

Service Charter and Its Moderating Effect on the Relationship Between Tangible Elements of Service and Student Satisfaction at Selected Public Universities in Kenya

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Abstract

In the last few years, Kenyan public universities have been faced with challenges of quality service delivery challenges. These challenges have in many occasions led to students' unrests leading to disruption of studies and university operations. The effects of such riots in public universities have resulted in massive destruction of property and injuries that lead to loss of life in the violent confrontation between the students and the police. To address these challenges, public universities have developed unique service quality strategies such as Service Charters and Complaint Resolution Mechanism among others to guide them in the delivery of services. The study aimed at examining how and to what extent service charters moderates the relationship between tangible elements of service and student satisfaction. The study used a descriptive research design. Through a stratified random sampling procedure, a sample of 1976 students was drawn from a target population of 270120 students from the selected five public universities. A questionnaire was used to collect data from the sampled students where a pick and drop process was used to administer the questionnaires. Under the descriptive analysis, the study computed the percentages and means while in quantitative analysis; the study used the regression and ANOVA to analyze the data and to test the research hypotheses. The study findings indicated that, university service charter positively and significantly moderated the relationship between tangible elements and student satisfactions (R^2 change = .235, $p < 0.05$). The study concluded that service charter has a critical role in directing the physical infrastructure that are needed to offer the service quality necessary for student satisfaction. This study recommended that management of put in place the right structures, teaching and learning facilities, accommodation facilities, Laboratory equipment and other physical facilities commensurate to the service they purport to offer.

Keywords: Service Charter, Tangible Elements, Student Satisfaction

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Introduction

Customers are the most critical assets in any organization and the success of an organization depends on the quantity and quality of her customers. When the customers are satisfied, they are likely to bring other customers to the organization, consume more her products and services, remain loyal to the organization and pay their bills promptly which improves the cash flow of the organization (Besterfield, Besterfield, & Besterfield, 2010) Service organizations who fail to effectively identify and address the needs and wants of customers are not only at a risk of losing these customers to their competitors, but are also likely to fail due to loss of profits. As a result of these challenges, many service organizations as noted by Kandampully (1998) are changing from the old customer satisfaction methods to more proactive strategies that enhance the achievement of sustainable and competitive advantage. The number of higher education seekers has been increasing globally and in particular this sector has been the fastest growing industry in Kenya (Abagi, Nzomo, & Otieno, 2010). The demand has been amplified by the liberalization of education in Kenya which has seen heavy investment and expansion in higher education. The emergence of many private universities which were established to cater for the students not absorbed by the public universities is a clear evidence of this growth (Abagi et al., 2010). In addition a number of university colleges have been upgraded to full-fledged universities, thus increasing the total number of Public Universities in Kenya. This rapid expansion of Public Universities' has raised critical questions on quality of services offered in these institutions. In addition to poor learning and teaching environment, insufficient learning and teaching facilities and deterioration of already inadequate infrastructure (Ntaragwi, 2003) the expansion of university education has resulted in increased competition among these institutions. Given the relationship between service quality on student satisfaction and borrowing the thought of Tierney (1998), it therefore means that, universities in Kenya must offer service that meet student expectation in order for those students to desire for more and better quality

