is provided by another company. A dissatisfied customer may well be negative by word-of-mouth and this could have a serious and damaging effect on the business. Baron and Harris (2003) have pointed out that satisfaction or dissatisfaction will result if the company performance confirms or disconfirms the customer expectations. From the above discussions, it can be said that the essential and major role of any business is to meet its customer's needs and expectations. Failure to meet needs and expectations is assumed to result in dissatisfaction with the product or service. The core function of every service is to satisfy the customer who consumes it.

However, customer satisfaction is defined as "the customer's fulfillment response, it is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provides a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment" (Oliver, 1997). Meanwhile, Petruzzellis et al. (2006) have seen customer satisfaction as a result of students' assessment of a service based on comparison of the perception of service delivery with their prior expectations. In the same vein, Student satisfaction refers to the favorability of a student's subjective evaluation of the various outcomes and experiences associated with education (Oliver & Desarbo, 1989). While, Borden (1995) found that student satisfaction is related to the match between student priorities and the campus environment. As Wiers- Janssen et al. (2002, 193) have stated "student satisfaction approaches may be a tool for building a bridge between more traditional and academic views on how to improve higher education, and more market-orientated perspectives".

Service quality is increasingly being recognized as of key strategic value by organizations in both the manufacturing and service sectors (Rashid & Jusoff, 2009). The terms of customer service and service quality have become very important in a variety of fields such as industry, academia and government over recent decades, having taken on different meanings through the years. On the other hand, Townsend (1986) defines quality in two perspectives: quality in 'fact' and quality in 'perception'. Quality in fact is usually the supplier's point of view, while quality in perception is the customer's view.

A similar distinction is proposed by Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991), who suggest that a third dimension might be appropriate, namely 'corporate quality', which involves the image or profile of the company. The service firm's image determines service quality and therefore whether a customer keeps

the relationship with the service provider or not. If the image is negative, there is little chance that new customers will actually be attracted. Arambewela and Hall (2009) have stated that the basic concept of quality is simply the match between what customers expect and what they experience. This is perceived quality. These researchers added that any mismatch between these two is a quality gap. Customer perception of quality was found to be influenced by various gaps. Since the quality perceived in a service is a function of the gap between customers' desires / expectations and their perceptions of the service that is actually received, understanding customer expectations and perceptions is the first step in delivering 'high service quality' (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2002).

The concept of expectations has been widely used in many studies about customer behavior (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2002; Baron & Harris, 2003). Usually customer expectations are based on their own norms, values, needs, wishes, etc. Moreover, these expectations are not stable, and may change over time due to changes in aspiration levels at a particular moment in time. Thus, customers will switch service providers if they are not happy or feel dissatisfaction with the service provided (Arambewela & Hall, 2009). At the same time, expectations are determined not only by individuals themselves, but also by reference groups, external situations, time, norms, and the like (Kasper et al., 1999). While perception reflects the service as actually received, it also depends on the nature of discrepancy between the expected service and perceived service (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Many researchers have discussed the concept of perception. According to Bolton and Drew (1991) perceptions are influenced by attributes of the service delivery process, and Schiffman and Kanuk (1987) have defined perceptions as the process by which an individual selects, organizes and interprets stimuli into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world.

Empirical Evidence on Students' Satisfaction and Service Quality

Several empirical studies have supported the theories on satisfaction and service quality. Some of these are examined in this session.

Cheruiyot & Maru (2013) studied service quality and relative performance of public universities in East Africa. Exploratory survey of three public universities in East African countries namely Moi, Makerere and Dar es salaam universities from three East African countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, were used respectively. Student perceptions were elicited on service quality and relative performance. Comparative analysis was done. A sample size of 450 respondents from a target population of > 50,000 was derived using a multistage sampling technique. Structured questionnaire was used to extract both nominal and ordinal data, the latter utilizing items anchored on a five-point Likert scale. Modified SERVQUAL and performance were standardized. Descriptive, one-way ANOVA, factor analysis, Pearson product moment correlation and multiple regression was used to analyze the data. The result showed that Modified SERVQUAL dimensions were confirmed, centrality of tangibility and reliability established, while importance of responsiveness was disapproved. Relative variation in service quality and relative performance across three countries universities was found to be significant. Finally significant effect of service quality on performance of universities was also established. However, it was realised that service quality and relative performance in higher education could be subjected to international verification and evaluation at the risk of cultural and contextual bias.

