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INTRODUCTION ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF SERVICE AT A UoT: THE CASE OF DUT

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A B S T R A C T

The quality of service in all industries, due to its unique and complex characteristics involving intangibility, has gained importance for over a decade. Customer / student satisfaction and service quality are essential concepts that industries and higher education institutions must consider to remain competitive, sustainable and relevant. Consequentially, ensuring a high level of service quality is advantageous to an institution thus emanating in student satisfaction, profitability, loyalty and retention. Despite this phenomenon not being a new concept in higher education, greater emphasis is highlighted upon academic quality and student satisfaction as opposed to the administrative sector, where service quality and student satisfaction is not being impressed upon adequately enough. The primary objective, therefore, of this empirical study is to assess the quality of service as regards the administrative support provided to students using the SERVQUAL model. The data in use were gathered from B-Tech full-time and part-time students registered in one faculty at a recognized UoT in KZN. This study adopted the quantitative data collection method. The research instrument was an adapted SERVQUAL questionnaire designed and distributed to the selected respondents by means of a purposive sampling technique. The large number of gaps evident indicate a considerable discrepancy between the expectations and perceptions of the respondents across all dimensions with Responsiveness showing the biggest gap score of (-0.9) and Tangibles being the lowest (-06.). The results have shown that students' perception of service quality is poor and that the service falls below their expectations. This study provided results that showed for every dimension measured, the expectations exceeded the perceptions thereby resulting in student dissatisfaction. Further observation of the perceptions reveal that none of the dimensions contributed to service quality as they all fell below expectations.

1. INTRODUCTION

The quality of service in all industries, due to its unique and complex characteristics involving intangibility, has gained importance for more than a decade. As "Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry" (1985, 41-42) so cogently noted, "Quality is an elusive and indistinct construct". Customer satisfaction and service quality is not only exclusive to the services industry, but have become a significant factor in the higher education sector as well. Service quality entails constant expectations of what customers anticipate from a service provider. Furthermore, because of increasing competition and major changes in higher education, it is imperative that management understand what service implies from a student's perspective and also recognize what influences superior service quality has as a means of competition in higher education institutions. "de Jager and Jan" (2015, 87) and "Tóth and Jónás" (2014, 96) noted in their writings, that institutions of higher education should ensure that students get what they expect due to the competition in global education markets and the decrease in government funding. The allocation of resources in higher education can be achieved in a way that is consistent with student priorities in order to gain an advantage over other higher education institutions. This should be done by surveying the services rendered and then allocating resources accordingly, since surveys can also assist institutions in finding their niche areas and focus on these to increase student numbers and funding. Student satisfaction feedback are the views of students about the services received from an institution. "Razinka et al" (2018, 2) declares that international researchers agree that education quality can be improved by collecting student feedback. Student surveys can also highlight the areas of weaknesses and this can alert management to the meaningful and timely measures of student satisfaction so that emphasis is focused on these challenges.

This is acknowledge by "Blair and Noel" (2014, 879) when the authors maintain that evaluation systems used by institutions of higher education highlight strengths and weaknesses. Student satisfaction is emphasised by the level of service delivery offered which focuses on the interaction between student and university staff. Furthermore, to see to it that the student

voice is heard, the quality of service delivery must be continuously assessed in order to maintain a respectable status quo. Students are not focused on institutional hierarchy, but rather on the quality of the services rendered, hence it makes sense that all staff of the university need to work together to bring about student satisfaction in higher educations

