Student Participation and Its Impacts on Perceived Service Quality in Higher Education: An Empirical Study

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Abstract. In higher education service, college students are no longer as the passive recipients of educational service and actually co-produce their education. However, despite the importance of student participation in the delivery of educational service, student participation has not received much attention in the literature. The purpose of study aims to explore the impact of student participation on perceived quality in higher education. The Survey results suggest that student classroom participation and extracurricular learning were found to positively influence student perceived service quality. Finally, implications for higher educational institutions’ managers are considered.

Introduction

Compared with tangible goods, one unique feature of service is that services are produced and consumed simultaneously. This implies that service customers are often present during service delivery and even actively involved in the production of the service they receive. Through customer participation, service provider can increase productivity, decrease costs, facilitate service development and innovation activities [1,2]. Participative customers can obtain personalized service, and then lower price sensitivity [3]. Participation leads to higher customer satisfaction and enhance customer loyalty [4,5].

In higher education, college students are actively participate in the delivery of educational services, no longer as the passive recipients. Students actually co-produce their education and contribute directly to their own satisfaction, quality and value perceptions[6]. However, despite the importance of student participation in the delivery of educational service, student participation has not received much attention in the literature, few studies have been done about the antecedents and consequences of customer participation in educational service setting[7].

This article will specifically focus on the participatory role of undergraduate students and explore the relationship between students participation and perceived service quality in higher education.

Theoretical Background and Research Hypothesis

Student Participation

Student participation refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in the learning process[8]. Student participation is a multi-dimensional construct. A review of the literature reveals that student engagement is divided into three dimensions: cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and behavioral engagement. Behavior engagement refers to the intensity of students' participation in learning activities. Researchers believe that behavioral engagement was mainly the degree of effort in the classroom, followed by extra-curricular time engagement[9,10]. In this study, we focus on the students’ behavioral engagement in learning activities, student engagement represents the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities.
Perceived Service Quality in Higher Education

Service quality results form the comparison made by consumers between the expectation about service, and the real perception of them[11]. Nowadays, because of the development of education market and the reduction of government funds, higher educational institutions have to concerned with not only what society values in terms of skills and abilities of their graduates, but also with how their student feel and perceive their education. SERVQUAL is the most popular and best researched method of evaluating service quality. Calvo-Porral, Levy-Mangin and Novo-Corti(2013) adapted SERVQUAL instrument to higher education[12].

Student Participation and Perceived Service Quality

In higher education, service quality is not only related to the level of higher education service, but also depends on the participation ability and degree of college students. According to service management theory, customer participation has a direct and positive impact on service quality and satisfaction[5]. Educational management theory also holds that student participation in teaching activities has a positive impact on students' perception of teaching quality, overall satisfaction and student loyalty. Therefore this study offers the following hypothesis:

H: Student participation will be positively associated with perceived service quality. The more time and energy college students take part in higher education service, the higher the quality perceived of higher education service.

Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

The object of our study were undergraduate college students. A web-based questionnaire survey was used to collect data. Online questionnaire survey was generated and released, 360 usable responses were received for data analysis. Among the subjects surveyed, Female accounted for 47.78%, Male 52.28%. Freshmen accounted for 9.72%, sophomores 6.11%, juniors 30.28%, senior 50.83%, the remaining 3.05% were five-grade students and postgraduates.

Study Measures

NSSE(National survey of student engagement) is an annual assessment launched by the United States, assesses the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development. In the NSSE survey, some items are used to measure students' participation in educational activities, while others are used to examine the extent to which universities attract students to participate in these educational activities through students' perception of the college environment. Our study mainly focuses on students rather than institutions to investigate the practice of higher education. So based on the NSSE Survey, the items and measurement indicators have been adjusted and summarized into three dimensions of Classroom Participation, Extracurricular Learning and Learning Harvest and Application. Six scale items were employed to measure Classroom Participation, 12 items for the measurement of Extracurricular Learning and 8 items for Learning Harvest and Application. For the measurement of perceived quality in higher education, SERVQUAL scale developed by Calvo-Porral et al.(2013) was employed and slightly modified. For the measurement of tangibility two scale items were employed, Seven scale items for measuring responsiveness, four scale items for assurance and empathy. All measures used in this study were assessed on five-point Likert scales, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Reliability and Validity Test

We tested the reliability and validity of the measurement model by Spss18.0. The Cronbach's α of the variables are higher than 0.7, indicating a high scale reliability. A exploratory factor analysis on the measurement model was conducted to check for the construct validity. KMO measures are
higher than 0.8 and the significance probability of Chi-square statistics of Bartlett's sphericity test is 0.000, less than 0.01.

Data Analysis

Statistical Regression analysis was conducted to test the study hypotheses. Table1 and Table2 provided the results from the regression analysis. The regression results indicated partial support for research hypothesis. Classroom participation ($\beta=0.179, p<0.05$), Extracurricular learning ($\beta=0.216, p<0.05$) were all found to be positively associated with student perceived service quality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.728</td>
<td>0.189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Participation</td>
<td>0.221</td>
<td>0.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular Learning</td>
<td>0.183</td>
<td>0.057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Harvest and Application</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>0.077</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to further clarify the impact of undergraduate college Student participation on the quality of higher education services in different dimensions, we have made a regression between Student participation and the different dimensions of services quality. Regression results showed that classroom learning participation had a greater impact on perceived reliability, responsiveness and assurance. College students' extracurricular learning had a greater impact on the perceived quality of reliability and empathy, learning harvest and application was found to be associated with perceived quality of tangibility, reliability and assurance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Tangibility</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
<th>Responsiveness</th>
<th>Assurance</th>
<th>Empathy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Participation</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>0.152*</td>
<td>0.242***</td>
<td>0.224***</td>
<td>0.159*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular Learning</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>0.184**</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.228***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Harvest and Application</td>
<td>0.187*</td>
<td>0.159*</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>0.181*</td>
<td>0.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.116</td>
<td>0.180</td>
<td>0.163</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>0.164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R-squared</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>0.156</td>
<td>0.155</td>
<td>0.157</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>15.67***</td>
<td>27.291***</td>
<td>24.334***</td>
<td>23.083***</td>
<td>23.321**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05

Conclusion

In higher education, student participation (classroom participation and extracurricular learning) were found to positively influence student perceived service quality. All dimensions of student participation had effect on perceived reliability. Classroom participation had most influential effect on responsiveness and assurance, extracurricular learning had great impact on empathy, learning harvest and application was found to be associated with perceived quality of tangibility.
According to the above analysis results, this study believes that universities should change the traditional teaching mode and educational concept, actively guide, encourage and support students to participate in higher education service activities, so that students can really participate in teaching and learning activities, and finally improve the perceived service quality of higher education.

Firstly, University should innovate the teaching management system and pay attention to student participation and make the classroom an interactive place where college students and teachers participate, discuss and learn together. In this way, students can not only have a deeper understanding of knowledge, but also enhance their sense of responsibility, participation and experience, and improve their perception and satisfaction of the quality of education services.

Secondly, Universities should change the idea from the students’ ability training at first, let students really realize the fun of learning, and cultivate their initiative. Let teachers and students establish a new concept of cooperative learning, fundamentally improve the learning ability of college students. Universities should organize more lectures and training activities to stimulate students' desire to learn actively, so that students can get better service experience of higher education.

Finally, college students are not only consumers of higher education, but also the participants and co-producers of higher education services. It is inevitable for college students to participate in higher education quality management. So universities should establish cooperative partnerships with students, fully mobilize their enthusiasm, and jointly commit themselves to the construction of higher education quality.

References