In addition, Subrahmanyam & Raja (2016) conducted a research to examine the effects of service quality on student loyalty: the mediating role of student satisfaction. The study proposes the use of mediation model that links service quality and student loyalty via student satisfaction and tests the direct and indirect effects of service quality on student loyalty with the mediation role of student satisfaction. The study employed survey research design and collected data from three oldest state universities in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India to find the relationships between service quality, student satisfaction and student loyalty in higher education sector using structural equation modeling. Service quality has been found to be an important input to student satisfaction. The result also shows that while university provides no basis for differentiation among the constructs, age and gender play a major role in determining the different perceptions of students about the constructs investigated. However, the study focuses on student satisfaction, of which service quality is an important antecedent. Identification of other variables, besides service quality, is crucial to contribute to the overall student satisfaction. Longitudinal studies in order to collect predictor and criterion variables

before and after the course would be much stronger.

Faizan et. al. (2016) also investigated the effect of Malaysian public universities' service quality on international student satisfaction, institutional image and loyalty. A total number of 400 questionnaires were distributed to international students, selected using convenience sampling technique, at three public Malaysian university campuses in Kuala Lumpur. Of this, 241 were deemed fit for analysis (60 per cent response rate). Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling was used to analyze the collected data, assess the model and test hypotheses. The findings show that all the five dimensions of higher education service quality influence student satisfaction which in turn influences institutional image, and together, they influence student loyalty. However, the study focused on a relatively small sample of international students.

In summary, it is evidence from the literature review that students' satisfaction and service quality is an important area that researchers are still giving attention to. There are extensive researches on students' satisfaction and service quality in higher education in the developed countries but there are few of such studies in the developing countries especially Ghana with regards to distance education. This gap is what the current research seeks to fill.

2.2 Service Quality Dimensions

Researchers and practitioners have found that customers consider many dimensions in their assessments of service quality (Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al. 1985, 1988; Rashid and Jusoff; 2009; Arambewela & Hall, 2009). To improve quality, service providers have to identify the key determinants of service quality. Parasuraman et al. (1988) highlighted 5 key determinants of perceived service quality, namely:

Reliability, the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately, means that the organization delivers on its promises regarding delivery, service provision, and problem resolution (i.e. a firm performs the service right the first time and honors its promises over a period of time).

Responsiveness, being willing to help, is defined as willingness or eagerness of employees to help customers and to provide prompt service. This dimension emphasizes attentiveness and promptness in dealing with customer requests, questions, complaints, and problems.

Assurance, inspiring trust and confidence, is defined as the employees' knowledge and courtesy and the ability of the firm and its employees to inspire trust and confidence. The university seeks to build trust and loyalty between its employees and individual students. In the early stages of the relationship, the customer may use tangible evidence to assess the assurance dimension. Visible confirmation of degrees, honors and awards and special certifications may give a new customer confidence in a professional service provider (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2002).

Empathy, treating customers as individuals, is defined as caring, individualized attention that the firm provides to its customers. The customers need to feel understood by, and important to, firms that provide service for them.

Tangibles, representing the service physically, are defined as the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, staff appearance, and communication materials that are used to provide the service. Teaching is classified as highly intangible, because services are performances or actions rather than objects: they cannot be seen, felt or tasted in the same way that one can sense a tangible good.

2.3 Measuring Service Quality

The research on service quality is an important theme in service marketing field. So far, scholars and practitioners have not arrived at a consistent agreement to the concept and evaluation of service quality. Research in defining and measuring service quality has been greatly influenced by the work of Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988). Based on above factors, a scale called SERVQUAL was developed (Parasuraman et al., 1988). This model works on the philosophy that customers typically assess service quality by comparing the service they have actually experienced (the perceived service quality) with the service they desire or expect (their expected service quality). In other words, service quality involves a comparison of customer expectations with customer perceptions of actual service performance. This can be formulised as $Q = P - E$; Q stands for perceived service quality, P refers to performance perception and E stands for performance expectation (Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005).

