



Tourist's Perception of Service Quality in Higher Education: A Comparative Analysis of Nigerian and Iranian Students in North Cyprus

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Abstract: This study analyze the perception of Service Quality in Higher Education (SQHE): A comparative analysis of the Nigerian and Iranian students in the Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU), North Cyprus with the objectives of finding the perspectives of service quality among the two nationalities. A conceptual model termed HESQUAL dimension scale made of five primarily features (administrative quality, support facility quality, core education quality, transformative quality and physical environment quality) was adapted and modified. Comprising 53 service quality attributes with the aid of nine sub-dimensions, holistic approach. Quantitative methods were employed to experiment the features of the measurement tool and appraise its validity and reliability. A specimen of 206 postgraduate and undergraduate Iranian and Nigerian students who enrolled at the institution and information were analyzed using exploratory factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha test. The study revealed that both nationals see learning setting as the best while administrative process and transformative quality is the worst category of service provided by EMU. Therefore, EMU needs to improve on these parameters to provide comprehensive satisfactory services to the students. Future researchers should extend use of the model used in this study in order to have a more comprehensive picture of service quality in higher education by testing the HESQUAL dimension scale. In addition, future studies should include more representative samples and also used a mixed methodology in order to have robust data and greater perspectives of the international students regarding their satisfaction.

Keywords: Higher education, Iranian students, Nigerian students, Service Quality.

INTRODUCTION

Higher Education (HE) is now measured as a vital universal knowledge; it is also termed as a kind of student tourism given the fact that each year a huge number of students pursue their advance learning overseas affecting the general expenditure, employment, and capital of the local populace (Moshe, 2013, Katircioğlu *et al.*, 2014). Most Universities sees HE as a global trade that will constantly discover options for spreading, HE (Yusof *et al.*, 2012). HE varies in all countries in terms of their strength and size (Neelavenic & Manimaran, 2015). Service quality (SQ), emphasizing student fulfillment, as it is a recently emerging field of concern (Pereda *et al.*, 2007). In order to attract students, provide their requirements and maintain them, higher education providers are vigorously involved in understanding the students' perception and their judgment of the SQ. They often require to adjust techniques of measuring the quality of their services just like in the trade sector (Shanka *et al.*, 2006;

Kimani, 2011). In some years back for instance, the universities have witness huge number of students who have enrolled outside their county of citizenship in higher increase. Over 4.3 million international students were estimated studying worldwide in 2011 as reported by Organization for Economic Corporation and Development (OECD, 2013). According to the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges, (2002), it was forecasted that the universal requirement for placements of international HE is estimated to reach 7.2 million by 2025. Northern Cyprus has 300,000 students ranks the 10th in the work of the HE Council with nine universities where government is vested with the responsibilities of managing the educational activities.

