# Application of Service Quality Model in Education Environment

**Ting Ding Hooi**

**Abstract:** Most of the ideas on service quality stem from the West. The massive developments in research in the West are undeniable of their importance. This leads to the generation and development of new ideas. These ideas were subsequently channeled to developing countries. Ideas obtained were then formulated and used by these developing countries in order to obtain better approach in channeling service quality. There are ample to be learnt from the service quality model, SERVQUAL which attain high acceptance in the West. Service quality in the education system is important to guarantee the effectiveness and quality of education. Effective and quality education will be able to offer quality graduates, which will contribute to the development of the nation. This paper will discuss the application of the SERVQUAL model into the education environment.

**Keywords:** tangibles, assurance, empathy, reliability, responsiveness, service quality, education.

There exist tremendous developments and studies in all aspects in the West. One of these aspects is service quality. Service quality models have been tested and proven and these developments have been channeled and absorbed into developing countries gradually. There are many Western ideas that have been translated into local culture and customs. Hence, the adaptation of the service quality model, which was developed in the West,

*Ting Ding Hooi is a lecturer at the Faculty of Economics, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia. E-mail: dhting@uum.edu.my*

should be pondered upon. There is the need to introduce the service quality model to the education system in Malaysia in order to provide better and quality education as the education system is also categorized as services. The objective of this paper is to discuss whether service quality model can be applied into the education system in Malaysia or not.

There are altogether 11 public universities and 6 public university colleges in Malaysia catering for all courses that are in great demand in the economy today. In most cases, the instructors or lecturers have their own rooms. But there are also some who share room with other instructors or lecturers.

The service quality offered in the education system is still in the infancy stage. In the evaluation of the service quality in the education system in Malaysia, the service quality model, SERVQUAL developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) has been considered.

**SERVQUAL MODEL**

The SERVQUAL model has been used extensively to indicate the service quality in the West. It is one of the most popular models thus far (Angur et al., 1999; Durvasula et al., 1999; Johnson & Nilsson, 2003). Many, especially in the services industries, have adapted the SERVQUAL model into their system. This is due to the reason that SERVQUAL model is able to capture most of the dimensions of service quality.

According to Berry et al. (1988), only customers alone know that competing organizations and offering same services do not offer the same level of service quality. The relationship between customers and organizations depended on the level of service quality obtained by customers (Beatty et al., 1996; Crosby et al., 1990). This is because services would create uniqueness.

Five main dimensions in SERVQUAL that affect the individuals' evaluations of service quality are as follows (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). Reliability: the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Tangibles: appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials. Responsiveness: willingness to help customers and provide prompt services. Assurance: kKnowledgeable, polite, competent and trustworthy employees. Empathy: provide care and personalized attention.

The perception of quality is the customers' evaluation (attitude) and is the outcome of comparisons made by these customers between the expectations and perceptions on the actual service performance (Lewis,

1989; Parasuraman et al., 1985; 1988). The service quality is seen as good if the perception is greater than the expectations and vice versa.

**Perceptions**

Till today, there are no conclusions as how the perception concept is being defined. This is because perception is a measurement of attitude and it is subjective among individuals.

In general, service quality perceptions are defined as an evaluation or attitude on the superiority of services (Avkiran, 1994; Zeithaml, 1988). In the services marketing literature, perception is defined as the believes customers have on the services that are being rendered (Parasuraman et al., 1985) or services experienced (Brown & Swartz, 1989).

According to Klara & Zeithaml (1993), perceptions towards the dimensions of service quality can be seen as an early expectations of customers on what would happen when the service is being rendered. According to Swift (1999), perceptions are subjective and depend on individuals' experiences and value system. Culture background of individuals would bear some impact on their perceptions.

Pitt et al. (1996) assert that, in most cases, perceptions would provide stronger estimation on the overall evaluation of service quality as opposed to the gap between expectations and perceptions. The problems encountered by managers are when they put much emphasis and then enhance the service quality level, it will lead to higher expectations among customers in the future. Hence, a higher level of service quality level rendered to customers would induce higher expectations during future patronization. Thus it is better for the organization to only render what they have already promised and not exceed it (Pitt et al., 1996). But there are problems with this strategy. When organizations only offer what they promised, competitors might take advantage and capture the customers away.

