ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Quality of Service and Customer Satisfaction in Educational Institutions. The case of INTERPASS S.A.C. in 2021

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article was to investigate the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the educational services provided by INTERPASS S.A.C. in Lima in 2021. The study used a survey technique and a questionnaire as data collection tool, with a sample of 325 students selected through random sampling. To test the hypothesis, the study employed Chi-square statistics and Spearman's correlation test. The results showed a statistically significant association between service quality and customer satisfaction. The statistical analysis confirmed the study's main hypothesis that there is a positive impact of service quality on customer satisfaction in the company studied. This was evidenced by a high Chi-square value of 374.952 and a strong Spearman correlation of 0.806, indicating a significant relationship between the two variables.

Keywords: service quality; customer satisfaction; SERVQUAL; quality.

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INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, we are living in a time of significant changes and intense competition, driven by globalization. As a result, companies require new and more comprehensive management tools to deliver high-quality products and services that can meet the demand of rapidly changing economies and markets. Experience has shown that a company's successful management and leadership require the application of such tools to address unforeseen situations promptly and effectively.

In today's globalized world, adopting the concept of global competitivity and making it a strategic objective is crucial for companies to thrive. Meeting the standards set by other companies in the same sector worldwide has become a necessity, as competition is not limited to local or national boundaries anymore, but rather exists on a global scale thanks to the widespread use of the internet. Failing to keep up with such standards may result in failure or stagnation, which is why it is vital to manage service quality effectively. Poor management of service quality does not only negatively affect the customers of the company under study but also society as a whole, as they are deprived of access to excellent services. Therefore, companies must prioritize not only their products but also the quality of their services. In other words, service quality is essential for companies to keep developing and avoid being marginalized by the market, which could result in negative consequences.

Measuring the quality of the service provided to customers, whether internal or external, is crucial and requires an efficient measurement model that has been successfully tested in several studies. One such model is the Servqual model, formulated by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in 1985. This model considers five dimensions to assess service quality: tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). While it is not a new instrument as it has been in the academic world for over 35 years since its first application, it is the most widely used and most reliable tool, which has been applied in several studies across different sectors with positive results.

This research aims to identify the relationship between the two variables under study and their impact on achieving customer satisfaction. A key success factor in this regard is the constant measurement of both variables, particularly service quality, which is considered the independent variable in this study due to its measurability. Thus, it will be possible to assess the company with greater accuracy and determine its competitiveness, efficiency, and the extent to which it relates with the other variable, which is customer satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction is considered the dependent variable in this research, and it is evident that it plays a crucial role in influencing the practice of delivering high-quality services. By prioritizing customer satisfaction, companies can consistently improve their operations, eliminate inefficient processes, and allocate resources to ensure that their customers, shareholders, employees, and society as a whole are content with the company's overall performance. This approach enables organizations to perform optimally, maintain their competitiveness, offer high-quality services at reasonable prices, and remain competitive in a market where other companies offer similar services.

According to Senlle and Gutiérrez (2005), within educational organizations "the learner is defined as a primary client who has some needs, while the family is also considered a client with specific expectations with respect to the educational service. Additionally, society is considered a tertiary client with specific needs and expectations" (p.14). Therefore, society is also considered to be one of the main beneficiaries of all organizations in general, and specifically business organizations, dedicating time, effort and resources to permanently study service quality and apply continuous improvement in their production processes to provide a better service to all their customers, since it has been proven that providing a higher-quality product or service has a multiplying effect on all sectors of society.

Objective

The primary aim of the article is to investigate the correlation between the quality of service and customer satisfaction with regard to educational services provided by INTERPASS S.A.C.

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in Lima during 2021. In today's business world, it is crucial to offer superior quality services to achieve customer satisfaction with the product and service. According to Thompson (1985), "the key to success in the service industry lies in providing high-quality services" (p.17).

Argumentative Review

In today's fast-paced world, marked by globalization, competitiveness, and the widespread use of cutting-edge technologies, having unique distinguishing factors is crucial for achieving success. It is not uncommon to come across products that are quite similar to one another, such as televisions or automobiles that boast identical features, with the only distinguishing factor being the after-sales service or the service quality. In fact, service quality has become increasingly crucial and is now considered the key differentiating factor setting competitors apart. Therefore, it is imperative to study, identify, measure, and draw insightful conclusions about service quality to make informed decisions in today's globalized marketplace.

Service quality is closely linked to customer satisfaction. It follows that when the quality of service provided is high, customer satisfaction increases, and vice versa. This research not only identifies the existence of this relationship, but also sheds light on its extent. Providing quality service is crucial for ensuring satisfied customers, which in turn contributes to society as a whole by promoting well-educated citizens and a more comfortable living environment.

To attain this objective, it is crucial to have a competent and motivated workforce that can provide the promised service to the customers. A fundamental principle suggests that good leadership is the key to developing people, and that by promoting the growth of others, one can also benefit from that growth and continue to grow indefinitely. According to Drucker (1985), one of the fundamental roles of management is to develop people, which includes oneself, without neglecting the primary function of management, which is to make resources productive. This approach will enable an organization to have strong internal support to deliver exceptional services to both internal and external customers.

