

THE QUALITY OF TRAINING SERVICE AND LEARNER SATISFACTION AT NON-PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Kieu Lan Huong

*Kieu Lan Huong – Postgraduate,
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS, FACULTY OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION,
HO CHI MINH CITY UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY (HUTECH),
HO CHI MINH, SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM*

Abstract: *in the past, education was considered a non-commercial and non-profit training activity. However, under the influence of external factors and especially the impact of the market economy, education has been considered as an “educational service” in which customers (students and parents) can invest and choose a service provider (universities) that they think is the most suitable. Universities need to focus on service quality and improve learner satisfaction to survive and develop. They will be able to make timely adjustments to enhance the quality of training based on learner satisfaction. This article develops a model of the factors affecting the quality of training service and their impact on student satisfaction and studies some cases of private universities.*

Keywords: *service quality, quality of training, higher education, satisfaction, learner satisfaction, education in Vietnam.*

1. The relationship between the quality of training service and learner satisfaction

Many researchers suggest that service quality and customer satisfaction are a direct proportion. Mehmet Aga and Okan Veli Safakli (2007) conducted a real-world study on service quality and satisfaction. They discovered that service quality, corporate image, and service pricing positively impacted consumer satisfaction [see 1, p. 84-98]. De Ruyter et al. (1997) researched the healthcare industry to determine the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. The findings revealed that customer satisfaction depended on the service quality provided [see 3, p. 387-406].

In the field of education, many studies have confirmed the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. Chua (2004) studied and assessed the training quality at universities from different perspectives such as students, parents, lecturers, and employers. The results indicate that students, parents, and employers expect more than what they get in most of the components of the SERVQUAL model (that includes five elements: empathy, responsiveness, reliability, tangibles, and assurance). Another research found that the difference between perception and expectation of lecturers was expressed in two components: tangibles and assurance [see 2, p. 1-7].

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that service quality and customer satisfaction are closely related and directly proportional. In which customer satisfaction is influenced by service quality. Thus, the higher the customer's evaluation of service quality is, the higher their overall satisfaction with service quality is.

2. Model for evaluating the quality of training service and student satisfaction at non-public universities

After studying the model and overview of the research relevant to service quality and student satisfaction at private universities, the author uses an analytical framework with four common factors building the quality of training service and affecting student satisfaction at non-public universities as follows:

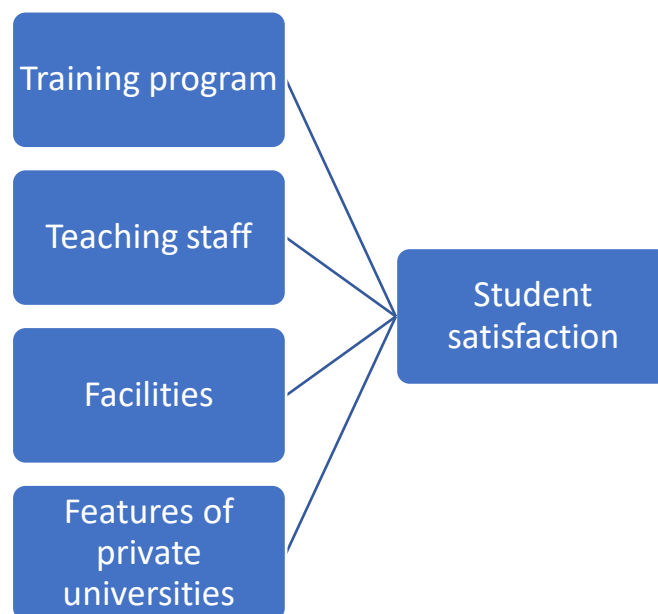


Fig. 1. A proposed research model

In which:

- The training program consists of design, content, and basic structure through other delivered attributes (Fallows and Steven, 2000) [see 4, p. 75-83]. It contributes significantly to the enhancement of training quality. Creating a friendly learning environment is also one of the factors that help learners enjoy learning. In particular, building a friendly and close relationship between lecturers and learners will make students more excited about learning and help teachers better understand their students to support them in the learning process.

- Teaching staff: According to Owlia and Aspinwall (1996), a significant quality dimension of education is primarily related to theoretical knowledge and science practice. Teachers' qualifications, expertise, and communication skill are indispensable factors affecting the learning quality of students. If an instructor has a thorough understanding of the teaching process, he or she is considered valid. In this case, he or she understands how to make the problem enjoyable and attract his/her students. With a written course guide, a teacher needs to master the contents taught. He or she needs to know how to deliver those contents, capture students' interest, and derive valuable experiences for his/her students [see 7, p. 12-20].