Hypothesis of the Study

The hypothesis of the study was developed as:

- *Ho: There is no significant relationship between reliability, tangibility, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance and student satisfaction.*
- *H1: There is a significant relationship between reliability, tangibility, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance and student satisfaction.*

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A descriptive research design was used for the research. According to Gay (1992) as cited in Amedahe and Gyimah-Asamoah (2015), descriptive survey is a research that specifies the nature of a given phenomena. It determines and reports the way things are. Descriptive research, thus, involves collecting data in order to test hypotheses or answer research questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study (Gay, 1992). This was deemed appropriate as it involves the description of the service quality dimensions that influence student satisfaction of College of Distance Education, UCC, in the Upper East Region. Descriptive research design is suited to research problems that are well understood and structured (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran, 2001). When the characteristics under investigation in a given situation already exist, descriptive studies are suitable since they can offer a profile of the factors to reveal the phenomena more clearly (Caruana, 2002).

3.2 Population and Sampling procedure

The population of the study comprised 1,007 distance students within Upper East Region. This was obtained from the database of College of Distance Education, University of Cape Coast, Students Affairs, for 2013/14 academic year. The population in this study was Diploma and Bachelor degree students studying at College of Distance Education, University of Cape Coast, and Upper East Region. A sample size was determined using Saratakos (2013) sample size determination formula. Adopting this formula, the minimum required sample size was estimated to be 278. The study used simple random sampling method to select the respondents. According to Amedahe and Gyimah-Asamoah (2015), a simple random sampling is appropriate when a population of study is similar in characteristics of interest. A total number of 278 questionnaires were distributed while 242 respondents completed and returned their questionnaires. The response rate was 81%.

3.3 Research Instruments and Data Collection

The instrument used in this study was adopted from Parasuraman et al., (1988) as cited in Anantha and Abdul (2012). The structured questionnaires were based on the five dimensions of service quality (tangibility, assurance, reliability, responsiveness and empathy) and used the five point Likert scale from 1 much worse than expected to 5 much better than expected.

3.4 Reliability Test

According to Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran (2001), reliability is the degree to which measure are free from error and therefore yield consistent results. The reliability of a measure indicates the stability and consistency with which the instrument measures the concept and helps to assess the “goodness” of a measure. According to Sekaran (2001), the closer the reliability coefficient gets to 1.0, the better it is, and those values over .80 are considered as good. Those values in the .70 category are considered as acceptable and those whose reliability value is less than .60 is considered to be poor (Sekaran, 2001). All the constructs were tested for the consistency reliability of the items using Cronbach’s alpha reliability analysis. Cronbach’s Alpha values in respect of each variable are given in table 1. Respondents were also assured about the confidentiality as information shared in this regard would be used for academic and research purposes only. In conclusion, the results showed that the scores of the Cronbach’s alpha for all the constructs exceeded the threshold of 0.70 indicating that the measurement scales of the constructs were stable and consistent.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test

Construct	Alpha Coefficient	Number Items
Customer satisfaction	0.864	21
Empathy	0.885	10
Tangibles	0.872	11
Reliability	0.724	13
Responsiveness	0.868	16
Assurance	0.846	11

Source: Field Data, 2014

4.0 Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the study.

Table 2: Gender of Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	154	63.6
Female	88	36.4
Total	242	100

Source: Field Data, 2014

The respondents' sex as displayed in Table 2 indicates that males (63.6%) were more than females (36.4%). This further implies that women within the school going age at the tertiary level are lagging behind even though education has been brought closer to them due to cultural, social and economic barriers within the region. The result confirms the finding of Subrahmanyam & Raja (2016) that while university provides no basis for differentiation among the constructs (Service quality and students satisfaction), age and gender play a major role in determining the different perceptions of students.