New competitors, in the form of private institutions, are continuously entering the higher education sector. As confirmed by "Mohamedbhai" (2017) private higher education institutions are prominent in the United States and East Asia, recently showing added presence in Western Europe and greatest progression in developing countries and continents such as Latin American, South Asia and Africa. These competitors are offering degrees to rival public universities and these include online offerings. The higher education environment has changed drastically since the end of the apartheid era. Universities therefore need to be proactive in order to keep up with these continuous changes. Although student satisfaction in the administrative sector is not a new concept to higher education institutions, emphasis is placed on academic satisfaction and the administrative sector student satisfaction is not being highlighted adequately enough. Universities that understand the challenges it faces, has a better chance of achieving their aims and objectives effectively. Student satisfaction must begin from the point of enrolment or initial student contact to the point of graduation. This will ensure a favourable repertoire between staff and student throughout the study life cycle of the student. Institutions need to recognise that satisfied students are necessary for an institution to achieve its aims. "Lacobucci *et al.*, 1995; Dabholkar *et al.* 2000; Yavas *et al.*, 2004; Carrillat *et al.*, 2007; Zeithaml *et al.*," (2008) cited in "Annamdevula and Bellamkonda" (2016, 449) reported service quality is an antecedent to customer satisfaction. Therefore, by assessing service quality and recognizing it as an antecedent to student satisfaction, HEI's can align their aims and objectives to achieve institutional goals, vision and mission.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study enriches the knowledge of student satisfaction in higher education institutions by providing significant literature pertaining to the quality of service delivery correlated to student satisfaction. "Green" (2014, 131) defines service as an "intangible product delivered for consumption at the time or place of delivery". The advent of the internet has globalised the higher education market place immensely thus forcing institutions to conform and as this continues, competition for the best students will increase both nationally and internationally. The survival of a university, as stated by "Dursan, Oskaybaş and Gökmen" (2013,1134), depends on their quality of an intangible service offered to the students who have become more discerning in their selection of institution, so institutions of higher education should develop strategies to satisfy the requirements through innovation and diversification.

According to "Daniel, Liben and Adugna" (2017, 111), a critical pre-requisite for sustaining customer satisfaction is service quality. Consequently, the aptness of this study in ascertaining quality service delivery of administrative staff could be one of the most important and effective initiatives to ensure that students leave the university feeling satisfied in that they are more knowledgeable and marketable to industry. "Sultan and Wong" (2013, 77) reiterate that not only academic, but also faculty support and administration staff play just as important a role in attaining student satisfaction. Key determinants of service quality have to be identified in order to improve quality and attain satisfaction. "Tsinidou, Gerogiannis, and Fitsilis" (2010) cited in "Vnoučková, Urbancová and Smolová" (2017, 110) emphasized that feedback from students on service quality of faculties is of primary importance for strategic decision making. Further rationale behind this study is that, with the evolution of higher education, the support departments must take cognisance of inefficiencies and determine which dimensions of service quality require further development. "Lekhanya" (2014, 300) cogently noted "service quality provided by UoT's are still unknown and surrounded by assumptions." It is anticipated that processes can then be put in place such that it benefits students in gaining their full academic potential to graduate with high levels of employable skills and successfully compete in industry, while at the same time improving the integrity and reputation of the DUT. Satisfied students can be a marketing strategy via word of mouth and a competitive advantage for education institutions. Following on this introduction, the paper will present the theoretical framework upon which the research question hinges, followed by the review of the literature. Thereafter follows the research methods that were used to undertake the study, a presentation and discussion of the results and how they link to the literature, and finally a conclusion drawn from the results is presented as well as the areas for further research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Subsequent to reviewing current literature related to the quality of service delivery leading to student satisfaction or dissatisfaction in higher education institutions globally, nationally and locally, this study has identified a scope to carry out an assessment into the quality of service at a UoT in KZN. Diversification in the higher education arena, stimulated by global, political, economic and technology concerns, are forcing universities to re-evaluate their service quality offered to students holistically. Universities must take cognizance of their own contributions and how these are perceived in order to excel in service quality. This resonates with "Kogovsek and Kogovsek" (2013, 2038) who assert that service quality is considered to be an essential factor if a university wants to attract and retain students. Consequently, this study seeks to highlight the impact of service quality on student satisfaction focusing on one of the faculty services at the DUT. This is aptly accentuated by "Kara, Tanui and Kalai" (2016, 45) whose study reflects on administrative service quality as being important determinants of student satisfaction in public universities. Several studies debate service delivery and student satisfaction with diverse conclusions at numerous institutions of higher education worldwide. Internationally, an examination by "Khoo, Ha and McGregor" (2017, 436) in Singapore, "Duong" (2016, 32) in Vietnam, "Saif" (2014, 177) in Jordan and "Wilkins and Balakrishnan" (2013, 146) at a United Arab Emirates university reveal satisfaction levels as high, moderate, stable or low. Previous empirical studies conducted globally by "Weerasinghe, Lalitha and Fernando" (2017, 533), "Maxwell-Stuart *et al.*" (2016, 2), "Sweeney" (2015, 3) and "Douglas *et al.*" (2014, 329) report on student/customer perceptions and expectations of satisfaction at universities. However, service quality that is profoundly directed at satisfying students and vital in attaining their viewpoint, is still an emerging phenomenon. This, therefore, necessitates and shapes the underpinning concept to this study. Significantly, "Van der Westhuizen" (2014, 407) posited service delivery as one of the main indicators of improvements in quality management in higher education.