- Facilities: According to Schneider (2002), facilities affecting the quality of training are sound, temperature, and light equipment, including equipment in classrooms, practice rooms, and laboratories. Aspects affecting comfort in the learning process are fresh and airy air and a quiet and comfortable environment. These factors are the learning space for students, the working space for teachers, the size of classrooms, the library, and the trees in the school. Improving facilities and applying information technology will significantly impact students' learning outcomes. It can be said that the library and information technology are representatives of a school. If a school has 100% highly qualified teachers without having a good library or abundant information technology equipment, students will be challenging to learn and access information, and teachers will be difficult to teach effectively [8].

- Features of private universities: According to Dang Thi Minh (2014), non-public universities are different from public universities in main aspects such as (1) Financial investment and school ownership, (2) Organizational structure, (3) Financial management mechanism, and using property, and (4) Legal status. These differences partly affect the teaching activities and training quality of private universities. In addition, non-public schools operate on the principle of financial autonomy, self-balancing of revenues and expenditures, and compliance with the law on accounting and auditing regimes. Incomes of non-public universities are used for necessary activities, tax obligations to the state budget, investment and development funds, and other funds. The remaining revenue is distributed to capital contributors according to the ratio of their initial capital investments. As a result, these elements greatly influence the operation process, teaching staff, and training quality of schools [see 6].

3. Analysis on student satisfaction about the quality of training service and student satisfaction at non-public universities

3.1. Research Methods

After building the model, the survey table is designed to collect students' evaluations of the service quality they have received at private universities and their level of satisfaction when using the service. The central part of the questionnaire includes 36 observed variables. Thirty-two observed variables are used to measure students'

evaluation of 4 components of service quality (that are training program, facilities, lecturers, and features of private universities). The remaining four variables will measure customer satisfaction about the training quality at non-public universities. In addition, there are four more variables used to track students' demographics. The following Table 1 shows these scales.

Data is collected by online surveys sent to students. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and multiple regression analysis are used to analyze the results, so the sample size required is at least five samples per observed variable (Hair et al., 2010) [5]. Accordingly, the study needs to collect a minimum sample size of 180 samples for a questionnaire of 36 observed variables.

After collecting 180 samples, the data was coded, cleaned, and processed on SPSS 16.0 software. The data analysis process was conducted through the following phases: Descriptive statistics, Evaluating the scale's reliability through Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and Multiple regression analysis.

Table 1. Satisfaction scale of students at non-public universities

No	Code	Contents
TRAINING PROGRAM		
1	CT1	The course content helps students develop skills that can be applied in their jobs.
2	CT2	Students can find suitable jobs thanks to the knowledge and skills they learn in the subjects.
3	CT3	The training program's objectives are well-defined.
4	CT4	The training plan is clear, consistent, and logical.
5	CT5	The ratio between theory and practice in the training program is very balanced.
6	CT6	The training content complies with the output standards' requirements.
7	CT7	The training program meets the demands of society and recruitment agencies.
8	CT8	The training program meets the needs of students.
9	CT9	The learning resources are extensive, varied, and always up to date.
TEACHING STAFF		
10	GV1	Lecturers clearly understand the rules and regulations of the school and State on higher education.
11	GV2	Lecturers always have a sense of self-improvement and expertise.
12	GV3	Lecturers have a positive and cooperative working spirit and attitude.
13	GV4	Lecturers actively advise and help students in the learning.
14	GV5	Teachers prepare materials and lectures carefully.
15	GV6	Lecturers are knowledgeable and experienced.
16	GV7	Learning outcomes are evaluated accurately and fairly.
17	GV8	Lecturers meet the training needs.
FACILITIES		
18	CS1	The system of facilities supports well for training.
19	CS2	The area for physical activities is diverse and fully equipped.
20	CS3	The dormitory is spacious and clean, and it meets the needs of users.
21	CS4	The canteen serves a variety of dishes and maintains food hygiene and safety.
22	CS5	It's convenient to use the equipment.
23	CS6	Classrooms and dedicated practice rooms are fully equipped with learning equipment.
24	CS7	Classrooms meet learning needs.
25	CS8	The Internet supports learning well.
26	CS9	The library has a diverse range of resources.
FEATURES OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES		
27	DT1	Views and prejudices of society, state agencies, and employers about non-public institutions.
28	DT2	Mechanisms and policies of the State also distinguish between public and non-public schools.
29	DT3	State policies towards lecturers of non-public universities have not been paid attention to.
30	DT4	Private universities must be financially self-sufficient and have to pay taxes.
31	DT5	Borrowing for student loans is still tricky and does not meet the needs.
32	DT6	It's difficult to access preferential capital for investment.
LEARNER SATISFACTION		

33	CL1	Overall, the school provides the service excellently.
34	CL2	The school provides better service than other universities.
35	CL3	The school's service standards are very high.
36	CL4	Overall, I am pleased with the training quality provided by the school.

