

# **TUTOR SERVICE QUALITY AND STUDENT SATISFACTION: A STUDY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY OF GHANA LEARNING CENTRES**

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*ABSTRACT:* This paper explores student satisfaction of tutor services provided at the University of Ghana Learning Centres specifically, Koforidua Learning Centre. A simple random sampling method was used to select current 150 undergraduate students pursuing varied degree programmes at the Koforidua Learning Centre. There was an observed significant relationship between the dimensions of service quality namely reliability, responsiveness, and empathy and student satisfaction in relation to tutors' service quality. Generally, the findings indicate that students for some specific programs were dissatisfied with tutor services at Koforidua Learning Centre. Overall, the findings indicate that the use of SERVQUAL outcomes may lead to improved tutor performance at the undergraduate level. Findings may also guide other Learning Centres of public higher education institutions in Ghana to put in place measures that will enhance the quality of services tutors provide.

*Keywords:* tutor services, Ghana, learning centre, satisfaction, SERVQUAL

In every higher education institution, the students are its major customers. Thus, the satisfaction of students relating to services provided is of paramount importance since there is competition for students both in the private and public sectors. The satisfaction of a customer is of paramount importance to any institution that provides service, and it is linked to the quality of service. Service providing institutions 'emphasize' the importance of service quality because in that situation, the relationship with existing customers is enriched while drawing new customers (Ugboma, Ogwude & Nadi, 2007). In higher education settings, it has been noted that a student is satisfied when expectations are met (Mark, 2013). A satisfied student will consistently attend lectures of a particular tutor and even encourage other students to sign up for modules of that particular tutor (Banwel & Datta, 2003). Thus, a satisfied student will invariably market the programs of a higher education institution and is thus regarded as a student ambassador. Research indicates that the quality of a service provided, will determine a customer's satisfaction (Hoisington & Naumann, 2003).

This survey is aimed at undergraduate students at a public higher education institution, namely University of Ghana Learning Centres (specifically, Koforidua Learning Centre). It explores the satisfaction of students about tutoring services provided at the Centre. Ghana currently has 24 public higher education institutions ([www.nab.gov.gh](http://www.nab.gov.gh)). Second, the number of students enrolled at this higher education institution has been fluctuating and the study's outcome may indicate measures, if any, that has to be put in place to enhance the tutoring process that may invariably increase enrollment figures at the Koforidua Learning Centre.

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The study attempts to determine student satisfaction with tutor services in a public higher education institution based on the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL research instrument, namely: reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy, and responsiveness (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Administrators of higher education institutions may find the outcome of this study 'beneficial'. Further, faculty members may also know what strategies to put in place in order to satisfy their students who are the clients of the higher education sector. Thus, the focus of this study can be defined as to what extent tutor service quality affect student satisfaction in a higher learning institution in Ghana.

### **Literature Review**

Students of higher education institutions can be satisfied or dissatisfied depending on the quality of service received, be it academic or support services. The quality of service a student receives will determine whether they will be retained and invariably become an ambassador for the institution by drawing other potential students. Varied research has been undertaken regarding student satisfaction in an academic institution.

Satisfaction is defined by Kotler and Keller (2012) as the 'feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing perceived performance in relation to the expectation.' Thus, customers will be satisfied when services provided is in consonance with expectations. However, the satisfaction of students in relation to the academics has been variously indicated. According to Appleton-Knapp & Krentler (2006), personal and institutional effects impact student satisfaction in the higher education environment. The personal factors include preferred learning style, employment and gender, while institutional factors refer to teaching style and quality of teaching. In Wilkins & Balakrishnan (2013) study, they identified quality of lecturers, physical facilities and effective use of technology as factors indicating student satisfaction. Further, student satisfaction in higher education institutions is impacted positively by course content, quality of feedback, lecturer-student relationship, interaction with fellow students, availability of learning materials, and library facilities (Garci a-Aracil, A., 2009; Sojkin et al., 2012].

To increase student satisfaction in a higher education institution it is essential that faculty embrace a student-centered learning approach where students become active learners rather than passive ones (Coskun, 2014). As a result of this, students will be more engage not only in academic work at the university but other aspects of university life which may lead to increased retention of students throughout the college years and thus increase graduation rates and low dropout rates. The positive impacts of a student-centered environment with supportive faculty include higher retention and graduation rates, which in turn impact the higher education institution when it comes to recruiting new students in the future.

According to the Danjuma & Rasli (2012) and Son, et al. (2018), there has been a recent trend in higher education institutions where institutions even publicly funded universities are embracing a private education model. In other words, institutions are found to be

leaning towards a privatization method where the university is the seller and student is the buyer (Coskun, 2014; Son et al., 2018). In this regard, while it may seem that the university is the only beneficiary of this model/system, the student is also a beneficiary given that they are able to obtain a return on investment in their education either in the form of completing their education, getting a job right after graduation or setting up their own business after graduation (Coskun, 2014). For a higher education institution, whether private or public, to remain competitive in the education market place, they must have a set of constructs that they abide by to improve their service quality, which will in turn increase student recruitment, higher retention rates, low dropout rates and, from a larger perspective, create a more educated society (Coskun, 2014). These constructs that higher education institutions must adhere to include the SERVQUAL scale that helps measure service quality under the themes of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Danjuma & Rasli, 2012).