It is eminent from preliminary assessments of South African UoT's conducted by "Hall" (2013, 4), "Noel" (2011, 2), "Pillay" (2011, 3) and "Manuel" (2008, 3) that there is minimal analysis of the quality of service delivery of administrative staff at the DUT. Further research by "Diedericks" (2012, 7) assesses two universities in the Gauteng Province while (Weideman 2008, 111) focuses on various criterion that can be used to evaluate service delivery. Driving service delivery to heighten student satisfaction is compulsory due to universities constantly adapting to the country's political climates and the increasing competitiveness of the higher education landscape. The "Council on Higher Education" (2011-2017, 10) noted in the quality assurance documentation, that student satisfaction surveys, to ascertain student experience, is used infrequently. "Mandal and Gupta" (2018, 353) strongly cited service quality as strategic to satisfaction between front line staff and customer and that numerous researchers believe that customer satisfaction is related to service quality. Accordingly, this study has been instigated to fill the gap of service quality of support services at a UOT in a developing country. Applicable resources can then be allocated to refine these elements to expand on service quality to attain satisfaction and improve institutional performance. Arguments are discounted by "Wilkins and Balakrishnan" (2013,145) that student satisfaction is determined solely by academic experiences. Additionally, this resonates with "Hanssen and Solvoll" (2015, 745) who emphasized that other factors are now showing equal, if not more importance than academic fulfilment.

"Myiwa *et al.*" (2017, 1060) believes that if service quality indicators are developed as a whole and not in isolation of each other, then this will result in advanced student satisfaction. The afore-mentioned researchers agree that an escalation in the service quality of support staff will have a greater impact on student satisfaction. "Govender, Veerasamy and Noel" (2014, 465) stipulate that long term sustainability of a university and the key to setting itself apart from the competition, lies in providing a quality service. Higher education service quality, although a daunting challenge, is consistent with the principle of student satisfaction, hence, the service of front line staff, who are critical to students and represent the organisation, have a direct impact on perception of service quality and student satisfaction. In today's competitive environment, where attaining the highest standard of service delivery seems to be elusive both locally and globally, enhancing both quality and student satisfaction will ensure that the university be the centre of academic excellence and gain a competitive edge over other institutions. Equally, "Khosravi *et al.*" (2013, 580) posited that addressing the needs of students is critical for higher education institutions if they want to be credible, competitive, successful and sustainable.

