A Research on Expectation and Perception of Service Quality in Tourism Education at University Level in Ankara

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Introduction

To supply qualified manpower that is necessary in tourism sector, “Quality of Education” is one of the most important factors in higher education institutions. In this study, expectations on tourism education and level of satisfaction of the students that are the most important customers of higher education institutions have been researched. In the research, service quality measurement models that are listed in the literature have been used to measure service quality in higher education institutions. By using the servqual model, the level of meeting the expectations of students about tourism education served by higher education institutions has been measured and important aspects of service quality according to students have been showed. The results of this study that is focused on tourism education and service quality show that the students, one of the major customer groups of higher education institutions, have a very low level of satisfaction about their education.

Tourism sector performs in service industry and “human” is the most critical and base factor in this sector. Qualified manpower can be educated in institutions and improvements in higher education institutions will result in the improvements of the quality of tourism sector services. To be able to increase level of education and service quality in higher education institutions, the expectations of their students have to be satisfied. This study aims to provide information on the level of satisfaction of tourism management students in different aspects.

As a result of being a multi-disciplinary sector, tourism produces services in many different areas and for this reason qualified manpower has an important role (Kocaoglu, 2002). The main target in tourism education should be to answer the needs of the sector both in qualitative and quantitative aspects (Timur, 1993).

There are three important themes in tourism education: personal development needs of the students, development of theoretical knowledge in the industry, analysis of experimental knowledge (Riley and others, 2002). The customers of the education institutions are students, families, business market and the state in general. The main target of the institutions should be satisfying of the expectations of each groups (Gungorsun, 2001).
Objects and Limits of the Study

In this study, expectations on tourism education and level of satisfaction of the students that are the most important customers of higher education institutions have been researched. According to the analysis in this study implemented on the students of various tourism management departments, service quality achievements of the education institutions have been evaluated and the results and comments have been discussed to contribute to the improvement efforts of service quality in tourism education institutions.

To be able to achieve this aim, below listed analysis subjects have been realized and according scientific results have been collected.

- Analysis of service quality expectations of the students
- Analysis of service quality perceptions of the students
- Analysis of the gap between expectations and perceptions of the students

187 first year undergraduate students of tourism management departments of 3 major universities in Ankara, Turkey have been included in this study. (Baskent University, Bilkent University, Gazi University)

Methodology of the Study

In this study, to evaluate service quality in universities, SERVQUAL model has been implemented.

SERVQUAL Model Questionnaire established for this study includes 36 statements. These questionnaires are prepared in two types; expectation and perception questionnaires, and then implemented on the students in different times. Each student assess different quality dimensions and gives a score out of 100 showing their degree of satisfaction on that particular quality subject. Statistical analysis methods and SERVQUAL analysis method have been used to evaluate the results of the research.

Results and Suggestions

According to the answers of the participating students in “Expectations Questionnaires” in the research study, the most important service quality dimension is “Physical Appearance”. Secondly “Trustworthiness”, thirdly “Interest and Eagerness”, fourthly “Assurance”, fifthly and finally “Empathy” have been reported as important service quality dimensions.

On the other hand, the answers of the participating students in “Perceptions Questionnaires” in the research study show that the most important service quality dimension is also “Physical Appearance” but it continues as, “Assurance” in second, “Trustworthiness” in third, “Interest and Eagerness” in fourth and “Empathy” in fifth order.

According to the analysis of the research results in Servqual Method, in which results are assessed either in positive or negative ways, all these three universities fail to satisfy the service quality expectations of the students.

The results have been also evaluated in “Gap Analysis” and some of the major reasons for the gap between expectations and perceptions of the students are as below:
Universities have insufficient or wrong knowledge about the expectations of the students coming to Tourism Management departments. The reason for this situation might be lack of sufficient research about their expectations and insufficient communications between academic and administrative personnel of the universities and students.

Even if the academic and administrative personnel of the universities or departments perceive the expectations of the students well, they might lack of eagerness and willingness, or their perception of impossibilities, or lack of service quality standards, or lack of targets to achieve a better level of education.

A third reason for the gap between expectations and perceptions of the students might be reasoned from role conflicts, lack of proper technology, team work and control mechanisms.

When the statements in the questionnaire have been analyzed, only “Physical Appearance” expectations is about financial situation of the education institutions. Other statements are not caused by financial abilities of the universities. This means that, other than “Physical Appearance” statement, better service quality dimensions can be achieved by the eagerness and willingness of the administrators in the institutions.

To improve academic service quality in tourism education institutions, a new understanding of administration has to be designed. Such an administration view should include all academic and administrative personnel in the organizational bodies of the institutions. The communicational skills and quality perceptions of these personnel have to be improved by continuous education within their work. Administrators, who believe in dynamism in the educational institutions rather than static managerial ways of administration will contribute higher level of service quality and better satisfaction level of expectations of the students in these educational institutions.

Tourism departments should aim to achieve an increased quality of service and higher level of satisfaction of students. To be able to achieve this target, the way of understanding of ‘management’ is important. The implementation of Total Quality Management, ISO 9000 Quality Insurance System, Customer Based Marketing, Relationship Marketing, Internal Marketing, Benchmarking, Accreditation, QFD Technology approaches that are developing service quality in higher education institutions and continuous efforts at management level will result in increased quality of service. The efforts on increasing the quality of education in undergraduate tourism programs in higher education institutions will result in the increase of the quality of education in tourism sector.