



IBBA Students' Perception on Service Quality Towards Satisfaction: An Application of SERVPERF in the Service of the Faculty of Management Science, Ubon Ratchathani University*

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Abstract

In the face of intense competition in the new educational environment, surviving in the market has become the key challenge for many educational institutions and different facilities within an institution. While educational institutions and faculties continue to strive for better education quality as a means of setting themselves apart from others, there has been growing emphases on not only the quality of education itself, but also of all services provided by educational institutions. Since these services consist mainly of intangible elements, service quality has taken considerable interest in many educational institutions. This study therefore considers students as customers and not products of educational institutions and tries to apply the 22 items of the SERVPERF scale to Measure students' (customers) perceived service quality in the Faculty of Management Science, Ubon Ratchathani University (FMS, UBU) with respect to its International Business Management Program (IBBA) Students. The primary data was collected using questionnaires. 75 questionnaires were administered to cover the entire population size of this program. The result revealed that students have a satisfactory level of positive perception on the services of the faculty. However, the perception towards tangibility was not encouraging. All dimensions of SERVPERF i.e. Reliability, assurance, empathy, tangibility and responsiveness contribute towards the service quality as seen by IBBA students but the influence of Reliability and Assurance is not so significant. What is more is, the results revealed that there is a positive linear relationship between the overall service quality and students satisfaction in the faculty. This therefore indicate the suitability of the SERVPERF scale and its applicability for measuring service quality and students' (customers) satisfaction at the faculty of Management Science, Ubon Ratchathani University.

Keywords : Service Quality, Customers' Satisfaction, SERVQUAL, SERVPERF

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1. Introduction

From the various quality definitions advanced by dictionaries and quality experts, there're a variety of perspectives that can be taken into consideration, for examples; customers and specification-based perspectives. Many experts however argue that a customer based definition is most appropriate, hence the modern definition (Juran, 1988) "fitness for intended use." He's basically saying that quality is "meeting or exceeding customer expectations." Because of market gains and lower cost importance of quality, quality's now recognized by both goods and service sectors as a strategic tool for attaining operational efficiency and improving business performance.

In a continuous strive to attract, retain and increase the satisfaction of customers, services are trying to exceed customer's expectations. Unfortunately, managing quality is more difficult in the service sector than in the goods sector as service quality's not easily identifiable and measurable due to the inherent characteristics of services which differentiate them from goods. Most researchers and managers of service firms have agreed that measuring service quality, involves a comparison of expectation with perception. Delivering quality service means conforming to customer's expectation on a consistent basis (Lewis and Booms, 1983). Similarly, (Gronroos, 1982) developed a model in which he contends that customers compare the service they expect with the perception of the service they receive, in order to determine quality. The idea is that where a negative gap exists, it shows low quality, thus dissatisfaction, and vice-versa.

Growing debates have evolved around the issue of considering students as customers with some opining that "Corporate models" of education in which students are viewed as "Customers" are not appropriate. Education is a unique activity in a democratic society that differs markedly from both business and government. Universities are absolutely essential in contemporary society as centers of free inquiry, free expression, open discovery, and dissent. Any attempt to force education into a corporatist model devalues faculty, lowers academic standards, and harms both students and the institution itself (GMU Faculty Senate, September 2002).



