



ISSN NO. 2320-5407

Journal Homepage: - www.journalijar.com

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/7411
DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/7411>



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)
ISSN 2320-5407
Journal Homepage: <http://www.journalijar.com>
Journal DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01

RESEARCH ARTICLE

SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSIONS OF A PHILIPPINE STATE UNIVERSITY AND STUDENTS' SATISFACTION: BRIDGING GAPS TO EXCELLENCE.

Florhaida V. Pamatmat¹, Leonor L. Dominguez², Caezar D. Pamin³ and Aileen M. Daran⁴.

1. Ed. D. Dean, College of Teacher Education.
2. M.A. Faculty, San Pablo City Campus.
3. Ph. D. Research CTE Coordinator, LSPU Main Campus.
4. Ed. D. Extension CTE Coordinator, LSPU Main Campus.

Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 14 May 2018
Final Accepted: 16 June 2018
Published: July 2018

Keywords:-

service quality dimensions, students' satisfaction, quality of services, quality of frontline services, excellence of service.

Abstract

In the business world, service quality is a prized commodity as it directly impacts the profitability performance of any establishment. On the other hand, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), while may not be considered business institutions, also depend on service quality which is believed to be an equally important factor in providing services to stakeholders. While it is noted that State colleges and universities are experiencing financial downturn due to the struggling economy and decreasing subsidy from the government, HEIs are dealing with reduced budget and searching for ways to do more with less. One way for universities to accomplish this objective is to place a renewed focus on meeting or exceeding the expectations and needs of their students. In all universities around the globe student satisfaction has been considered an important factor in measuring the quality of services provided by the institution. Being the most important beneficiary of the educational institution's services, students are in the right position to determine the quality of services offered by their university.

This research examined the relationship between service quality dimensions and the level of students' satisfaction with the quality of services provided by the university. A questionnaire was used to collect the related data hence establish the relationship between the two types of variables - service quality dimension variables and students' satisfaction level of identified services. Recommendations were identified to strengthen the delivery of services within the university system to bridge the gaps towards excellence.

The study also examined how efficient and effective the services are provided to LSPU customers, particularly the students through assessment on their expectations and their perception or observation.

After the investigation, the study revealed that students' level of satisfaction is correlated with their observations related to the five service quality dimensions such as reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. The effort of LSPU to continuously improve the services (academic and administrative) provided to its clients and stakeholders spell how competitive it is and how far it will reach towards achieving excellence.

Introduction:-

Service quality is a priced commodity and it is an equally important index to measure the satisfaction of clients and stakeholders. In all universities around the globe, student satisfaction has been an essential measure of the quality services provided by the institution.

In the Philippines, universities are key players in education and responsible in the integral formation of professionally competent, service-oriented, principled, and productive citizens. Moreover, one of the most important purposes of Philippine universities is service quality dimensions which reflect the accessibility and quality of frontline services to meet the needs of clients.

This study exemplifies excellence of services provided to the students of Laguna State Polytechnic University within five (5) dimensions such as reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness between service quality dimension variables and students' satisfaction level of identified services; thus, strengthen delivery of services within the university system to bridge the gaps towards excellence.

Objectives:-

The study examined how efficient and effective the services are provided to LSPU customers, particularly the students through assessment on their expectations and their perception or observation. Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the respondents' expectations in the service quality dimension of LSPU with respect to reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness?
2. What is the respondents' perception or observation in the service quality dimension of LSPU with respect to reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness?
3. What is the significant difference between the respondents' expectations and observation in the university's service quality dimension?
4. Is there a significant correlation between the student-respondents observation and satisfaction in connection with the university quality services?

Methodology:-

The study is a social research and survey method was utilized. Data to satisfy the objectives were elicited from a survey questionnaire. The locale is confined with randomly selected students, at least 800 students from the four campuses of LSPU (Santa Cruz - 250, San Pablo - 220, Siniloan - 180, Los Banos - 150) Collected data were mainly analyzed through descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation.

Literature Review:-

The Philippines envisions its higher education system to be the key player in the education and integral formation of professionally competent, service-oriented, principled, and productive citizens; hence it is expected to become the prime mover of the nation's socioeconomic growth and sustainable development. Directed by this vision, the higher education system should offer programs and services that meet the demands of an industrializing economy within the context of sustainable development and a culture of peace, as well as the challenges of a diverse and globalized society (Garcia 2004)

One of the most important purposes of Philippine universities is service quality dimensions that reflect the accessibility and quality of frontline services to meet the needs of our clients. It also talks about lean management that shapes the changes and improvement in which services and workflows are implemented.