2.1 The relationship between the quality of service and student satisfaction

"Churchill and Surprenant" (1992, 491) were amongst the first researchers to establish a connection between the delivery of service quality and satisfaction with the authors stating that satisfaction emerged as early as the 1970's. Elements of quality in higher education is the ability to adapt to global changes, produce skilled and knowledgeable students who are able to compete in international markets and contribute to the country's economy. Various stakeholders in higher education view service quality differently according to their individual needs. However, students being the primary consumers of higher education were the focus of this paper. Nevertheless, other stakeholders should not be disregarded, as their views are considered important as well. "Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml" (1991, 39) declare that superior service delivery comes from understanding a customer's expectations, where the customer compares the perception of service quality with expectations when evaluating services rendered. Similarly, in higher education, a service is rendered albeit intangible, and students can compare their perception of actual delivery to expectations delivered to assess the level of service quality received that eventually leads to student satisfaction. The concept of satisfaction also includes the university sector so it is imperative that service delivery be measured to ensure that quality is prevalent. "Yusof and Ghouri" (2013, 43) reiterated, "effective delivery of service is the determination of customer satisfaction.Some of the determinants of service quality in higher education, as explained by "Abdullah" (2006, 41), as being "program issues, academic and non-academic as well as access and reputation". Although service quality and student satisfaction are fundamentally different concepts, ensuring the highest service quality will result in the attainment of student satisfaction. The repeated experiences of student campus life shape the student's level of satisfaction. The advantage of satisfied students is positive word of mouth advertising to the institution and will be found to be appealing to new and future students to the university. Several studies debate service quality and student satisfaction with diverse conclusions at numerous institutions of higher education worldwide.

"Prakash and Muhammed" (2016, 74) believe that "service quality is an antecedent to student satisfaction". Previous research by authors "Cronin & Taylor" (1992)','"Dion et al.," (1998) and "Lee et al.," (2000) cited in "Prakash and Muhammed" 2016, 74) supports this theory with empirical evidence. A study by "Sultan and Wong) (2013, 70) further established that student satisfaction has a direct relation with perceived service quality. Monitoring the quality of service delivery enables management to get a better understanding of students' attitude towards the education environment and thus derive the level of student satisfaction required. A key benchmark of a successful university is quality leading to the utmost satisfaction thereby assisting in nurturing the skills and expertise necessary for university graduates to be successful in the world of works. When measuring student satisfaction with educational services, quality is the core element and management must exceed students' expectations. "Azoury, Daou and Khoury" (2014, 3) indicate that service quality is perceived by marketers as "the level of service needed to make it acceptable in the market place while customers perceive service quality as the level of service required to satisfy their needs". When a customer's expectations are met to the fullest and when the customer feels that they got what was expected for the monetary value paid, this indicates satisfaction. Satisfaction could be regarded as one of the most important factors for positive word of mouth advertising, future enrolments and brand imaging.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive, cross sectional quantitative design. The questionnaire comprised of 50 questions modified to suit this study from the SERVQUAL questionnaire compiled by "Parasuraman, Ziethaml and Berry" 1988, 23). The questionnaire used the five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The sample population comprised of full-time and part-time B-Tech students enrolled at the Durban University of Technology's Faculty of Management Sciences.

"Sekaran and Bougie" 2016, 240) indicate, "The population must be defined in terms of elements, geographical boundaries and time". The sample size consisted of 185 students out of a total of 355 registered students within the faculty. A purposive judgement sampling technique was used due to resources, time and cost constraints. After administration of the pre-test, the questionnaire was distributed to the students both online and in a classroom setting while adhering to strict COVID-19 rules and regulations.

4. DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Once collected, the researcher organised and summarised the data to make sense of what the respondents had said. Thereafter, the data coded from the classroom questionnaires and online surveys on a Microsoft Excel worksheet, which was then forwarded to a statistician. Data were analysed by using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 25) software. The interpretation and analysis of the data gathered was presented using descriptive and inferential statistics. The analysis allowed the researcher to deduce if the responses were similar, different or if there were relationships between what was studied.