A survey that tries to find out students reaction to this statement however suggests a high level of disagreement amongst students who hold the opinion that by paying fees they are more the same like customers and should be given a greater say in the design and methods by which courses are offered to them. A number of researchers and writers have express different view concerning considering students as customers. Emerget et al (2001) express two main concerns about the customer-oriented approach to students, arguing that this approach shifts the primary role of teachers to that of satisfying customers and taking into consideration the business model approach that customers are always right, this approach lowers academic standards. To them students prefer less work and better grades even when undeserved and satisfying students in this case greatly lowers academic standards. Another concern advanced by same authors is that the student-customers-model promotes the commoditization of education and so paying fees become the main objective not learning. To support this point of view, they bring out the work of Gordon (1998) who suggested that instead of introducing such a model and still expects students to learn, universities could just become a diploma mill selling diplomas out rightly to students rather than doing the same thing and fooling the world that they are different. However other researchers see things differently Eagle & Brennan (2007) argue that the idea that students want easy work and inflated grades is not consistent with existing evidence. Their article showed that students are comfortable with the idea of hard work as a path to quality education. Therefore the student-customer concept has no effect on students' desire to learn. In addition, some factors brought forth by (Bayfield, 2007) suggested that the customer concept is relevant to students, at least as a useful analogy. Students pay a price (fees), make a choice of courses they want to study, express satisfaction through formal and informal systems and change schools if they feel unsatisfied. All these are customer-like behaviors. According to him the 'customer' terminology is appropriate for use with students. Furthermore Eddie (3013) in his article "Students Are Not Products, They Are Customers" suggested that students should be viewed as Customers because failure to do so considers them as products. In his argument, he brings out products characteristics and show how incompatible they are with students. Raw material and products don't make choices about how they would be shaped rather they are design according to specifications of entities other than themselves. Students can therefore not be raw materials nor products because not only are the selective about their educational and career goals such as education fields and desired



professions, they also have expectation of the education they wish to receive and design a set of specification for it. This behavior is not consistent with characteristic of mindless products but rather those of customers therefore students are and should be viewed as customers.

1.1 Objectives of The Research

Generally the main objective of this research is to determine the service performance level of FMS-UBU with respect to its' international Business Management Students' using the service dimensions of; reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness (RATER). Specifically it'll;

- Determine the perception of IBBA students towards service quality of the Faculty of Management Science, UBU.
- Examine the relationship between students' perceive service quality and students overall satisfaction.
- Examine students' Preference of the service quality dimensions.

1.2 Significance of The Study

Higher education in recent years has become more competitive with both private and government institutions striving to perform better to attract new students and retain old ones by consistently meeting, or exceeding students' expectations in order to improve their bottom-lines. In effect, neglecting the service performance aspect of the FMS-UBU will not only put it in a competitive disadvantage but also in a financial disadvantage not only because students pay fees but because government funding is depended on number of students enrolled. This study by measuring the service quality of the FMS-UBU is of great significance to this faculty as it will not only provide information as to how the faculty is performing but will also determine the service dimensions considered by students to be of relatively more importance vis-à-vis others. By so doing, the faculty will avoid wasting resources in areas students don't deem important and concentrate its scarce resources in areas which can improve students' satisfaction

1.3 Scope and Delimitation

This study examines the FMS-UBU's performance amongst its IBBA students, excluding students from other programs offered by the faculty. The result can therefore not be seen as a valid representation of the entire faculty as a whole. Furthermore, the results will be valid only



within a limited time frame since expectation and performance do change over time. Finally, data for this study was collected through online and printed questionnaires. The limitations of these modes of data collection may limit the validity of our results and thus need to be taken into consideration.

2. Literature review

In this section, we'll take a brief look at the theoretical and conceptual review of customers' perception of performance, service quality dimensions, SERVQUAL and SERVPERF.

2.1 Customers Perceptions of Performance

Perception is the process of receiving, organizing and assigning meaning to information or stimuli detected by the customers five senses and it gives meaning to the world that surrounds the customer (Strydom, Jooste and Cant, 2000).

In terms of how consumers actually assess service quality, customers service quality perceptions result from comparing their prior expectations with their actual experience of the service (Berry et al., 1985). Thus it's not surprising that if consumer's expectation is met, service quality is perceived to be satisfactory; if not, it's unsatisfactory; and if exceeded, it's more than satisfactory or delighting. This has developed into the perceptions minus expectation (P-E) conceptualization of service quality referred to as "gap theory".

