

SERVICE QUALITY AND SATISFACTION OF GRADUATE STUDENTS OF J.H. CERILLES STATE COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT: *The study aimed to assess the service quality and graduate students' satisfaction with the J.H. Cerilles State College Graduate School. A correlational research design was utilized to investigate the relationships of the variables and to analyze further which service quality factors significantly affect the graduate student's satisfaction. The study surveyed 104 graduate students across the programs offered in the graduate school. Results revealed high measures of service quality of the graduate school and high satisfaction of the graduate students. The service quality domains, reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness, showed strong and significant correlations toward students' satisfaction. Furthermore, regression analysis has only reported significant effects on assurance, empathy, and responsiveness toward students' satisfaction. The college administration, faculty, and stakeholders may utilize this study's empirical evidence to improve the graduate school's quality of services. The report may also serve as a benchmark for improving the graduate school programs' teaching strategies, policies, and standards.*

Keywords: *Graduate school, Service Quality, Satisfaction, Correlation, Regression Analysis*

1. INTRODUCTION

Service quality is a valuable asset in the business world, as the quality performance of any organization is directly affected. Higher education institutions (HEIs), although they may not be considered business organizations, also rely on the standard of service that is thought to be an equally significant factor in providing services to individuals and others clients.

In the past, student satisfaction has been a minor issue. But currently, it has gained critical recognition since the success and sustainability of institutions highly depend on students' enrollment, of which satisfaction is a determining factor [1]. As a result, effective schools regularly assess the quality of their services and try to meet the demands of their students. Students are recognized as the most crucial asset of every successful higher education institution [2]. These initiatives would help institutions recognize ways to increase standards and develop student loyalty. Service quality and satisfaction are strong predictors of student retention [3]. This implies that institutions must continuously work to provide service quality to attract and enable students to enroll and stay in school until graduation. Hence, creating educational value to inspire higher confidence in students by delivering value-laden perks, tailored treatment, and responding to their requirements would boost loyalty and minimize attrition by reducing defection and dropouts [4]. To meet the standards of services and course offerings for students, HEIs would thrive in attracting, keeping, and grabbing a good reputation.

Dissatisfied students are more likely to transfer to other schools that would offer the best possible opportunity for them when resources are available to meet student needs. Hence, constructing strategies to motivate students and creating an effective and efficient learning environment is part of the institution's plan to link academic success to concepts such as retention and recruitment. Institutions can gain students' satisfaction by delivering excellent service

values, which is integral to securing a sustainable competitive advantage in today's international market [5]. Higher Educational Institutions face a multifarious challenge to contend with a need to be of service quality and maintain and gain competitive advantage from the different institutions [6]. Understanding student satisfaction is critical as this provides inputs to develop better tools to teach the students. However, understanding and addressing the vital sources of student satisfaction is a challenge for many higher educational institutions [7]. As viewed, service quality is an antecedent to satisfaction. Thus, a proper understanding of the antecedents and determinants of customer satisfaction can be seen as having an extraordinarily high value for service organizations, especially in a competitive environment.

In this way, the association between service quality and customer satisfaction has emerged as a significant and strategic concern. Recently, relevant to education, service quality among Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) has caught the attention of the general public, more commonly to the student clients, due to rapid modifications to meet educational standards for global developments [8]. Additionally, to consider the growing competitive academic settings where students enjoy various options, the factors that enable the school to attract and retain students must be reviewed and given favorable consideration. In line with the context, some schools are not meeting student satisfaction with their quality service. Several studies reported that campus facilities and digital libraries are difficult to access, and the quality of the lecturers is far below expectations.

In the Philippines, several studies justified that the current state of service quality among higher education institutions lags compared to other countries. For illustration, many university students were dissatisfied with their school's clinic and supply office [9]. Reports examined students' satisfaction, among other components measured, such as academic counseling, administrative support services, campus life, individual welfare, service excellence, and instructional effectiveness, all of which had fair satisfaction ratings.

Service quality measures the following indicators: reliability,

.assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness, as these are the generic service quality components that are applicable to be used by researchers and practitioners to assess the effectiveness of service quality in various types of service [10].