### **Conceptual Framework**

The SERVQUAL model serves as a guide to this study about tutor service quality and satisfaction of students at University of Ghana's distance education unit at Koforidua Learning Centre. The SERVQUAL model was developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) over a five-year period to assess quality in the service sector. The quality of service was acknowledged to consist of five dimensions, namely: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. Thus, institutions use these dimensions to evaluate their quality of service. Thus, in applying this framework, Koforidua Learning Centre will apply these dimensions of service quality by focusing mainly on tangibility, empathy and responsiveness to evaluate the quality of service provided. When a student's expectations from a tutor in terms of tangibility, empathy and responsiveness are lower than what is perceived to have been received then the service quality is adjudged to be high. Notably, the outcome of this study will inform administrators and faculty about what can be done to enhance tutor service quality and student satisfaction. Invariably higher education institutions will have more data and information to increase enrollment by improving on tutor services to enhance student satisfaction.

Using the SERVQUAL model three hypotheses were tested:

H1: Reliability has positive effect on students' satisfaction with tutor services.

H2: Empathy has positive effect on students' satisfaction with tutor services.

H3: Responsiveness has positive effect on students' satisfaction with tutor services.

### **Methodology**

This research adapted Parasuraman et al (1988) SERVQUAL dimensions by examining reliability, empathy and responsiveness. The participants were distance education undergraduate students of the University of Ghana, specifically, Koforidua Learning Centre in the Eastern Region of Ghana. They consisted of 150 Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science in Administration, Bachelor of Science in Information Technology and

Bachelor of Nursing of varied levels namely 100, 200, 300 and 400. Institutional Review Board requirements were adhered to before questionnaires were distributed to the students. The questionnaire was piloted with 12 students drawn from all four levels at one of the Regional Learning Centres of the University of Ghana. The pilot enabled the researcher to indicate the reliability of the questionnaire items using the computation of Cronbach's alpha. In this study, the reliability of the constructs was above 0.7. Consequently, a simple random sampling was used to select 150 undergraduate students. Every third student for each level was randomly selected during an end of first semester tutorial session for the 2019/2020 academic year. This procedure provided each student with a fair chance of being selected. Paper questionnaires were administered to the students at the end of the first semester's tutorial sessions that the students had with various tutors at the Centre. On average, each participant completed the questionnaire within 20 to 30 minutes. Upon completion, the participants handed over the questionnaires to the researcher. The questionnaires focused on tangibility, empathy and responsiveness. Students' satisfaction with tutor services was a dependent variable while the service quality dimensions such as tangibility, empathy and responsiveness were the independent variable. The questionnaire that was administered to the students at the end of tutoring for the semester also contained Likert scale questions. A few of the questions were open-ended and students were offered the opportunity to provide narratives.

### **Findings**

A total of 150 undergraduate participants consisting of 55% male and 45% females responded to the questionnaires. The study used the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) to test the nature of the relationship between the key variables of interest as stipulated in the hypotheses.<sup>1</sup> The majority of the correlational output analysis indicated a positive and significant correlation between undergraduate students' satisfaction with tutor services and the three dimensions namely, reliability, empathy and responsiveness. This resonated with majority of undergraduate participants of varied levels at the Koforidua Learning Centre, University of Ghana. Thus, in some instances such as the Bachelor of Science in Administration courses, participants preferred some level of improvement in the services provided by tutors. There were further indications of dissatisfaction from participants regarding tutoring provided for some of the courses. Invariably, some of the level 200 Bachelor of Arts participants were dissatisfied by the services that some of their tutors provided for their courses. Participants indicated more practical hands-on activities which some of the tutoring lack. Majority of level 400 participants in the Bachelor of Arts class indicated that they would have preferred practical demonstrations of some of the theories learnt. Another level 200 Bachelor of Science in Administration participant wanted an increase in time slots given to tutors to teach. Overall participants indicated the need to improve the output of the SAKAI Learning Management system that is used to complement the limited tutor face-to-face teaching. In Wilkins and Balakrishnan's (2013) study, they identified quality of lecturers, physical facilities and effective use of technology as factors indicating student satisfaction.

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<sup>1</sup> The test was conducted at 0.05 confidence level.

## Conclusion

A positive student satisfaction model at a public higher education institution is a salient feature that enhances an increase in the enrollment figures of institutions. Students are now considered clients or customers that need to be satisfied. Assessing tutor service quality and undergraduate student satisfaction at University of Ghana's Koforidua Learning Centre has enabled the institution to know what services to improve upon as well as what its students require in order to be competitive. Further, increasing privatization of higher education institutions has led to competing forces among public higher education institutions. It has further improved service quality, physical facilities, branding and a more empathetic, reliable and responsive learning environment.

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