2.2 Service Quality Dimensions

1. Tangibles-appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials
2. Reliability-ability to dependently and accurately perform the promised service
3. Responsiveness- willingness and promptness in the provision of service
4. Competence-possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service
5. Courtesy-politeness, respect, consideration, and friendliness of contact personnel
6. Credibility-trustworthiness, believability, and honesty
7. Security-freedom from danger, risk, or doubt



8. Access-approachability and ease of contact

9. Communication-keeping customers informed in the language they can understand and listening to them

10. Understanding the customer-making the effort to know customers and their needs

2.3 Summarized dimensions;

- Reliability,
- Assurance (competence, courtesy, Credibility, and security),
- Tangibility,
- Empathy (Access, Communication and Understanding/knowing customers) and

Responsiveness.

These dimensions have been widely used in the following two service quality measurement scales (SERVQUAL and SERVPERF).

2.4 Measuring Quality in Education

Many researchers in higher education quality suggest that, there is no single possible definition of quality. Quality is “..... a relative concept, meaningful only from the perspective of those judging it at the time” (Higher Education Council 1992: 3), Cheng and Tam (1997, 2001) also suggested that educational quality is a rather vague and controversial concept they argued that quality is a relative concept with respect to the stakeholders in higher education and the circumstances involve. What they were practically saying is not only does quality mean different things to different people, but same people may adopt different conceptualization of measuring quality at different times or in different circumstances. However, Sahney et al. (2004) sited a number of definitions of “quality in education” to show that quality in education follow the general definitions of quality. The term “quality in education” has been defined as “conformance of education output to planned goals, specifications and requirements” (Crosby 1979); “defect avoidance in the education process” (Crosby 1979) “excellence in education” (Peters and Waterman 1982) and “meeting or exceeding customer’s expectations of education” (Parasuraman et al. 1985) and finally “fitness of educational outcome and experience for use” (Juran and Gryna 1988). As a result of the difficulty in defining quality in education, there has equally been difficulties in arriving at an industrial model to measure service quality in higher education. However, various attempts have been made such as, The Importance – Performance



analysis (Ford et al. 1999), The Balanced Scorecard (Cullen et al. 2003) and Total Quality Management (TQM). The TQM remains the most internationally widely used. Define as the management approach of an organization centered on quality based on the participation of all its members at a long run success through customer satisfaction and benefit for all organization members and the society, (ISO 8402 in Wiklun et al. 2003,p.99) , the suitability of TQM is based not only on its potential to encompass the perspectives of both internal and external stakeholders but also on the possibility of enabling a comprehensive approach to quality management that will assure quality while also facilitating change and innovation.

Sahney et al. (2004) in their literature review on service quality in higher education observed that there has been a number of attempts to articulate the dimensions of quality in higher education as Garvin (1987) did for services. One of the most clearly define set of dimensions of quality in higher education has been identified by Harvey and Knight (1996). To them, quality can be viewed in five different but related dimensions.

- (1) Quality as exceptional (e.g. high standards);
- (2) Quality as consistency (e.g. zero defects);
- (3) Quality as fitness for purpose (fitting customer specifications);
- (4) Quality as value for money, (as efficiency and effectiveness); and
- (5) Quality as transformative (an ongoing process that includes empowerment and enhancement of customer satisfaction).

As shown on the **Table 1** If we look at a combination of some of quality dimensions with sample items by Owlia and Aspinwall's (1996) theoretical framework of quality dimensions with an emphasis on teaching aspects of education (academic resources, competence, attitude, content) and Waugh (2001) model of administrative and supportive services quality (reliability and responsiveness, assurance and empathy). We will find little or no meaningful deference in the conceptualization of service quality scale of SERVPEF and SERQUAL this is one of the reasons responsible for the preference of the SERVPEF scale in this research.



