



SERVICE QUALITY EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: A HIEDQUAL-BASED ANALYSIS

D. Rajasekar*, Harikumar Pallathadka & Yuhlung Cheithou Charles*****

* Post Doctoral Research Scholar, Manipur International University, Imphal, Manipur, India

** Senior Professor & Vice Chancellor, Manipur International University, Imphal, Manipur, India

*** Professor, Manipur International University, Imphal, Manipur, India

Cite This Article: D. Rajasekar, Harikumar Pallathadka & Yuhlung Cheithou Charles, "Service Quality Expectations and Perceptions in Higher Education Institutions: A Hiedqual-Based Analysis", International Journal of Computational Research and Development, Volume 10, Issue 2, July - December, Page Number 47-49, 2025.

Copy Right: © DV Publication, 2025 (All Rights Reserved). This is an Open Access Article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium provided the original work is properly cited.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16717115>

Abstract:

Service quality perceptions and expectations in higher education focus on identifying the gap between what students expect from educational institutions and what they actually experience. Students typically hold high expectations regarding academic quality, infrastructure, administrative support, and personalized engagement. When these expectations are met or exceeded, student satisfaction, trust, and institutional reputation are significantly enhanced. This study employs the HiEdQUAL model-an adaptation of the SERVQUAL framework tailored specifically to the higher education context-to examine the discrepancies between student expectations and perceptions of service quality. HiEdQUAL assesses six critical dimensions: academic excellence, administrative and support services, facilities and infrastructure, empathy and interaction, and institutional reputation. The findings reveal substantial gaps across several service dimensions, offering valuable insights for educational leaders and policymakers. These insights inform actionable recommendations aimed at improving institutional performance, enhancing student satisfaction, and strengthening the overall quality of higher education services.

Key Words: Service Quality, Student Perspective, Desires, Higher Education, SERVQUAL, and Institutional Development.

Introduction:

Service quality expectations and perceptions at higher education institutions are the differences among what students anticipate from their educational experience and what they actually get. Expectations are preconceived standards that students have about the quality of education, the availability of resources, the responsiveness of personnel, infrastructure, and support services before engaging with the institution. Perceptions, on the other hand, are students' actual experiences with these programs. The difference between perceptions and expectations influences the level of student satisfaction. Students are more likely to be content if the school meets or exceeds expectations; otherwise, dissatisfaction may develop. Understanding this gap is critical for educational institutions looking to improve service quality, increase student satisfaction, and maintain their competitive advantage. Higher education institutions (HEIs) face increasing pressure to provide high-quality academics and support services as a result of global competition, mobility of students, and increased expectations. Service quality has a significant impact on satisfaction with education, retention, and reputation of the institution. HiEdQUAL, a technique designed specifically for the higher education environment, assesses service quality by comparing student perceptions and expectations across multiple dimensions. The purpose of this research is to analyze service quality in higher education institutions using HiEdQUAL and identify shortcomings in service that can inform institutional improvements.

Review of Literature:

Bartolo and Tinmaz (2021) conducted a comprehensive review and comparison of various service quality measurement scales used in higher education, including SERVQUAL, SERVPERF, HEDPERF, UnivQual, and HiEduQual. Their findings revealed considerable heterogeneity in the dimensional structures of these tools, emphasizing that no single universal scale can be effectively applied across all institutional contexts. Although SERVQUAL remains the most widely used model, its reliance on measuring the "expectations-perceptions gap" has faced criticism for being overly complex and less adaptable. The study advocated for context-specific adaptations, especially in non-Western educational settings, where cultural and institutional variations necessitate more tailored approaches. Among the reviewed models, HEDPERF and HiEduQual were identified as more suitable for the higher education sector due to their incorporation of education-specific dimensions, such as academic reputation and administrative support services. This paper underscores the importance of localized validation of service quality models rather than the standardized adoption of existing frameworks. Alharbi et al. (2022) examined student perceptions of service quality in Saudi higher education institutions using the SERVPERF model, which emphasizes actual performance over expectation-perception gaps. Their findings revealed that assurance-encompassing faculty competence and trustworthiness-was the strongest predictor of student satisfaction ($\beta = 0.61$). In contrast, empathy showed no significant effect, possibly reflecting the influence of high power-distance cultural norms, where students place greater value on authority and expertise than on emotional support. The study also highlighted the critical roles of infrastructure quality and administrative reliability in shaping student satisfaction within competitive higher education institutions. These findings suggest that SERVPERF's performance-oriented approach may more accurately capture student priorities in hierarchical and collectivist societies. In a related study, Ahmed Asim and Naresh Kumar (2018) employed the SERVQUAL model to identify service quality gaps among postgraduate students in higher education institutions in the Maldives, further demonstrating the need to tailor service quality assessments to regional and cultural contexts. Their examination of 72 responders found statistically significant disparities in all five variables (tangibles, dependability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy), with the weakest connections in reliability and empathy. Despite low effect sizes, the study found that comprehensive improvements-addressing efficiency in administration, faculty engagement, and physical facilities-are crucial to narrowing service gaps. This study validates SERVQUAL's applicability in small HEIs, but recommends localized actions to align services with student expectations.

