ABSTRACT

This study aimed at exploring, analyzing, and measuring students' (external customers), academic staff's and administrative staff's (internal customers) perceived quality of services rendered by the Ethiopian institutions of higher learning as well as to identify the dimensions that determine these customers' evaluation of service quality. Moreover, the relationship between customers' overall service satisfaction and the customers' propensity to recommend (positive word of mouth) and switching intention (loyalty); and the relationship among these customers' overall service satisfaction was examined. A total of 383 students out of 469 samples (81.6%), 271 academic staff out of 319 samples (84.95%), and 282 administrative staff out of 345 samples were responding the SERVQUAL questionnaire and a scheduled interview was undertaken with randomly selected 20 academic staff, 30 administrative staff, and 10 management bodies. After the reliability (Cronbach's alpha) and validity (Factor Analysis) was tested, the paired-samples t-test, independent-samples t-test, Pearson's correlation, one-way ANOVA, and multivariate regression were employed for hypothesis testing. Its finding revealed that (1) students', academic staff's and administrative staff's corresponding service expectation was not met. Students' perception statements significantly fell below expectation by at least 2.00 (except for Tangible dimension), academic staff's perception statements fell significantly below expectation by at least 2.00 (except for Tangible dimension), and administrative staff's perception statements fell significantly below expectation by at least 2.00 in all dimensions (Hypothesis 1A,1B,1C); (2) there were also significant mean differences on service expectations, service perceptions, overall service satisfaction, and rating of importance of service quality dimensions among customers' on some demographic variables (Hypotheses 2A,2B,2C; 3A,3B,3C; 6A,6B,6C; 9A,9B,9C); (3) there was strong positive correlation between customers' perceived service quality dimensions and their perceived overall satisfaction (Hypothesis 4A,4B,4C); (4) the step-wise linear regression pointed out Assurance and Empathy (for students), Reliability and Tangible (for academic staff), and Responsiveness dimensions (for administrative staff) as the most predictors of their overall service satisfaction (Hypothesis 5A,5B,5C); (5) customers' overall service satisfaction had positive significant impact on their propensity to recommend to others and their switching intention to others (Hypothesis 7A,7B,7C; 8A,8B,8C); (6) there was no significant relationship among the students', academic staff's, and administrative staff's
overall service satisfaction (Hypothesis 10); (7) and customers were not cooperative during service delivery process (Hypothesis 11). The study recommended that (1) service assessment be repeated from time to time (at least once in a year) for continuous service improvement through cooperative venture among the service stakeholders; (2) shape customers’ service expectation through perpetual customer education; (3) emphasis on the service gaps, and the service dimensions that are identified as the most predictors of overall service satisfaction and the dimensions that the customers are rating as the most important; (4) empower the customers as well as the front line and support employees by introducing the 360° performance evaluation system along with the matrix structure; and (5) establish quality circle represented from the service stakeholders to bridge the service cooperation gap among the customers. Finally, this research finding had limitation for generalization because (1) the timing of the research study coincided with a major restructuring process within the Mekelle University (public) resulted in a mass grievance on recruitment, placement, and promotion of the administrative staff, patronage issues from both the students and academic staff, and negative publicity, which may have a negative impact on the survey and (2) this survey was addressing only one of the 21 public universities (one of the two in Tigray) and one of the 55 private institutions of higher learning, i.e., Sheba University College, (one of the five in Tigray) students, academic, and administrative staff owing to both time and financial constraints. Thus, further research could be conducted by covering more public as well as private institutions of higher learning for having valid generalization.