

## STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF SERVICE QUALITY IN HOSPITALITY EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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### **Abstract**

With the advent of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the whole education sector is in upswings with increase in educational institutions and universities across the entire nation. But has it increased the standard of education *per se*?, a pertinent question to be asked. Hospitality education too, like others has seen a major upswing with institutions providing hospitality education mushrooming all over the country.

Having said that, it must also be noted that there is essentially a gap between industry and academia where often, the students' perception towards hospitality education as a whole is not very heartening. This research paper analyzes the students' perception particularly at Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra campus wherein their perception was studied on the basis of different variables. The study is based on the premise that graduates and post graduates will have divergent perception and so would students' of tourism and hotel management. The questionnaire asking students to rate the education has been tested using Chronbach alpha and the resultant data is analyzed through 't' test and ANOVA.

**Key Words; Hospitality Education, Service Quality, Training and development.**

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## Introduction

The word 'Quality' is a very relative term which attributes different meaning to different people. There is not a single thing where quality cannot be measured, owing to varied reasons. The dynamics of service sector make it even more complex where personal touch is involved in each and every service transaction. The education sector is essentially an integral part of the service sector lexicon. To analyze the service quality in education is even more difficult of a task where the students' mental framework at any given point becomes more decisive to assess the quality which again is highly personalized. Sadly, not enough research has been done to measure the service quality and its effectiveness in educational sector.

The application of Total Quality Management (TQM) philosophy and methodology in the context of higher education is fully acknowledged and widely used today. The necessity to use the TQM philosophy is aimed at providing educational services and giving results of academic and research activities. TQM methods are also implemented in the Quality Standards ISO 9001-2000, also known as the basic quality principles for Higher Education Institutions by Bologna Process.

The term Hospitality embraces many terms but only hotel management and tourism have been taken up in light of this study.

## Objective

- To identify the various factors/ variables related to service quality in hospitality education.
- To examine the difference between perception of graduate and post graduate students' on varied parameters regarding hospitality education service quality.
- To analyze the difference among various classes on said parameters regarding hospitality education service quality.

## Hypothesis

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant difference between perception of graduate and post graduate students' regarding hospitality education service quality.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference in perception of students of various classes i.e. BTM, MTTM, BHM&CT, MHM&CT regarding hospitality education service quality.

### Research Instrument, Sample and Area of study

Questionnaire is drafted after extensive review of literature. Study is confined only to Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra campus including students of Department of Tourism and Hotel Management and University College. In order to undertake the study sample of 90 students has been taken, 25 each from BTM, MTTM and BHM&CT and 15 students of MHM&CT. After scrutiny only 71 questionnaires were found completed in all respect. Convenience sampling has been used to collect data.

### Review of Literature

Currently, the literature pertaining to service quality in the higher education sector is significantly undeveloped. In light of the current economic climate, funding cuts and potential future decreases in student numbers, universities must realize that they are business entities, competing for resources and students, both in the local and international market (Paswan and Ganesh, 2009). This means that universities should be continually looking for appropriate ways of gaining a competitive advantage. Accordingly, the higher education sector must strive to deliver a high quality of service and satisfy its students, who some may term 'participating customers', to achieve sustainability in a competitive service environment (DeShields *et al.*, 2005). After all, universities can only be successful as long as their students are being offered something that they wish to buy, at a quality they feel is acceptable (Brown and Mazzarol, 2009). This demonstrates the importance of service quality in gaining a competitive advantage, whilst also highlighting the need to better understand the role that service quality plays in the higher education sector.

DeShields *et al.* (2005) argue that it is essential for higher education management to apply market-orientated principles and strategies that are used in profit-making institutions. These principles and strategies are being applied to higher education institutions with the aim of gaining a competitive advantage (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). Accordingly, institutions are increasingly realizing the importance of higher education as a service industry and are placing greater emphasis on meeting the expectations and needs of students (DeShields *et al.*, 2005). Nadiri *et al.* (2009) point out that it is crucial for higher education providers to understand students' expectations and perceptions of what constitutes a quality service in order to attract students and serve their needs. This promotes the need for higher education institutions to

continue to deliver a quality service and satisfy its participating customers to achieve sustainability in a competitive service environment (DeShields *et al.*, 2005).