Service quality is defined as a form of behavior that relates to satisfaction but not equivalent to it which results as a balance of prospect with performance (Shepherd 1999). In connection to this, in university customers such as students keep an eye on the quality of services provided to them all the way from the front line down to the classroom situation. Hence, Dotchin and Oakland (1994) mentioned that service quality is a degree to which any service fulfills customer's requirements or hope.

In the study of Mosahab et. al., (2010) it is stated that service quality would be one of the determinants of satisfaction and loyalty. In fact, nearly 43 percent of customer's satisfaction change is explained by service quality. On the other hand, service quality has a direct relation with loyalty, and nearly 45 percent of loyalty changes can be explained by service quality changes. Another point is that if the satisfaction variable enters the model, the resulted determination index will be higher in figure than other cases (0.803). This figure means that nearly 80 percent of loyalty changes can be explained by satisfaction and service quality, although satisfaction plays a more important role in this relation.

According to NT Jamaludin et al. (2014) "organizations which pay more attention to customers as offering service quality survive as a center of excellence". Hence, this study exemplifies excellence of services provided to the students of Laguna State Polytechnic University relative to student population within the five dimensions such as reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness.

Reliability means "do what you say you're going to do when you said you were going to do it" (Zeithaml 2009). In LSPU this refers to the manner in which the university facilitates the services to respond to the needs and expectations of its clients like timeliness, accuracy of records, and punctuality of the front line service providers, and also including teachers' proficiency and sensitivity in addressing students' concerns. Accordingly, LeBlanc defined reliability as the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately (LeBlanc 2014).

Boyd (2013) stated that taking care of customers should lead to increased retention, which is an increasingly important revenue source for higher education institutions. The bottom line is institutions of higher education need students to survive and thrive. Commenting about the relationship of students and higher education, Bejou (2005) stated, "The longer these ongoing transactions are satisfactory to both parties, the longer the relationship will endure, to the benefit of everyone"

Responsiveness in this research means to respond quickly, rapidly, immediately, instantly. It is the willingness to help clients and provide prompt service. It refers to the availability of officials, faculty, personnel and staff to assist or address students' concerns/complaints appropriately and promptly.

To better serve students, Ewers (2010) suggested that institutions have employees attend customer service training sessions to learn the basics of customer service. Yet many in academia find this a hard pill to swallow. Regarding the benefits of good customer-student relationships, Emery et al. (2001) remarked, "Student-customer satisfaction directly correlates to larger enrollments: Happy student stay in school, so retention rates remain high; happy students tell their high-school friends, so recruitment numbers are higher" More students mean more tuition revenue. Bejou (2005) spoke about buyer's satisfaction—given that students pay for their education—by saying, "If the quality of the initial encounter is good, and the ongoing relationship is strong, satisfaction and loyalty remain high" Vaill (2008) further pointed out, "Education is clearly a service, not a product ... in higher education; they have to be mindful of, responsive to the characteristics, needs, and expectations of the students."

Assurance, on the other hand, simply implies that service providers are expected to be the experts of the service they're delivering. This means that the profile of the frontline service providers and professors including the accuracy of the delivery of their functions are realized as prescribed in the university manuals of procedures and guidelines. This also refers to the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.

Tangibles in this research refers to the adequacy of facilities, including the availability of state-of-the-art equipment, availability of parking space, access to internet, and visual appeal of the university. Even though this is the least important dimension, appearance matters.

Another variable utilized is empathy that encompasses consideration of the students' best interest, and fair and unbiased handling of students concerns. This means that services can be performed completely to specifications.

This research also speaks of students' satisfaction as the primordial issue in determining the quality of services of a university worldwide and at the same time the primary dimension to establish a standard of excellence, this study investigated the expectations and observations of student respondents as regards to the quality of services provided in one of the promising state universities in the Philippines, the Laguna State Polytechnic University. This study

further analyzed the quality of services in the university as perceived and observed by the student respondents. The probable gap that exist and the attributes of services needing improvement based from the respondents' expectations and observation were identified for recommendations towards pursuing excellence.

This study is deeply rooted on the two-factor theory theorized by psychologist Frederick Herzberg which states that there are certain factors in the workplace that cause job satisfaction, it should be concerned with the nature of the work itself — the opportunities it presents for gaining status, assuming responsibility, and for achieving self-realization while a separate set of factors cause dissatisfaction job environment — policies, procedures, supervision, and working conditions.; hence he said that job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction act independently of each other. According to Herzberg, hygiene factors are what cause dissatisfaction among employees in a workplace. Herzberg's theory concentrates on the importance of internal job factors as motivating forces for employees.