For education, Nigeria spends an estimated 2.4% of its GNP while Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole spends 5.1% (Halai, 2013). Evidently this level of enrolment has offered a key opening for institutions mainly at a time when public financial support for higher education has been limited but has also presented challenges. Consequently, the measurement of the SQ in HE can offer considerable merit that will be constructive for administration and human resource to keep on enhancing the educational quality (Russell, 2005, Al-Alak & Alnaser, 2012). In contrast, many developing countries have neither articulated a development strategy linking knowledge to economic growth nor built up their capacity to do so. Nigeria is one of these countries (Sultan & Wong, 2011). According to Gusten (2014) foreign students are trooping to North Cyprus mainly for the quality system of education as well as skills acquisition. Nigerian students, believed that, pursuing education abroad is far much better than studying in the home country. In spite of the lack of holistic quality dimensions, SQ is still considered from the perspectives of a customer (Ganiyu, 2016). The deficiency in the educational system is a global issue, because it is not peculiar to Nigeria alone. Hence, socio-economic development can be only achieved through speeding the relevance of knowledge (Fabiya and Oladipo, 2008). Urban & Bierlein (2014) reported that higher institutions, typically, are the solution to the growth of knowledge in the economy and humanity in all countries of the world. Moreover, Ene, (2004) argued that there is great awareness and acceptability among Nigerian citizens that only university degrees promise a reputable future. Therefore, International students are not only a precious economic benefit to universities in developed countries; they are individuals who also supplement these countries with their varied traditional perspectives, hence, helping to improve cultural perceptive and admiration (Güsten, 2014). International students convey a huge variety of knowledge and skills across many branches of knowledge, thus adding value to the academic resources of their host country and also boosting the work force (Son & Pearce, 2005, Urban & Palmer, 2014). Competition in regard to research and modernization, in most higher learning institution is also forecasted to give out high SQ. Therefore, the evaluation of the SQ in HE can offer a large contribution and inputs which will be valuable for the administration and employees to constantly enhance the quality of learning (Al-Alak & Alnaser, 2012).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is a quantitative research methodology. A structured questionnaire was designed based on the 53 items identified and a pilot study was also conducted. The questionnaire was adopted and modified from Teeroovengadadum *et al.*, (2015) and a survey was then conducted among a larger sample of Iranian and Nigerian students. A five-point Likert scale was used, and a performance-only in the operation of SQ was adopted. The sample size for the survey was largely determined by the requirement of EFA. In that respect, Hair *et al.*, (2006) pointed out that a satisfactory sample size would have a ratio of 10 to 1. The sample of the study consists of students studying at Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) located in Famagusta, North Cyprus. Accordingly, it was estimated that a satisfactory sample size should consist of about 200 students. The questionnaire was administered to a total of 206 students using a non-probability sampling technique, and a total of 175 (87 and 88 for Nigerians and Iranians respectively) usable filled in questionnaires were retrieved. In all, the 53 SERVQUAL items for rating service quality constituted the questions asked for this study. A number of items were contained under each category of the measures of service quality as follows; Administrative quality (5 items), Administrative Processes (5 items), Physical environment quality (5 items), Learning setting (5 items), General infrastructure (3 items), Core educational quality (6 items),

Curriculum (4 items) Pedagogy (4 items), Competence (9 items), Transformative quality (7). Subsequently, Principal Component Analysis was used to obtain a measure of each of the categories. Factors that have highest correlation with the first components which constitute at least 70% proportion of the factor loading were used for each category. Chronbach alpha test of reliability were conducted on each category and the results shows that the reliability coefficients of each of the categories are greater than 0.65. So; the instrument is valid for analysis. Also, frequencies simple percentages were used to examine the perception of Nigerian and Iranian students on the quality of services at EMU. To compare their perceptions, two-sample Z-test was employed. This allows for the comparison of the service needs of the students from both countries. This is imperative in the sense that it enables the management of EMU to know if single frameworks for the provision of services will suit the demand of the students from both countries. The null hypothesis of the test is that there is no difference in the mean responses of the students from both countries. When the Z-statistic is greater than the critical value of the Z-test, the null hypothesis will be rejected otherwise, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents for both Nigeria and Iran are females, single and undergraduate student between the ages of 18 to 25. However, a significant proportion of them were males. This indicates that the majority of the students are in their youthful age. So, they would want to have the best of services in all aspects of their lives. Barry and Kim, (2001) reported that, an experiential view of consumer behavior places a key role on consumer's pursuit of value.

Table-1 Demographic characteristics of respondents

Nigerians			Iranians		
Gender	Frequency	Percent.	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	38	43.68	Male	40	45.45
Female	49	56.32	Female	48	54.55
Total	87	100.00	Total	88	100.00
Age	Frequency	Percent	Age	Frequency	Percent
18-25	79	90.80	18-25	70	79.55
26-35	7	8.05	26-35	17	19.32
36-45	1	1.15	36-45	1	1.14
Total	87	100.00	Total	88	100.00
Marital status	Frequency	Percent	Marital status	Frequency	Percent
Single	79	98.75	Single	75	94.94
Married	1	1.25	Married	4	5.06
Total	80	100.00	Total	79	100.00
Educational Status	Frequency	Percent	Educational Status	Frequency	Percent
Undergraduate	77	89.53	Undergraduate	66	75.00
Postgraduate	9	10.47	Postgraduate	22	25.00
Total	86	100.00	Total	88	100.00

The perception of the Nigerian and Iranian students about the quality of service at EMU is examined using frequencies and simple percentages. The result is presented in Table-2. It shows that the majority of the Nigerian students agreed that administrative quality, Physical environment quality (support infrastructure), Learning setting, General infrastructure, Core educational quality (attitude and behavior), Curriculum, Pedagogy and Competence are good in EMU. But they perceived the transformative quality and administrative process to be defective.