According to Oldfield and Baron (2000), higher education can be seen as a “pure service,” suggesting that it possesses all the unique characteristics of a service (Section 2.2.4). More recently, Gruber *et al.* (2010) assert that higher education is a service that is predominantly intangible, perishable and heterogeneous. This is due to the service experience varying from one situation to the next, making higher education service encounters difficult to standardize. Higher education as a service also satisfies the perishability criterion since it is difficult to store. However, ways to overcome this are evident, for instance, the emergence of e-learning and video technology (Cuthbert, 1996a) over the past fifteen years. As a result, service sectors such as higher education are attempting to defy the perishability characteristic of a service through the assistance of innovation and technological advances. Notwithstanding the characteristics of higher education as a service, it is important to appreciate that higher education institutions, like any other businesses, have different stakeholders with varying interests and agendas.

Abdullah (2006a) developed the HEdPERF model. The model is an adaptation of the standard SERVPERF model of Cronin and Taylor, 1992 adopting a perceptions-only approach. Abdullah (2006a) states that the aim of this model is to capture a context specific view of service quality in higher education, enabling the whole student experience to be measured. The instrument measures 41-items and each item have been tested for reliability and validity, using both types of factorial analysis, exploratory and confirmatory. Furthermore, comparative results show that the HEdPERF scale captures more variance relative to that of the SERVPERF scale (Sultan and Wong, 2010). Abdullah (2006a) argues that tertiary institutions can use HEdPERF to improve service performance. In particular, research findings confirm that students’ perceptions of service quality can be determined by evaluating six dimensions, specifically, non-academic aspects, academic aspects, reputation, access, programme issues and understanding. Evaluating service quality and understanding how these dimensions impact service quality can enable higher education institutions to efficiently design the service delivery process.

Therefore, since the student is the main recipient of the service, it becomes even more crucial to understand service quality and its influence on the service delivery process, in an attempt to fulfil students’ needs more effectively. Beaumont, D.J. (2012) has investigated perceptions of service quality at the University of Manchester from the viewpoint of the student.

It sought to uncover what students perceived to be most important and best performing characteristics of service quality. In terms of the performance of different characteristics, it can be concluded that there are four characteristics that students believed performed well - reputation, knowledge and experience of staff, campus location and layout, organisation and management of course. It is also evident that there appears to be relationships between some of the characteristics, demonstrating that focusing on improving the service quality of one characteristic could have a positive impact on another characteristic (e.g. the 'knowledge of academic staff' influences the 'quality of lectures').

According to Sultan and Wong (2010), service quality research in the higher education sector is relatively new, at least when compared to that of the commercial sector. With significant changes taking place in higher education institutions over the last decade, it seems that higher education should be regarded as a business-like service industry, which focuses on meeting and exceeding the needs of students (Gruber *et al.*, 2010). Many higher education institutions are beginning to realise this and are competing for students, both in the local and international market (Paswan and Ganesh, 2009). Furthermore, with the emergence of many informal platforms for students to post their views on their experiences (e.g. The Student Room), higher education institutions are increasingly being called to account for the quality of education that they provide. Accordingly, achieving quality has become an important goal for most higher education institutions (Abdullah, 2006b).

Harvey and Green (1993) contend that quality in higher education is a complex and multifaceted concept and an appropriate definition is lacking. There are many ways to define quality in higher education and each definition has its own criteria and perspective and is regarded as 'stakeholder relative' (Harvey and Green, 1993). In terms of the student as the stakeholder, DeShields *et al.* (2005) argue that the higher education sector needs to continue to deliver a high quality service and satisfy students in order to succeed in a competitive service environment. Therefore, attempting to evaluate the level of service quality and understanding how different factors impact overall service quality is crucial so that higher education institutions can design their service in the best possible way (Abdullah, 2006b). Furthermore, knowing the strengths and weaknesses of different factors and their relative influence may lead to better allocation of resources, resulting in students being provided with an improved service (Abdullah, 2006b).

O'Neill and Palmer (2004) express a view that higher education has proceeded from a niche service consumed by a small elite, to a mass-market service in which increasing numbers of students are catered to by an increasing number and diversity of providers. Furthermore they state that the provision of higher education has typically gone from being a centrally planned service to one in which resources are allocated by market forces. They point out that as this market matures, it is service quality that will differentiate one higher education institution from another.

## Analysis and Interpretation of Data

### Cronbach's Alpha

#### Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	71	100.0
	Excluded <sup>a</sup>	0	.0
	Total	71	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

#### Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.911	28

### Results

The Cronbach's alpha happens to be one of the most authentic tests for testing the reliability of any given questionnaire. After the said test was applied, it was found to be reliable as the theory suggests that cronbach alpha score over and above .75 will be good and thus make the questionnaire a good fit for the study and here it is .911 making it reliable.

