IJIET, e-ISSN 2548-8430, p-ISSN 2548-8422, Vol. 9, No. 2, July 2025, pp. 470-482

International Journal of Indonesian Education and Teaching
http://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/IJIET
Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

SERVICE QUALITY OF WELFARE SERVICES AND STUDENTS' SATISFACTION IN NIGERIAN FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES

Akinwale A. S. [*1], Ibrahim R. A. [2], Ayelabowo S.[3], and Anyanwu, L.'s[4]
[1, 2] Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
[3] University of Derby United Kingdom
[4] Hague University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands
ayotunde.akinwale@yahoo.com[1], ebrahimroshidah@gmail.com[2],
sinaayelabowo@gmail.com[3] and leycots@gmail.com[4]
*correspondence: ayotunde.akinwale@yahoo.com
https://doi.org/10.24071/ijiet.v9i2.12119
received 3 April 2025; accepted 30 July 2025

Abstract
This study determined the effect of Service Tangibility of welfare services, Service Reliability of welfare services, Service Responsiveness of welfare services, Service Empathy of welfare services, and Service Assurance of welfare services on the satisfaction of students in federal universities in South West Nigeria. The design for the study was descriptive correlational research design using quantitative approach. This study was conducted in January, 2025. The study population was 193,526 students while the study sample was 1,144 students. The sample was drawn from three universities in South West Nigeria. The instrument for the study was tagged 'Students' Satisfaction and Service Quality Questionnaire (SSSQQ). Hypotheses for the study were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The results indicated that Service Tangibility had significant relationship (r=0.758; p<.000) with students' satisfaction. Furthermore, Service Reliability had significant relationship (r=0.635; p<.000) with students' satisfaction. Also, Service Responsiveness had significant relationship (r=0.518; p<.000) with students' satisfaction. Similarly, Service Empathy had significant relationship (r=0.692; p<.000) with students' satisfaction. In addition, Service Assurance had significant relationship (r=0.532; p<.000) with students' satisfaction. The study recommended improvement in the quality of various services offered to students for corresponding improved students' satisfaction.

Keywords: reliability, service punctuality, students' satisfaction, tangibility, welfare service

Introduction

Students in the universities are part of the key stakeholders that contribute to the realisation of the actualisation of the goals of a university. Students are the main reason for establishing the university. The level of satisfaction and happiness of students with welfare services and programmes that are meant to support teaching

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and learning could affect students' learning, retention, and the general performance of students in their academics as well as in the quality of graduates that are produced in the country. The welfare services that should be provided for students in the university include accommodation, healthcare services, counselling services, sports recreational services, financial services, transport services and security services. Students' satisfaction with these services contributes greatly to the achievement of university overall objectives which in turn affects social, political, technological and economic development of a nation (Akinwale, 2024). Students' satisfaction therefore can be seen as a prerequisite to the realisation of educational and national goals and development of a nation (Ebenezer, Adiyaa & Kumabia, 2023; Hartono, 2017; Kanwar & Sanjeeva, 2022).

As students gain admission into the university for example, they came with series of expectations of how educational services should be. After a period of time, students assess their expectations with actual performance of services in the educational institution. If the expectations are met in the performance of the services, then students could be satisfied. In other words, if the performance of the services is below students' expectations, then students could be dissatisfied. In other words, students' satisfaction serves as a measure of the strong points and weak points of a higher education institution. Students' satisfaction surveys are important in determining whether schools and universities are achieving their goals or not.

Students' satisfaction has tremendous benefits to students, the university as well as to the nation. From students' perspectives, students' satisfaction enhances students' enjoyment during their stay in school, it enhances students' grade, course participation, relationship with lecturers, reduces absenteeism as well as increases the employability of the students after school life. Students' satisfaction also increases students' motivation and improves students' interaction. From the institutional perspectives, students' satisfaction enhances enrollment, students' retention, enhances easy and smooth running and management of the institution, gives an institution a competitive advantage over other institutions, enhances production of quality graduates and encourages students to return to their Alma Malta and contribute to the development of the institution as alumni. Students' satisfaction can also impact on university's standing in the global ranking. Students' satisfaction contributes greatly to the achievement of university overall objectives which in turn affects social, political, technological and economic development of a nation. Students' satisfaction therefore can be seen as prerequisite to the actualisation of educational and national goals and development (Addai, Sarfo, Okyere & Kumordzie 2023; Hartono, 2017; Li, Yin & Mohamad, 2022; Rasheed & Rashid, 2023).

