
DELIVERY AND PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION OF THE BACHELOR OF ARTS DEGREE IN SOCIAL SCIENCES OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA - ASSESSMENT OF SERVICE QUALITY

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Abstract

The Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences is one of the undergraduate degrees offered by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Open University. This study evaluates how student profiles impinge on student expectations and their perceptions pertaining to quality of services offered by the faculty. The study is based on the premise that distance students are mature adults who self finance their educational pursuits and whose expectations in relation to service quality are different from those of conventional university students. The study reveals that profiles of adult students significantly impact on their expectations and that in the case of the BA in Social Sciences, the faculty has been successful in exceeding student expectations with respect to quite a number of priority areas of services. Based on the findings of the study a few recommendations are presented for implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Management of quality emerged as one of the central themes of university education in the last decade (Stiles, 1992; Kells, 1992). The decline in public confidence in higher educational institutions on the one hand and the gradual decrease in budgetary appropriations in many countries, on the other, contributed to this pressure for revival of quality (Burkhalter & Muse, 1995; James, 1995). Yet, much of the emphasis was on quality assurance through academic accreditation aimed at ensuring the recognition of educational qualifications both nationally and internationally¹. The voice of the student was rarely accommodated in most of these discussions and hence there was very little concern about student expectations and student perceptions of the quality of the services offered².

The issue of service quality is particularly important in the context of distance education where the students play multiple roles as the products, inputs, customers, financiers and the ultimate beneficiaries (Clare, 1994)³. This paper attempts to assess service quality of the BA degree program in social sciences, in terms of its ability to live upto and exceed student expectations in both, the delivery of the program and its administration⁴.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The principal objective of this paper is to examine the level of service quality of the BA degree program administered by the department of social studies. The supplementary objectives of the paper includes 1) identification of student characteristics which have a strong influence on student expectations pertaining to service quality, 2) establishing benchmark expectations of students, and 3) evaluating performance of the study programs in relation to the identified benchmark expectations.

The paper is divided into three parts. Part one reviews existing literature on service quality pertaining to university education in particular with a view to providing the conceptual framework of the study. Part two presents the findings of the study while part three discusses the above findings in relation to the conceptual framework in order to ascertain how the quality of the degree program could be improved and to help identify future research priorities.

PART I

The emergence of education as a service industry can be traced back to the past decade, which enabled open discussion by academics, educational planners and researchers on issues pertaining to customer satisfaction (Geddes, 1993). In such discussions university staff was led to believe that they belong to a customer/supplier chain of relationships, in which the “worker”⁵ is a supplier who should aim at meeting customer expectations as fully as possible. The question then shifted to the identification of the customer in university education.

However, more recent literature has attempted to portray the student as the main customer, as far as university education is concerned (Brannigan *et al.*, 1992; Clare, 1994). University students, in fact, are customers because of their capacity to influence the programme mix by way of choosing relevant courses and rejecting others, which fail to make acceptable service quality standards. This is more so when they are called upon to pay for higher education.

Another important reason for this argument is that in learner-centered education the needs of the learner constitute the basis of all activities and hence the student is at the center as the final customer (Garvin, 1991). This

description is particularly apt in respect of the students following the BA degree in social sciences at the Open University of Sri Lanka.

It is in this broad framework that the role of the student as the customer became important in the discussions on quality. Initially, these discussions were based on student opinion surveys to identify shortfalls in the quality of teaching, in library facilities and other services provided by the universities (Clare, 1994). The coverage of quality issues in university education today is in fact centered round a number of questions, i.e., who is the customer, what are his expectations, how can the university satisfy them, how do students perceive and rate University services, and how do these ratings affect University policies. The answers to these questions highlight the importance of customer satisfaction, which has become one of the all-important activities in the quality improvement programs of universities.

In this context 'quality' encompasses a wider meaning of 'delighting the customer' (Kotler, 1998). This can only be achieved by ascertaining customers' quality goals and by 'exceeding' them in the endeavor to provide the best of what matters the most (Kanji & Kondo, 1988). Quality therefore is a drive to be best at what matters most to customers, which in other words means continuous improvement of products and services.

The identification of customer expectations and improving service quality of the BA degree program therefore should involve three logical steps.

- an attempt to identify the salient characteristics of the student community, because they have a bearing on customer expectations. Accordingly the building of student profiles and classifying students into groups are important steps in this direction.
- identification of benchmark expectations with respect to service quality.

Assessment of Service Quality - BA in Social Sciences. *OUSL Journal*. Vol.3. 2001
Vidanapathirana, Morais and Dorabawila

- customer ranking of performance should be compared with benchmark expectations to identify possible gaps.

Figure 1 below sets out how these steps are related in terms of key concepts and processes.