The study of Jiewanto et. al. (2012) discussed the several problems causing dissatisfaction among university students relative to service quality. However, results indicated that service quality (SERVQUAL) had a positive impact to student satisfaction and university image towards sustainability in the higher education sector. On the other hand, the study of service quality held in Malaysian universities, the finding indicate that majority of the students are satisfied with the facilities provided; hence, result reveals that there is significant relationship between the five dimensions of service quality and students' satisfaction (Ari 2011).

Discussion:-

Table 1:- presents the expectations and observations of the respondents relative to the service quality dimensions of LSPU in terms of reliability.

Items	Expected			Observed		
	Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
1.The registration is timely and error free	3.20	0.868	MH	2.52	0.812	L
2.This university keeps its records accurately	3.55	0.722	H	3.15	0.831	MH
3.Instructors, professors & lecturers do not cancel classes	3.07	0.925	MH	2.67	0.816	MH
4. The staff are sincere & attentive to students' problems	3.32	0.883	MH	2.64	0.862	MH
5.The university provides its services promptly	3.37	0.806	MH	2.67	0.807	MH
6.Instructors, professors & lecturers are proficient and competent	3.55	0.707	H	2.89	0.876	MH
7.Instructors, professors & lecturers do as they say	3.39	0.793	MH	2.87	0.826	MH
Average	3.25	0.814	MH	2.77	0.832	MH

Scale	Range	Description	Verbal Interpretation
5	4.20 - 5	Strongly Agree	Very High
4	3.40 - 4.19	Agree	High
3	2.60 - 3.39	Moderately Agree	Moderately High
2	1.80 - 2.59	Disagree	Low
1	1.00 - 1.79	Strongly Disagree	Very Low

The table shows the expectations of student-respondents in the service quality of LSPU in terms of reliability with an average mean of 3.25 and standard deviation of 0.814. This record means that LSPU students don't have very high expectations relative to the front line services of LSPU because they are convinced that registration for one, is error free and accurate. They also believe that all the staff concerned are sincere, timely, and they mean what they say in terms of rendering services, and more importantly the professors are proficient and competent.

On the other hand, when it comes to the student-respondents observation, there is a recorded average mean of 2.77 and standard deviation of 0.832 which means that as observed, there is low quality of service in terms of timely and error free registration. There is also a slight deviation in their observation when it comes to accuracy of records and also based on their observation, instructors and professors need to improve a bit in terms of proficiency and competency which may be attributed to the bulk of other job related functions/ duties and requirements that hamper instructors and professors' enthusiasm in teaching. It can be noted that there is same level of consistency in the student-respondents' expectation and observation as reflected in the recorded standard deviation.

According to Zeithaml (2009) reliability means "do what you say you're going to do when you said you were going to do it" which applies to the services rendered by Laguna State Polytechnic University.

Table 2:-presents the expectations and observations of the respondents relative to the service quality dimensions of LSPU in terms of assurance.

Items	Expected			Remark	Observed		
	Mean	SD	Remark		Mean	SD	Remark
1.The staff are friendly and courteous	3.44	0.811	H	2.79	0.859	MH	
2. Instructors and professors are likewise friendly and courteous	3.49	0.742	H	2.98	0.836	MH	
3. They are productive and efficient in research	3.46	0.728	H	3.01	0.826	MH	
4. They are high profiled instructors and professors	3.52	0.704	H	3.03	0.838	MH	
5.They are innovative and agents of change	3.42	0.778	H	2.95	0.820	MH	
6.The staff possess adequate knowledge on the university policies and guidelines	3.54	0.674	H	3.05	0.805	MH	
7.The university has a high degree of community involvement	3.54	0.709	H	3.04	0.894	MH	
8. The university has excellent security measures	3.48	0.760	H	2.88	0.936	MH	
9. Instructors, professors, and lecturers possess excellent communication skills as evidenced by a well-taught subject matter	3.51	0.714	H	3.01	0.840	MH	
Average	3.48	0.735	H	2.97	0.850	MH	

It is in the record that the student-respondents have high level of expectations in terms of assurance with an average mean of 3.48 and standard deviation of 0.735 which is interpreted as high. This means that the students expect harmonious relationship with the faculty and staff of the university, and highly expect them to be friendly and courteous. They also have expectations that teachers are highly profiled and can be productive and efficient in terms of research. Teachers are also highly expected to be innovative and agents of change.