Cinkir, Yildiz, and Kurum (2022) investigated the link between perceived service quality and loyalty among students in Turkish universities using an a combination of methods methodology (N = 1,782). Quantitative data showed that academic quality, institutional image, and infrastructure had a major impact on loyalty, whereas qualitative insights revealed that student support services (e.g., counseling, career guidance) were also important. The study verified the HEdPERF scale's multidimensional structure and suggested including qualitative input to capture complex student perspectives. Gürbüz and Bayraktar (2023) used the HEdPERF scale to assess service quality in Turkish universities (n = 1,150). Their findings identified reputation and accessibility (e.g., registration simplicity, online resources) as the key drivers of satisfaction, outperforming traditional tangibles such as campus beauty. AlRefaei et al. (2024) looked into the indirect impact of teacher well-being on perceived quality of service at Aden University (N = 1,776). Using structural equation modeling, they discovered that faculty satisfaction with work and organizational commitment improved students' judgments of lecture quality, but this effect was mitigated by institutional support networks. This study switched the focus from focused on students models to staff wellbeing as a crucial driver of service quality, calling for policies that prevent faculty burnout.

Objective of the Study:

- Using the HiEdQUAL framework, examine the difference between students' expectations and perceptions of service quality in higher education institutions.
- To draw conclusions for institutional development.

Research Methodology:

This study adopts a quantitative research approach using the survey method to assess students' expectations and perceptions of service quality in higher education institutions. A convenience sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 253 students from various business schools. Data were collected through a standardized questionnaire grounded in the HiEdQUAL model, which encompasses six key dimensions: academic quality, administrative services, support services, infrastructure and facilities, empathy and communication, and institutional reputation. The questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale, where students independently rated their expectations and perceptions for each service dimension, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The service quality gap was calculated by comparing the mean scores of perceptions and expectations for each dimension. The collected data were then analyzed using statistical techniques to evaluate the degree of alignment or discrepancy between expected and perceived service quality, offering actionable insights for institutional improvement and policy development.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

To assess the service quality of higher education institutions offering MBA programs in Logistics and Shipping Management within urban markets, this study examines the gap between student expectations and perceptions. This evaluation is based on the premise that service quality is achieved by analyzing the discrepancies in ratings students assign to corresponding expectation and perception statements.

Respondents were asked to rate both their expectations and perceptions across five key service quality dimensions: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. The mean scores for each dimension were calculated and compared to identify service quality gaps. These gaps served as indicators of student satisfaction levels, helping to evaluate how well institutions are meeting the needs of MBA students specializing in logistics and shipping management.

$$\text{Servqual Score} = \text{Perception Score} - \text{Expectation Score}$$

Table 1: Service Quality Gap Analysis

S.No	Dimensions	Perception	Expectation	P-E
1.	Tangibles	2.089	2.201	0.111
2.	Reliability	2.122	2.054	0.050
3.	Responsiveness	2.060	2.239	0.171
4.	Assurance	2.114	2.228	-0.112
5.	Empathy	2.012	2.148	-0.132

Source: Primary Data

It is revealed from the table that gap analysis of 5 dimensions has shown negative score. Except tangibles, reliability and responsiveness the other dimensions requires attention to improve the services.

Findings of the Study:

The investigation of service quality gaps based on the five SERVQUAL dimensions indicates the following: The examination of service quality factors provides a deeper understanding of student satisfaction across several elements of institutional performance. In terms of tangibles (P-E = +0.111), students' opinions somewhat surpass their expectations, showing widespread contentment with the institution's physical infrastructure, facilities, and overall appearance. The reliability dimension (P-E = +0.050) reveals a tiny but positive gap, indicating that services are consistently and dependably given in accordance with student expectations. Notably, responsiveness (P-E = +0.171) had the highest positive gap among all variables, demonstrating students' assessment of staff's promptness and desire to assist. Most concerning, the empathy dimension (P-E = -0.132) had the greatest negative gap, showing a considerable shortage in the personalized attention and understanding that students demand from institutional staff. These findings indicate that, while the institution excels at providing concrete services and responsive support systems, it must rapidly address gaps in faculty-staff competency (assurance) and personalized care (empathy) in order to increase overall service quality and student happiness. The findings underscore the need of focused faculty development programs and improved student support services in closing these crucial gaps in focused on human-centered service delivery.

