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Vol. IX - Issue II (July-2022)  
ISSN - 2277-7067

**Kavikulaguru Kalidas Sanskrit University**  
Ramtek, Dist. Nagpur, Maharashtra

Peer Reviewed

# **Journal of Fundamental & Comparative Research**

UGC CARE Listed Journal

**शोधसंहिता**

New Research Frontiers

July 2022

Volume - IX Issue II  
*Research Journal*  
ISSN No. 2277-7067

*Journal of Fundamental & Comparative Research*

# शोधसंहिता

A Peer Reviewed Bi-annual Interdisciplinary Research  
Journal of the University

UGC CARE Listed Journal  
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## MEASURING SERVICE QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the possible use of the SERVPERF scale for measuring service quality in Higher Education Institute [HEI] in rural part of Maharashtra, India. The HEI in the study has the MBA program. Students being primary customers (Pereira & Silva, 2003) of an educational institute, only they are considered as the sample unit. As the study is related with service quality, responses from students of both years i.e. MBA I & MBA II will be considered making research sample of 109. The SERVPERF dimensions were considered to design the questionnaire for the survey. Changes in terminology pertaining to HEI context were made so that the respondents find it easy to understand. The findings revealed that the students' service perceptions were not different across both years. Dimensions such as Reliability, Assurance, Tangibility, Empathy and Responsiveness were studied. The most important dimensions perceived by the students were Assurance and Reliability. This was followed by Responsiveness and Empathy whereas tangibility was not given much importance by the students.

**Keywords:** Servperf, Hei, Dimensions, Perceptions and Service Performance.

### Introduction

In higher education, the issue of evaluating service quality has drawn more attention. One of the most crucial challenges for universities is how the service quality is viewed by the students in higher education. Education as a service is aimed to the people (Mazzarol, 1998). Education involves formal interface between the education sources and the students, and engagement by the students in the learning process might be essential to success. The degree to which education services are personalized varies. Students do have "membership" relationship with service providers providing them with opportunity to foster strong loyalty and increase client service features (Lovelock 1983). The "service quality perception of students" metric is used to assess service quality in education. According to research on service quality, the majority of studies use the measuring tools SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al. 1998) or SERVPERF (Cronin and Taylor 1992) to assess the service quality of higher education. Finding that SERVQUAL can be applied to the education sector and can be used in higher education seems to be interesting. This measurement has been applied in research studies for HEIs and service quality in business schools (Wong 2000).

### Scales to Measure Service Quality in HEI

Quality being multi-dimensional, its measurement becomes complex. The most often used scales to gauge service quality particularly in HEIs are SERVQUAL, SERVPERF, and HedPERF, according to a study of pertinent studies. SERVQUAL scale was developed by Parasuraman et al. in 1988 based on the idea that service quality is the difference between customer expectations and performance perceptions. In total, there are 22 items in the two halves of SERVQUAL, which are organized into five categories: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Following are the five dimensions of service quality as defined by SERVQUAL:

- (1) Tangibles represented how buildings, machinery, and personnel appeared.

- (2) The degree to which knowledge, abilities, and services are provided accurately and promptly might be characterized as reliability.
- (3) The willingness to assist clients and offer fast service is referred to as responsiveness.
- (4) Assurance represented the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.
- (5) Empathy indicates attention and care that the institution may offer to customers as well as convenient operating hours.

To measure service quality in HEI, researchers largely used this scale in their studies.

Several authors have criticized the SERVQUAL instrument, particularly in the areas of expectation stability and improved scale item wording (Andresson, 1992). One of the reasons with using this scale i.e. SERVQUAL is that students could become weary and anxious while filling out a lengthy questionnaire.

Cronin and Taylor stated that only performance part of SRVQUAL instrument can be sufficient enough for the designing of SERVPERF instrument. The later instrument is methodologically ideal in reducing the number of items. Faganal (2010) has used SERVPERF scale in their study to measure service quality in higher education.

### Objectives

1. To know if students of both years MBA I & MBA II differ in their service perception.
2. To identify which factor for students is the most important in services

### Scope

The current study is confined to one management institute only in Pune District of Maharashtra, India. Educational institutions have multiple stakeholders, but here only students as primary stakeholders are studied.