Table 1

**Comparative analysis of Students' Perception towards Service Quality in Hospitality  
education between Graduates and Post Graduates**

Attributes	Graduate (N=43)		Post Graduate (N=28)		S.E.D.	't' value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Use of Modern Equipments and Technology	3.8605	1.18686	3.4643	1.03574	.27444	1.444
Physical facilities like Building, Parking, Ambience, Location etc.	3.4884	1.09918	3.4643	1.03574	.26100	.092
Library facility	4.0698	1.00937	3.5714	.95950	.24045	2.073
Lab (Computer/Production etc.) facility	3.2791	1.43636	2.1786	1.38921	.34437	3.196
Faculty dress up and grooming	4.0233	.80144	4.1786	.90487	.20481	.758
Mgt. promised to do something and did so like training, placements etc.	3.6047	1.11568	3.1429	.93152	.25437	1.815
Mgt. takes personal interest in solving your problem	3.9535	.95002	2.5714	1.23013	.25945	5.327
Administrative staff perform/provide services at promised time	3.6279	.92642	3.2500	.75154	.20938	1.805
Administrative staff maintain error free records	3.4884	.88296	2.6429	1.31133	.26012	3.250
Teaching Staff takes personal interest in solving your problem	4.0233	1.03483	3.2857	1.21281	.26904	2.741
Teaching Staff perform services at time like delivering lectures, providing notes	3.8837	1.07370	3.6071	1.03062	.25669	1.077
Teaching Staff maintain error free records	3.4651	.93475	3.1786	1.44154	.28163	1.017
Administrative staff timely inform important notices and information	4.0698	1.00937	3.8571	.93152	.23789	.894
Administrative staff always respond positively and promptly	3.7209	.88171	3.8929	.83174	.20945	.821
Teaching Staff is willing to help any time	4.3721	.84581	3.7143	1.01314	.22218	2.961
Teaching Staff is easy to approach	3.7674	.81174	3.6429	.91142	.20693	.602
Teaching Staff respond to your request promptly	3.8837	.93119	3.5357	.96156	.22904	1.519
Learning Environment is safe	3.9535	1.02245	4.2143	1.19744	.26573	.981
Adm. staff had knowledge and experience to sort out your queries	4.0465	.92462	4.1071	1.03062	.23494	.258
Administrative staff is courteous to you	4.0233	.77116	3.5714	.99735	.21047	2.147
Teaching Staff had knowledge and experience to answer your questions	4.3023	.86009	4.0000	.81650	.20479	1.476
Teaching Staff behavior instilled	4.0233	.96334	3.7500	1.00462	.23791	1.149





safe, Adm. staff had knowledge and experience to sort out your queries, Teaching Staff had knowledge and experience to answer your questions, Teaching Staff behavior instilled confidence in you, Working hour convenience, Teaching Staff provide personalized attention to your learning, Course Structure/ Relevance of course material are the attributes on which there is no significant difference among graduate and post graduate students regarding hospitality education service quality at 0.05 level of significance. Hence  $H_1$  is accepted on these attributes.

**Table 2**  
**Mean of different classes**

Attributes	BTM (N=19) Mean	MTTM (N=18) Mean	BHM&CT (N=24) Mean	MHM&CT (N=10) Mean	Total (N=71) Mean
Use of Modern Equipments and Technology	4.0000	3.5000	3.7500	3.4000	3.7042
Physical facilities like Building, Parking, Ambience, Location etc.	3.6842	3.6667	3.3333	3.1000	3.4789
Library facility	4.2105	3.5556	3.9583	3.6000	3.8732
Lab (Computer/Production etc.) facility	3.6842	2.3333	2.9583	1.9000	2.8451
Faculty dress up and grooming	3.5789	4.1111	4.3750	4.3000	4.0845
Mgt. promised to do something and did so like training, placements etc.	3.7368	2.9444	3.5000	3.5000	3.4225
Mgt. takes personal interest in solving your problem	4.2632	2.0556	3.7083	3.5000	3.4085
Administrative staff perform/provide services at promised time	3.7368	3.0000	3.5417	3.7000	3.4789
Administrative staff maintain error free records	3.3158	2.1667	3.6250	3.5000	3.1549
Teaching Staff takes personal interest in solving your problem	4.0000	2.8889	4.0417	4.0000	3.7324
Teaching Staff perform services at time like delivering lectures, providing notes	4.1579	3.6667	3.6667	3.5000	3.7746
Teaching Staff maintain error free records	3.2632	2.8889	3.6250	3.7000	3.3521
Administrative staff timely inform important notices and	4.2632	3.8889	3.9167	3.8000	3.9859