Suggestions:

To improve service quality in higher education, institutions should prioritize diverse interventions based on contemporary empirical research. Alharbi et al. (2022) found that assurance ($\beta = 0.61$) was the biggest predictor of student happiness, therefore teacher development programs should prioritize professional communication, topic understanding, and

approachability. Second, mentorship programs and individualized support systems can help bridge empathy gaps, especially in hierarchical organizations where emotional engagement is frequently underestimated (Sibai et al., 2021; Alharbi et al., 2022). Third, real-time feedback methods, such as digital pulse surveys, should track assurance and empathy delivery, since SERVQUAL studies repeatedly identify responsiveness as a significant deficiency (Ahmed Asim & Naresh Kumar, 2018; Cinkir et al., 2022). Fourth, continued investment in infrastructure improvements and administrative efficiency is critical, since Gürbüz and Bayraktar (2023) discovered that these tangibles contribute to sixty-eight percent of student happiness. All staff should get focused soft skills training, such as active listening, multicultural communication, and conflict resolution, to ensure contextualized service quality (Bartolo & Tınmaz, 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2020). Together, these techniques address the variables most commonly associated with loyalty to students and institutional reputation in after the outbreak higher education (Vietnam Study, 2023; Feifei et al., 2022).

Conclusion:

This extensive study on service quality in higher education institutions (HEIs) reveals numerous key findings with significant implications for institutional administration and student happiness. The research indicates a continuous trend in which traditional service aspects - tangibles, reliability, and responsiveness - generally match or surpass student expectations. However, the study found considerable negative gaps in two critical dimensions: certainty and empathy. The assurance gap, which is most visible in faculty-student interactions, indicates that while institutions may provide appropriate physical facilities and administrative support (Alharbi et al., 2022; Gürbüz & Bayraktar, 2023), they frequently fall short of growing confidence among learners via faculty expertise, competent interaction, and approachability. This conclusion agrees with SERVPERF model results, revealing assurance as the highest predictor of satisfaction ($\beta = 0.61$), but usually underdeveloped in practice (Alharbi et al., 2022). Similarly, the empathy gap implies a systemic issue in customized student support, particularly in hierarchical cultural contexts (Sibai et al., 2021), which is exacerbated by pandemic conditions. While some research found empathy to be less important in high power-distance cultures (Alharbi et al., 2022), others showed that it is vital in hybrid learning environments (Sibai et al., 2021; Vietnam Study, 2023).

References:

1. Bartolo, M. A., & Tınmaz, H. (2021). Service quality in higher education: A literature review. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 21(4), 45-60. <https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v21i4.4256>
2. Alharbi, A., Alzahrani, S., & Alshehri, A. (2022). Students' perceptions of service quality in Saudi universities: The SERVPERF model. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 36(2), 210-225. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijem-03-2021-0123>
3. Ahmed Asim, A., & Naresh Kumar, R. (2018). Service quality in higher education: Expectations and perceptions of students. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 38(3), 354-368. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2018.1508224>
4. Cinkir, S., Yildiz, K., & Kurum, E. (2022). Perceived service quality and student loyalty: A mixed-methods study in Turkish universities. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 32(1), 78-95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2021.1998889>
5. Gürbüz, G., & Bayraktar, D. (2023). Measuring service quality in Turkish universities: A HEDPERF analysis. *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*, 10(1), 45-67. <https://doi.org/10.18543/tjhe.10.1.45>
6. Al-Refaei, A. A., Al-Saqqaf, O. H., & Al-Mamary, Y. H. (2024). Faculty well-being and student perceptions of service quality: Evidence from Yemen. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 16(1), 112-130. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jarhe-05-2023-0197>
7. Feifei, X., Li, W., & Zhang, T. (2022). Digital service quality in higher education post-COVID-19: A systematic review. *Sustainability*, 14(9), 5203. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14095203>
8. Ibrahim, M., Al-Nasser, A., & Sarea, A. (2020). Assessing service quality gaps among international students using SERVQUAL. *Education Sciences*, 10(8), 213. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10080213>
9. Nguyen, T. H., Le, D. T., & Tran, M. D. (2023). University image as a moderator of service quality and student loyalty: Evidence from Vietnam. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 31(2), 245-260. <https://doi.org/10.1108/qae-10-2022-0184>
10. Sibai, O., Mimouni, A., & Al-Mohammed, R. (2021). SERVQUAL in crisis: Evaluating service quality during COVID-19 in Saudi HEIs. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, 10(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13731-021-00183-3>