Table 1 quality dimensions in higher education

Quality dimensions	Sample items	Number of items	Source
Academic resources	Sufficiency of academic equipment, such as laboratories Ease of access to information sources e.g. books journals, and software	5	Owlia and Aspinwall (1996)
Competence	Theoretical knowledge of academic staff Experience of Academic staff in teaching and communication	4	Owlia and Aspinwall (1996)
Attitude	Extent to which academic staff understand students' academic need Degree of academic staff's willingness to help Availability for academic staff for guidance and advice	3	Owlia and Aspinwall (1996)
Content	Extending to which students learn communication skills Extent to which students learn team working skills Relevance of the curriculum to the future jobs of students	7	Owlia and Aspinwall (1996)
Reliability responsiveness	Academic contact Confident and dependable administrative advice Early information of administrative changes	9	Waugh 2001
Assurance empathy	Courteousness and confidence of contact personnel		Waugh 2001



2.5 SERVQUAL Scale

Based on their empirical work, (PZB 1985) developed SERVQUAL SCALE in which they identified a set of 22 items tapped from RATER. The scale is comprised of a total of 44 items (22 for expectations and 22 for perceptions) because the founders operationalized service quality as being a gap between customer's expectations and perception of performance on these items. Customers' responses to their expectations and perception are obtained on a 7-point Likert scale and compared to arrive at (P-E) gap scores with the level of perceived service quality being higher as the gap scores get more positive. The SERVQUAL conceptualization of the gap in service quality encompasses 5 different gaps as shown on figure 1 below.

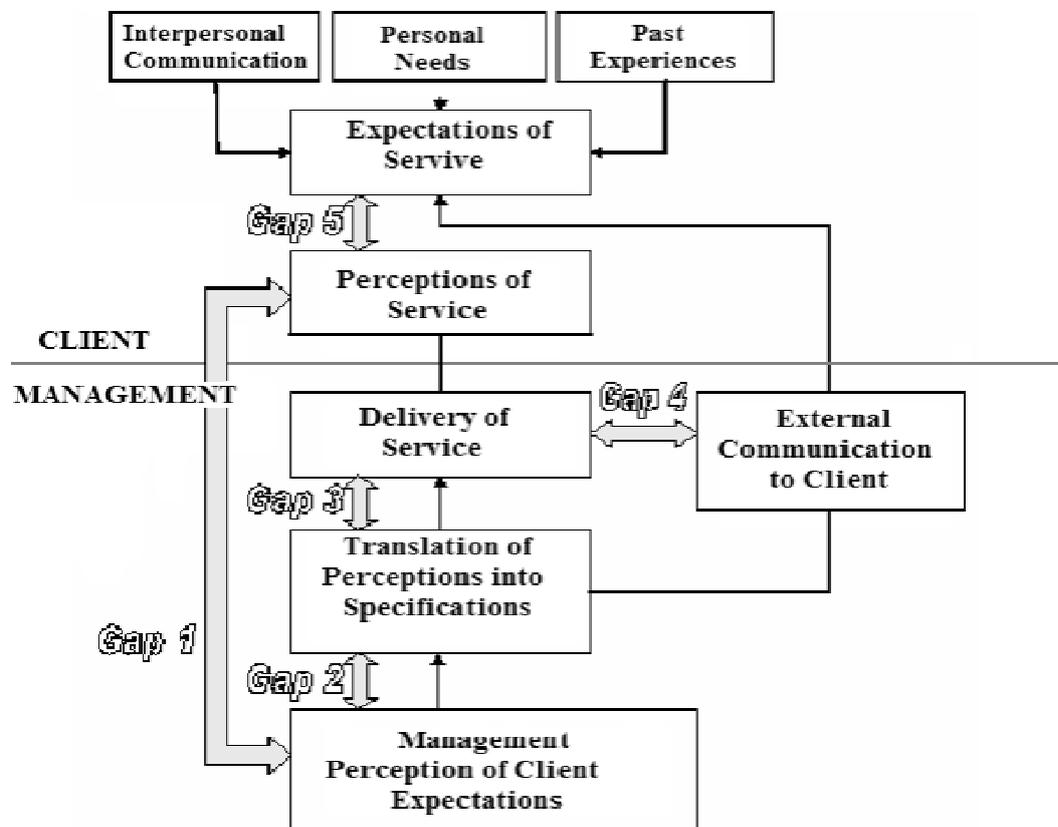


Figure: 1. Gap Theory

Source : Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (apud SALOMI, 2005).

