CHAPTER-5
QUALITY IN EDUCATION SERVICES

5.1. Definition of Quality

It is the customer who has to define quality. As Gale says: “value is simply quality, however the customer defines it, offered at the right price”. Improving quality in the eyes of the customers pays off for the institution in the long run.33

There is always a challenge as one has to maintain a balance between low cost operation of the institution and enhancement of quality to the customer / student. If one accepts for cost reduction, one is often under pressure to do so at the cost of quality and vice versa.

The relationship between a consumer / student and an organization / institution will last as long as both parties benefit mutually. Thus, it is absolutely necessary to gain some valuable insight into this balancing act of enhancing value to both parties.

In order to enhance the quality provided to the students, the researcher will use some theories and models of services marketing to meet the challenges of all the stake holders of an educational institution through quality educational programme.

5.1.1 Gaps Model of Service Quality

The Gaps Model of Services Quality is one such model that addresses to meet the challenges of any service industry. It provides strategies and processes that an institution can employ to drive service excellence.

The central focus of this gap model is the *customer gap* - the difference between customer expectation and perception. Expectations are the reference point that customers have, as they come into a service experience. Perceptions reflect the service as actually received.

Any educational institution wants to close the gap – between what is being expected and what is actually being received – to satisfy their students and build long-term relationships with them. In order to close this gap, an institution should identify four more gaps that may arise due to the following causes

Gap-1- Not knowing what students expect  
Gap-2- Not selecting the right service/course designs and standards  
Gap-3- Not delivering to service standards  
Gap-4- Not matching performance to promises

These gaps can be explained with the help of diagram 5.1.

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The following are the suggested remedies to bridge the gaps arising due to the service providers:

**Gap 1 - Learn What Customers Expect**

1. Gain a better understanding of customer expectations through research, complaint analysis, student forums, feedback etc.
2. Increase direct interactions between Principal, teachers and students to improve understanding.
3. Improve upward communication from contact personnel to management and reduce the number of levels between the two.
4. Utilize the information to incite corrective measures / actions.

**Gap 2- Establish the Right Service Quality Standards**
1. Ensure that University/ Educational institution displays ongoing commitment to quality as defined from the students' point of view
2. Get Teachers, non teaching staff to set, communicate, and reinforce student-oriented service standards for their work units.
3. Train teachers and non teaching staff in the skills needed to deliver quality service i.e., functional quality (the teaching plans or process) and technical quality (the outcome).
4. Become receptive to new ways of teaching and administrative methods that overcome barriers to delivering quality service
5. Standardize repetitive work tasks, to ensure consistency and reliability, by substituting hard technology for human contact and improving work methods (soft technology).
6. Establish clear teaching/service quality goals that are challenging, realistic, and explicitly designed to meet students’ expectations
7. Measure performance and provide regular feedback
8. Reward staff for attaining quality goals

**Gap 3-Ensure That Service Performance Meets Standards**
1. Avoid staff role ambiguity.
2. Ensure that the entire staff understands how their respective jobs contribute to students’ satisfaction.
3. Provide staff with the technical training needed to perform their assigned tasks effectively.
4. Develop innovative recruitment and retention methods to attract the best people and build loyalty.
5. Enhance staff performance by selecting the most appropriate and reliable technology and equipment
6. Train staff about students’ expectations, perceptions, and problems.
7. Train staff in interpersonal skills, especially for dealing with students under stressful conditions.

8. Eliminate role conflict among staff by involving them in the process of setting standards.

9. Train staff in priority setting and time management,

10. Measure staff performance and tie compensation and recognition to delivery of quality service.

11. Develop reward systems that are meaningful, timely, simple, accurate, and fair.

12. Empower the staff in the field by pushing decision-making power down the organization; allowing them greater discretion in coming up with innovative ideas to reach the specified goals.

**Gap 4 - Ensure That Delivery Matches Promises**

1. Seek inputs from staff when new advertising programs are being created.

2. Institution brochures and magazines should contain information and pictures depicting the staff at work.

3. Allow the staff to preview these brochures before the students see it.

4. Develop internal communication to strengthen links between the teaching staff, non-teaching staff and the management.

5. Ensure that any advertised contents accurately reflect those service characteristics that are most important to any student interested to join the institution.

**5.2. Quality Dimensions**

Research suggests that customers do not perceive quality as a one-dimensional concept—that is, customers’ assessment of quality include perceptions of multiple factors. For example, it has been suggested that the following eight dimensions of quality are applied to all goods and services: performance, features, reliability, conformance, durability, serviceability, aestheticism and perceived quality. In the case of services, a human element, more so in teaching (undeniably), is involved and also due to its complexity, ten dimensions of quality can be determined.\(^{23}\)
There is some overlapping of these dimensions and therefore the experts in services marketing have summarized them in the following five-

1. Reliability- Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
2. Responsiveness- Willingness to help, and provide prompt service by the staff of an institution
3. Assurance – The staff’s knowledge and courtesy, and their ability to cultivate trust and confidence.
4. Empathy- Care, individualized attention given to students
5. Tangibles – Appearance of the physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and written materials.

