

INVESTIGATING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' LEVEL OF SERVICE QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT: The present study aimed to investigate whether university students' level of service quality in higher education makes a difference or not in their education process in accordance with gender, department, and class level variables. As a data collection tool, "Higher Education Service Quality Scale" was used. The sample was composed of 239 students studying at Sakarya University. Collected data was analyzed via t-test, and ANOVA. According to findings, there was no significant difference between university students' level of service quality in higher education in terms of gender. On the other hand, there was a significant difference in university students' level of service quality in higher education in terms of department, and class level.

Keywords: Service quality, higher education, gender.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays quality service, quality in education, and service quality in higher education terms have been considered important by relevant institutions in order to meet the expectation of people who benefit from these service, and to increase their satisfaction level. Thus, quality assessment studies become important at universities. Universities have great responsibility in terms of strengthening the social structure, and contributing to the national economy. Hence, it can be suggested that the offered service at universities should be qualified in order to give qualified education to individuals. There are several different definitions of the service concept. Some common points of these different definitions are as follows: service is abstract, beneficial for those who buy it, customers can participate in production process of the service, service cannot be stored, they are consumed as soon as they are produced, service quality assessment is subjective, quality control is limited to process control basically, labor is intensive in service production (Özçalık, 2007). There may be some problems in determining quality in service industry because of different features. Therefore, different methods and assessment tools are developing and applying in order to determine service quality. Two factors gain importance in those different methods. Those factors are determining quality according to customer opinions and to employer/ manager opinions or to employee opinions (Bektaş and Ulutürk-Akman, 2013). According to the definition of The Banks Association of Turkey (1994), service quality means that meeting expectations and request of individuals who benefit from this service. At this point, quality perceived by individuals is important. Quality is determined with factors such as how much it meets the expectations of individuals/ customers at the service and how individuals perceive availability of qualifications that take place at the service (Cengiz, 2008). In other words, offering service in accordance with the request, needs, and expectations of the individuals is an indicator of service quality. Institutions which offering service in this way can increase individuals' perception about service quality as much as they can meet the expectations of individuals. Thus, the dimensions of service quality should be determined by institutions that offer service. Those dimensions are as follows: reliability (offering accurate and consistent service), giving feedback (giving accurate and explicit feedback to customers in time), guarantee (employees should establish environment of confidence with their behaviors), empathy (employees should put themselves in customers' shoes and serve necessary communication to the customers), physical assets (visuality of the institutions, physical environment, offered materials, and employees) (Okumuş and Duygun, 2008).

Education and quality concepts are closely related to each other. Producing qualified products in labor market corresponds to educating people qualitatively in education service (Karahan, 2013). In order to educate people qualitatively, qualified education is necessary. Qualified education can be achieved by applying accurate education programs effectively to individuals in right time and place (Devebakan, Koçdor, Musal and Güner, 2003). Quality in education is a concept that is used in different meanings. In general, quality in education means reaching education purposes and success in terms of bringing individuals in intended knowledge, skills, and abilities (Karşlı, 1997). Like all other institutions that offer service, higher education institutions also aim to offer qualified service. In order to offer qualified service, it is important to provide products and service that aim to fulfill customers' needs. The important thing here is defining the customer concept accurately in higher education (Açan and Saydan, 2009). According to Madu, Aheto, Kuei and Winokur (1994), students, families, personnel, and all individual in the society constitute customers in educational institutions. Students, families, and personnel are internal customer, whereas companies and the society is foreign customer (Yılmaz, Filiz and Yaprak, 2007). Within those customer groups, students are considered as important in terms of increasing service quality in education. As Taylor (1995) stated that effective factors in determining service quality is

customer expectations, and customer satisfaction. Therefore, the most important factor that affects the quality in education is student satisfaction. It is necessary to give education in accordance with students' request, need, expectation, and interest by offering service in educational institutions, and even to meet students' expectations by giving education that goes beyond those features (Güzel-Şahin, 2011). Owlia and Aspinwall (1996) approached to quality features in higher education in six headings. Those features, in which students are considered as customers, are as follows: concrete factors, competence, attitude, content, presentation, and reliability. Concrete factors include providing university students with adequate physical environment and opportunities, and creating an interesting visuality. Competence covers having sufficient number of well-equipped instructors, good communication of those instructors with students, and efficient teaching- learning process. Attitude includes caring students one to one, determining students' needs, and giving adequate consultancy to students. Content comprises interdisciplinary curriculums, supporting students in terms of their professions, and providing an opportunity for group works. Presentation includes preparing effective presentations, making objective assessment and evaluation, giving feedback to students, and improving students' self- confidence. Reliability covers fulfilling commitments, considering complains, requests, and suggestions, and solving determined problems. There have been various studies that investigate the service quality that is offered to students at universities. In order to determine the effectiveness of those studies, mostly students' self-reports are used.