Table 3: Age group of Respondents

Age (Yrs)	Frequency	Percent
Below 20 years	4	1.7
20 - 29 years	104	43.0
30 - 39 years	110	45.5
40 - 49 years	23	9.5
50 years and above	1	.4
Total	242	100

Source: Field Data, 2014

Table 3 indicates the respondents' age. It is obvious that most of them are young adult and economically active, between the ages of 20 and 39 constituting 88.4% while the rest constitute 11.6% made up of respondents below 20, between 40 and 49, and 50 years and above. This implies that, the youth within the region are beginning to understand the importance of education and for that matter once it is closer to them they have started taking advantage of it and educating themselves both in education programmes and business programmes for better future. This implies that the University needs to do more to get more of the youth in the region to get enrolled into the program.

Table 4: Occupational status of respondents

Category	Frequency	Percent
Self-employed	53	21.9
Privately-employed	44	18.2
Government-employed	145	59.9
Total	242	100

Source: Field Data, 2014

Table 4 depicts respondents' occupation. Most of the respondents were government employees either at the ministries, health sectors and education sectors etc. representing 59.9% while 18.2%, employed by private businesses and 21.9% were self-employed. This implies that majority of the students are one way or the other employed and since they cannot leave their jobs for school, they have taken advantage of the distance education program as the best alternative to conventional mode and at the same time securing their employment since job is difficult to come by especially within the region. It also implies that the University should do more to educate the public that distance education now is not only for people who are working but once you have completed secondary level education with passes he/she qualifies to enroll on the distance program.

Table 5: Satisfaction ratings of CoDE, UCC within Upper East.

Expectations	Frequency	Percent
MW	12	3.4
W	83	23.5
E	115	32.6
B	98	27.8
MB	45	12.7
Total	242	100

Source: Field Data, 2014

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with service quality using Expectation Disconfirmation (ED) measures. The ED measure had a five-point Likert scale: "much worse than expected", "worse than expected", "equal to expectation", better than expected and "much better than expected". The results from table 5 indicates that using ED measure, 32.6% of respondents rated their satisfaction as equal to expectation, 3.4% and 23.5% representing 26.9% rated their satisfaction as much worse than expected and worse than expected respectively, and 40.5% (27.8% and 12.7%) of respondents rated their satisfaction as better and much better than expected. This result affirms findings from Petruzzellis et al. (2006) that, customer satisfaction as a result of customers' assessment of a service based on comparison of the perception of service delivery with their prior expectations. In the same vein, student satisfaction refers to the favorability of a student's subjective evaluation of the various outcomes and experiences associated with education (Oliver & Desarbo, 1989).

Research objective one was to determine level of students' satisfaction of service quality delivered by CoDE, UCC within Upper East Region. Descriptive statistics such as mean, and standard deviation were used to analyse the data. This was done first by determining the normality of the data distribution. According to Fidel and Tabachnik (2001) as cited in Boohene, Agyapong and Gonu (2013) normal distribution has four characteristics such as the mean, mode and medial are equal; it is symmetrical; it is asymptotic and it is neither too peaked not too flat. Fidel and Tabachnik (2001) further stated that skewness can also be used to see if a distribution is normal. The mode, mean and median value obtained for the distribution of the study were all approximately three (mode, mean and median=3) confirming normality of the data for the study. The scale for the mean was determined by adding all the items on the scale of 1 – 5 and dividing it by five. That was $(1+2+3+4+5)/5=3$. It means any value 3 and above was high and below it was low. Discrete quantitative numbers were used to represent the five points – Likert – scale ranging from one to five as stated earlier.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Student satisfaction	3.194	0.8615
Responsiveness	3.344	0.8258
Assurance	3.239	.08381
Tangibles	3.196	0.7579
Empathy	3.117	0.7579
Reliability	3.065	0.7934