Table-2 Perception of Nigerians and Iranian students about service quality at EMU

Nigerians						
Service category	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Administrative quality	12 (13.79)	5 (5.75)	39 (44.83)	25 (28.75)	6 (6.90)	87(100)
Administrative Processes	6 (6.98)	25 (29.07)	26 (30.23)	14 (16.28)	15 (17.44)	87(100)
Physical environment quality	6 (6.98)	8 (9.30)	19 (22.09)	36 (41.86)	17 (19.77)	87(100)
Learning setting	0 (0)	15 (17.44)	19 (22.09)	21 (24.42)	31 (36.05)	87(100)
General infrastructure	1 (1.16)	7 (8.14)	19 (22.09)	42 (48.84)	17 (19.77)	87(100)
Core educational quality	6 (6.98)	10 (11.63)	31 (36.05)	37 (43.02)	2 (2.33)	87(100)
Curriculum	9 (10.34)	13 (14.94)	14 (16.09)	39 (44.83)	12 (13.79)	87(100)
Pedagogy	0 (0)	27 (31.03)	19 (21.84)	12 (13.79)	29 (33.33)	87(100)
Competence	6 (6.90)	4 (4.60)	27 (31.03)	42 (48.28)	8(9.20)	87(100)
Transformative quality	3 (3.45)	35 (40.23)	23 (26.44)	23 (26.44)	3 (3.45)	87(100)
Iranians						
Service category	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Administrative quality	11 (12.50)	7 (7.95)	38 (43.18)	27 (30.68)	5 (5.68)	88(100)
Administrative Processes	5 (5.68)	22 (25.00)	29 (32.95)	17 (19.32)	15 (17.05)	88(100)
Physical environment quality	6 (6.82)	7 (7.95)	22 (25.00)	38 (43.18)	15 (17.05)	88(100)
Learning setting	0 (0)	15 (17.05)	21 (23.86)	23 (26.14)	29 (32.95)	88(100)
General infrastructure	3 (3.41)	7 (7.95)	17 (19.32)	38 (43.18)	23 (26.14)	88(100)
Core educational quality	5 (5.68)	14 (15.91)	31 (35.23)	34 (38.64)	4 (4.55)	88(100)
Curriculum	9 (10.23)	11 (12.50)	16 (18.18)	36 (40.91)	16 (18.18)	88(100)
Pedagogy	0 (0)	24 (27.27)	23 (26.14)	16 (18.18)	25 (28.41)	88(100)
Competence	6 (6.82)	6 (6.82)	27 (30.68)	39 (44.32)	10 (11.36)	88(100)
Transformative quality	6 (6.82)	34 (38.64)	21 (23.86)	19 (21.59)	8 (9.09)	88(100)

Similarly, the Iranian students agreed that all the service categories are good except transformative quality and administrative process. In short, students of both countries (Nigeria and Iran) expressed their perceptions that all categories of services, except the transformative quality and administrative process in EMU are not satisfactory. Comparatively, both nationals see learning setting as the best while transformative quality is the worst category of service provided by EMU. Therefore, EMU needs to improve on administrative process and transformative quality to provide comprehensive satisfactory services to the students. To examine whether there are differences in the perception of the Nigerian and Iranian students about the service quality in EMU, Two-sample z test was employed and the result is presented in Table-3. The result shows that the null hypothesis of no difference cannot be rejected. This implies that the perception of the students from both countries about the service quality is the same. By implication, uniform service framework can satisfy the demand of the students from both countries. In other words, different service delivery methods are not necessary to cater for the service need of students from both countries.

