

ANALYSING THE STUDENTS' SATISFACTION ON THE EDUCATIONAL SERVICES- THE SERVQUAL MODEL

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ABSTRACT: *It has somehow become a truism the fact that when a client is satisfied by a product or a service that he buys from a company, he becomes loyal to this product and automatically to the respective company. On the contrary, when the product or the service do not rise to the desired or expected level of quality, the individual can become a private or public campaign agent against that service. Because the satisfaction of an individual is associated with his loyalty for a specific service or product (Gholipour & Einolahzadeh, 2018; Cai&Chi, 2018; Shahsavar& Sudzina, 2017), the university should be preoccupied about the relationship between student satisfaction and their institutional loyalty. If the students are satisfied with the quality of the educational services offered by a certain specialization, they will also suggest to relatives, acquaintances or friends to follow the studies within the that specialization and educational institution.*

In the scientific literature, the definitions on customer satisfaction are divided into two categories (Grigoroudius & Siskos, 2010): the satisfaction as a result, an emotional response related to the gained experience from the process of purchasing specific products / provided services / due to a certain model of behaviour induced by sellers and the satisfaction as a process, an evaluation response based on the experience regarding to the effective quality of a product.

Keywords: *satisfaction; students; quality of the educational services; new educational environment; SERVQUAL model;*

Students' satisfaction

The universities are increasingly aware on the importance of students' satisfaction in the context of the new educational environment. Most of the time, the students can be considered satisfied by the environment in which they carry out their educational activity and they are motivated to complete their studies, only when the university offers them adequate facilities for their academic and professional development (Oldfield& Baron, 2000, Malik, Danish, Usman, 2010).

Rowley (2003) identified four arguments in order to sustain the studies on the

students' feedback analysis. One referred to the fact that the university must provide to the students the opportunity to express their level of satisfaction with courses and educational activities, and in general with academic experience.

Price et al. (2003) mentioned, among other things, in a study on the impact of the available facilities in educational institution on the students' decision to choose a certain university, the courses' structure, the computers' availability and the quality of the library' services. Referring to the students' satisfaction, they concluded that the institutional facilities influence the students' decision to attend the courses of a particular university.

Measuring customers' satisfaction

The SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1985) is still a used tool for measuring customers satisfaction and especially the quality of a service.

The authors started from ten initial dimensions regarding the satisfaction on services and after analysis they reduced the list to five dimensions. The first one refers to the tangible aspects and includes the satisfaction on physical facilities or equipment. The second dimension is reliability and aims the ability to perform the promised services. It follows responsiveness, that refers to the willingness of helping customers and providing prompt services. The fourth dimension, assurance refers to the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence: The empathy accentuates the caring, individualized attention that a firm provides to its customers (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1998)

The studies that used the SERVQUAL model proved the notoriety and usefulness of the model in analysing customers satisfaction in different fields of activity (Bojanic& Drew Rosen, 1994; Van Dyke, Kappelman& Prybutok, 1997; Ruby, 1998; Udo, Bagchi&Kirs, 2011; Naqavi, Refaiee, Baneshi& Nakhaee, 2014; Qadri, 2015; Galeeva, 2016; Uppal, Ali& Gulliver, 2017).

The research methodology

The goal of this research was to identify the level of students' satisfaction on the educational services offered by the two specializations from West University of Timisoara (UVT) and Politehnica University of Timisoara (UPT).

The study was conducted within West University of Timi oara at the Faculty of Political Sciences, Philosophy and

Communication Sciences, Department of Communication and Public Relations and at Politehnica University of Timisoara at the Faculty of Communication Sciences, Department of Communication and Public Relations.

The sample included 170 respondents, representing students. There were randomly selected 80 students from UVT and 90 students from UPT. The selection criteria also considered the year of study, creating within each university groups of approximately 30 students per year of study. The data was collected by giving the questionnaires to each selected student. The research was sustained by the help of the teachers who agreed to provide several minutes during their courses for students to complete the questionnaire. The students responded to the statements regarding the quality of the educational services offered by their specialization and about university services overall.

The used scale was an adaptation of the original SERVQUAL scale. Following the analysis of the items with a group of students not included in the study sample, we decided on some modifications and adaptations of the initial items. The final version of the scale was composed of 23 items considered relevant for the target audience (students).

On the **tangible** dimension were used items as: faculty has modern equipment; the library has an updated specific literature for your field of interest; the administrative staff and the teachers are dressed neatly and elegantly.