3.2. Research results

After sending the survey, 185 responses have been collected, of which 180 responses are complete and valid. The majority of respondents are female (accounting for 51.7%).

The findings of descriptive analysis indicate that average values of each component are between 3 and 4 (on a scale of 5), which has different meanings for each element. However, the average level of student's evaluation of the components of training quality is relatively high. The variances of variables are small (all less than 1.5), showing that all respondents answer close to the average value of these variables.

Most standard deviations are less than 1.2, demonstrating that the variation is relatively small. Most of the respondents have similar views on the question asked (training quality and student satisfaction). The results of Cronbach's Alpha show that the four components of the scale of training quality have reliability greater than 0.6. Thus, the scale designed in the research is statistically significant and achieves the necessary reliability coefficient. Specifically, (i) Cronbach's alpha value in "the training program" is 0.938. (ii) "Teaching staff" has Cronbach's alpha value of 0.718 (in which GV1, GV2, and the total variable correlation coefficient of GV7 variables is smaller than 0.3. (iii) Facilities have a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.915. (iv) Cronbach's alpha value of "Features of non-public universities" is 0.724 (in which the DT3 variable has a total correlation coefficient that is smaller than 0.3). In addition, there is an additional component, which is the assessment of student satisfaction. This component has a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.688. Therefore, all four components of training quality are used in exploratory factor analysis (EFA).

The results of factor analysis in the scale of service quality demonstrate that the KMO coefficient has a value of 0.851, greater than 0.5, presenting the appropriateness of EFA. As a result, EFA obtains four components that are 1,023 at Eigenvalues. The study concludes that the scale is acceptable. The 28 observed variables are grouped into four factors. The average variance extracted is 66,383, indicating that these four factors account for 66,383% of the variation of the observed variables.

Based on the Cronbach Alpha coefficient and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in the initial research model, the four proposed components are adequate and statistically significant. The above components will be used in the next integration test. According to the regression coefficients analysis in this model, the significance level of components such as facilities, training programs, and assurance have Sig. that is smaller than 0.05. Therefore, we can conclude that the independent variables impact student satisfaction about the training quality at non-public universities. Facilities, training programs, teaching staff, and features of private institutions are crucial in this model and have a positive influence on student satisfaction because their regression coefficients are positive. The following are the values of independent variables through standard regression: The training program is 0.406. The teaching staff is 0.217. Facilities are 0.460. Finally, the features of non-public universities are 0.228.

Based on the results of regression analysis, we have the following formula:

$$CL = 0,406*CT + 0,217*GV + 0,460*CS + 0,228*DT + 0,940 + \varepsilon$$

The above model explains that the independent variables cause 56.0% of the change in the CL. Other variables outside the model cause the remaining 44.0% of the variation.

The results of standardized coefficients beta show the importance of each independent variable to the dependent variable. The Beta value in Table 2 indicates this point. Through the standard regression, we know that the training program has a 40.6% influence on satisfaction. The teaching staff affects 21.7% on the satisfaction. Facilities have a 46.0% influence on satisfaction. Finally, features of private universities affect 22.8% on satisfaction.

Table 2. Results of multiple regression analysis

Model	R	R squared		Corrected R-squared	Estimated SE	Durbin-Watson		
1	.755 ^a	.570		.560	.25987	1.784		
Coefficients								
Model		Unstandardized regression coefficient		Normalized regression coefficient	t	Sig.	Multicollinearity	
		B	Standard Bias	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
	(Constant)	.94	.248		3.78	.0		

	0			8	00		
CT	.21	.027	.406	7.92	.0	.936	1.06
	1			1	00		8
GV	.15	.035	.217	4.31	.0	.975	1.02
	0			4	00		6
CS	.21	.024	.460	8.93	.0	.926	1.08
	3			1	00		0
DT	.18	.040	.228	4.55	.0	.982	1.01
	4			3	00		9

3.4. Implications for research and recommendations

The findings suggest that the elements of training quality have a positive relationship with student satisfaction at non-public universities. In which facilities, training programs, characteristics of non-public universities, and teaching staff are variables determining student satisfaction in decreasing order. Based on the findings, it is clear that it is crucial to focus on improving the facilities to enhance the quality of training so that learners are more and more satisfied. Furthermore, the training program must be strengthened and improved. Finally, it is vital to pay attention to the features of non-public universities and the teaching faculty.