Among factors that have been found to have direct impact on students' satisfaction is service quality. A good parameter that is usually used to evaluate any service be it academic or administrative service is the concept of service quality. Karen, Hayes and Schultz (2019) and Jinnaidi, Hussein and Al-Sudani (2018) described service quality as the results of comparing the real performance of service and customers' perceived or expected performance. According to them, if the actual performance of service delivered meets or surpasses the anticipated or perceived performance, the level of quality of such a service is high. On the other hand, if the actual performance of a service is lower than expected, then the service quality is low. A quality service therefore will always meet the needs of the customers in terms

of their expectations of the service.

The quality of various services in the education sector and institutions of higher learning is not just crucial, but also a key measure of educational success. Quality students' welfare services are important for students in tertiary institutions because the institution is set up to act as 'in loco parentis' for all the students. It is therefore the duty and responsibility of university management to provide quality welfare services to students who are the customers, as this goes a long way in affecting their total well - being as well as their academic performance. Deshields, Kara, and Kaynak (as cited in Paricio, 2017) opined that institutions of higher learning ought consider their students as their main customers, as a result, they must provide good and excellent academic and welfare services which will meet the needs and desires of these students. Yidana, Bawa, Gariba and Adabuga (2023) was of the opinion that there is no much reason for universities to provide services to students unless the service quality is good, suitable, acceptable and valued by students. Clewes, (2011); Islam and Salma, (2016) all opined that the success of tertiary institution relies on the quality of various services in educational institutions.

Similarly, Martha-Martha and Priyono (2018) and Kalam and Mahonta (2017) submitted that delivering high-quality educational services can result in improved satisfaction among students at colleges and universities. O'Neill and Palmer (2010) submitted that the quality of services in tertiary institutions is a significant and crucial concept since both the institution providing the service and the students receiving it are all people. Huang et al. (2012) submitted that providing outstanding service may assist schools boost students' satisfaction which is essential for preserving a competitive advantage in the present global education market. Improving the perception and opinions of students on the quality of the services received by them can lead to increase in their satisfaction. Higher educational institutions and their authorities therefore have a significant obligation to deliver high quality services that will meet students' emotional, physical, psychological and social needs. Similarly, According to Douwes et al. (2023), the main goal of higher educational institutions is to provide students with good and excellent services that will enhance their wellbeing while in school.

Numerous studies have been conducted worldwide to evaluate how aspects of quality services relate to customer satisfaction and customers' fulfillment. Batang, Uwais and Ito (2017) examined the effects of service quality dimensions on clients' loyalty and satisfaction in Indonesian commercial banks. The study found that consumers' happiness and loyalty to Bali's commercial banks are significantly influenced by the tangibles, dependability, empathy, responsiveness, and assurance aspects of service quality. Eyonam, Kojo and Annang (2018) investigated service quality dimensions and students' satisfaction in selected private universities in Ghana. The study indicated that empathy, responsiveness, tangibles and reliability influenced the satisfaction of students in private university in Kumasi and Takoradi Accra. Jinaidi, Hussein and Al-Sudani (2018) examined quality service and satisfaction of customers in the telecommunications industry in Jordan. The study showed that responsiveness, assurance, empathy tangibles and reliability aspects of service quality are positively related to customers' satisfaction in the communication sector. Khan, Imran and Assad (2016) assessed the effects of dimensions of quality service on customers' satisfaction in telecommunications sector in Pakistan. It was found that empathy, reliability, assurance, network quality

and responsiveness dimensions of service quality are determinants of customers' satisfaction.

In order to achieve quality service delivery in various service organisations, different theories and models have been introduced to evaluate quality service in different fields. Among this models is Service Quality (SERQUAL Model) propounded by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, (1985). These scholars viewed service quality as the extent to which services offered meet the needs, desires and the expectations of the customers. According to them, service quality of a product is ascertained by comparing customers experience with their expectations on the product. This theory relates the quality of services offer by an organisation with the satisfaction that is felt by the customers or the service receivers. The model has been used by different service organisations and has proven to provide a useful index that has been considered to be appropriate for measuring service quality offered by organisations and the impact of such services on customers' satisfaction.