Aim of the Study

In the present study, university students' perception levels about service quality in higher education during their education process was determined and also whether or not their scores in Higher Education Service Quality Scale differed in terms of gender, department, and class level was investigated. Within the scope of this purpose following questions were sought an answer.

Research Problems

- Do students' scores of service quality in higher education differ in terms of gender?
- Do students' scores of service quality in higher education differ in terms of class level?
- Do students' scores of service quality in higher education differ in terms of department?
- In which level students' perception about service quality in higher education?

METHOD

Research Design

The current study was conducted with relational screening model. Within the scope of this model, "Higher Education Service Quality Scale" was applied to students.

Participants

The sample of the present study was composed of 239 students in Sakarya University Faculty of Education: 133 (58.1%) female, 96 (41.9%) male. The distribution of students according to gender and department was shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Distribution of Students According To Gender and Department

Department	Gender	N	%	Total	Grand Total
SST	Female	30	13.1	91	239
	Male	61	26.6		
ST	Female	60	26.2	71	
	Male	11	4.8		
MDT	Female	43	18.8	67	
	Male	24	10.5		

SST: Social Science Teacher Education

ST: Science Teacher Education

MDT: Mentally Disabled Teacher Education

Data Collection Tools

Higher Education Service Quality Scale: Higher Education Service Quality Scale includes 22 items and four sub dimensions. The Turkish adaptation of the scale was done by Eskicumalı, Arslan and Demirtaş (2013). Confirmatory factor analysis results show that 22 items were loaded in four sub dimensions as it was in original scale, and four dimensional model showed a good fit ($X^2=337.86$, $sd=186$, $RMSEA=.043$, $IFI=.98$, $CFI=.98$, $GFI=.93$, $AGFI=.91$, $SRMR=.056$). The internal consistency reliability coefficient was calculated as .92.

Analysis of Data

The ANOVA and T test were conducted in order to investigate whether students' perceived Higher Education Service Quality Scale points differed in accordance with gender, department, and class level or not.

FINDINGS

The current study was conducted in order to determine university students' perceived service quality in higher education and also to investigate whether or not their scores in Higher Education Service Quality Scale differ in terms of gender, department, and class level. Obtained data was analyzed according to research questions and interpreted.

Whether or not the difference between students' scores in service quality in higher education was significant in terms of gender variable was analyzed via t- Test and results were shown in Table 2.

Table 2. T- Test Results of Students' Mean Scores of Service Quality in Higher Education in Accordance with Gender

	Gender	N	\bar{X}	Ss	Sd	t	p
Service Quality in Higher Education	Male	96	62.17	15.7	227	-.72	.46
	Female	133	63.53	12,4			

As it was seen in Table 2, students' scores of service quality in higher education did not significantly differ in terms of gender variable ($t_{227}=-.72$, $p<.05$).

Whether or not the difference between students' perceived scores in service quality in higher education was significant in terms of class level was analyzed via t- Test and results were shown in Table 3.

Table 3. T- Test Results of Students' Mean Scores of Service Quality in Higher Education in Accordance with Class Level

	Class Level	N	\bar{X}	Ss	Sd	t	p
Service Quality in Higher Education	1 st grade	98	60.2	13.9	227	-2,54	.01
	4 th grade	131	64.9	13.6			

As Table 3 shows that students' scores of service quality in higher education significantly differs in terms of class level ($t_{227}=-2.54$, $p<.05$). Indeed, mean scores of seniors in terms of service quality in higher education was higher ($\bar{X}=64.9$) as compared to the freshmen ($\bar{X}=60.2$).

Whether or not the difference between students' perceived scores in service quality in higher education was significant in terms of department variable was analyzed via ANOVA-Post Hoc comparison and results were shown in Table 4.