Along with the service quality domains, this study focuses on the graduate student's level of satisfaction concerning learning outcomes, physical facilities, academic responsiveness, and personality development and how they are correlated. Additionally, a multiple linear regression was utilized to determine which service quality domains significantly contributed to the graduate student's level of satisfaction.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive-correlational research design was implemented to report the variables' interrelationships and the causal effects of service quality factors on graduate students' satisfaction. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to report on the levels of perceived service quality and their satisfaction with the graduate school of J.H. Cerilles State College, Mati, San Miguel, Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines.

The survey comprised 104 graduate students who responded to the self-report scale questionnaires. The study variables were measured using the adopted Likert scale questionnaire, Students' Service Quality [11], and Students' Satisfaction [12]. The service quality of the graduate school was quantified in terms of reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. At the same time, their satisfaction measures the learning outcome, physical facilities, academic responsiveness, and personal development. The reliabilities of these measurements were tested from a try-out group and reported .94 and .89 Cronbach's alpha coefficients for service quality and satisfaction, respectively. The descriptive levels of the study variables were reported using the following scale:

<i>Limits</i>	<i>Scale</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Qualitative Description</i>
1.00-1.79	1	Strongly disagree	Very low service quality/satisfaction
1.80-2.59	2	Disagree	Low service quality/satisfaction
2.60-3.39	3	Undecided	Moderate service quality/satisfaction
3.40-4.19	4	Agree	High service quality/satisfaction
4.20-5.00	5	Strongly agree	Very high service quality/satisfaction

The data collected were coded and analyzed using spreadsheets and statistical software. Descriptive levels of the construct were presented using means and standard deviations. Correlation coefficients and regression analysis were also utilized to investigate the interrelationships of these constructs.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The summary of descriptive levels of the perceived service quality and their satisfaction with the graduate school were presented in Tables 1 & 2.

Table 1. Service quality of the graduate school (n = 104)

Indicators	M	SD	QD
Reliability	3.63	0.63	High service quality
Assurance	3.87	0.66	High service quality
Tangibles	3.81	0.69	High service quality
Empathy	3.78	0.56	High service quality
Responsiveness	3.78	0.67	High service quality
Overall	3.78	0.57	High service quality

Note: M = mean, SD=standard deviation, QD=qualitative description

The perceived service quality (M=3.78, SD=0.57) of the graduate students in graduate school was reported as high. Table 1 illustrates that assurance (M=3.87, SD=0.66) and tangibles (M=3.81, SD=0.69) domains were found to have the highest remarks from the respondents. The graduate school faculty and employees' knowledge of courtesy and capacity to rouse trust and confidence in the graduate students were adequate. Respondents' positive remarks were also reported regarding the overall physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials. The graduate school administration may improve its mechanisms and policies in connection with reliability (M=3.63, SD=0.63), empathy (M=3.78, SD=0.56), and responsiveness (M=3.78, SD=0.67). Relatively lower remarks from these factors may inform the stakeholders to capacitate further the dependability and quality of the guaranteed service. This indicates the clients' desire to cover their expectancy of reliable graduate school services. The graduate school's attentiveness and promptness in dealing with students' requests, questions, complaints, and problems may also be strengthened. However, on average, the J.H. Cerilles State College's graduate school received high perceived service quality.

The learning outcome (M=3.94, SD=0.61) and personal development (M=3.87, SD=0.63) factors of their perceived satisfaction were found to have the highest ratings from the respondents (Table 2). The graduate school's physical facilities (M=3.78, SD=0.65) and academic responsiveness (M=3.79, SD=0.55) were also sufficient based on the means.

Table 2. Service quality of the graduate school (n = 104)

	M	SD	QD
Learning Outcome	3.94	0.61	High satisfaction
Physical Facilities	3.78	0.65	High satisfaction
Academic Responsiveness	3.79	0.55	High satisfaction
Personal Development	3.87	0.63	High satisfaction
Overall	3.85	0.55	High satisfaction

Note: M = mean, SD=standard deviation, QD=qualitative description

The results signify that the school as a whole, with its physical campus with its faculty and staff, was considered satisfactory enough by the students, making them feel confident because they have professional teachers and competent school facilities and services. Students also viewed the individualized instructions provided by their teachers