education and recommend the universities to their friends. Public universities have been pushed beyond their capacities sometimes making them unmanageable. As a result, the physical facilities which provide the tangibility of services in the universities such as the library, practical laboratories, lecture halls and halls of residence being stretched beyond limits are the common features in these universities (Ojwang, 2009). Similarly, Amutabi (2002) noted that due to the funding crisis in the higher education, essential facilities such as lecture halls, equipment and teaching materials are not available. In addition to the inadequate physical facilities, Public Universities lack adequate permanent teaching staff, which forces them to depend largely on part time lecturers causing a serious threat to quality education services (Sifuna, 1988). This is due to the fact that part time lecturers hold their loyalty to their other place of work or work as freelance with no loyalty to any institution. Furthermore, the part time lecturers usually teach in several universities and as such their time to undertake research is limited which is likely to compromise their quality of teaching. The situation is further complicated when full time lecturers also engage in part time teaching outside their own university. A report by the Vice Chancellor Committee (GoK, 2000) indicated that sixty nine university students' riots in Kenyan public universities were recorded in a span of 30 years (1969 - 2000). This report also showed that, the number of the riots incidents have been on the increase with 68% of the 30 reported incidents happening within a decade (1990 - 2000) of these incidents happened within one decade. The result of the student riots has had negative effects both for the students and the institutions. For instance, the peaceful demonstration by student in most cases lead to violent confrontation with the police resulting in destruction of institutional property and serious injuries that sometimes causes death of students (GoK, 2000). A good example is the student riot that happened at Kenyatta University in 2009 that led to massive destruction of property worth millions of shilling and death of one student (GoK, 2009). The decreasing quality of service in public universities has also attracted the regulating authority, CUE, to recommend the closure of these satellite campuses. To address the service challenges and guide employees in the service delivery at public universities, the government of Kenya introduced service charters to all public institutions, public universities included. A service charter is an institutional policy that defines the purpose, scope and standards of the institution commitment to customer service so that both the employees and customer know what to expect. It is a blueprint that contains the customer journey as well as all of the interactions that make that journey possible and it can be used to better deliver a successful customer experience (Ross, 2014). It is a description of the service that institutions provide to customers, how it's delivered to those customers, and the expected outcomes from a customer's perspective. Service charter has attracted international attention due to its significant improvement in public service delivery and as a result it has become a common phenomenon around the globe especially in the developing countries (Laikera, 2013). Through the help of service charter, organizations are able to easily realize the importance of the key operational of human resource, and marketing strategies that offer the service experience for customers (Bitner, Ostrom, & Morgan, 2007). Implementing a customer service charter therefore is paramount to Public Universities as it allows these institutions to recruit people who understand the services they offer. It also gives the students a good perspective of the kind of service offered and the expectations around these services. According customers (Bitner, Ostrom, & Morgan, 2007), a service charter clarify the interactions between students and service providers, both in those contact activities that impact the students directly, and the backstage activities that the students do not see. Additionally, Dong and Shiang (2010) viewed service charter as that which helps to give an aerial view indicating all the steps necessary in the service procedures that leads to customer satisfaction, and as a process description which allow the organization to identify and rectify failure in service points. It is all about communication, explaining in simple terms what the customer requires to be delivered and likewise a communication to the customer on what it is that the organization is doing for them. The Public Universities in Kenya have developed service charter that they use to deliver service quality to their students who are their core customers. Given that a service charter is like a customer's journey map (Ross, 2014), then it should be implemented in a way that shows only one service journey without variations. Given the financial and other resource constraints under which Public Universities are currently operating, it is important that student expectations that lead to their satisfaction are properly understood, measured and gaps in service quality identified. This information is important for the Public Universities to develop service charters that will assist in closing the identified gaps with the limited resources and ensure their survival as learning institutions. However recent studies in the area of service quality and student satisfaction have not considered the fact that universities have unique service charters that guide their service delivery. These studies have measured the effect of service charter as a dimension or a construct of service quality (Owino, 2013). However, treating service charter as a construct or a dimension of quality ignores the fact that service charters for Public Universities are not homogenous but each institution service charter is unique and it comes in between the relationship of service quality and student satisfaction. This study treated service charter as a moderator and it sought to examine the moderating effect of service charters on the relationship between dimensions of service quality and student satisfaction

Literature Review

Tangibility of is one of the challenges of service. When it comes to service, customers do not find it easy to make