On the dimension of **reliability**, we used items such as: when the students have problems, administrative staff and the teachers are friendly, even if they are not able to help; teachers follow the schedule of the courses and the exams; the courses are taught by well-trained teachers.

On the **responsiveness** component we tested: students are informed in advance about the changes in the schedule; the administrative staff and teachers are always

willing to help you; the schedule of the activities is suitable for all students. The **assurance** dimension included items such as: the administrative staff and teachers are friendly and polite; the administrative staff and teachers are trustworthy. On the last dimension, **empathy** were included items such as: the administrative staff and teachers have convenient hours to advise students; faculty understands the specific needs of the students.

Research results

The tested hypotheses supposed a comparison between the two specializations. Below we present the results obtained through the perspective of the UPT and the UVT comparisons:

In terms of students' satisfaction from the communication specializations within the UVT and within the UPT, the obtained results suggest that there is no significant difference between the students answers, but the average recorded by UVT is higher ($M = 3.45$) than that of UPT ($M=3.40$). This result shows that the students from UVT are more satisfied by the tangible aspects (physical facilities, equipment, staff aspect) than the others.

H1. There are significant differences in terms of tangible aspects between UVT and UPT students. To compare the results of the two groups participating in the study we used the independent t test. The means obtained by the two groups showed that there is no significant difference between the answers offered by UVT students:

$$M = 3.45 \text{ and } SD = 0.471$$

and by students from UPT

$$M = 3.40 \text{ and } SD = 0.678$$

the significance obtained is of

$$p=0.640, t(165) = 0.469$$

We can therefore say that the hypothesis regarding the existence of differences regarding the tangible elements was not confirmed.

Regarding to the capacity of the administrative staff and the teachers to carry out the programmed activities in a safe and precise way, the results indicated that the students from both universities are satisfied with this issue.

H2. Between the UVT and the UPT students there are significant differences about the institutional reliability dimension. Thus, the averages obtained by the two samples showed that there are no significant differences between student responses from:

$$UVT (M=3.82 \text{ and } SD=0.555)$$

and student responses from UPT:

$$(M=4.02, SD=0.645)$$

$$t(167) = 0.759 \text{ and } p = 0.08$$

H3. Between the students from UVT and the students from UPT are significant differences on the responsiveness dimension. The results showed that the administrative staff and the teachers at UPT want to help students and provide concrete information/services to their students. This aspect was mentioned by UVT students to a lesser extent. The satisfaction of UPT students was higher than the UVT's.

These statements were validated by using the independent t-test for comparisons between the two groups of students. Between the mean of the students' responses from UVT:

$$M= 3.17, SD = 0.603$$

and those from UPT students:

$$M = 3.63, SD = 0.799$$

was a significant difference;

$$t(171) = 3.547, p = 0.001$$

H4. Between the UVT and the UPT students there are significant differences on the assurance dimension of SERVQUAL questionnaire.

Regarding the ability of the employees (teachers and administrative staff) to inspire confidence, the results have shown that the students from the communication specializations within both universities

declared themselves satisfied with these aspects.

The comparison between the two groups of students demonstrate that the responses of the students from UVT:

$$M = 3.60, SD = 0.643$$

and those of the students from UPT:

$$M = 3.69, SD = 0.874$$

were not differs significantly:

$$t(171) = 0.595, p = 0.553$$

H 5. Between the UVT and the UPT students are significant differences on the empathy dimension.

Regarding the empathy, students from UPT declared themselves more satisfied with this aspect comparing to those from UVT. UPT students considered that the administrative staff and the teachers pay individual attention to the students, they understand the needs they have. These characteristics are not as much important for the administrative staff and the teachers at UVT.

We used the T-test for independent samples to compare the two groups of students and between the responses of students from UVT:

$$M = 2.71, SD = 0.711$$

and those of students from UPT:

$$M = 3.28, SD = 0.829$$

were significant differences:

$$t(188) = 4.019, p < 0.01$$

Hypothesis H5 was considered confirmed.

Conclusions

Customer satisfaction is an important issue and the needs and expectations of the clients regarding the quality of services must be known in any organization in order to assure them. Following the research results we can say students' satisfaction with the educational services offered by UVT and UPT is high, the means obtained exceeding the middle of the assessment scale. Only on two dimensions of SERVQUAL, namely responsiveness and empathy, the significant differences between the two specializations was confirmed.

The quality of the educational services of the two universities from Timisoara is somewhat similar. To overcome the exploratory level of this research and for the results to be used in the institutional development strategies are required additional analyses in both universities, possibly longitudinal investigations and on representative samples to.

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