information					
Administrative staff always respond positively and promptly	3.7368	3.9444	3.7083	3.8000	3.7887
Teaching Staff is willing to help any time	4.4737	3.5000	4.2917	4.1000	4.1127
Teaching Staff is easy to approach	3.8947	3.6667	3.6667	3.6000	3.7183
Teaching Staff respond to your request promptly	4.3158	3.5000	3.5417	3.6000	3.7465
Learning Environment is safe	3.5789	4.2778	4.2500	4.1000	4.0563
Adm. staff had knowledge and experience to sort out your queries	4.1053	4.1667	4.0000	4.0000	4.0704
Administrative staff is courteous to you	4.0526	3.5000	4.0000	3.7000	3.8451
Teaching Staff had knowledge and experience to answer your questions	4.5263	4.0000	4.1250	4.0000	4.1831
Teaching Staff behavior instilled confidence in you	4.0000	3.7778	4.0417	3.7000	3.9155
Teaching Staff is consistently polite with you	3.7895	2.7778	3.7500	3.6000	3.4930
Working hour convenience	3.2632	3.1667	3.5000	3.5000	3.3521
Administrative staff gives you individualize attention	4.2632	3.0556	3.4583	3.1000	3.5211
Teaching Staff provide personalized attention to your learning	4.0000	3.6667	3.9167	3.4000	3.8028
Teaching Staff had your best interest at heart	4.0000	3.1667	3.7917	4.0000	3.7183
Course Structure/ Relevance of course material	3.0526	2.7778	3.4583	3.3000	3.1549

**Table 3**  
**ANOVA table to study the difference between different classes**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	
Use of Modern Equipments and Technology	Between Groups	3.389	3	1.130	.866	H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Within Groups	87.400	67	1.304		
	Total	90.789	70			
Physical facilities like	Between Groups	3.380	3	1.127	.989	

Building, Parking, Ambience, Location etc.	Within Groups	76.339	67	1.139		H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Total	79.718	70			
Library facility	Between Groups	4.898	3	1.633	1.634	H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Within Groups	66.961	67	.999		
	Total	71.859	70			
Lab (Computer/Production etc.) facility	Between Groups	27.332	3	9.111	4.626	H <sub>2</sub> rejected
	Within Groups	131.964	67	1.970		
	Total	159.296	70			
Faculty dress up and grooming	Between Groups	7.359	3	2.453	3.900	H <sub>2</sub> rejected
	Within Groups	42.134	67	.629		
	Total	49.493	70			
Mgt. promised to do something and did so like training, placements etc.	Between Groups	6.195	3	2.065	1.892	H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Within Groups	73.129	67	1.091		
	Total	79.324	70			
Mgt. takes personal interest in solving your problem	Between Groups	49.068	3	16.356	17.650	H <sub>2</sub> rejected
	Within Groups	62.087	67	.927		
	Total	111.155	70			
Administrative staff perform/provide services at promised time	Between Groups	5.976	3	1.992	2.795	H <sub>2</sub> rejected
	Within Groups	47.743	67	.713		
	Total	53.718	70			
Administrative staff maintain error free records	Between Groups	24.566	3	8.189	8.222	H <sub>2</sub> rejected
	Within Groups	66.730	67	.996		
	Total	91.296	70			
Teaching Staff takes personal interest in solving your problem	Between Groups	17.179	3	5.726	5.000	H <sub>2</sub> rejected
	Within Groups	76.736	67	1.145		
	Total	93.915	70			
Teaching Staff perform services at time like delivering lectures, providing notes	Between Groups	4.035	3	1.345	1.212	H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Within Groups	74.360	67	1.110		
	Total	78.394	70			
Teaching Staff maintain error free records	Between Groups	7.010	3	2.337	1.796	H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Within Groups	87.187	67	1.301		