Source: Field Data, 2014

Table 6 indicates that students' satisfaction towards CoDE's quality of service was high with a Mean figure of 3.194 indicating CoDE's quality of service is better than expected. The finding for responsiveness shows a mean of 3.344. This means that students within upper east region attest to the fact that the responds services provided by CoDE are much better than expected. Especially how staff of CoDE are able to inform students precisely when services will be performed and how staff are approachable and easy to contact in emergency situations (See appendix A). The mean 3.196 for tangibility shows that upper east distance students were more satisfied with the tangible service provided especially with the provision of attractive offices, classrooms and materials like marker, chalk, modules (See appendix A). This confirms a work by Siu and Cheung (2001) that the physical appearance has the greatest impact on overall perception of service quality which leads to satisfaction. Students' satisfaction was above satisfactory level (with a mean value of 3.194). As far as the mean values were concerned distance students were satisfied with all the five dimensions of service quality namely; tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance. Students are likely to be satisfied in their educational institution when the service provided fits their expectations, or they will be very satisfied when the service is beyond their expectations, or completely satisfied when they receive more than they expect (Anantha & Abdul, 2012).

4.1 Pearson Correlation Coefficient Analysis

By far the most common correlation coefficient in research is the Pearson's correlational coefficient (r) (Heiman as cited in Amedahe & Gyima-Asamoah, 2015). According to Sekaran (2001) as cited in Anatha and Abdul (2012), in research studies that includes several variables, beyond knowing the means and standard deviations of the dependent and independent variables, the researcher would often like to know how one variable is related to another. While correlation could range between -1.0 and +1.0, the researcher need 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 $p=0.05$ is the generally accepted conventional level in social sciences research. This indicates that 95 times out of 100, the researcher can be sure that there is a true or significant correlation between the two variables, and there is only a 5% chance that the relationship does not truly exist but exist by chance. The following values of correlation interpretations suggested by Cohen (1988) as cited in Boohene, Agyapong and Gonu (2013) were used as guidelines for the interpretation of the correlation results:

Correlation coefficient (r) = .10 to .29 or $r = -.10$ to $-.29$ Very Weak.
 $r = .30$ to $.49$ or $r = -.30$ to $-.49$ Weak.
 $r = .50$ to 1.0 or $r = -.50$ to -1.0 Strong.

Level of significance (p-value) = $p \leq 0.05$. (2-tailed).

The correlation matrix between dependent variable and independent variables are exhibited in Table 7. The findings from this analysis are then compared against the hypotheses developed for this study.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 7: Correlation Coefficient Between service quality dimensions and students' satisfaction

Variables	Students satisfaction	Sig. Values
Reliability	.445**	.000
Tangibility	.506**	.000
Responsiveness	.671**	.000
Empathy	.680**	.000
Assurance	.565**	.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Source: Source: Field Data, 2014

The relationship between reliability and students satisfaction was investigated using Pearson correlation coefficients for respondents (UCC Distance Students, Upper East Region). Table 7 indicates, a weak but positive relationship between reliability and student satisfaction exists among UCC Distance students with a correlation coefficient of ($r = .445$, $p < 0.00$). This means that the more the university is reliable in the provision of timely delivery of message, modules and other services the more satisfied the students will be. This finding affirms the work by O'Neill (2003) who posits that the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately, means that the UCC delivers on its promises regarding delivery, service provision, and problem resolution (i.e. UCC performs the service right the first time and honors its promises over a period of time).

The results in Table 7 indicates, a stronger and positive relationship between tangibles and student satisfaction exists among Distance students ($r = .506$, $p < 0.00$). In this regards, Distance students are more satisfied or having stronger relationship between tangibles and student satisfaction. This work supports the work by Zeithaml and Bitner (2002) as also cited in Hanif and Muzammil et al. (2010) emphasized the relative dominance of intangible attributes in the make-up of the service product.

In addition, the table 7 point to a strong and positive relationship between responsiveness and student satisfaction among Distance students ($r = .671$, $p < 0.00$). This results means that as the level of the rate of responses to students' issues increase the level of students's satisfaction will also increase. This work affirms the work of Anantha and Abdul (2012) that attentiveness and promptness in dealing with customer requests, questions, complaints, and problems satisfies them. The results in Table 7 also point toward a strong and positive relationship between empathy and student satisfaction exists among Distance students ($r = .680$, $n=242$, $p < 0.00$). In this regards, Distance students were more satisfied or having stronger relationship between empathy and student satisfaction. The results also indicate a stronger, positive relationship between assurance and student satisfaction exists among Distance students ($r = .565$, $p < 0.00$), with high levels of perceived assurance associated with high level of satisfaction. This work affirms the work of Zeithaml and Bitner (2002) that visible evidence of degrees, honors and awards and special certifications may give a new students' confidence in a professional service provider. The result means that all service quality dimensions have strong relationship with students' satisfaction. This result shows that as the service quality dimensions increases so will students' satisfaction will also increase. Therefore, the null hypotheses were rejected while accepting the alternate hypotheses that; *H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between reliability, tangibility, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance and student satisfaction.*