4.1 Validity and Reliability

"Sekaran and Bougie" (2016, 220) notably pointed out "validity is concerned with whether we measure the right concept and reliability with stability and consistency of measurement". The validity and reliability of the SERVQUAL scale was reassessed by "Parasuraman, Berry and Ziethaml" (1991, 439 & 445), and this substantiated using the instrument to ascertain expectations and perceptions of service quality in various sectors. Face validity, which is an index of content validity, was used in this study. Reliability was achieved using the Cronbach alpha coefficient ranging from 0.886 to 0.939 was obtained for service quality expectation dimensions and 0.941 for overall service quality expectations; and 0.814 to 0.947 for service quality perception dimensions and 0.947 for overall service quality perceptions. The reliability scores for all sections exceed the recommended Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70. This indicates a degree of acceptable consistent scoring for these sections of the research showing that the research instrument is sufficiently reliable.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The primary objective of this empirical study was to assess the quality of service as regards to administrative support provided to students using the SERVQUAL model. The findings of this study indicate that across all dimensions, GAP scores existed ranging from the lowest of (-0.6) to the highest of (-0.9). This means that the expectation mean scores were greater than the perception mean scores across all five SERVQUAL dimensions. A study by "Mwiya" (2017) demonstrated a positive relationship between the SERVQUAL dimensions and student satisfaction. The author also maintained that the higher the level of perceived performance marks a higher level of student satisfaction (Myiwa 2017, 1062).

5.1 Demographic analysis of the respondents

Of the 185 respondents, 57 were male and 128 were female. The majority of the sample was African (84.3%), with small and similar numbers of Coloured and White respondents. The remaining respondents were Indian ($p < 0.001$) making up the second highest within the race groups.

5.2 Reliability dimension

The perceived importance of the five dimensions differ, but "Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml" 1990, 39) posit that reliability has consistently shown to be a key performance indicator and the most important determinant of perceptions of service quality.
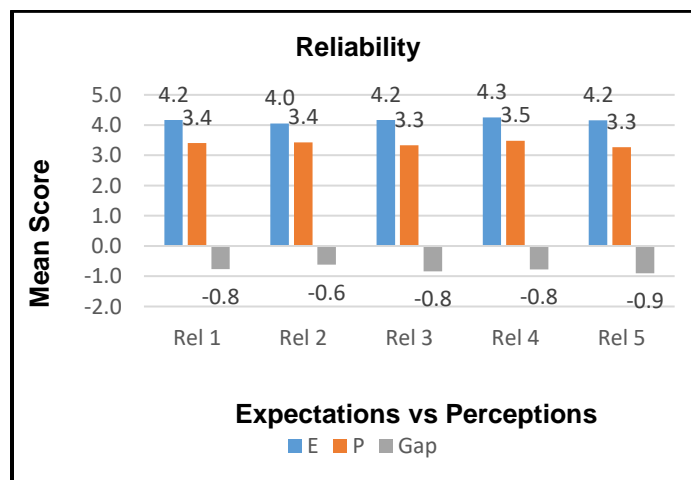

The figure above shows the items covered under the dimension of reliability. The overall gap score is (-0.8) with the average gap score for the Reliability dimension being (0.78). The result in gap scores for the reliability items are: keep error free records (Rel2) and perform services right the first time (Rel5) were (-0.6) and (-0.9) respectively. Provide a service at the time they promise to do so (Rel1); show sincere interest in problem solving (Rel3) and provide a dependable and accurate service (Rel4) all scored an equal gap score of (-0.8). It is noted that the mean scores for expectations and perceptions of the items under the reliability dimension is (>4) and (>3.0) respectively. Although the perception scores are relatively high in most

of the reliability dimension statements, they cannot prevent the overall score of reliability from having a very high negative result.