**Expectations**

Expectations are defined as wants or needs of customers, which is a common definition used in the service quality literature (Zeithaml et al., 1993). Parasuraman, et al. (1994) defined expectations as customers' believes on what should be provided by the service provider.

There are two standards for expectations. One standard represents the prediction to future events. This is a common standard used in the

satisfaction literature (Boulding et al., 1993). Another standard is the normative expectation on the future events (Prakash, 1984), which are the ideal expectations (Boulding et al., 1993). This is normally used in the service quality literature (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Though there are different standards used for expectations, the expectations and perceptions in both the quality and service quality literature are connected to the disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1977; Oliver, 1980). This paradigm says that customers' predictions will be used as the measurement standard for firms' performance (Bearden & Teel, 1983; Woodruff et al., 1983). Olson & Dover (1979) state that customers' expectations is their pre-believes before trying out products or services.

Service intangibility would induce more complicated form of expectations (Parasuraman et al., 1988). If customers are not able to see the results of services (tangibles), hence it would be difficult for them to determine what should be expected (Bebko, 2000).

## APPLICATION OF SERVQUAL MODEL IN THE EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

The following discussions will look at whether SERVQUAL model could be applied effectively in the learning institutions or not. In order to prepare a good and fine environment for students, instructors or lecturers need to pay attention and realize that they should create an environment that is able to build and enhance the learning process. This can be done through delivering better than what the students expect. This is because the SERVQUAL model itself states that a good service quality exists when perception is higher than the expectations of individuals.

SERVQUAL model has five main dimensions and these will be looked at in order to determine its application in the education environment.

### Tangibility

The tangibility factors are able to give first impressions to students. Students are unable to determine the service but they are able to see the tangibles that are associated with the services. Since there exists the intangibility of services, the students need to find evidence from their instructors or lecturers to support their perceptions and this can be done through tangible aspects. In general, students tend to look at the following aspects: (1)

instructors or lecturers: the attire and the way they dress, their appearance and approach as well as their attitudes and behavior; (2) physical evidence: teaching materials, lecture notes, reference books and equipment associated with teaching in the instructors or lecturers' room and the lecture halls.

In other words, the students will evaluate the facilities, the service provider, internal and external decorations in the lecture halls or the instructors or lecturers' room. What instructors or lecturers can do is to upgrade the lighting system, temperature, internal and external decorations in order to make it more attractive and tidier. The temperature in the lecture halls should not be too cold as this will distract the students' focus and concentration. Moreover, the blood circulation would be slower when it is cold. Hence, the ability of students to absorb lecture notes and knowledge would be less.

Tidy lecture notes and good lectures in a systematic way would help the students take down notes and understand the lectures conducted. There are some lecturers who do not really prepare their notes or lecture well. This will make the students lose their interests and also concentration.

Instructors or lecturers should also focus on the way the reference books or teaching materials are being arranged in their rooms. This is because when they are arranged neatly, it is easier for instructors or lecturers to refer. Furthermore, the students are able to browse through them when they are in the lecturers' room during consultations.

Neatly dressed instructors or lecturers would give good impressions to students. This will instill the perceptions that they have the morale, discipline and tidiness in their work. Their professionalism is able to upgrade their image as an educator.

**Reliability**

Support should not mean that after the lecture is over, that's the end of the lecturers' job. The lecturers should instead always be there to help and assist students in order to make the points clear or to solve the students' problems regarding the course. They should also be there to make the students happy and satisfied. This is because there are times when there exist some technical problems or fraud that is unavoidable during lectures, and hence students should be given the change to make it clear.

All promises must be kept. To say "no" is difficult but to say "yes" and not able to keep the promise is even worse. When instructors or lecturers promise to meet students at a certain time, they should be around when the students come. Instructors or lecturers who do not keep their promise would lose the students' trust and confidence. Students' trust and confidence are important assets because when the students lose their trust and confidence, the instructors or lecturers would lose their function and purpose as an educator.

Instructors or lecturers should also understand what can or cannot be done. This is because if they promise to do something, and it is against the policy or regulations, it cannot be carried out. This will create embarrassing situations to them and also jeopardize their image. They should instead take actions depending on the needs of students and the current scenarios, not promising extremes.