Gap 1: Knowledge gap: The difference between consumer expectations and management perceptions of consumer expectations.

Gap 2: Standard gap: The difference between management perceptions of consumer expectations and service specifications.



Gap 3: Behavior gap: The difference between service specifications and the service actually delivered.

Gap 4: Communication gap: The difference between service delivered and what is communicated about the service to stakeholders.

Gap 5: Gap between service and expectations: The discrepancy between consumers' expectations of the service and perceptions of the actual service performance

The 44 items of the SERVQUAL are based on gap 5 the gap between the service expected and the perception of the service received. The SERVQUAL model argues that in other for businesses to improve service quality, there is considerable need to strive to reduce gap 5. Despite the importance of SERVQUAL, it has been criticized on various conceptual and operational grounds. Thus SERVPERF scale was developed (Cronin and Taylor, 1992).

2.6 SERVPERF

The authors based their criticism on SERVQUAL conceptual bases, finding it confusing with service satisfaction. Contrarily to SERVQUAL which has its origin from the disconfirmation paradigm, SERVPERF is based on the perception component alone, with the expectation component discarded. In effect, they proposed 22 items from the 44 items of SERVQUAL. It has witnessed considerable support over time from other researchers; (Babakus and Boller, 1992); and (Boulding et al., 1993) though not yet widely applied as SERVQUAL, even one of the founders of SERVQUAL- Zeithaml in a recent study observed that "...Our results are incompatible with both the one-dimensional view of expectations and the gap formation for service quality. Instead, we find that perceived quality is directly influenced only by perceptions of performance", (Boulding et al., 1993). Such admittance in no doubt goes a long way to testify such superiority, thus my motivation for using it in this research. To further support the use of this measurement scale, Low Dennis (2013) carried out an exploratory factor analysis on which measurement scale was most suitable for measuring service performance in higher education in China, using a correlation statistics and comparing the SERVPERF and HEDPERF (Higher Education Performance only) result reveal that the SERVPERF was more suitable in measuring service quality in China's higher educational context. Though many scholars differ in opinion as to which is more suitable? In looking at students as customers, it is more logical to use a customer-like model to capture students' perception of performance than using a higher educational scale which may not fully explain the "students-as-customers" analogy.



3. Methodology

3.1 Research Framework

This study is adapted from SERVPERF scale. The study measures the level of service performance of the FMS-UBU amongst its IBBA students, using the five dimensions of RATER. Chronbach's Alpha (α) was use to measure the reliability of the scare dimensions used in the study. The study applied the use of simple arithmetic mean and median to test the perception of students towards the faculty's service quality while a coloration and multiple regression analysis was equally carried out to test the relationship between service quality and overall student service quality satisfaction.

3.2 Sample:

It constitutes FMS-UBU IBBA students. 75 of them were sampled and 51 completed and returned the questionnaires. The sample size of 75 represents the entire population of students in the international Business Program. Note should be taken however that the 4th year students were not included in this study as they had already graduated at the time of the research.

3.3 Instrumentation

Data is collected using questionnaires, structured in three sections; Section one covers demographic information with three questions covering age, gender, and year of study. Section two covers students' perception of the FMS-UBU's performance using 22 items (five items for reliability, four for assurance, four for tangibility, five for empathy and four for responsiveness). One extra item was included at the end to capture the students overall satisfaction regarding the faculty's service. A Likert scale of five was used ranging from one for strongly disagree to five for strongly agree. Section three covers students' preference for RATER vis-à-vis each other using a Likert scale of five ranging from one for very unimportant to five for very important.



4. Results

4.1 The reliability statistics.

In order to examine the reliability of the scale dimensions used, the Chronbach's Alpha which is considered as the most widely acceptable reliability measure was calculated. Table 1 provides the Chronbach's Alpha (α) of the five dimensions. As there is no value below 0.7 it can be concluded that the measures used here are consistent enough for the study.