Reliability gap scores can be narrowed by ensuring that staff do not over promise and under deliver. A system should be maintained where student records and information is captured accurately. Staff members should ensure that they are available and actively involved in solving a student's problems. "Berry, Parasuraman and Ziethaml" (1994, 41) writings have convincingly showed that service quality declines with the absence of team-work. Strategies should be defined that can assist with providing a dependable and accurate service, and efficient and technical service process outcomes must be discussed among the faculty to ensure that staff members work together in harmony thereby creating a pleasant working environment. The writings of "Nell" (2014, 73) established service dependability, accuracy and timeliness of the services provided were most important under this dimension. This emphasized that administrative staff should be better trained to provide these services that much more efficiently. Furthermore, the study by "May and Viljoen" (2014, 884) established that reliability had the highest negative result of all five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model.

5.3   Assurance dimension
"Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml" (1991, 47) define assurance as knowledge, courtesy and the ability to convey trust and confidence.
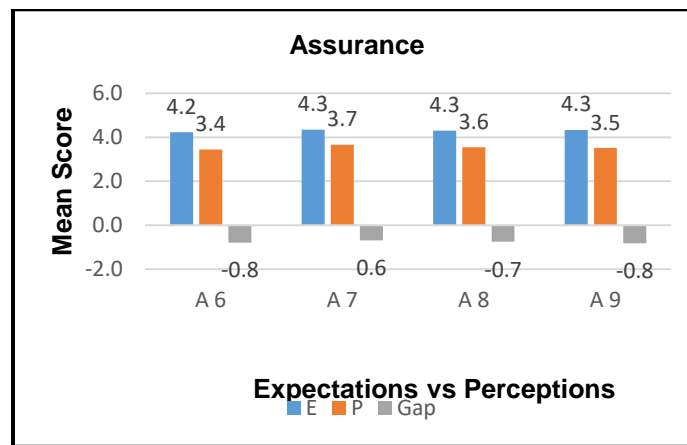
In the figure above the responses to whether the FoMS staff were polite and courteous when providing a service (A6) and if students were made to feel safe in their transactions (A9) results in an equal gap score of (-0.8). The reactions to whether the FoMS staff were suitably knowledgeable in their area of expertise to offer quality service (A7) and whether the staff inspired confidence and trust (A8), both scored an equal gap score of (-0.7). The overall gap score was (-0.8) while the average gap score was (0.75). University staff are expected to be constantly polite and courteous to students and have a pleasant behaviour when answering questions. A composition by "Asmal" (2012, 166) also found that 32% of the respondents did not inspire trust and confidence and therefor felt less assured when dealing with staff. Training staff members and educating them in their respective fields would assist in understanding the needs of the student better. Additionally, staff must ensure that the communication channel between staff and students are clear and undisrupted. Understanding the student is most important for the UoT to make efforts to know the needs and wants of the students. This dimension is about the behaviour and ability of the employees to in-still confidence, secure transactions, courtesy and the knowledge of the employees to provide positive feedback to the student.

5.4   Tangibles dimension
As explained by "Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml" (1991, 47) this dimension is the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communications materials.
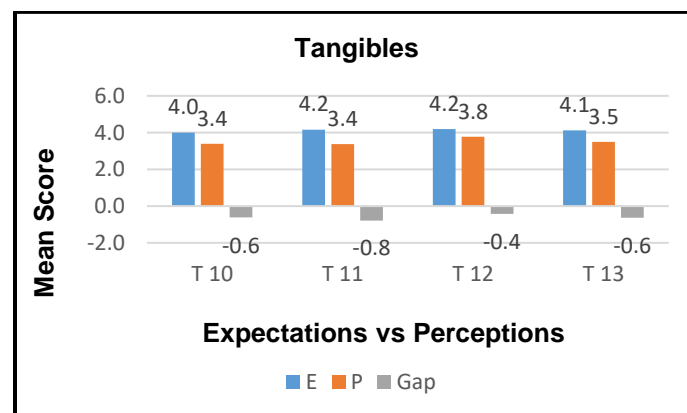
The responses to the FoMS having physical facilities that are visually appealing (T10) and have up to date equipment (T13) resulted in equal gap scores of (- 0.6). Items: have material associated with service (eg. statements and pamphlets) that is visually appealing (T11) and have staff that are well dressed and neat (T12) resulted in (-0.8) and (-0.4) respectively. The statement have staff that are well-dressed and neat (T12) has the lowest gap score of (-0.4). The highest gap score within this dimension (T11) indicated that FoMS do not have material associated with service (eg. statements and pamphlets) that is visually appealing. The highest gap score within this dimension (T11) indicated that FoMS do not have material associated with service (eg. statements and pamphlets) that is visually appealing. "Anwowie, Amoako and Abrefa" (2015, 152) reported in their study conducted at a Polytechnic that students agreed that materials should be visually appealing. This denotes that the brochures and handouts that provided information to students must not only be informative, but also visually appealing. Emphasis should also be placed on the visual materials distributed by the UoT, which should have an essence of an attractive marketing appeal. These pamphlets or statements should be error free and professional looking thereby creating a positive impression of the university. In addition, the mission, vision and goals of the UoT should be clearly defined, transparent and communicated as thus to the students