Instructors or lecturers are perceived to be an important factor in determining the success of the education entities. The fast and effective service delivery, educating and consultation are important elements in evaluating services. This is because instructors or lecturers are important to communicate the image of learning institutions and also affecting students applying to these learning institutions. In other words, students would normally go to instructors or lecturers for information sources and knowledge.

Instructors or lecturers should also be able to provide services correctly and accurately on the first instant. This means that during lectures or consultations, the concepts, theories or information provided should be correct and not in a haywire without preparation.

**Responsiveness**

Instructors or lecturers should inform students when they have time to see students. This is because consultation hours are very important. Consultation hours can to strengthen the students' understanding on issues that are difficult to grasp. Moreover, consultations also involve two-way interactions. This will induce and lead to the ability of students to think critically and analytically. This skill is important when the students graduate from their studies and move into the working world.

Instructors or lecturers should also come to the class punctually. This is because time is important to students. If the instructors or lecturers are late, they will waste a lot of the students' time when the total number

of students' time is being totaled up. Same goes to the consultation hours. They should be in their room on the time promised.

Instructors or lecturers should also be prepared and have the tendency to help students. This is because students normally come when they have problems either academic problems or personal problems. The instructors or lecturers should not show their ego and reluctance to help as this will deter students to come in the future. There are also instructors or lecturers who are busy with their research. It should be a practice for these instructors or lecturers to put aside their tasks and focus on the students, as students are their clients.

**Assurance**

In all circumstances, instructors or lecturers should provide positive perceptions on themselves. Instructors or lecturers should be able to instill security when the students approach them. Confidence towards instructors or lecturers is important as this involves the students' safety. When instructors or lecturers are able to instill safety measures to students, the students need no longer worry of them being cheated as most of the instructors or lecturers have their own room to themselves. This shows that the instructors or lecturers should have discipline and consciousness as well as strong faith when rendering services to students.

In many circumstances, instructors or lecturers cannot be separated from services. In order to provide quality services, instructors or lecturers should be able to perform their tasks well. When there exists a good relationship between students and instructors or lecturers, a better studying environment would be created. The students would also feel comfortable when dealing with them.

Instructors or lecturers should be able to understand their field well. They should have the knowledge in hand when students approach them. Hence, the learning institutions should channel their resources in order to upgrade the ability of their teaching staffs. This is because the success of an organization depends highly on the expertise and knowledge and accuracy of the staff members. On the other hand, it also involves to what extent the instructors or lecturers are able to solve problems or queries raised by students. The more expert one is in the field, the better they are in the eyes of the students. Hence, continuous education and training should be provided to these instructors or lecturers.

**Empathy**

Instructors or lecturers should smile often, not showing cross or grumpy faces. Facial expressions are important to create moods. Furthermore, if instructors or lecturers show cross or grumpy faces, it will affect the tendency of students to come for consultations when matters or problems arise. It will also make the lecture boring if they do not smile. Smile is able to bring forth care, courtesy, friendliness and personalization. Personalization has positive impact towards the evaluations of students and one's experiences. Friendliness and courtesy of instructors or lecturers are one of the main factors that differentiate between services and products. Politeness and good manners are a tactic towards individualism, which is change from a more formal transaction to personalized services.

Flexible hours for students' consultation will enable students to come at times convenient to them. Students need to carry many hours of lectures a week and, hence, might not be able to meet the time the instructors or lecturers fix. Hence, flexible consultation time would bear a great impact to students and therefore, more students would come and discuss topics that they could not understand. Two way discussions and interactions between students and instructors or lecturers are better than having the students asking their peers who might give them wrong information.

Instructors or lecturers should also be able to give individual attentions to slow learners. This might be due to the fact that these students might face some other problems; hence the personal attention would be able to boost up the motivation and intention towards success. They also need to pay attention to students' problems and be there to support them as instructors or lecturers not only provide knowledge but also guidance in the students' life towards success and to make them a better person to the society.

**CONCLUSION**

From the above discussions, it is deemed feasible for the SERVQUAL model to be applied to the education institution. Though there are not many studies done to test the effectiveness of the application of SERVQUAL model in the education situation, the above discussion could be adapted and applied to the education scenarios. It should be used as a guideline in order to upgrade the quality and teaching standard.