Undoubtedly, service quality plays a significant role in achieving satisfactory outcomes for all participants in the market of goods and services. As noted by Kelada (1992), quality "involves simultaneously satisfying all parties involved in the organization, including shareholders, customers, managers, and employees." Shareholders seek to protect their investment, customers expect quality services, and employees strive for a high quality of life. By delivering quality services, both the customer and the company can benefit from this process" (p. 11).

It is worth noting that quality is not only about production, but also about customer orientation. As Kelada (1992) suggests, "quality is defined by its usefulness," which means "producing what the customer needs rather than trying to sell what has been produced" (p. 9). This implies that the identification of consumer needs should be the primary focus before considering production.

Quality is becoming an increasingly crucial factor and a prerequisite for the economic performance of industries, particularly in the service industry, where services are intangible and, as a result, more challenging to assess. As Kelada (1992) notes, there is still much work to be done in the area of quality.

Prominent researchers have noted that customer expectations play a vital role in the assessment of an organization's service. Customers tend to assess the service they receive based on their expectations and perception of what they are receiving. Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) argue that service quality "represents the disparity between customers' actual perception of the current service and their expectations of the expected service." This makes service quality a strategic factor that can provide companies with a competitive and sustainable advantage over time. They also suggest that service quality can be broadly defined as the difference between expected service and perceived service (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988).

Customer satisfaction is a widely studied variable, but it is crucial to continue researching it since it is closely linked to the service experience and the customer's perceptions during their interaction with a company at the

moment of truth. Understanding and identifying the factors that contribute to customer satisfaction can help informed decision-making and improve business outcomes. In today's environment, customer satisfaction can no longer be considered a secondary or alternative concern but must be seen as a key success factor for the survival and growth of businesses. This is especially true in today's highly competitive and globalized market, where companies face numerous challenges that require effective management tools to minimize threats and leverage opportunities presented by a constantly changing environment.

Numerous authors have studied this important construct and agree that customer satisfaction should be a strategic objective for any company. Therefore, all factors that affect this variable must be considered in order to measure and control it effectively. As one of the basic principles of management, what cannot be measured cannot be controlled, managed, or improved. Customer satisfaction can be defined as the level of satisfaction or disappointment that "reflects a customer's assessment of a product or a service's perceived performance relative to their expectations" (Kotler and Keller, 2012, p. 11). Customers expect value-added services and a positive experience with the service provider. Therefore, organizations must ensure that all services provided meet or exceed their customers' expectations.

Other researchers emphasize that higher education institutions, similar to other service organizations, should prioritize the maintenance and continuous improvement of customer satisfaction to contribute to the enhancement of educational systems, the development of the university's processes, and overall progress. However, educational organizations often assume they understand their students' needs by conducting surveys that mainly assess their system's functionality (Mejías and Martínez, 2009). This highlights the significance of attaining a satisfied user, as it can lead to benefits not only for the user but also for society as a whole and the educational institution, such as enhanced prestige, positioning, and delivery of high-quality services.

Caruana (2002) conducted an analysis of the mediating role played by customer satisfaction and found that service quality has an impact on satisfaction, which results in satisfied customers becoming loyal. This finding is supported by other studies that have examined the "direct and indirect effects of service quality and customer satisfaction on behavioral intentions" (Cronin *et al.*, 2000, p. 215). These studies demonstrate that customer satisfaction is a critical variable in managing service quality effectively.

According to Mejías and Martínez (2009), "student satisfaction refers to the extent to which students' perception of their needs, expectations, and requirements being met shapes their overall feelings about their institution" (p. 36). This highlights the significance of providing customers with what is promised, as it has a direct impact on their perception of services and their satisfaction level.

METHODS

The research utilized an explanatory, non-experimental design that examined the cause-and-effect relationship between the quality of service provided to clients of an educational institution and the resulting satisfaction of those clients.

The research had an applied orientation as it aimed to address practical problems related to customer satisfaction. It was retrospective in directionality, looking back on past events to understand the cause-and-effect relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. Data collection was selective, with information gathered based on the researcher's criteria and specific research goals. The study was cross-sectional in nature.