These dimensions represent how students organize information about institutional service quality in their minds. The ten dimensions of quality are depicted with the help of Table 5.1. and applied to educational institutions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples of questions that students might ask</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Credibility</strong></td>
<td>Trustworthiness, believability, honesty</td>
<td>Reputation of the college or University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Security</strong></td>
<td>Freedom from danger, risk</td>
<td>Validity of the Degree or diploma offered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access</strong></td>
<td>Approachability and ease of contact</td>
<td>It is easy to approach a teacher or Head of Institution when there is a problem: the procedure user friendly.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td>Listening to customers and keeping them informed in a language they can understand</td>
<td>Willingness showed by the staff to pay heed to my problems. Their ability to explain things that can help me to understand faster and better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding the customer</strong></td>
<td>Making the effort to know the customers and their needs</td>
<td>Awareness of students’ requirements, their strengths and weaknesses, their inner drives and about their individual personalities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tangibles</strong></td>
<td>Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials</td>
<td>The class room, Laboratories, rest room, Library, stationary, the appearance and grooming of staff, Canteen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reliability</strong></td>
<td>Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately</td>
<td>Regularity in conducting lectures, examination, declaration of results, hand outs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsiveness</strong></td>
<td>Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service</td>
<td>The admission procedure, submission forms for appearing for examination, distribution of results, issue of important certificates and documents, resolving complaints if any.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competence</strong></td>
<td>Possession of the skills and Knowledge required performing the service.</td>
<td>Qualification of the staff, Experience both academic and Industrial expertise and specialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Courtesy</strong></td>
<td>Politeness, respect, consideration and friendliness of contact personnel</td>
<td>Respect and treatment meted out to students.</td>
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5.2.1. Reliability

Delivering promises-
Reliability is defined as the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. In the broad sense, reliability means that the institution delivers on promises—promises about delivery like teaching methods, service provisions like library, computer lab, problem resolutions like attending to grievances etc. Students prefer the institutions that keep their promises, particularly their promises about core service attributes i.e., the learning experience.

A star performer will surely use TQM techniques and especially *poka-yokes* (fail-safe) to improve education service reliability.

5.2.2. Responsiveness

Being willing to help-
It reflects the staff’s willingness to help students and provide prompt service. This dimension emphasizes attentiveness and promptness in dealing with students’ requests, questions, complaints and problems. The delivery should be prompt and if possible an attempt to adopt customization should be made.

5.2.3. Assurance

Building trust and confidence-
Assurance is defined as the staff’s knowledge and courtesy and the ability of the institution and its staff to build trust and confidence. This dimension plays a very important role when the customer/student perceives involvement of high risks or is uncertain about their ability to evaluate outcomes. For instance, when an institution starts a new course or an autonomous course, there is an element of uncertainty about its scope. The students might experience an uncertainty; in depending completely upon the credibility of the institution and the expertise of its staff. The institution should carefully
prepare its brochures, providing information that will reduce this sense of uncertainty. The contact personnel should be well trained to display the competency and security of the students taking up such courses.

5.2.4. Empathy

Treating students as individuals-
Students are unique and special. If the staff is able to know each student on a one to one basis, it will be greatly and deeply appreciated by the students. This will lead to a bonding between the two, thereby fostering long term relationships. Thus these students would become “advocates”, as they would spread a good word of mouth about the institution. Also, such service will lead to greater loyalty from the students’ side.

5.2.5. Tangibles

Representing the service physically-
Tangibles are defined as the appearance of the physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and written materials. All of these provide physical representations or images of the services that students, especially new students, will use to evaluate quality. In the case of educational institution, the building, the approach road, locality, the immediate environment, signage, layout, class room, stationary, brochure, library, laboratory and even the attire of the staff play a very important role in forming an opinion about the institution.
5. 3. Measurement of Quality

It is commonly said “You cannot manage what you do not measure”. Measurements helps the institution to understand its standing when it comes to students’ preference. A proactive institution should therefore take all measures to define measure and manage the quality of services.

There are external agencies like NAAC, NBA, ISO that certify the quality of services provided by the institution and its staff. But a star performer should always create its own techniques to measure its quality of services.

It can use techniques like, SERVQUAL, Flowcharting, Control charts, and Cause-effect analysis etc. Parasuram, Ziehtham and Berry (PZB) have pioneered innumerable researches in service quality in marketing. While doing so they developed a measurement instrument called SERVQUAL for assessing service quality. It is based on the premise that customers/ students can evaluate an educational institution’s service quality. SERVQUAL is extremely valuable when it is used periodically to track service quality trend. PZB have suggested twenty one evaluation statements related to each dimension of quality and each statement is accompanied by a seven-point scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”.

Flowchart or Blue printing of services is a powerful tool for identifying fail points. It enables the institution to visualize the process of service delivery- admission procedure, teaching plans, procedure at library, examination procedure-by depicting students’ interactions with people, equipments and procedures. It will help the institution to identify potential fail points.

Control Charts offer a simple method of displaying performance over time against specific quality standards. The charts can be used to monitor and communicate individual

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35 Lovelock Christopher; Wirtz Jochen; Chatterjee Jayanta; ‘Services Marketing People, Technology, Strategy’, Sixth Edition
variables. The visual representations suggest the issues to be addressed by the institution.

*Cause and Effect Analysis* popularly known as *Fishbone diagram* was first developed by Japanese Quality Expert Kaoru Ishikawa. The Causes of failures or problems are grouped as equipment, manpower (people), material, procedures, and others.

**Figure-5.2. Cause and Effect Analysis**

![Fishbone Diagram](image)

*Source: Lovelock Christopher; Wirtz Jochen; Chatterjee Jayanta; ‘Services Marketing People, Technology, Strategy’, Sixth Edition, page-412*

But in any service industry, in order to sharpen the value of analysis, eight causes are determined in place of five as mentioned above, i.e., ‘People’ has been sub grouped as ‘Front-stage personnel’ and ‘Back-stage personnel’, ‘Information’ has been split out from “Procedure”, and a new category has been added – “Customer”. Once the causes for poor service delivery are identified, a proactive educational institution can prepare an effective solution which, if well designed, well managed and well documented, will help the institution to give an accurate service to its students.