On the other hand, it is in the record that with respect to the student-respondents observation there is a recorded mean of 2.97 interpreted as moderately high and standard deviation of 0.850 which means that the actual observation of the student-respondents did not register equally with their expectations. This result may be attributed to staff and teachers' diverse qualities or characteristics which may not meet students' expectations. For instance, staff and teachers' may not always be friendly, teachers' research competencies are not of the same level, in the same manner that teachers have varied educational qualifications, and some, if not all staff, may not be aware of the entire university policies and guidelines. Moreover, not all student-respondents are aware about the university's high involvement in community programs.

Table 3:- presents the expectations and observations of the respondents relative to the service quality dimensions of LSPU in terms of tangibles.

Items	Expected		Remark	Observed		Remark
	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	
1. Layout & lightings of the classrooms are first-rate	3.45	0.819	H	2.48	0.861	L
2. Instructors, professors, and lecturers use technology-based instructional materials	3.56	0.712	H	3.09	0.850	MH
3. The university buildings and grounds are well-maintained	3.54	0.737	H	2.67	0.989	MH
4. The overall cleanliness of the university is evident	3.56	0.713	H	2.63	0.909	MH
5. University classrooms library, and other study rooms are furnished with required equipment	3.59	0.727	H	2.69	0.902	MH
6. The university atmosphere & decorations have visual appeal	3.41	0.765	H	2.61	0.843	MH
7. The university personnel have equipment needed for student transactions and mobility	3.61	0.682	H	3.06	0.882	MH
8. Computers & its accompanying software are up to date	3.46	0.786	H	2.54	0.933	L
9. The university provides student access to internet	3.53	0.833	H	2.57	1.038	L
10. Parking spaces are available	3.57	0.711	H	2.91	0.896	MH
Average	3.52	0.748	H	2.72	0.910	MH

In terms of tangibles, in this research refers to the adequacy of facilities, including the availability of state-of-the-art equipment, availability of parking space, access to internet, and visual appeal of the university. Even though this is the least important dimension, appearance matters.

It can be noted that relative to student-respondents expectations on tangibles there is a recorded mean average of 3.52 and standard deviation of 0.748 which is interpreted as high. This result means that the students expect that the university will provide adequate facilities for quality education such as availability of state-of-the-art equipment, spacious parking space, access to internet and harmonious environment for learning.

On the other hand, inasmuch as they have high expectations, the student-respondents observation resulted to an average mean of 2.72 with standard deviation of 0.910 which means that all respondents have unanimous observation that in terms of tangibles, there is only a moderately high visibility of adequate facilities. This result may be attributed to limited internet access, very few state-of-the-art equipment, lack of space for vehicle parking and physical environment which may need more make-up and not all teachers have visible technology-based instructional materials. to satisfy the students.

Table 4:- presents the expectations and observations of the respondents relative to the service quality dimensions of LSPU in terms of empathy.

Items	Expected		Remark	Observed		Remark
	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	
1. The university administration promotes students' best interest	3.51	0.733	H	2.78	0.844	MH
2. The university provides students convenient access to computer facilities	3.45	0.840	H	2.52	0.972	L
3. The university provides students convenient access to study rooms, laboratories, and library facilities	3.53	0.760	H	2.75	0.903	MH

4. The staff are willing to give students' individual attention	3.49	0.783	H	2.67	0.910	MH
5. Instructors & professors are sympathetic & supportive to students' concerns	3.50	0.743	H	2.84	0.862	MH
6. Opening and closing time of the libraries, computer labs & other facilities are convenient for the students	3.55	0.707	H	3.03	0.806	MH
7. University officials are fair & unbiased in the treatment of individual students	3.49	0.804	H	2.68	0.971	MH
Average	3.50	0.767	H	2.75	0.895	MH

Empathy in this study encompasses consideration of the students' best interest, and fair and unbiased handling of students concerns. This means that services can be performed completely to specifications.

The table reveals an average mean of 3.50 with standard deviation of 0.767 interpreted as high level with respect to student-respondents expectation in terms of empathy. This means that they expect that the services within the university system are for the best interest of the students, there is convenient space in the classrooms and access in the internet, personnel and staff address the concerns of the students, professors are sympathetic and supportive to student needs, and each individual is treated fairly.

On the other hand, when it comes to students' observation, there is an average mean of 2,75 with standard deviation of 0.895 which is interpreted as moderately high. This result means that the observation does not equal the expectations of the respondents maybe because they have high expectations with regard to the services and attention provided by the professors, personnel and staff.