	Total	94.197	70			
Administrative staff timely inform important notices and information	Between Groups	2.091	3	.697	.719	H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Within Groups	64.895	67	.969		
	Total	66.986	70			
Administrative staff always respond positively and promptly	Between Groups	.644	3	.215	.281	H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Within Groups	51.187	67	.764		
	Total	51.831	70			
Teaching Staff is willing to help any time	Between Groups	10.003	3	3.334	4.055	H <sub>2</sub> rejected
	Within Groups	55.095	67	.822		
	Total	65.099	70			
Teaching Staff is easy to approach	Between Groups	.843	3	.281	.380	H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Within Groups	49.523	67	.739		
	Total	50.366	70			
Teaching Staff respond to your request promptly	Between Groups	8.473	3	2.824	3.443	H <sub>2</sub> rejected
	Within Groups	54.964	67	.820		
	Total	63.437	70			
Learning Environment is safe	Between Groups	6.132	3	2.044	1.764	H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Within Groups	77.643	67	1.159		
	Total	83.775	70			
Adm. staff had knowledge and experience to sort out your queries	Between Groups	.358	3	.119	.125	H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Within Groups	64.289	67	.960		
	Total	64.648	70			
Administrative staff is courteous to you	Between Groups	3.748	3	1.249	1.624	H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Within Groups	51.547	67	.769		
	Total	55.296	70			
Teaching Staff had knowledge and experience to answer your questions	Between Groups	3.258	3	1.086	1.536	H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Within Groups	47.362	67	.707		
	Total	50.620	70			
Teaching Staff behavior instilled confidence in you	Between Groups	1.324	3	.441	.447	H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Within Groups	66.169	67	.988		
	Total	67.493	70			

Teaching Staff is consistently polite with you	Between Groups	12.577	3	4.192	4.447	H <sub>2</sub> rejected
	Within Groups	63.169	67	.943		
	Total	75.746	70			
Working hour convenience	Between Groups	1.513	3	.504	.452	H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Within Groups	74.684	67	1.115		
	Total	76.197	70			
Administrative staff gives you individualize attention	Between Groups	16.231	3	5.410	5.217	H <sub>2</sub> rejected
	Within Groups	69.487	67	1.037		
	Total	85.718	70			
Teaching Staff provide personalized attention to your learning	Between Groups	3.006	3	1.002	.816	H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Within Groups	82.233	67	1.227		
	Total	85.239	70			
Teaching Staff had your best interest at heart	Between Groups	7.908	3	2.636	4.160	H <sub>2</sub> rejected
	Within Groups	42.458	67	.634		
	Total	50.366	70			
Course Structure/ Relevance of course material	Between Groups	5.179	3	1.726	1.481	H <sub>2</sub> accepted
	Within Groups	78.117	67	1.166		
	Total	83.296	70			

Table value of F in ANOVA table is **2.74**, when  $\alpha = 0.05$  and degree of freedom between group is 3 and within group is 67. Hence attributes having F value less than 2.74 means there is no significant difference among all classes on those attributes, hence H<sub>2</sub> is accepted and if F is 2.74 or more than that it means there is significant difference among all classes on said attribute, hence H<sub>2</sub> is rejected.

### Results and Conclusion

First, variables were searched matching to our research, the best match were selected and modified but most were established after brainstorming. After the immense deep study the objectives for the research and hypothesis were established in order to make the best match to the questionnaire. Where, our first and foremost objective was to find or establish quality variables matching service quality in the field of hospitality education and it may seem boastful to say but we were fortunate and successful in attaining our objective to a great extent. For this research

convenience sampling model was adopted and pre defined universe (Kurukshetra University) and population (graduate and post graduate hospitality education students) was selected. Moreover, the number of students taken up for study can be justified as there are comparatively less amount of post graduate students' intake as compared to its graduate counterparts in the field concerned, particularly in Kurukshetra university. Further, our second aim in conducting this research was to find out if there is any difference among graduate and post graduate hospitality education student's perception about service quality in hospitality education? Our first hypothesis was based on this objective stating that 'there is no significant difference among graduate and post graduate students' perception about service quality in hospitality education'. After analyzing both the respondents' group, it is found that on some attributes there is no significant difference while on few attributes there is a difference among both groups. Our second hypothesis was based on third objective of this research that 'there is no significant difference between different classes perception about service quality' that was also found to be true on few attributes.

In last it can be concluded that hospitality education require good service quality. President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Manchester, Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell, states that "*this is necessary to ensure and improve the quality of teaching and the wider experience that we offer to all of our student.*" (BBC, 2011).

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