### Methodology

The institute under study is related to higher education and has only one management program i.e. MBA. As the perceptions are studied, students of both years i.e. MBA I & MBA II are considered. The total sample size of the research is 109. For collecting the data, questionnaire was designed using SERVPERF dimensions. Some changes were made in the same considering the context of the study like instead of word employee, administrative and academic staff were used. Google form was used to design the questionnaire. 121 responses were received but only 109 were valid. 16 variables were used to assess the service quality. The research design that was used is descriptive in nature. As the data is collected from the students at one point only, hence it is cross-sectional. The scale used to rate the perceptions of students was seven-point likert scale. It ranged from 1 being strongly disagree to 7 being strongly agree. The questionnaire reliability was tested. The cronbach alpha was found to be above 0.7 i.e. 0.901, which is considered to be highly reliable. Data Analysis is carried out using descriptive statistics and independent sample test.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

Group Statistics					
	Graduation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SP	MBA-I	54	3.69	.773	.105
	MBA-II	55	3.85	.803	.108



**Table No. 1: Students' Differences in Service Perception**

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
SP	Equal variances assumed	.091	.764	1.122	107	.265	-.169	.151	-.469	.130
	Equal variances not assumed			1.122	106.957	.264	-.169	.151	-.469	.130

Levene's test for equality of variance is significant (p value= 0.764) which is more than 0.05. This clarifies that variances are equal. From Table no. 1 it is evident that MBA I & MBA II do not differ in their service perception.

**Table 2: Means and ranks of service performance**

Item	Dimension	MBA I Year		MBA II Year	
		Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
Academic staff is caring towards students	Assurance	5.02	1	6.59	2
Academic staff is knowledgeable	Assurance	5.80	2	6.65	1
Academic staff solve my queries	Reliability	5.67	3	6.12	3
Academic staff keeps their promises when it comes to services	Reliability	5.66	4	5.53	10
Academic staff is very courteous	Assurance	5.65	5	5.71	6
I feel secure in my transactions with this faculty	Assurance	5.55	6	5.35	13
Services are quick	Responsiveness	5.52	7	5.65	9
Academic staff understands our learning needs	Empathy	5.51	8	5.88	4
We get Individualized attention by our academic staff	Empathy	5.50	9	5.12	15
Administrative staff keeps perfect records	Reliability	5.47	10	5.70	7
Administrative staff keeps their promises related to official services	Reliability	5.42	11	5.47	11
This faculty provides quick services	Responsiveness	5.41	12	5.66	8
Services are provided on time by the office staff	Reliability	5.39	13	5.71	5
Administrative staff is keen in solving our problems	Reliability	5.36	14	5.29	14
I have confidence in this administrative staff	Assurance	5.32	15	5.41	12
Administrative staff responds to my requests	Responsiveness	4.99	16	4.88	16

Source: Researcher's calculation



According to management students, tangibles are not a crucial aspect of service performance. All students agree that the faculty building's and surrounds' aesthetic appeal was the least significant quality component. Dimensions that are considered important by the students were only considered for further analysis. Differences in the opinions of students were observed while carrying out analysis.

Referring table no. 2, for the first year and second year students' assurance is the most important dimension. The first-year students felt that the academic staff were caring whereas the second-year students thought that the academic staff were knowledgeable. Students of both years share the same opinion when it comes to academic staff solving their queries. They opined that the academic staff is prompt enough to solve their queries.

The statements "I feel secure in my interactions with this faculty" and "we individualized attention by our academic staff" were ranked significantly low by second year students when compared to other factors.

Contrary to the academic staff are the ranking of administrative staff. It is quite evident from the above table that the administrative staff have received very low ranking when it came to solving their queries. Students of both years differ in their opinion in when it comes to record keeping by the administrative staff. Second year students have rated them better than the first-year students. One factor could be the frequency of interactions between students and administrative personnel during the stressful exam time. The statement "services are given on time by the administrative personnel" is where the first- and second-year students differ the most from one another.

The second-year students are more likely to concur that the faculty members are aware of their needs.

### Research Findings

1. As compared with the academic staff, the ratings given to the administrative staff were relatively lower.
2. Academic staff is rated good for their courteous behaviour by the students of first and second year.
3. Students of both years were of opinion that the administrative staff does not respond to their requests though they are good in record keeping.
4. The factor related to responsiveness is the one which the administrative staff needs to work on as the mean values (4.99 & 4.88) calculated for both years were comparatively less and the ranking by both years was the same.
5. It is found that students of both years feel that the administrative staff keeps their promises when it comes to services and records.

### Conclusion

One of the most crucial challenges for HEIs is how students view the quality of the services they receive in higher education. Along with enticing students, evaluating the quality of higher education services is a challenging subject.

The outcomes demonstrated that HEIs might employ SERVPERF. When evaluating the quality of a service, other educational institutions can utilize this instrument or modify it to suit their needs. An essential method for assessing service performance in higher education is a modified questionnaire with sixteen statements.

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# Shodhasamhita शोधसंहिता

ISSN No. 2277-7067

## CERTIFICATE OF PUBLICATION

This is to certify that

**Smita S. Khatri, Dr. Vinod N. Sayankar**

For the paper entitled

**MEASURING SERVICE QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Volume – IX, Issue – II, July 2022

in

**Shodhasamhita**

Impact Factor: 4.95

UGC Care Group 1 Journal

  
Editor-in-Chief