decisions as they do when purchasing products. This is because service elements cannot be tasted, smelt, touched or heard before buying, simply due to their intangibility nature. Services are not tangibles and they have no features that appeal to the customer's senses, which may help them to make decision before the actual purchase and consumption. According to Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1985). employee responsiveness, motivation, service skills, positive attitude, training, clearer role and perception and knowledge of the services process are some of the evidences that have tangible impact which can increase the goodwill and credibility of the organization which goes hand in hand in enhancing the trust and confidence of service customers. Additionally there are the non-human tangibles which form the facets of the service quality. These may include but not limiting to equipment, machinery, and the appearance employee offering the services. These non-human tangibles form the physical environment popularly known as the service scope (Tiernan, Rhoades, & Wagnes, 2008) According to Tiernan et al. (2008), Social responsibility for organizations gives a good corporate image and together with the service-scopes provide and indication of good corporate image and the goodwill that impacts on the overall customer evaluation of service delivered. In public universities, tangibles of service may include the entire physical infrastructure in the institution, the appearance of employees and lecturers involved in delivery of services to students. In recent research scholars have utilized and expanded the extant service quality models and measurement tools such as SERVQUAL and SERVPREF by including the physical and environmental features in the assessment of student overall perception of service quality (Kao, 2007). In addition, a study by Ilias, Hasan, Rahman, and Yaso (2008) indicated that beyond student perception on learning and teaching other support facilities are also important. These facilities vary from learning equipment, campus infrastructure, accommodation facilities, laboratory facilities refectories and health facilities among others. Ilias et al. (2008) observed that, an institution that provides the best tangible capabilities such as those mentioned above is likely to address the expectations of students and beat the market competition. In addition, Mavondo and Zaman (2000) noted that, both the reputation of the learning programs and the quality of lecture hall, qualified lecturers and other physical and online facilities are paramount for student satisfaction. Further, Sapri, Kaka and Finch (2009) need that, in addition to the human interaction element of those providing services to the students, other necessary infrastructure such as hall of accommodation, laboratories, academic and administration buildings health and catering facilities as well as recreation and sport facilities should be put in place too. Additionally, Guolla (1999) added that most literature in major studies and research which have tried to measure service quality and customer satisfaction in the sector of higher learning, such as Students' Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness (SETE) have concentrated mostly on teaching quality i.e. the core services of the institutions. However, according to Cuthber (1996) student perception of service quality and satisfaction goes beyond teaching and learning, rather it includes the environment in which the teaching and learning takes place without which one cannot wholly assess the total student experience in a learning institution. The university service charter should point clearly the requirements beyond human interactions that are needed in the successful delivery of education services. This may include all the facilities, equipment's and materials that will accompany the human element for quality service delivery. According to Bitner, Ostrom and Morgan (2007) service charter creates in an organization an environment necessary for invention of new services and new ways of delivery, continuous improvement and change management in the area of customer satisfaction and quality service to be very effective. However it is a fact that Public Universities in Kenya have been pushed beyond their capacities and as reported by Ojwang (2009) this has resulted in stretching the institutional facilities such as the library, practical laboratories, lecture halls and halls of residence beyond their limits yet the university service charter clearly states what will be used in terms of infrastructure and materials in the delivering services. In this case one wonders whether service charter guidance on service delivery has a role in the satisfaction of students. This was analyzed using the following hypothesis;

Objective of the study

To examine the moderating effect of service charter in the relationship between tangible elements of service and student satisfaction

Hypothesis of the Study

H₀₁: Service charter has no statistical significant moderating effect on the relationship between tangible elements of service and student satisfaction

Methodology

The study was undertaken among the public universities in Kenya. Five public universities with a total population of 270,120 students were targeted estates. Enarson, Kennedy and Miller (2004) define target population as the sum of all the entities from which conclusions can be derived while Mugenda and Mugenda (2004) view it as that population in which a generalization on the results of a study can be made. A sample of 1976 students was drawn whereby; University of Nairobi had 398 students, Kenyatta University had 398 students, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology 396 students, Moi University 396 students and Egerton University 388 students.