Table 5:-presents the expectations and observations of the respondents relative to the service quality dimensions of LSPU in terms of responsiveness.

Items	Expected			Observed		
	Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
1. The university has available personnel to assist students	3.51	0.774	MH	2.78	0.876	MH
2. The university instructors, and professors are available to assist students	3.50	0.778	H	2.83	0.856	MH
3. Instructors, professors & lecturers have the capacity to solve problems when they arise	3.49	0.733	MH	2.84	0.825	MH
4. The students seldom get the "run around" when seeking information about the university	3.45	0.772	MH	2.85	0.810	MH
5. The university provides its services promptly	3.39	0.814	MH	2.73	0.892	MH
6. Channels for expressing student complaints are readily available	3.41	0.799	H	2.68	0.885	MH
7. Queries are dealt with efficiently and promptly	3.42	0.752	MH	2.82	0.825	MH
Average	3.45	0.774	H	2.79	0.852	MH

Responsiveness in this paper refers to the availability of officials, faculty, personnel and staff to assist or address students' concerns/complaints appropriately and promptly. As revealed in the table there is an average mean of 3.45 with standard deviation of 0.774 interpreted as high when it comes to students' expectations. This result means that they expect that the university will handle all their concerns and queries appropriately and promptly.

However, when it comes to the actual observation of the student-respondents relative to responsiveness, there is an average mean of 2.70 with standard deviation of 0.852 interpreted as moderately high. This result indicates that the

observation of the students did not meet their expectations, which may mean that students concerns are not all addressed appropriately and the students are not oriented as to who to approach in case they have issues or concerns.

Table 6:-presents the test of difference between the expectations and observation of student-respondents relative to service quality dimensions of LSPU.

Indicators	f-value	p-value	Analysis
Reliability	1.714	.031	Significant
Assurance	1.786	.013	Significant
Tangibles	1.434	.063	Not Significant
Empathy	1.082	.068	Not Significant
Responsiveness	1.662	.036	Significant

It is recorded that two among the five quality dimensions such as tangibles and empathy become not significant with f-value of 2.434 and a.082 respectively which means that there is no big difference between the expectation and observation of the student-respondents. This result can also be interpreted that the observation of the respondents almost meet the expectations. With respect to tangibles, it shows that the students feel that there is adequate facilities provided by the university, whereas in terms of empathy, results mean that the students receive satisfactory attention from the administration and their concerns are addressed appropriately.

Table reveals that in terms of reliability, there is a significant difference of 1.714 between the expectation and observation of the student-respondents which may mean that the university has to improve more on the quality of services provided to the students to establish more trust and confidence from them. Their problems related to academics should be dealt with accordingly. Moreover, the students expect the teachers to be more proficient and competent in teaching and they should refrain from cancelling classes.

In terms of assurance, the f-value of 1.786 indicates a significant difference between student-respondents expectation and observation. This result means that teachers are expected to be highly profiled and experts in their fields. They are also expected to be efficient in the conduct of research and possess good communication skill evidenced by a well-taught subject matter.

Table 7:-presents the correlation between student-respondents level of satisfaction and their observation of the university service quality.

Indicators	r-value	p-value	Analysis
Reliability	.483	.000	Significant
Assurance	.560	.000	Significant
Tangibles	.537	.000	Significant
Empathy	.526	.000	Significant
Responsiveness	.550	.000	Significant

Table reveals that student-respondents level of satisfaction are highly and positively correlated with their observations of the five service quality indicators in the university such as reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. These results may mean that student-respondents' observation of the delivery of service quality dimensions determine their level of satisfaction.

Conclusion:-

It is concluded that students' level of satisfaction is correlated with their observations related to the five service quality dimensions such as reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. The effort of LSPU to continuously improve the services (academic and administrative) provided to its clients and stakeholders spell how competitive it is and how far it will reach towards achieving excellence.

Recommendations:-

Based on the data gathered & analyzed, the following were hereby recommended:

1. Inasmuch as there is a high correlation between students' satisfaction and observation relative to academic and administrative services of the university, it is recommended that better strategic plan be implemented to enhance students' satisfaction and the university performance in general.

2. LSPU should continuously aim for quality oriented services in order to obtain excellence.
3. ISO practices should be continually implemented for quality services.
4. More trainings, seminars, and workshops be attended by the unit heads, front line services and instructors/professors in order to obtain supplementary knowledge, and become skillful in the delivery of excellent services to the students and university stakeholders.

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