MODERNIZING UNIVERSITY SERVICES IN UZBEKISTAN: A SERVQUAL FRAMEWORK APPROACH

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Abstract. *Purpose – This study aims to assess service quality in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Uzbekistan through the SERVQUAL framework. It examines the impact of five critical service quality dimensions—reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness—on student satisfaction.*

Design/methodology/approach – Employing a quantitative survey approach, data were collected from 1,200 students using a structured questionnaire distributed via email, Telegram, and in-person. The SERVQUAL dimensions were validated through reliability analysis and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Statistical methods, including regression analysis, were applied to test the relationships among the dimensions and their effects on service quality.

Findings – The results demonstrate that punctuality of classes (reliability), staff professionalism (tangibles), and financial transaction accuracy (assurance) significantly influence student satisfaction. Responsiveness and empathy also play important roles, albeit with mixed feedback. The SERVQUAL dimensions collectively explain a significant portion of the variance in service quality perceptions.

Practical implications – The findings underscore the need for HEI administrators to allocate resources for modernizing infrastructure, enhancing staff training, and improving non-academic services to bridge service quality gaps. Prioritizing reliability and tangibles can yield immediate improvements in student satisfaction.

Originality/value – This study is among the first to adapt the SERVQUAL model to the higher education context in Uzbekistan, providing actionable insights for HEIs in transitional economies. The findings offer a scalable framework for evaluating and enhancing service quality across similar settings.

Keywords*: service Quality, SERVQUAL Model, Higher Education, Student Satisfaction, Uzbekistan*

Introduction. Service quality has emerged as a pivotal factor for achieving a competitive edge in higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly in transitional economies such as Uzbekistan. As educational institutions undergo reforms to align with global standards, assessing service quality from the students' perspective becomes essential (Utkirov, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d, 2024e, 2023).

The SERVQUAL model, introduced by Parasuraman et al. (1988), evaluates service quality through five key dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, and empathy. This study seeks to:

1. Tailor the SERVQUAL model to the unique context of higher education in Uzbekistan.
2. Identify the dimensions that most significantly impact student satisfaction.

3. Provide actionable recommendations to improve service quality.

By pursuing these goals, the study aims to address the challenges HEIs face in delivering education that is focused on student needs.

Data and Methods

Sample:

The research involved 1,200 students from various HEIs across Uzbekistan, ensuring a broad representation of service quality perceptions.

Data Collection:

A structured questionnaire, based on the SERVQUAL framework, was used to gather data. Respondents evaluated service quality using a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "Strongly Disagree" and 7 indicated "Strongly Agree."

Instrument:

The questionnaire, designed to measure the five SERVQUAL dimensions (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988, 1990), included items such as "Lectures are conducted according to the schedule without delays" (Reliability) and "Classrooms are equipped with modern technical tools for teaching" (Tangibles). To maximize participation and ensure diverse responses, the survey was distributed through multiple channels: Telegram, leveraging its popularity among students; email, targeting institutional mailing lists; and in-person distribution, using paper-based questionnaires at university campuses. This multi-modal approach facilitated the inclusion of varied perspectives and enhanced the overall robustness of the data collection process (Utkirov, (2025c).

Research Framework

Table 1 outlines the primary dimensions that impact service quality, as highlighted in the literature, along with their definitions and corresponding references. These dimensions—reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, and empathy—are fundamental elements of the SERVQUAL model, as defined by Parasuraman et al. (1988).

Table 1. Factors influencing service quality

S. No.	Dimension	Meaning	References
1.	Reliability	Consistently providing services as promised with precision and reliability (Parasuraman et al., 1988).	(Hoque et al., 2023) (Fuchs et al., 2022)
2.	Responsiveness	Being proactive and responsive in assisting customers and delivering services promptly (Parasuraman et al., 1988).	(Akhlaghi et al., 2012) (Nanda et al., 2015)
3.	Assurance	Demonstrating staff expertise, courtesy, and the ability to foster trust and credibility (Parasuraman et al., 1988).	Akhlaghi et al., 2012, Mey et al., 2006, Alumran et al., 2020. (Nanda et al., 2015)
4.	Tangibles	Maintaining high standards for physical infrastructure, equipment, and the professional appearance of staff (Parasuraman et al., 1988).	(Auka, 2012) (Fuchs et al., 2022)
5.	Empathy	Prioritizing personalized care and attention to meet the unique needs of customers (Parasuraman et al., 1988).	(Alumran et al., 2021) (Fuchs et al., 2022; Nanda et al., 2015)