The study employed a descriptive research design According to Jackson (2009), According to Malhotra and Dash (2009), descriptive research design describes the characteristics of a target group and is more suitable in estimating the percentage of units in a target population, display certain behaviour, influencing the perception of product characteristics, degree of association between various marketing variables and making specific predictions. In a study to establish how customer satisfaction is influenced by corporate image and service quality, Owino (2013) viewed descriptive design as one that enables the researcher to generalize the findings of a sample survey to the population. Given the research problem and philosophy of this study, the descriptive survey was adopted as the most appropriate for achieving the research objective, as it sought to learn, understand and explain the effects of service charter on the relationship between tangible elements of service and student satisfactions. This study collected only the primary data with a purpose of addressing the research problem and the objectives of the study. A structured questionnaire which consisted of 5 point likert scales constructed to collect the data. Malhotra and Das (2009) emphasized that, questions contained in the questionnaire are critical to the survey research and thus care must be taken when constructing the questions According to Prayag (2007), 5 point scales reduce the level of frustration among respondents, and increases the rate and quality of the responses. According to Newing (2011) and Bryman (2008), a questionnaire consists of a series of specific, usual short and precise questions that are asked verbally through an interview, or answered by respondents by themselves. In this study, variable measuring items were indicated as simple statements where the respondent selected their answers based on the five options in a 5–point Likert-type scale. The five-point Likert scale measured the items where 5= Strongly Agree, 4= Agree, 3= Neutral, 2 Disagree 1=, Strongly Disagree. To examine the validity and reliability of the data collection tool, a pilot study was carried out before the full scale survey. According to Dawson (2009) a pilot study enables the researcher to check whether the prepared questionnaire will produce the desired results. This process therefore assisted the study in refining the questionnaire and the protocols set out for the study thus improving it for the benefit to the final analysis as supported by Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2008). The reliability test was carried out on the data to ascertain the consistency of the measurement sets in line with Fornell and Larcker, (1981). Cronbach's alpha, a coefficient of reliability given by Cronbach (1971), which provides an unprejudiced estimate of data generalization alpha was used (Zinbarg, Revelle, Yovel, & Li, 2005). According to Pallant (2007) Cronbach's alpha assessment explains how highly the questionnaire's items are interrelated. The acceptable reliability co-efficient had been recommended as 0.7 and above Nunnally (1978) but nevertheless, according to Shelby (2011) alpha values of above 0.6 are also acceptable therefore confirming reliability of the instrument. To ensure construct validity, the questionnaire was developed based on the conceptual framework and research hypotheses in this study and it consisted of four parts to whereby each part assessed information for particular hypothesis. According to Kungu' (2014) content validity explains the degree to which investigative questions have been covered by the measurement device. Two independent resource persons were used to examine the content validity of the questionnaire from the Department of Quality Assurance that audits customer service in a selected public university. The study adopted a pick drop and method of administering the questionnaires where the students in the respective public universities were issued the questionnaires and later allowed to dropped them at a designated point in their institution. The data was analyzed in two steps; descriptive and quantitative analysis. In descriptive analysis, a measure of central tendencies that is mean was calculated. Frequency distribution and percentages were also calculated. Prior to undertaking quantitative analysis, factor analysis was carried out using Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The aim of the analysis was to reduce large set of measures to smaller and manageable number of composite variables to be used for further analysis. Composite variable that had less than 0.4 factor loading was eliminated in accordance with the recommendation of David, Patrick, Philip and Kent (2010) and Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black (1998) from the subsequent analysis in the study. Factors analysis was also presided by two other tests which helped to determine the necessity of factor analysis. The two tests were Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was used to evaluate the appropriateness of factor analysis whereby values of 0.5 to 1.0 confirmed the suitability of factor analysis. In addition to KMO values, the significance of Bartlett's test at P-value 0.05 also confirmed the necessity of factor analysis in accordance with Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) and William, Brown and Osman (2010). Inferential statistics usually indicate the presence of causal relationship within the particular variables in a study. Normality test was conducted on the dependent variable to find out whether the data was normally distributed or not. This is because the opposite, that is, if the dependent variable was not normally distributed, there would be problems in the statistical analysis (Child, 1990). Thus, the Q-Q Plots were used as graphical tests of normality and were supplemented with a numerical test using Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test. This test was considered appropriate for such a large sample as per the recommendation of Oztuna, Elhan, and Tuccar (2006) to test normality of the dependent variable. According to Cameron (2005) and Garson (2012), independent observation may also be assumed in most statistical procedures including multiple regression analysis. Lastly, the study applied multiple regression analysis to assess the influence of the independent variable on student satisfaction (dependent variable) and the moderating effect of service charter on these relationships. Multiple regression analysis was used to pinpoint the service quality dimensions (independent variables) that influence student satisfaction (dependent