Table 2. Service quality variables and items used in the study with reliability measures.

Dimension	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Reliability	1. the faculty perform service within promise time	0.718
	2. lecturers and staff show sincere interest in solving students problems	
	3. registration is timely and accurate	
	4. student's records are accurately kept	
	5. lecturers are generally reliable	
Assurance	1. lecturers and staff show competence in doing their job	0.789
	2. lecturers are innovative in their teaching method and style	
	3. lecturers and staff are friendly and courteous	
	4. I feel safe when I am at the faculty	
Tangibility	1. the faculty has modern teaching equipment	0.701
	2. physical installations are visually attractive	
	3. internet is available to students and works well	
	4. Class and study rooms are clean and comfortable	
Empathy	1. lecturers and staff are supportive to students	0.712
	2. class schedules are convenient for students	
	3. administration has students best interest at heart	
	4. lecturers and staff understand and know the student's needs	
	5. students are treated fairly and without bias	
Responsiveness	1. lecturers are available to assist students even after teaching hours	0.703
	2. staff are willing to assist students when ever need arises	
	3. the faculty has an effective website to assist online	
	4. the faculty has a short response time to students problems	

Source: FMS-UBU study survey, generated by the researcher (2015)



4.1 profile of respondents

The respondents in this study were students in the international business management program first to third year. 51 students were sampled. Of these, there were 8 male and 43 female. The age range of the respondents was 18-25 with 20 and 21 years old making up 27.5 and 33.3 percent of the total sample size respectively. Of the total number of respondents 17 were first year, 8 second year and 28 third year.

4.2 perception of customers towards service quality of the FMS-UBU

Table 2 reveals that the perception of customers for the overall service quality of the Faculty of Management Science, Ubon Ratchathani is at satisfactory level as the mean values of the dimensions are above 3 but for tangibility which falls slightly below. The highest measures (mean and median) are scored by Assurance followed by responsiveness, reliability empathy and tangibility. Hence the dimension assurance is superior to the other four dimensions. This points out that the faculty is performing at a satisfactory level in the trustworthiness of its IBBA students and that the faculty staff and lecturers are friendly and courteous towards students. The mean score (2.97) is noted for tangibility this indicates that the faculty is performing low in terms of physical installations, classroom comfort and other needed equipment.

Table 3. Mean and Median scores for service quality dimensions

Dimension	Mean score	Median score	Std. Deviation
Assurance	3.82	4.00	0.665
Responsiveness	3.51	3.50	0.752
Reliability	3.47	3.60	0.575
Empathy	3.36	3.40	0.599
Tangibility	2.97	3.00	0.740

Source: FMS-UBU study survey, generated by the researcher (2015)

2.3 Relationship of Service Quality with Students Satisfaction

In order to observe the individual linear correlation between the students overall satisfaction and each variable under the service quality, Pearson's product moment correlation test was done. For the correlation analysis, the mean scores of each dimension across the items listed in Table 2 were used. According to Table 4, there is positive correlation between each dimension of service quality and students satisfaction. The highest correlation is observed between empathy and students satisfaction followed by tangibility, responsiveness, assurance and reliability. Since all coefficients of correlation are positive, it can be concluded that better service quality will lead to higher level of student's satisfaction.

Table 4. Correlation result between student's satisfaction and the service quality.

Dimension under service quality	Coefficient of correlation	Sig (p)
Reliability	0.445	0.001
Assurance	0.451	0.001
Tangibility	0.513	0.000
Empathy	0.516	0.000
Responsiveness	0.460	0.001

Source: FMS-UBU study survey, generated by the researcher (2015)

Furthermore, it's imperative to investigate the relationship between the students satisfaction in the face of all the dimension in a single model. The multiple linear regression model was able to capture about 35% of the total variation of the data.