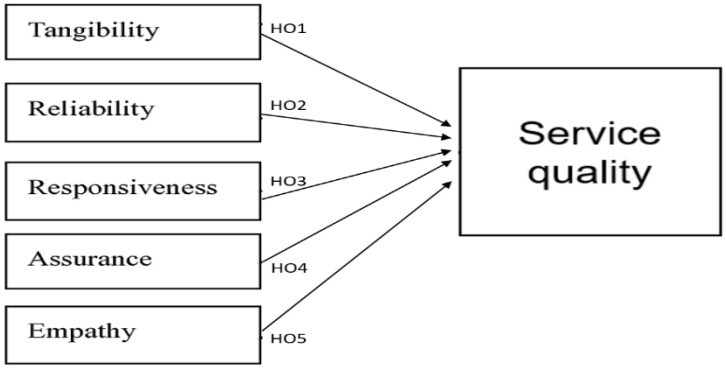
1. **Hypothesis 1 (HO1):** The quality of physical facilities, equipment, and the appearance of staff positively influences customers' perceptions of service quality.
2. **Hypothesis 2 (HO2):** A service provider's ability to reliably fulfill promises with accuracy enhances the perceived quality of service.
3. **Hypothesis 3 (HO3):** The willingness and readiness to assist customers and deliver timely service positively affect perceived service quality.
4. **Hypothesis 4 (HO4):** Employees' expertise, courtesy, and ability to instill trust and confidence are strongly associated with higher perceptions of service quality.
5. **Hypothesis 5 (HO5):** Providing personalized and compassionate attention to customers significantly enhances their overall perception of service quality.
6. 

Figure 1: Visual representation of the study's conceptual framework

Source: Adapted from Parasuraman et al., (1988).

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework linking SERVQUAL dimensions—tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy—to service quality, as hypothesized in HO1 through HO5. Supported by Parasuraman et al. (1988) and further validated by studies such as Hoque et al. (2023) and Akhlaghi et al. (2012), the model highlights each dimension's direct and positive impact on perceived service quality (Utkirov, 2024b).

Main results

Key Findings

The SERVQUAL analysis highlighted key dimensions impacting service quality perceptions among students. High satisfaction was observed with **reliability**, particularly punctuality of classes (Mean = 4.92, SD = 1.61), and **tangibles**, where staff professionalism received the highest ratings (Mean = 4.93, SD = 1.73). **Assurance**, represented by financial transaction accuracy, also emerged as a critical factor in student satisfaction (Mean = 4.57, SD = 1.80). **Empathy**, reflecting positive communication between staff and students, demonstrated moderate satisfaction levels but indicated a need for improved student understanding (Mean = 4.44, SD = 1.75). However, **responsiveness**, particularly in non-academic services, received mixed feedback, highlighting areas requiring attention (Mean = 4.64, SD = 1.72). Overall, these findings emphasize the importance of focusing on staff professionalism, financial accuracy, and enhanced non-academic services to elevate service quality perceptions (table 2).

Table 2: Overview of SERVQUAL Dimensions and Statistical Outcomes

Dimension	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha	Key Observations
Reliability	4.92	1.61	0.842	High satisfaction with punctuality
Assurance	4.57	1.80	0.900	Importance of financial accuracy
Tangibles	4.93	1.73	0.866	Emphasis on staff professionalism
Empathy	4.44	1.75	0.911	Need for better student understanding
Responsiveness	4.64	1.72	0.925	Mixed feedback on non-academic services

Statistical Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) validated the SERVQUAL dimensions, with all components achieving eigenvalues greater than 1 and explaining a cumulative variance of 72.2%. Regression analysis further confirmed the significant influence of SERVQUAL dimensions on overall service quality, with an R^2 value of 0.753.

Implications

The findings emphasize the necessity of:

1. Strictly adhering to class schedules to improve reliability.
2. Prioritizing staff training to enhance assurance and empathy.
3. Improving non-academic services to address gaps in responsiveness.

Discussion

The study aligns with global research underscoring the importance of reliability and tangibles in educational service delivery, while also highlighting unique challenges specific to Uzbekistan, such as irregularities in non-academic support and outdated teaching materials (Utkirov, (2025d). Overcoming these issues will require investments in modern infrastructure and technology, regular training for academic and non-academic staff, and the establishment of robust feedback mechanisms to continuously improve service delivery. The SERVQUAL model demonstrated its effectiveness as a tool for evaluating service quality in Uzbek HEIs, providing a scalable framework applicable to similar contexts.

Conclusion

This research validates the application of the SERVQUAL model in Uzbekistan's higher education system and identifies critical dimensions influencing service quality. Addressing these gaps will enhance student satisfaction and help align institutional practices with international standards. Future studies should consider longitudinal analyses of service quality trends and include insights from faculty and administrative staff to provide a more comprehensive perspective.

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