variable). Multiple regression was also used to identify the effect of service charter in the influence of service quality on student satisfaction. The process of testing the hypotheses started by testing first the direct effect of independent variables on the dependent variable whose relationship must be significant for the moderations effect to be tested (Aiken & West, 1991). The hierarchical regression analysis was undertaken to assess relationship between predictors and the dependent variables. The study first assumed a linear relationship between the service quality dimensions (predictor variables) and student satisfaction (dependent variables) after establishing the assumptions of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS). A regression model to explain the possible relationship was given by the following equation (Aiken & West, 1991; Fairchild & MacKinnon, 2010). From the perceived relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable, the following linear functional Tangible element and student satisfaction: $H_{02}: SSN = \beta_0 + \beta_2 TE, + e$ (Where; SSN = Student Satisfaction, β_0 = Constant, TE = Tangible Elements and e = error term). In the second part of the analysis the moderator, service charter was added in a multiple regression analysis where the following regression equation was estimated; $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \varepsilon$ (Where; β_0 = was the estimate of the intercept, β_1 = Coefficient of the independent variable, β_2 = Coefficient of moderating variable, X_1 = independent variable, X_2 = University Service charter while ε = was the associated regression error term while Y= was the dependent variable (student satisfaction). The analyses of R^2 to establish the change in R^2 in the moderated effect model was then undertaken in accordance to the formular suggested by Aiken and West (1991). The study rejected the null hypothesis if the the change in R^2 after adding the moderating variabe was significantly more than R^2 before the moderator was added in the model (Aiken & West, 1991).

Results and Discussion

The objective of this study was to examine the moderating effect of service charter in the relationship between tangible elements of service and student satisfaction. This objective was based on the premise that service charters in public universities are not homogenous but each institution's service charter is unique and its supposed to guide on service delivery that will lead to student satisfaction as public universities. The study first sought to evaluate the direct relationship between tangible elements and student satisfaction. The study findings of the model summary of tangible elements and student satisfaction in Table 1 showed that the coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.426, which implies that tangible elements explained 42.6 percent of the variations in student satisfaction.

Table 1: Model Summary of Tangible Elements and Student Satisfaction relationship

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
Direct Effect	.653 ^a	.426	.426	.639	1.696
Moderated Effect	.812 ^a	.660	.660	.492	1.818

a. Predictors: (Constant), Tangible Elements

b. Dependent Variable: Students Satisfaction

In the analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistics of tangible elements in Table 2, the F-value was 1174.001 and the p-value was 0.000. These results showed that the relationship between tangible elements and student satisfaction was significant with p-values less than 0.05 at $\alpha = 0.05$ level.

Table 2: ANOVA for Tangible Elements and Student Satisfaction relationship

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Direct Effect	Regression	480.096	1	480.096	1174.001	.000
	Residual	645.716	1579	.409		
Moderated Effect	Regression	743.121	2	371.560	1532.100	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Students Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Tangible Elements

The study results in Table 2 above indicated that both the direct and moderated effect were significant; model for direct effect ($F=1174.001, p<0.05$) and the model for the moderated effect ($F=1532.100, p<0.05$). Additionally the study findings shown in Table 1 revealed that the interaction between service charter and tangible Element accounted for significantly more variance than that of tangible elements by itself, R^2 change =0.235, $p< 0.05$. Applying the procedures given by Aiken and West (1991), the hypothesis it means that service charter had a significant effect in the relationship between tangible elements and student satisfaction. This further meant that when tangible elements are provided as per the service charter in public universities, student satisfaction was enhanced by 23.5%.

Conclusions

The intangible feature of services poses great challenges that service institutions among them the public universities must effectively and continuously address. The significant moderating effect of service charter on tangible element and student satisfaction relationship mean that the management of public universities need to put

in place the tangible features mentioned and promised in the university policies and guidelines as they are critical in service delivery and student satisfaction. It therefore means that a conducive learning environment, necessary learning materials, laboratory and lecture room, examination materials, physical infrastructure and the entire learning tool provided for in the service delivery standards and guidelines of university must be provided. University management should also ensure that both staffs who offer the services and the student receiving the services are able to use the learning tools especially those that have technical aspects.

Recommendations

Management of public universities should prioritize their investments on those tangible elements of infrastructure, materials, structures and general environment that affect the quality of service delivery to students. The developed standards, policy and guidelines should state clearly the tangible aspects that will be necessary for a quality service delivery that will ensure student satisfaction.

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