

Assessing Facilities Management Service in Postgraduate Hostel Using Servqual Technique

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Abstract

There is growing concern over the quality of service facilities management firms provide and the perception of customers on service satisfaction for the achievement of overall organizational goal. The study aimed at assessing the facilities management service in Henry Carr postgraduate hall of University of Lagos. A sample of 100 postgraduate students were randomly selected and administered with a 20-item questionnaire design to capture the various service dimensions. The result was analyzed using a Likert-scale type scoring where weights were assigned on the different measurement scales. It was discovered that there is wide gap between student's service expectations and perceived facilities management service offered in the hall with highest expectations being on the assurance dimension. The existing gap need urgent remedy in the area of prompt quality service delivery in order to achieve the cooperate overall goal of the prestigious learning centre in the country and also to harness the objective of encompassing people, process and procedure in outsourcing for customer satisfaction

Keywords: expectation, perception, service quality, facilities management

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, Facilities management-FM has been regarded as the common task of cleaning, repair and maintenance (IJFM, 2010; Atkin & Brooks, 2000). However, recently FM has been considered beyond this as it is now recognized as encompassing other support services such as catering, security, car fleet services, mail service, reception etc. This change of perception of FM from traditionally routine services of cleaning, repair and maintenance to other support services has been linked to the effect of globalization which resulted into more open market and increased competition among organizations (Hamer, 1994).

Similarly, Shohet (2006) pointed out that Facilities Management has witnessed significant development, mainly due to the following five global trends: (1) increased construction costs, particularly in the public sector; (2) greater recognition of the effect of space on productivity; (3) increased performance requirements by users and owners; (4) contemporary bureaucratic and statutory restrictions that decelerate the procurement of new construction projects; and (5) recognition that the performance of high-rise and complex buildings is highly dependent on their maintenance. Consequently, this development prompted the need for professional Facilities Manager whose responsibility is making strategic and operational facilities planning decisions that affect the organization's performance (Cotts et al., 2009) and at the same time meeting users' need.

University is one of the organizations that provide service to the people. Learning and research are the core activities of any university irrespective of being private or public. However, the presence of support services such as recreational facilities, accommodation, medical services, security etc to both students and staff are essential towards the realization of the core objective of the university. Quality education is a function of the extent to which students' needs and expectation can be satisfied (Mohamad, 2008). Student satisfaction is often used to assess educational quality, where the ability to address strategic needs is of prime importance (Cheng, 1990). One of the basic needs and expectation of postgraduate students is the availability of a functional serviced accommodation (Abu Bakar and Abu Bakar, 2008). There is a growing concern over quality of service provided in the postgraduate hall of University of Lagos of particular mention is Henry Carr Hall. Facilities management encompasses people, process and procedure for achieving cooperate goal of the institution or organization. The missing link was created by the complaint students advance on the quality of service provided and the claimed service provide by the facilities management organization. Firms are under increasing pressure to demonstrate that their services are customer focused and that continuous performance improvement is being delivered. An understanding of customer expectations is the key to success because any gaps in service quality can be identified by referring to the

customer's perspective. This will enable firms to know their performance in delivering quality service. It will also enable them to identify optional costs of minimizing quality service gaps and prioritizing which gap to focus on. Thus the purpose of this paper is to assess the students' satisfaction towards the facilities management service offered in Henry Carr Postgraduate Hall, a students' hall of residence in University of Lagos, Nigeria with a view to assist the decision maker(s) involved in meeting the needs of the students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researches were conducted on the consumers' perception of services offered by various service providers: Tourism (Susana and Sanja, 2010), Human resource (Bhattacharjee, 2010), Education (Mohammad, 2008; Abu Bakar and Abu Bakar, 2008; Kay and Sie, 2004; Dilanthi, 2001), Construction/Property Development (Noorsidi, Noor and Shahabudin, 2008). The works on consumer satisfaction (e.g. Cadott et al, 1987; Churchill & Surprenant, 1982; Fornell, 1992; Oliver, 1997) and Perceived Service Quality-PSQ (e.g. Parasuraman et al, 1985, 1988; Rust & Oliver, 1994; Zeithaml et al, 1996) have been considered the primary intervening constructs in the area of service marketing because they led to the development of consumer loyalty or re-patronization of a product or service (Ravichandran, Prabhakaran & Kumar, 2010).