Table 3. Correlation matrix of the study variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Service Quality	-									
2 Reliability	.774*	-								
3 Assurance	.894*	.615*	-							
4 Tangibles	.906*	.649*	.794*	-						
5 Empathy	.792*	.566*	.717*	.646*	-					
6 Responsiveness	.900*	.688*	.743*	.780*	.662*	-				
7. Satisfaction	.892*	.692*	.802*	.828*	.762*	.813*	-			
8 Learning Outcome	.726*	.465*	.699*	.690*	.667*	.617*	.838*	-		
9 Physical Facilities	.850*	.693*	.768*	.754*	.678*	.803*	.911*	.669*	-	
10 Academic Responsiveness	.775*	.723*	.669*	.714*	.711*	.698*	.822*	.631*	.735*	-
11 Personal Development	.741*	.536*	.680*	.708*	.653*	.688*	.893*	.723*	.777*	.628*

Note: Cell contains Spearman Rank Correlation coefficient, * r is interpreted using Cohen’s Scale: -0.3 to +0.3 = weak, -0.5 to -0.5 or +0.5 to +0.9 = strong relationship, -1.0 to -0.9 or +0.9 to +1.0 = very Strong relationship

during the teaching-learning process as high. The results also confirmed that the promptness of school staff is serving the best interest of the students and has high regard for their welfare.

Correlation coefficients were reported to investigate the relationship between graduate students’ perceived service quality and their satisfaction with the graduate school. Table 3 revealed significant relationships among service quality and satisfaction domains. Reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness of service quality reported positive and strong correlations toward satisfaction ranging from .69 to .82. High satisfaction of the students was associated with high ratings of the graduate schools’ service quality domains. Table 3 also illustrates a positive and significant correlation between the overall service quality and satisfaction ($r=.89, p<.05$). Results confirmed that the service quality of an institution has a significant and positive connection to students’ satisfaction [13]. Increased service quality may improve the clientele’s interest in studying, promoting positive expectations and values towards graduate school.

To view these relationships in a model form, a multiple linear regression analysis was done to examine which of the five service quality domains best predict the students’ satisfaction. Results in Table 4 illustrate a significant regression model explaining students’ satisfaction in service quality domains ($F=117.20, p<.05$). Among the five domains, assurance ($\beta=.12, p=.02$), empathy ($\beta=.36, p<.05$), and responsiveness ($\beta=.25, p<.05$) significantly affect students’ satisfaction. The results also showed that the empathy domain of the service quality has the highest causal effects on students’ satisfaction. When there is an increase of 1 standard deviation on the empathy index, there will be a .36 standard deviation increase in satisfaction. Contrary to many empirical studies reported, the reliability ($\beta=.12, p=.06$) and tangibles ($\beta=.14, p=.06$) domains of the service quality do not significantly affect graduate school students’ satisfaction. Results also revealed that 86% of the variability observed in the students’

satisfaction is explained by the regression model comprising the 5 dimensions of service quality. The school’s administration and its policy-making body may reflect on the results that may serve as a basis for recommendations for improvement.

Table 4. Regression analysis of students’ satisfaction

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> -value
	B	SE	β		
(Constant)	0.35	0.15		2.35	0.02
Reliability	0.10	0.051	0.12	1.95	0.06
Assurance	0.15	0.062	0.18	2.47	0.02
Tangibles	0.11	0.057	0.14	1.94	0.06
Empathy	0.36	0.06	0.36	5.92	0.00
Responsiveness	0.20	0.059	0.25	3.47	0.00

Note: R squared = .86, $F = 117.20, p$ - value $<.05$

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Empirical results of the study confirm positive associations between graduate schools’ service quality and students’ satisfaction. An increase in clients’ satisfaction was associated with an increase in service quality dimensions [14]. Improving the reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness may increase the students’ overall satisfaction. In enhancing clients’ satisfaction, the employees’ service competence plays an important role [15]. Regression analysis revealed that the best critical factors that explain students’ satisfaction are assurance, empathy, and responsiveness. Together with empathy, responsiveness and empathy revealed significant effects on satisfaction [16]. Improving empathy may help the clients feel that they’re valued by the institution and that their concerns matter. Focusing on augmenting these factors will directly improve overall student satisfaction. As implied by the literature, the schools may further explore ways to strengthen reliability and tangibles, for these are inseparable antecedents of students’ satisfaction.

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