Table-3 Result of Two-sample z test for the comparison of the responses of Nigerian and Iranian students in EMU

Service category	Z-Statistic	P-value
Administrative quality	-0.0069	0.9945
Administrative Processes	0.5873	0.5570
Physical environment quality (support infrastructure)	-0.1621	0.8712
Learning setting	-0.2684	0.7884
General infrastructure	0.1830	0.8548
Core educational quality (attitude and behaviour)	-0.1081	0.9139
Curriculum	0.4985	0.6181
Pedagogy	-0.1123	0.9106
Competence	-0.1114	0.9113
Transformative quality	0.0855	0.9318

Limitations and Future Research

In spite of the significant gains of this study to knowledge and HESQUAL constructs to the universal learning field, the research has some limitations and interpretations which need to be taken into consideration:

1. First, the main constraint of this research is its scope which was only limited to the two nationalities studying at EMU. The generalization of the outcome becomes a problem in this framework. The reason for the choice of these two nationalities is due to the fact that they are the leading nationalities when it comes to educational enrolment in EMU, after Nigerians, is the Iranians students. There are about six universities in North Cyprus other institutions should be included in to have a robust sample for further research in SQHE.
2. Second, Future study should be aimed to investigate SQ outlook from a broader perspective of not only the students but extending it to the administrative personnel opinion or view (Houston and Rees, 1999, Teeroovengadadum *et al.*, 2015). This will help to compare and contrast the potentials of the consequential inequality that need to be filled. It is also crucial to engage students from other countries to further confirm the outcome of the findings in this study.

CONCLUSION

This research investigates the perception of SQHE: perspective of Iranian and Nigerian students in EMU North Cyprus. So therefore, this research provides SQHE with helpful guidelines for future research that will help future researchers in literature and methodological approach. It is presumed that, the judgment of these two nationalities will help the management of EMU because the areas that have been given priority by students in assessing the quality of services will bring improvement for the management in their revenue generation and also promotes satisfaction and gained the loyalty of the students. This research is also significant because it is going to assess between the Iranian and Nigerian students' level of perception regarding service quality whom are both regarded as the leading nationalities in the economic growth of EMU. This study focused on the perception of service quality in higher education: a comparative analysis of the Iranian and Nigerian students in Famagusta, EMU-North Cyprus. SQ is a significant element of the educational sector. Therefore, neglecting SQ from international students' point of view will put academic sectors at competitive disadvantage. Hence, the majority of universities income is officially registered through influencing its fiscal security. The results from this study indicated that both countries (Nigeria and Iran) expressed their perceptions that all categories of services, except the transformative quality and administrative process in EMU are not satisfactory. The negative value clearly signifies dissatisfaction (Shekarchizadeh *et al.*, 2011) Therefore, EMU needs to improve on administrative process and transformative quality to provide comprehensive satisfactory services to the students. Ham, (2003) reported that once dissatisfaction sets in the repercussion will include:

- i. International students will abuse the minds of their counterparts who wish to purchase the educational service to decline
- ii. The existing students will lose confidence in the school authority and discourage others not to seek for admission
- iii. The existing students will be forced to switch to another university, which means the university cannot be able to retain them.
- iv. The international students will use the powerful weapon known as the words of mouth to tarnish the image of the university, hence, if the student is treated right, they will tell others if otherwise, they will tell others.

The HESQUAL Scale instrument which was adopted to provide valuable instrument for the institutions are constantly in search to improve service quality. The theoretical level provides an insight on the perspectives of both nationalities regarding service quality in EMU. Moreover, the likely replication and testing of the adopted model in different HE systems can help make available important information with regard to higher education service quality worldwide.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This study has established that the perception of service quality in higher education: A comparative analysis of the Iranian and Nigerian students in North Cyprus and conclude that the perception of service quality in higher education: a comparative analysis of the Iranian and Nigerian students is a significant element of the educational sector. Therefore, neglecting SQ from international students' point of view will put academic sectors at competitive disadvantage.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no competing interest

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