Service quality as defined by Parasuraman et al. (1985) is the differences between customer expectation of service and perceived service while Dotchin and Oakland, (1994) viewed it as the extent to which a service meets customer's needs or expectations. If the expectations are greater than performance, the perceived quality is less than satisfactory and hence customer dissatisfaction occurs.

The idea of measuring service quality was originally rooted in goods sector and the pioneering work by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry in 1985 laid the foundation for research in the area (Bhattacharjee, 2010). They have suggested that the concept of quality prevalent in the goods sector is not extendable to the services sector. Being inherently and essentially intangible, heterogeneous, perishable, entailing simultaneity, inseparability of production and consumption, measurement of services require a different structure for analysis and improvement. While in the goods sector, tangible clues exist to satisfy consumers by product quality, on the other hand, quality in the service sector is accompanied in terms of the parameters or attributes, that is, under the domain of "experience" and "credence" properties. Parasuraman et al (1985) measures service quality as a difference between consumer expectations of "what they want" and their

perceptions of "what they get" and it is based on this that they developed what is called "SERVQUAL". This paper by intent and scope will attempt to measure the quality of service provided at Henry Carr, postgraduate hall of university of Lagos, with a view to identifying the perception of the users' satisfaction to the overall service in the facility.

The SERVQUAL Technique

SERVQUAL is considered the most common method for measuring service quality. Service quality is seen as the comparison of service expectations with actual performance perceptions (Zeithaml et al., 1990; Bloemer, Ko de Ruyter and Wetzels, 1998). Research has shown SERVQUAL to be an effective and stable tool for measuring service quality across service industries (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988; Zeithaml et al., 1990; 1993; Bebeko, 2000), hence its wider acceptability as a measuring instrument among service industries (Dabholkar et al., 1996; Caruana, Money, and Berthon, 1998). Service quality can be measured by the level of discrepancy between consumer expectations or desires and their perceptions of what they received, as described by the SERVQUAL scale (Bebko, 2000). Service quality is a function of the difference scores or gaps between expectations and perceptions ($P \pm E$). It measures the difference between what is expected from a service encounter and the perception of the actual service encounter (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). They named this the disconfirmation paradigm, and expressed it as:

Service Quality (Q) = Perception (P) - Expectation (E)

Based on this model, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry developed and proposed the SERVQUAL survey instrument as a reliable, valid, and a general way to measure the service quality construct. The original SERVQUAL survey was comprised of a set of twenty-two paired expectations/performance items (making up to forty-four items) which purported to capture the domain of service quality (Noorsidi, Noor and Shahabudin, 2008)

Parasuraman *et al.*, (1988) suggested that the domain of service quality can be conceptualized as comprised of five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Hemmasi, Strong, and Taylor, 1994) and it have provided researchers with the possibility of measuring the performance expectations gap.

SERVQUAL in Educational Institutions

The use of SERVQUAL in educational institutions has been focused on measuring the quality of the overall service (both teaching and support service) from the students' perspectives (Mohamad, 2008; Abu Bakar and Abu Bakar, 2008). In all the literature reviewed for this study, the students' perception of quality of services rendered in their halls of residence was either given a slight touch thereby generalized

with other services or neglected completely. Therefore this paper will contribute to the literature in order to fill in the gap.

The Case Study

Henry Carr is one of the postgraduate halls of residence of University of Lagos, Akoka. It houses 460 postgraduate students. The facilities management service is coordinated by an out-sourced professional Facilities Manager whose service covers general cleaning, security, porters, electric maintenance, car parking, internet service and plumbing among others.

METHODOLOGY

The SERVQUAL instrument can be adopted to fit into any service organization irrespective of its characteristics (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The original SERVQUAL instrument contains a pair of 22 items measuring the level of expectation and perception of customers to service provided along the following factors: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. This study however adopts a slightly modified instrument where a 20-paired item questionnaire is designed to measure the expectations and perceptions of Facilities Management services rendered in the Henry Carr Postgraduate Hall University of Lagos.