Table 4. ANOVA Results of Students' Mean Scores of Service Quality in Higher Education in Accordance with Department

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degree of Freedom	Mean Square	F	P	Significance
Between groups	2592,12	2	1296,06	7,03		1-3
Within Groups	41651,60	226	184,29		,001*	2-3
Total	44243,7	228				

1: Social Sciences T., 2: Science T., 3: T. of Mentally Disabled

As Table 4 indicates that students' scores of service quality in higher education significantly differs in terms of department ($F=7,03$, $p<.05$). In fact, mean scores of students in Social Science Teacher Education ($\bar{X}=64.5$) in terms of service quality in higher education was higher as compared to students in Teacher Education of Mentally Disabled ($\bar{X}=57.7$). Moreover, mean scores of students in Science Teacher Education ($\bar{X}=65,7$) in terms of service quality in higher education was higher than those of students in Teacher Education of Mentally Disabled ($\bar{X}=57.7$).

Furthermore, as Table 2, 3, and 4 show that students' mean scores in terms of service quality in higher education was at medium- level. In other words, students are satisfied with the service quality of their university's education at medium level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted in order to determine university students' perceived service quality in higher education and also to investigate whether or not their scores in Higher Education Service Quality Scale differ in terms of gender, department, and class level. According to findings, students' perceived service quality in higher education was at medium level. Researches, conducted in different universities and in departments, found that students were satisfied with their university service at medium level (Çavdar, 2009; Taşkın, Demireli, Cingöz, 2008; Eren, Özgül and Çullu-Kaygısız, 2013) and at low level (Eti-İçli and Vural, 2010; Yüce, 2013; Güzel-Şahin, 2011). Moreover, Tayyar and Dilşeker (2012) carried out a study at both foundation and state universities in terms of service quality and found that students' perceived service quality at foundation universities was higher as compared to state universities. Furthermore, when two different state universities were compared, students' perceived service quality was higher in long- established university than that of the developing one. Şahin (2009) carried out a longitudinal study for three years with students in Faculty of Education, and tried to determine students' satisfaction level in six sub dimensions. Students' satisfaction level with university service showed an increase generally for the following three years. Nevertheless, for academic year in which the last application took place, students' satisfaction about especially the management, resources, and computer opportunities sub dimensions were at relatively low levels, on the other hand, students' satisfaction about instructors, consultancy, and lesson plan sub dimensions were at medium levels.

The present study indicated that students' perceived service quality in higher education scores were not significantly different in terms of gender, on the contrary, they were significantly different in terms of department and class level. Perceived service quality in higher education scores of seniors were higher than those of freshmen. In addition, perceived service quality in higher education scores of students in Social Science Teacher Education and Science Teacher Education were higher than those of Mentally Disabled Teacher Education. Similarly, according to the study of Okumuş and Duygun (2008) which aimed to investigate the relationship between students' perceived service quality in higher education and student satisfaction, it was found that there was no significant difference in service quality in higher education in terms of gender. Besides, Güzel-Şahin (2011) investigated the university students' perception about service quality in terms of five dimensions, namely, physical appearance, reliability, interest/ desirousness, assurance, and empathy. For all dimensions, there was no significant difference in students' perception about service quality in terms of gender. Yılmaz, Filiz and Yaprak (2007) examined the service quality of university students in five dimensions. In terms of gender, there was no significant difference in interest dimension; on the contrary there was a significant difference in competence, reliance, concrete features, and desirousness. In terms of department, there was a significant difference in competence and desirousness dimensions. In terms of class level, the obtained value in desirousness variable was close to the significance level.

Çavdar (2009) investigated service quality in higher education in six dimensions (concrete features, competence, attitude, content, presentation, and reliability). In terms of gender, there was a significant difference in reliability dimension, but not in other five dimensions. With regards to department, there were significant differences in competence, attitude, content, and presentation dimensions, but not in concrete features and reliability dimensions. In the sense of class level, there was a significant difference in content, and presentation dimensions but not in other four dimensions. Eren, Özgül and Çullu-Kaygısız (2013) conducted a study on undergraduate students who were studying at tourism and found that there was no difference between students' education satisfaction in terms of gender variable. On the other hand, there was significant difference in consultancy service and assessment and evaluation in the sense of department variable. Similarly, in terms of class variable, there were significant differences in consultancy and education services. Seniors were more satisfied with the consultancy service than freshmen. Moreover, in terms of education service, juniors and seniors were more satisfied than freshmen. Service quality in higher education was approached in different dimensions. When service quality was investigated in terms of different variables, the difference between different dimensions of the service quality and gender, class level, and department was found. Moreover, students, who benefit from education services at higher education institutions generally perceived service quality at medium and low levels. Therefore, it is thought that universities, which prepare students to the profession and life, should increase their service quality in order to provide students with qualified education.

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