Worldwide, the SERVQUAL model has been tested, validated and used in a number of service-related businesses. For example, this approach has been used to measure service quality in pharmaceutical organisations in Georgia (Marika, 2010), in the healthcare sector in the United States (Lonial et al. 2010) and in retail banks (Abratt, Bick & Moller, 2010). Several studies have used this method to measure service quality and students' satisfaction in tertiary institutions due to its applicability and relevance (Weerasinghe & Fernando, 2018; Yilmaz & Gurbuz, 2018; Farooq, et al. 2019; Aye & Soe, 2020; Jabbar, Hashmi & Ashraf, 2019).
The model initially consisted of ten dimensions, namely:

I. **Reliability:** To what extent is the promised service delivered?
II. **Responsiveness**: How quickly do customers receive responses?
III. **Competence:** To what extent does the service provider have the necessary expertise and know-how to support customers?
IV. **Access:** How easily can customers contact the service provider?
V. **Courtesy:** How friendly are the service providers?
VI. **Communications**: To what extent does the service provider inform customers on services to be provided?
VII. **Credibility:** What is the level of dependability of service provider?
VIII. **Security:** Does service providers effectively and efficiently protect customers' privacy
IX. **Understanding the customer:** How much effort does the service providers put into learning about the needs and preferences of the client?
X. **Tangible**: To what extent can the service provider provide physical facilities to consumers?

The ten components and dimensions of service quality (SQ) were eventually reduced by Parasuraman and Berry (1991) to five dimensions. These dimensions are:

Tangibility

These are the actual buildings, tools and facilities needed to deliver the service. In the context of this study, tangible dimension of university services are the accommodation and various sub-structure within the school hostel, sports complex and various games arena, medical equipment for medical treatment as well

as security equipment available for security personnel to secure school environment. Tangibles dimension of university services represent physical facilities that students use in accessing service in higher educational institutions. It will also enhance the institutions' image and provide students' continuity.

Reliability

This is the capacity of providers of services to deliver the promised service reliably, precisely, and consistently. This relates to all services that make students' lives worth living that the university management promised the students when they gained admission to the university.

Responsiveness

This is the ability to response to customers' requests on time or readiness of service providers to promptly and professionally assist customers and provide prompt service. This is also relevant to this study because the effectiveness and efficiency of individuals and departments that offer welfare services and that provide security on campus can be measured by their readiness to help students on time when need be or to come to the aid of the students during emergencies. Responsiveness can be used to measure promptness of medical personnel and their attitude towards students during medical emergencies or situations. This also relates to how security personnel respond to students during threat or emergencies.

Assurance

Proficiency, civility, reliability, and stability (the capacity of staff members to foster confidence). It also describes how service providers may exude confidence and trust by demonstrating their expertise and civility. This also has to do with how university employees who provide services to students—like counsellors and security guards treat students.

Empathy

The capacity to treat clients with respect and consideration. It also refers to the capacity of providers of services to inspire confidence and trust. Students' counselllors and medical personnel must be empathetic, show concern for students as well as operating in line with the principle of confidentiality and respect for the secret and privacy of the students.

The relevance of SERVQUAL model

The model is relevant to this study because all the five dimensions and components of service quality emphasised the roles and importance of service providers and services provided at achieving students' satisfaction in the university. Students in the university have great expectations of how service providers in the university should treat them. When this expectation is not met, this might lead to reduction in satisfaction of students with services provided. In the context of this study, the service providers are the medical personnel that treat students during their medical conditions, the hostel portal which implement hostel policies that guide the usage of the hostel and its facilities, school counsellors that provide academic, career and emotional counselling, sports instructors that coordinate all sporting activities, drivers of campus shuttle as well security personnel providing safety and

security in the university. As much as students in the universities are interested in various services that support them to achieve their academic goals and vision, the attitudes of individuals and personnel that provide such services are always a source of concern for them. In the light of this, various service providers in the universities must be conscious of their actions while rendering services to the students as their actions, reactions and their dispositions have great influence on students' satisfaction in the university.

Furthermore, the tangible service aspect of SERQUAL model emphasises the importance of physical facilities and equipment that service providers make use of to render various welfare services. These facilities include accommodation with toilet, kitchenette, bed, wall drops, reading rooms and other facilities within the hall of residence sports complex and various games arena, medical equipment for medical treatment, psychological test kits for school counsellors, shuttle buses for ease of students' movements as well as equipment for security personnel within the campuses.