5.0 Conclusion

To determine and assess the students' satisfaction level with the service quality provided by higher educational institutions is not easy but not impossible (Anantha & Abdul, 2012). The results can be very supportive in shaping the satisfaction level of UCC distance education students within Upper East Region for management to influence or enhance the quality of services provided. In this study, the results indicated that the level of distance education students satisfaction in the upper east region was high 40.5% (27.8% and 12.7%) of respondents rated their satisfaction as better and much better than expected and also, all the service quality dimensions had positive, strong relationship with students' satisfaction especially empathy. The study emerges that UCC, CoDE should pay attention to all the five dimensions of service quality, and they should give more focus on the role of quality in the

delivery of distance education within the Upper East Region and Ghana in particular in increasing overall distance students' satisfaction. Further research is needed to determine the overall satisfaction levels among distance students in Ghana both public and private universities. This is important for education service providers to gradually improve the quality and allocate resource accordingly. Future research should focus on the perception of quality distance education in Ghana from other stakeholders (Parents, employees, government agencies, industries, banks, Non-governmental organizations', international donor partners etc.).

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APENDIX A

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
CoDE's ability to given you access to information	242	1.00	5.00	3.0496	1.12203
Provision of visually attractive, offices, classrooms and materials like markers, chalk, modules	242	1.00	5.00	2.9587	1.17651
CoDE's ability to providing variety of programmes, etc.	242	1.00	5.00	3.3430	1.03574
How appealing are the appearance and uniforms of employees of CoDE,UCC	242	1.00	5.00	3.4339	1.04949
How timely is the delivery of messages, modules and other services of CoDE	242	1.00	5.00	3.1983	1.17102
How truthful (keeping promise) is CoDE to you	242	1.00	5.00	3.2066	1.12988
How dependable and consistent is CoDE in solving students's complaints	242	1.00	5.00	2.8471	1.14025
How able is CoDE to perform services right the first time	242	1.00	5.00	3.0992	1.09624
How able is CoDE able to insist on error-free records	242	1.00	5.00	2.9711	1.13926
How is CoDE able to tell students exactly when services will be perform	242	1.00	5.00	3.3636	1.08555
How able is CoDE able to give prompt customer services and attend to student needs/problems	242	1.00	5.00	3.0909	1.20854
How is CoDE's staff willing to help students in emergency situations	242	1.00	5.00	3.2066	1.11881
How are the staff approachable and easy to contact	242	1.00	5.00	3.5455	1.11942
CoDE staffs ability to communicate clearly with you	242	1.00	5.00	3.5124	1.13134
Having convenient period & flexible terms for payment of fees	242	1.00	5.00	3.1074	1.17936
Having operating hours convenient to all students	242	1.00	5.00	3.1570	1.09323
CoDE provides feedback on students problems	242	1.00	5.00	2.9959	1.20338
Having the students' best interest at heart	242	1.00	5.00	3.1322	1.07358
Giving individual student attention by staff	242	1.00	5.00	3.1860	1.05577
Efforts to understand specific student needs	242	1.00	5.00	3.0785	1.05749
Apologising for inconvenience caused to students	242	1.00	5.00	3.1612	1.15359
Ability to provide enough and good chairs and desks for our classes and examination	242	1.00	5.00	3.0579	1.30303
Sincerity and patience in resolving students' complaints/problems	242	1.00	5.00	3.1446	1.17713
The behavior of CoDE's staff in instilling confidence in students	242	1.00	5.00	3.3140	1.05479
Staffs' use of required skills and knowledge to answer students' questions	242	1.00	5.00	3.4380	.99703
Valid N (listwise)	242				