The total study population consisted of 1,900 students from an educational institution, of which a sample of 325 students located in the province of Lima and its districts was taken. A total of 335 valid surveys were obtained using probability sampling with random selection of each respondent. The survey technique used a five-point Likert scale questionnaire ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" as collection instrument. The first version of the questionnaire was

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formulated based on information obtained during an exploratory phase and following the guidelines recommended by Ajzen (2019). The questionnaire was formulated according to the dimensions chosen for each of the variables: 11 dimensions to measure the service quality variable and 5 to measure the customer satisfaction variable. This first version was reviewed and corrected by an expert and then applied to a pilot test involving 25 people. After analyzing the results, the final version of the questionnaire was prepared. To assess the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's alpha was calculated with all the questions that were part of the dimensions. The result of 0.981 indicates a high level of reliability for the instrument applied, as it is very close to 1, which is the maximum value for the reliability coefficient. For the construct's validity and to test the instrument, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (KMO) was used to measure the correlation between questions of each variable. The KMO value for the independent variable (X), quality of service, was 0.963, indicating a correlation between the dimensions of the instrument applied to this variable as the value is greater than 0.6. Similarly, for the dependent variable (Y), user satisfaction, the KMO value was 0.963, indicating a correlation between the dimensions of the instrument applied to this variable as the value is greater than 0.6.

Last, the KMO was calculated for the two variables to assess the validity of the instrument by checking the correlation between the dimensions. The resulting KMO value for the total variables was 0.969, indicating a strong correlation between the dimensions of the instrument and demonstrating its reliability. This value exceeds the threshold of 0.6 commonly used to establish instrument reliability.

RESULTS

According to the results of the general hypothesis test, the variable service quality has a positive and statistically significant influence on the satisfaction of students at the educational institution INTERPASS. The degree of relationship between these variables is 0.806, with a Chi-square value of 374.952. This indicates that there is a significant and positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

Moreover, the dimensions of safety, empathy, customer treatment, credibility, accessibility, ethics, and innovation all show a statistically significant and positive relationship with customer satisfaction. These relationships are considered to be moderate, as they exceed the threshold of 0.6. The dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, and brand image also show a moderate relationship with the variables, as their values are higher than 0.5.

The analysis of the results indicates that the tangibility dimension has the lowest value, with 0.462, which is positive but falls short of the average. This suggests that clients of the institution do not perceive the tangible elements, such as the appearance of digital technology equipment, presentation of offices, staff appearance, and quality of didactic materials, as being of good quality. Although there is a positive relationship, it is recommended to work on improving this dimension to increase its rating in the service delivery process. This finding suggests that the physical and virtual facilities do not reflect the image that the institution wants to convey. Therefore, to enhance customer satisfaction, the company should focus on improving the appearance of physical and virtual facilities, providing quicker service, improving the quality of teaching materials, and offering competitive pricing.

The analysis indicates that there is a positive correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction, with a correlation coefficient of 0.806. This implies that an increase in service quality would lead to an increase in customer satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

The results of the present research, which demonstrate a significant and highly correlated relationship between service quality and student satisfaction at the private educational institution INTERPASS, are consistent with the findings by other researchers. For example, Matos (2021) found that "there is a significant relationship between service quality and the training of technicians, which can positively influence the educational process" (p.99), concluding that student satisfaction can only be achieved if a high-quality educational service is provided.

Based on the theory, a correlation coefficient value exceeding 0.8 is deemed to be excellent. Therefore, the obtained value of 0.806 suggests a strong relationship between the two variables under investigation, namely service quality and customer satisfaction.

It can also be observed that the users are satisfied with the quality of the service: 114 users consider the services to be very good, 61 consider them to be excellent, 110 users consider them to be good, and 40 consider the services provided by the educational institution to be average. This means that 285 out of 325 users are satisfied with the quality of the services provided.

The results of this research are consistent with those of other studies, such as Basantes' (2017) and Alcaide's (2015). Basantes (2017) found a "high influence of service quality on student satisfaction at the Universidad Nacional de Chimborazo Riobamba in Ecuador, based on the Servqual Model" (p.92), while Alcaide (2015) identified that an "excellent, high-quality service is one that can satisfy all the needs, desires, and expectations of customers" (p. 41). These findings are similar to those of this research, which also found a direct relationship between service quality and student satisfaction. Therefore, the consistency of these results allows us to state that there is a close relationship between theory and organizational practice in the field of educational services.

CONCLUSIONS

- The study concludes that service quality has a significant impact on customer satisfaction, as demonstrated by a Chi-square value of 374.952 and a correlation coefficient of 0.806. This indicates a strong positive relationship between the two variables, within an acceptable range. Furthermore, the study reveals that in most cases, customers' perceptions of service quality surpass their expectations.

- The tangibility dimension of service quality has a low correlation value of 0.462 with the customer satisfaction variable, indicating a weaker relationship between the two variables.

- Service quality in the reliability dimension is related to customer satisfaction, with a correlation value of 0.529, which indicates a moderate relationship.

- Service quality in the responsiveness dimension is related to the customer satisfaction variable, with a correlation value of 0.572, which indicates a moderate relationship.

- Service quality in the assurance dimension is related to customer satisfaction, with a correlation value of 0.652, which indicates a moderate relationship.

- Service quality in the empathy dimension is related to customer satisfaction, with a correlation value of 0.653, which indicates a moderate relationship.

- The dimensions of customer treatment, credibility, and accessibility are moderately related to customer satisfaction, with correlation values above 0.650. Furthermore, the ethics dimension is highly related to customer satisfaction, with a correlation value of 0.757.

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