**REFERENCES**

Angur, M.G., Nataraajan, R. & Jahera Jr., J.S. 1999. Service Quality in the Banking Industry: An Assessment in a Developing Economy. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 17 (3): 116-125.

Avkiran, N.K. 1994. Developing an Instrument to Measure Customer Service Quality in Branch Banking. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 12 (November): 10-18.

Bearden, W.D. & Teel, J.E. 1983. Selected Determinants of Customer Satisfaction and Complaint Reports. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 20 (November): 21-28.

Beatty, S.E., Mayer, M., Coleman, J.E., Reynolds, K.E. & Lee, J. 1996. Customer-Sales Associate Retail Relationships. *Journal of Retailing*, 72 (3): 223-247.

Bebko, C.P. 2000. Service Intangibility and Its Impact on Consumer Expectations of Service Quality. *Journal of Services Marketing,* 14 (1): 9-26.

Berry, L.L. & Parasuraman, A. 1991. *Marketing Services: Competing Through Quality*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Berry, L.L., Parasuraman, A. & Zeithaml, V.A. 1988. The Service-Quality Puzzle. *Business Horizons*, (September-October): 35-43.

Boulding, W.S., Klara, A. & Zeithaml, V. 1993. A Dynamic Process Model of Service Quality: From Expectations to Behavioral Intentions. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 30 (February): 7-27.

Brown, S.W. & Swartz, T.A. 1989. A Gap Analysis of Professional Service Quality. *Journal of Marketing*, 53 (April): 92-98.

Crosby, L., Evans K.R. & Cowles, D. 1990. Relationship Quality in Services Selling: An Interpersonal Influence Perspective. *Journal of Marketing*, 54 (July): 68-81.

Durvasula, S., Lysonski, S. & Mehta, S.C. 1999. Testing the SERVQUAL Scale in the Business-to-Business Sector: The Case of Ocean Freight Shipping Service. *Journal of Marketing,* 13 (2): 132-150.

Johnson, M.D. & Nilsson, L. 2003. The Importance of Reliability and Customization from Goods to Services. *The Quality Management Journal,* 10 (1): 8-19.

Lewis, B.R. 1989. Quality in the Service Sector: A Review. *International Journal of Bank Marketing,* 7 (5): 4-12.

Oliver, R.L. 1977. Effect of Expectation, and Disconfirmation on Post-Exposure Product Evaluation: An Alternative Interpretation. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 62 (April): 480-486.

Oliver, R.L. 1980. A Cognitive Model of the Antecedents, and Consequences of Satisfaction Decisions. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 17 (November): 460-469.

Olson, J.C. & Dover, P. 1979. Disconfirmation of Customer Expectations through Product Trial. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 64 (April): 179-189.

Parasuraman, A. Zeithaml, V.A. & Berry, L.L. 1985. A Conceptual Model of Service Quality, and Its Implications for Future Research. *Journal of Marketing*, 49 (Fall): 41-50.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. & Berry, L.L. 1988. SERVQUAL: A Multiple-item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality. *Journal of Retailing*, 64 (1): 12-40.

Parasuraman, A, Zeithaml, V. & Berry, L.L. 1994. Alternative Scales for Measuring Service Quality: A Comparative Assessment Based on Psychometric and Diagnostic Criteria. *Journal of Retailing*, 70 (3): 201-229.

Swift, J.S. 1999. Cultural Closeness as a Facet of Cultural Affinity: A Contribution of the Theory of Psychic Distance. *International Marketing Review*, 16 (3): 182-201.

Woodruff, R.B., Cadotte, E.R. & Jenkins R.L. 1983. Modeling Consumer Satisfaction Processes Using Experience-Based Norms. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 20 (August): 296-304.

Zeithaml, V.A. 1988. Consumer Perceptions of Price, Quality, and Value: A Means-End Model, and Synthesis of Evidence. *Journal of Marketing*, 52 (3): 2-22.

Zeithaml, V.A., Berry, L.L. & Parasuraman, A. 1993. The Nature and Determinants of Customer Expectations of Service. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 21 (1): 1-12.