Table 5. Regression result Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
.647 ^a	.419	.354	.64450	2.008

a. Predictors: (Constant), Responsiveness, Tangibility, Reliability, Empathy, Assurance

b. Dependent Variable: the overall service performance of this faculty is very good



In this research, we utilized the five dimension as reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness to determine the student's satisfaction in the faculty's services. Due to that, we have to check the Multicollinearity among independent variable (Velnampy and Achchuthan 2013a; Kajananthan and Achchuthan, 2013; Velnampy and Achchuthan 2012b). Based on the findings there is no collinearity problems among independent variables. All the tolerance values are well below one and the VIF is also below 10 also a Durbin-Watson close to 2.0 is constant with no serial correlation, while a number close to 0 means there is, probably serial correlation. In this study, DW has a value of 2.008 which is closer to 2.0 thus there is no serial correlation between the variables used in this study.

Going by the result of the multiple regression, students overall satisfaction is positively influence by sangibility, empathy and sesponsiveness but not significantly influenced by reliability and assurance.

Table 6 coefficients of multiple linear regression analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.084	.632		.133	.895					
Reliability	.043	.232	.031	.187	.852	.445	.028	.021	.467	2.142
Assurance	.052	.215	.043	.241	.810	.451	.036	.027	.405	2.466
Tangibility	.378	.158	.348	2.397	.021	.513	.336	.272	.611	1.636
Empathy	.185	.239	.139	.776	.442	.516	.115	.088	.406	2.466
Responsiveness	.313	.178	.294	1.763	.085	.460	.254	.200	.466	2.146

a. Dependent Variable: the overall service performance of this faculty is very good

2.4 Students' preference of the service quality dimensions

To examine students' preference of the five service quality dimensions, the mean score of the five questions as to how important each dimension was to the students was calculated. The result showed that responsiveness was considered to be the most important, with a mean score of 4.27 followed by reliability, empathy and assurance, tangibility was seen by the students to be least important with a mean score of 3.82. This therefore shows that emphasis



should be given to the different service dimensions with priority given to responsiveness, reliability and empathy as students turn to place more importance to this. If this is done this could lead to better service quality perception by the students and therefore higher service quality.

Table 7 Students' preference of service quality.

	Mean	Std. Deviation
How important is responsiveness of service to you?	4.2745	.72328
How important is reliability of service to you?	4.2353	.68083
How important is empathy of service to you?	4.1373	.60065
How important is assurance of service to you?	3.9804	.81216
How important is tangibility of service to you?	3.8235	.86501

3 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to measure student's perceived service quality in the faculty of Management Science, Ubon Ratchathani University with respect to its IBBA students and its relationship with student's satisfaction. The mean score for service quality were between 2.97 and 3.82. The faculty was found to be very good in providing assurance, responsiveness, reliability and empathy but tangibility was seen to be less satisfactory. Though all dimensions of service quality indicated a relatively higher level of performance, the faculty still needs to improve customer's perception of tangibility since this dimension indicated the lowest mean value. The results also revealed that there is a positive individual linear correlation between each service quality dimension and students satisfaction. The dimension reliability was the leading determinant of customer satisfaction. This means that the faculty should perform its services within the promise time, error free, students records be accurately kept and both staff and lecturers should show sincere interest in solving students problems. Furthermore the results indicated that providing better service quality will increase students' satisfaction in the Faculty of



Management Science, Ubon Ratchathani University. The result also indicated the suitability of the SERVPERF scale in measuring service quality in the FMS-UBU. Future research may be directed towards measuring the service quality with respect to students from all programs in the faculty. Moreover a comparative analysis research could be carried out on the SERVPERF, SERQUAL and HEDPERF in measuring service quality in educational institutions. Developing and validating a measuring scale for service quality in higher education in Thailand which considers students as customers and takes into account the cultural values of the Thai society could also help provide more inside as to how students in the Thai higher educational setting measure service performance. It may also be important to look at the relationship between students perceived service quality and students drop out in higher educational settings in Thailand.



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