The items are categorized under the following

- ❖ Tangibles: statements 1-4
- ❖ Reliability: statements 5-8
- ❖ Responsiveness: statement 9-12
- ❖ Assurance: statement 13-16
- ❖ Empathy: statement 17-20

The questionnaires were self administered to the respondents and an interval of one to two days was given for retrieval. The respondents constituted of Ph D., Masters and M Phil students residing in the Henry Carr Postgraduate Hall, University of Lagos. A sample of 100 out of the 460 students in the hall was randomly selected. A total of 100 questionnaires were administered and retrieved for the analysis, thus achieving 100% return.

In order to assess the measurement of service quality in Henry Carr Postgraduate Hall, a questionnaire was developed which focused on two measures i.e. expectations and perceptions of performance. Measurement scales were adopted from the literature and each contained 20 items based on SERVQUAL, which were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from "Strongly Agree with a weight of (5) to "Strongly Disagree" with a weight of (1) for perception statements and "Absolutely Essential" with a weight of (5) to "Absolutely not Essential" with a weight of (1). The minimum mean score that a statement can record is one (1) with a maximum of seven (5). The mid point of the scale is three (3), which implies a neutral opinion on the statement. Mean scores higher than three show that the respondents agree with the

statement, while mean scores lower than three show disagreement. Similarly, mean score higher than three in the case of the expectation statements shows respondents have high expectation while mean score less than three shows lower expectation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The mean scores of the scale values for each of the expectation and perception statements in the questionnaire are shown in Table 1 and 2 respectively. Table 3 shows the mean service gap obtained by subtracting the mean expectations from mean perception. The mean scores of expectations (E) and perceptions (P) and the quality (P-E) value of the five items (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) and mean overall satisfaction is shown in Table 4

As shown in Table 1, the expectations (E) mean scores are almost similar and very high. The highest expectation score is 5.00 for statements 4, 6 and 15 while the lowest expectation score is 4.00 attributed to statements 7, 8 and 16. Statements 3, 9, 10 and 20 are tied with a mean score of 4.80; statements 11, 13, 14, and 17 have a common score of 4.60; each of statements 18 and 19 have a score of 4.40 and lastly, statements 1, 2, 5 and 12 showed a score of 4.20 each. On the other hand, all the mean perception scores are lower than the mean expectation score this therefore, indicate that there is gap between the students' expectation and the perceived service provided. The highest perception score is 3.40 while the lowest is 1.00. Table 3 shows the service quality gaps obtained as the difference between service expectation 'E' and perception 'P'. All the P-E values are negative, which means that students' have negative perceptions on the facilities management service offered. With the exception of one service statement "neatly dressed employee" which has a absolute gap score of less than (-0.80), all other gaps fall in between one and three. The highest gaps are those associated with these statements "sincerity of purpose" (-3.80); "updated and accurate information" (-3.80) and "standby generating set" (-3.60). This shows that students' expectations of such services far exceeds the level at which is being provided now. Other seventeen statements' gaps fall in between one and three. From Table 4, the five factors measuring service quality are presented according to the priority demand based on the gap analysis. Highest gap score in absolute term is associated with the assurance dimension while responsiveness has a gap of -2.15. As depicted in Table 3, the gap between expectations and perceptions is very large, thus indicating the need for improved FM service delivery in the Henry Carr postgraduate hall. From the viewpoint of five service dimension statements, students have higher expectations to almost all the five dimensions. With "assurance" having the highest gap score, this

indicates the need for management to take deliberate action towards improving on the areas concerned.

CONCLUSION

This study adopts the SERVQUAL technique in assessing the facilities management service offered in Henry Carr students' hostel, university of Lagos. The paper focused on the evaluation of students' expectations and perceptions on the level of service quality in hall of residence. In this case, the residents have uniformly high expectations across all dimensions and lead to negative gaps which reflect the low quality services in Henry Carr postgraduate hall. Although all the service dimensions showed high gap scores, the most important dimension as found in this study is assurance which showed a gap score of -3.00. This therefore calls for more attention to be given to the elements that make up of this factor. The measurement of service quality can provide specific data that can be used in quality management. This allows a firm to focus its resources and to maximize service quality whilst costs are controlled. With the knowledge of the service quality dimensions, the decision making unit/facilities manager can then judge how well the employees performed on each dimension, identify the weakness in order to make improvements, be able to monitor and maintain quality service and efficiently design the service delivery process.

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