Another content of the dimensions of SERVQUAL model is the quality of services that are available to the students. Within this study, students expect quality service in the aspects of students' accommodation service counselling services, sports and recreation, health care, scholarship and bursary, as well as security services in the university. For students to be satisfied with university education and university services, the Students Affairs Department and the university management must take actions and ensure various services that are provided are of good quality. It is high quality service that can meet the needs, desires and aspirations of the students which in turn will improve their level of satisfaction and general wellbeing. According to Weerasinghe and Dedunu (2017) and Weerasinghe and Fernando (2018), students' happiness levels are determined by the services, facilities, and educational opportunities they enjoy throughout their studies. The quality of education services and facilities that are made available by universities is correlated with students' happiness (Mukhtar et al. 2015). Similarity, Martirosyan (2015) posited that students' satisfaction at universities is different due to the quality and quantity of services available. The author added the quality of university services can influence students' satisfaction with their education. Students have higher chance of being satisfied with a school if it renders quality and high valued services. In another perspective, a school may have low students' satisfaction if the services provided to students is poor and does not satisfy them.

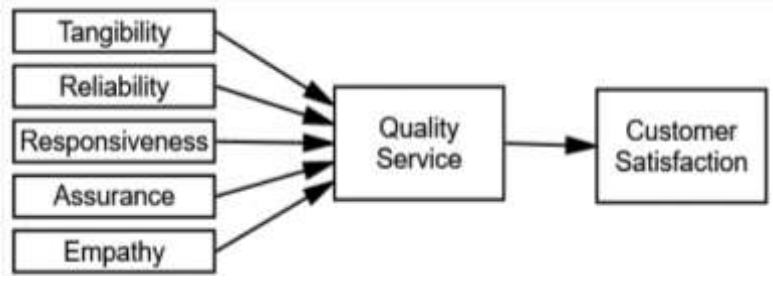


Figure 1. Service Quality Model (SERQUAL Model)
Source: Adopted from Parasuraman et al. (1985) (as cited in Nautwima & Asa (2022)

Federal universities in Nigeria recently have faced different unrest and disruption of academic calendar due to students' protest arising from perceived

dissatisfaction with various services being offered to them. This face-off between the university management and students or students' union government has affected smooth running of the universities adversely with its attendant consequences on the achievement of the goals and objectives of university education (Davies, Ekwere & Uyanga, 2016; Odebode, 2019; Etaneki & Okolie, 2020; Subair & Adeniyi, 2021; Chikendu, 2022).

Various known studies (Ahmad, Saleh, & Abdulrazaq, 2022; Ewanlen, 2022; Yakubu, 2023) that have attempted to uncover the causes of students' dissatisfaction in public universities in Nigeria have mostly focused on lecturers' competence, teaching methodology, students' involvement in decision making and other academic related services as determinants of students' satisfaction.

However, despite various studies that had been carried out on academic related factors as determinants of students' satisfaction, it has been observed that students' level of satisfaction continues to dwindle resulting in protracted protest, disruption in academic activities, absenteeism, poor grade, high crime rate among students and poor quality of graduate among others. In a bid to uncovering the main variables responsible for low level of students' satisfaction in federal universities in Southwestern Nigeria, this study is therefore aimed at investigating the effects of Service Quality on students' satisfaction.

Research objectives

This study:

1. determined the effect of service tangibility of welfare services on satisfaction of students in federal universities in Southwestern Nigeria
2. determined the effect of service reliability of welfare services on students' satisfaction in the study area
3. determined the effect of service responsiveness of welfare services on students' satisfaction in the study area
4. determined the effect of service empathy of welfare services on students' satisfaction in the study area
5. determined the effect of service assurance of welfare services on students' satisfaction in the study area

Hypotheses

1. Service tangibility of welfare services does not significantly affect students' satisfaction in federal universities in Southwestern Nigeria.
2. Service reliability of welfare services does not significantly affect students' satisfaction in the study area.
3. Service responsiveness of welfare services does not significantly affect students' satisfaction in the study area.
4. Service empathy of welfare services does not significantly affect students' satisfaction in the study area.
5. Service assurance of welfare services does not significantly affect students' satisfaction in the study area.

Method

Research design

This study adopted descriptive correlational research design quantitative

approaches.

