

Chapter 24

Cultural Influence on Global Assessment of Higher Education Service Quality: The Case of Central Queensland University, Australia

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ABSTRACT

This study compares students' cultural influence on global assessment of higher education service quality. In particular, this study surveyed the full-time students (that is at least 24 credit points of study in a semester) studying at the Central Queensland University (CQU), Australia. CQU has ten campuses and is one of the largest universities in Australia, with more than 14,000 students, in which 3,000 students are enrolled as full-time students and 11,000 as part-time students. An online survey was undertaken, and 227 responses from full-time students were returned for data analysis. Exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were performed to determine valid and reliable dimensions of perceived service quality. Tests of differences such as ANOVA and t-test were conducted to examine the differences of perceived service quality in terms of four cultural dimensions; namely, power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity. Findings show that different cultures perceive service quality differently; especially administrative service quality and physical facilities service quality.

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INTRODUCTION

Australian higher education institutions are popular destinations for both domestic and international students. However, the Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales (2008) report states there is a clear sign that the quality of the educational experience is declining in Australia. One of the significant recommendations of this study emphasises course experience as perceived by the students (Bradley, et al., 2008). Current studies develop a number of measures of service quality in commercial service settings. Of these service quality measures, most of the studies have used either the SERVQUAL (perception–minus–expectation) measure (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985, 1988) or the SERVPERF (perception–only) measure (Cronin & Taylor, 1992, 1994). Although there are debates in relation to superiority of these service quality measures, the SERVPERF measure of service quality has been termed as an effective measure for the purpose of explaining variance in dependent constructs (Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1994; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). Therefore, the present research is centred upon the SERVPERF measure.

Although the service quality measure in higher education is relatively new, the HEDPERF measure (Abdullah, 2005) and the PHed measure (Sultan & Wong, 2010a) may be considered as comprehensive scales, as these measures include a broad range of service attributes in the context of higher education. The HEDPERF measure and the PHed measure were conceptualised on the perception–only scale. However, there is little evidence as to how one's culture affects service quality assessment in a global higher education context. This study is expected to fill in this research gap by furnishing empirical evidence.

The direction of this study is to compare students' cultural influence on global assessment of higher education service quality. Particularly, the objectives of this study are:

1. To study the impacts of one's culture on service quality assessment in a global higher education context.
2. To examine if there is any significant difference between two or more cultures in terms of service quality assessment in a global higher education context.
3. To understand the implications of this difference in terms of service delivery.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service Quality and Its Dimensions in Higher Education

Service quality is defined as the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs (Johnson & Winchell, 1988). Perceived service quality is based on one's experience and is a function of attitude (Sultan & Wong, 2010a). Service quality has also been viewed as a critical determinant of competitiveness (Lewis, 1989), as a source of lasting competitive advantage through service differentiation (Moore, 1987), and as a driver of corporate financial and marketing performance (Buttle, 1996).

The higher education service quality has been the predominant area of research to both academics and practitioners for the last decade. Table 1 shows the service quality dimensions in higher education across various countries and cultures developed between 1997 and 2010. There are two major approaches to determine service quality, the supply-side approach and the demand-side approach (Gatfield, Barker, & Graham, 1999). A handful of studies (Abdullah, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; Angell, Heffernan, & Megicks, 2008; Gatfield, et al., 1999; Kwan & Ng, 1999; LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1997; Sultan & Wong, 2011) examined service quality dimensions within the higher education sector from the students' perspective, essentially a demand-side perspective

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