5.5 Empathy dimension

"Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml" (1991, 47) outline this dimension as the provision of caring, and giving individualized attention to customers.
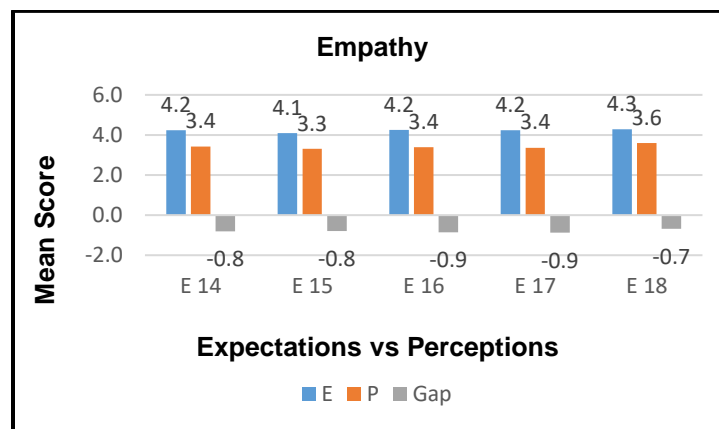
For this dimension, the average gap score is (0.82) and the overall gap score is (-0.8). The average expectation is (4.2) while the average perception is (3.4). The responses for have convenient operating hours (E18) resulted in the lowest gap score of (-0.7) in this dimension. Students expect the FoMS to have convenient operating hours and perceive that they do indeed. The responses to statements: have the student's best interest at heart (E14) and provide individual attention (E15) resulted in equal Gap scores of (-0.8). The responses to the statements that FoMS staff show sincere interest in solving queries (E16) and understand the needs of the students (E17) have the highest Gap scores of (-0.9) suggesting that students expect staff to show a sincere interest in solving queries and to understand their needs. This resonates with (Nell 2014, 84) where the author's study found that staff did not give student's individual attention and did not understand student's needs and neither did staff have the student's best interest at heart. Staff should show considerable care for student's problems and understanding of their desires. In addition, sufficient consulting times should be allocated so that students can be provided with individual attention thereby making students feel that staff are showing a sincere interest in solving their queries. This will increase the low perception of staff and result in satisfied students. Students expect attention that is more individual but this was not always possible. Staff should offer a service integrated with interpersonal skills showing a caring, positive and understanding attitude. A paper by "Tan, Muskat and John" (2019) focuses solely on the Empathy dimension of service quality. The authors emphasize the need for understanding and offering individualized and professional attention to students. It must be understood that each student is unique and special and therefore they should be treated with respect and it is of utmost importance that their needs are ascertained and understood. Each student wants to feel important and it would be a good strategy for universities to know their students by building lasting relationships that reveals the university's personal knowledge of the student's requirements and preferences.