Participants

The study population was 193,526 students who were the undergraduate students of the seven federal universities in Southwestern Nigeria. The sample was 1,144 students, drawn from three selected federal universities in South West Nigeria. The study adopted multistage sampling procedure. Firstly, University of Ibadan (UI), Ibadan, University of Lagos (UNILAG), Lagos and Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife were purposively selected from the seven federal universities in South West Nigeria. Secondly, 381, 381 and 382 students were proportionally selected from UI, UNILAG and OAU respectively. The selection of the students was done through accidental sampling technique.

Instrument

One adapted instrument was used. The instrument was titled 'Students' Satisfaction and Service Quality Questionnaire' (SSSQQ). The questionnaires were administered by the researchers and were collected back on the spot. Google Form was also used to obtain responses from the students in each of the institutions. The Google Form was used by sending the link to the group WhatsApp of students in the study area and the responses were extracted. All the students who participated in the study gave informed consent to participate in the study. Out of 1,144 questionnaires that were distributed to the students, 1,108 copies were returned and were useful for analysis.

Statistical analysis

Hypotheses raised were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 significant level.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Table 1. Correlation matrix showing the relationship between students' satisfaction and elements of service quality model

		Service Tangibility	Service Reliability	Service Responsiveness	Service Empathy	Service Assurance	Students' Satisfaction
Service tangibility	R	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N	1108					
Service Reliability	R	.563	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.055					
	N	1108	1108				
Service Responsiveness	R	.491**	.028	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.619				
	N	1108	1108	1108			
Service Empathy	R	.370**	.641	.398**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.440	.000			
	N	1108	1108	1108	1108		
Service Assurance	R	.631	.311	.426	.525**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.372	.000	.462		

N	1108	1108	1108	1108	1108	
R	.758**	.635**	.518**	.692**	.532**	1
Students' Satisfaction Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.0	
N	1108	1108	1108	1108	00 11081108	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 presents the correlation matrix results that show the relationship that exists between students' satisfaction and elements of service quality model. Based on the data analysed, the result indicated that there exists a significant and positive relationship between Service Tangibility (r=0.758; p<.000) with students' satisfaction. Also, Service Reliability had significant relationship (r=0.635; p<.000) with students' satisfaction. Similarly, Service Responsiveness had significant relationship (r=0.518; p<.000) with students' satisfaction. Furthermore, Service Empathy had significant relationship (r=0.692; p<.000) with students' satisfaction. Finally, Service Assurance had significant relationship (r=0.532; p<.000) with students' satisfaction.

These results therefore show that all dimensions of Service Quality model had significant effects on students' satisfaction in Federal Universities in Southwestern Nigeria. In view of this, the null hypotheses are therefore rejected. It was therefore found that service tangibility, service reliability, service responsiveness, service empathy and service assurance all had significant effect on students' satisfaction.

Discussion

The results of data analysis on the effect of service quality variables on the satisfaction of students revealed that Service Tangibility, Service Reliability, Service Responsiveness, Service Empathy and Service Assurance all significantly affect the satisfaction of students in federal universities in South West Nigeria. It can therefore be stressed that students' satisfaction is largely influenced by the quality, the quantity and the functionalities of both tangible and intangible physical facilities and structure that are used in delivering various welfare services to students. Similarly, the attitude of Students Affairs Officers in terms of the ways medical personnel, counsellors, sports instructors, drivers of shuttle buses and security treat students are all affect students' satisfaction with welfare services. In addition, the overall quality of welfare services in terms of the actual performance of the services vis- a- vis of students' expectations of the services are determinants of students' satisfaction. The outcome of this study is in tandem with Batang, Uwais and Ito (2017); Bali, et al. (2018); Jinaidi, Hussein and Al-Sudani (2018); Khan, Imran and Assad (2016) who found that service quality of tangibility, reliability, assurance, empathy and responsiveness significantly influenced customers or students satisfaction. Martha-Martha and Priyono (2018); Kalam and Mahonta (2017) submitted that delivering high-quality educational services can result into greater and better satisfaction among students at colleges and universities.

Conclusion

The study concluded that service quality of welfare services in terms of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy have positive significant impacts on students' satisfaction. In view of the outcomes of this study,

this study recommended that government and management of federal universities in South West Nigeria should consciously improve the service quality of welfare services in order to improve students' satisfaction.

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