Facilities are a factor that dramatically affects learner satisfaction at private universities. Therefore, private universities need to improve facilities and equipment such as classrooms and learning equipment. Their libraries shall have enough learning materials and various references on specialized fields to meet the demands for reference, study, and research of learners.

According to the survey, the training program is another aspect that significantly impacts student satisfaction. As a result, colleges must pay special attention to increasing the quality of their training programs to strengthen learner satisfaction. The training program must meet the needs of the learners and the demands of the labor market and society. In addition, schools shall develop relationships with businesses and provide opportunities for their students to visit, practice, and interact with real situations. At the same time, this relationship also helps schools understand the needs of employers. From there, they can design, regularly update and renew training programs to ensure that their training programs are relevant and satisfy the demands of society's human resources and students' learning and research.

Features of non-public universities are critical in creating the quality of higher education in general and the training quality of private institutions in particular. Currently, there are many shortcomings in executing training activities in private universities. In particular, the training program is focused on theory and undervalues practice, making students uninterested in learning. As a result, it is difficult for them to find suitable jobs after graduation. Therefore, non-public universities must develop and follow training quality standards to make investment plans for this work. It is one of the long-term strategies for improving the training quality at universities.

Finally, it is necessary to improve the capacity of the teaching staff of non-public universities. The goal of training and cultivating is to strengthen the professional capacity, teaching ability, scientific research, and other activities of the lecturers to meet the requirements on qualifications and standards for professional titles in non-public institutions. Professional training and cultivating must contribute to improving the capacity and qualification of lecturers. This work must be carried out regularly, continuously, and flexibly with many synchronous measures such as mobilizing, encouraging, and attaching the university's responsibility to the faculties, subjects, and lecturers sent for training and cultivating.

Based on popular models to measure service quality globally, the paper proposes an applied model to evaluate service quality and its relation with student satisfaction at private schools. The proposed model and observed variables can be used in educational institutions to assess training quality and student satisfaction. Thanks to that, schools will effectively plan to use resources for enhancing training quality and student satisfaction. From there, private institutions can build a brand and reputation, create a good competitive advantage, and develop sustainably in the future.

4. Limitations and directions for further research

The influence of four components in the quality of training service on student satisfaction at non-public universities is demonstrated in this study. However, these factors only account for 56.0% of the variation in learner satisfaction. As a result, many elements that affect learners' satisfaction at private universities have not been studied.

References

1. *Aga M. & Safakli O.V.* An empirical investigation of service quality and customer satisfaction in professional accounting firms: Evidence from North Cyprus // *Problems and perspectives in management*, 2007. № 5. Iss. 3. Pp. 84-98.

2. *Chua C.* Perception of quality in higher education. In Proceedings of the Australian universities quality forum. Melbourne: AUQA Occasional Publication, 2004.
3. *De Ruyter K., Bloemer J. & Peeters P.* Merging service quality and service satisfaction. An empirical test of an integrative model. *Journal of economic psychology*, 1997. № 18(4). Pp. 387-406.
4. *Fallows S. & Steven C.*, 2000. Building employability skills into the higher education curriculum: a university-wide initiative // *Education+ training*, 2000. № 42(2). Pp. 75-83.
5. *Hair J.F., Black W.C., Babin B.J. and Anderson R.E.* Multi VARiate data anlysis. 7th ed. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2010.
6. *Minh Dang Thi.* Policy on development of private universities in Vietnam. A doctoral thesis. Hanoi: National Academy of Public Administration, 2015.
7. *Owlia M.S. & Aspinwall E.M.* A framework for the dimensions of quality in higher education // *Quality Assurance in Education*, 1996. Vol. 4. № 2. Pp. 12-20. Doi: 10.1108/09684889610116012.
8. *Schneider M.*, 2002. Do School Facilities Affect Academic Outcomes? [Electronic Resource]. URL: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED470979.pdf>/ (date of access: 28.05.2021).