5.6 Responsiveness dimension

This dimension is described as the willingness or readiness of employees to provide a prompt service (Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml 1990: 35).
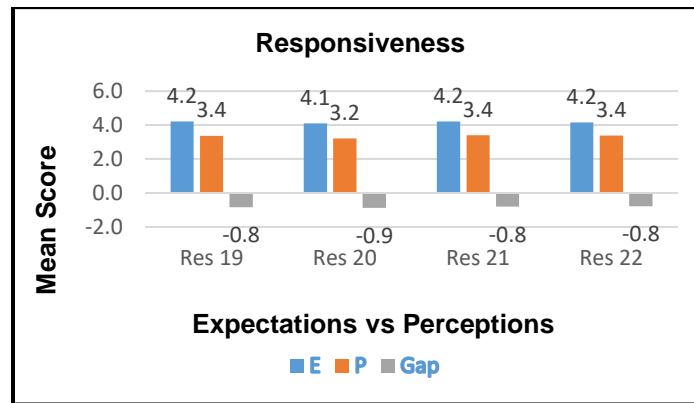
The average gap score is (-0.8) with the average expectation score being (4.2) and the average perception score (3.4). The response to whether FoMS staff give prompt service (Res19), always willing to help (Res21) and to advise exactly when services will be performed (Res22) have an equal but high Gap score of (-0.8). The highest gap score of (-0.9) for (Res 20) showed that FoMS staff are always too busy to respond to requests. FoMS staff do not advise students on exactly when services will be performed indicating that punctuality is lacking, service unprofessional and staff not committed to student satisfaction. It is also representative of the length of time that students wait for assistance or answers to questions. The willingness of FoMS staff to provide the required service at any time without any inconvenience will have a positive impact on student satisfaction. Similar to the writings of "Naidoo" (2014, 204) this study shows that this dimension has the highest negative gap score of all five SERVQUAL dimensions. It is imperative that students feel that staff are responsive to their requests. When this happens, then a radical shift occurs in student satisfaction.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study above, the following recommendations are made:-

- Staff should be continuously trained and monitored to ensure that they find out what is expected of the students in terms of service accuracy and expectancy and be proactive in helping to solve student queries.
- Mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that students' queries are not repeated. Efficacious communication channels between students and staff should always be established and utilized.
- Clear and concise communication between staff and student will encourage a healthy and long lasting relationship thereby ensuring that every encounter with the student is handled with courtesy, trust and knowledge. The role quality in job descriptions should be provided to empower staff to be more responsible and knowledgeable in decision making as well as delivering valuable service.
- More resources needs to be allocated to enhance faculty material eg. statements and pamphlets. These materials should be trendy and colourful in keeping with the diverse student population and ensure that they are distributed widely to students via all channels of communication. Support staff must at all times be clean, neat and presentable to the students.
- A balance should be found whereby staff do not over compensate but provide individual and professional assistance to the student by understanding the needs of the student. Staff must practice empathy i.e listening to and understanding exactly what the student requires so that staff can provide services right the first time.
- Planned workshops on customer service, personnel skills and communication skills will assist staff in offering an improved service, especially the staff that are "front-line" as they are the first line of contact. If time management is problematic with the staff or staff are too busy with other work and therefore inaccessible to the student when the need arises, this must be addressed as a matter of urgency to make staff work more efficiently and to learn to better manage time.

7. CONCLUSION

This study provided a view of the level of service delivery from administrative support staff to the university students. Ultimately, the student's perceptions were not commiserate with their expectations thus resulting in a negative gap score in all five SERVQUAL dimensions namely reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. Measuring student perception of an intangible service is difficult but necessary for any university because the students' views are important and needs to be assessed. "Koen and Bester" (2009, 283-304) accentuated on their quality of education received and how this has shaped their future and helped them eventually attain success as professionals in the academic sector in HE. The university management should be aware of discrepancies and look for ways to close the gaps to bring about student satisfaction because ultimately assessing service quality and recognizing it as an antecedent to student satisfaction, prompts higher education institutions to align their aims and objectives to achieve the institutional goals, vision and mission.

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