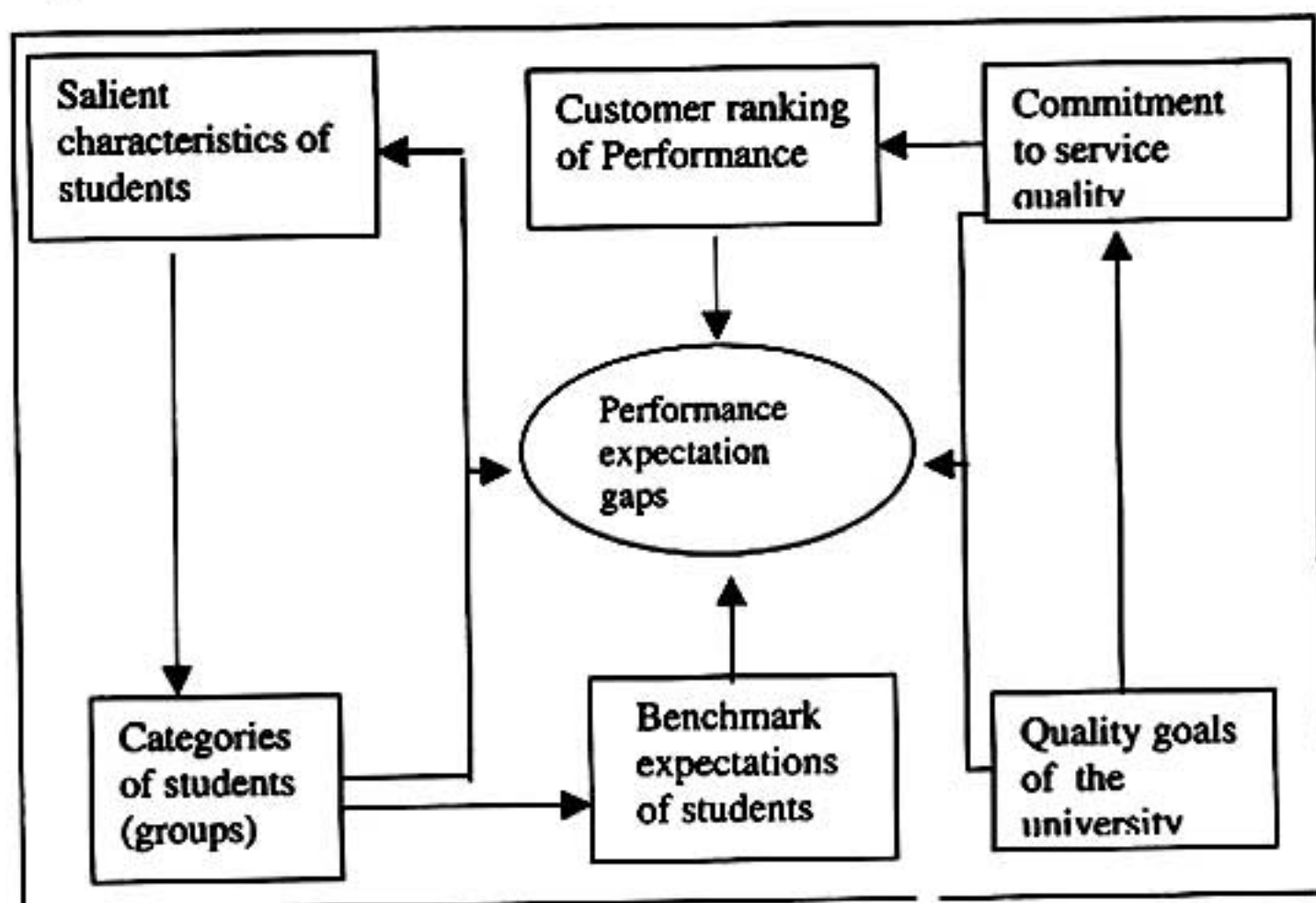


Figure 1 - Service quality model giving key concepts and processes

The model developed by the authors described how student characteristics could be used to develop classifications of students into typologies (groups). It is postulated that benchmark expectations of students vary depending on their characteristics that result in broad types of classifications into groups.

Three major types of characteristics pertaining to personal data, educational and employment data, place of residence, medium of study, and other features peculiar to the university itself have been used by a number of researchers to ascertain student profiles (Jayatileka *et al*, 1997; Woodley *et al*, 1992; Gamaathige & Dissanayake, 1999). For this study, researchers

collected additional details on schools attended, proficiency in English, occupational status, marital status, income levels and purpose of enrollment into the program.

This was done because it was postulated that a student with a middle class family background, resident in Colombo, with good educational qualifications and language competency had different expectations from another student who was from a radically different social and economic background.

The authors believed that benchmarking provides important pointers to future directions of quality for any institution. However, benchmark expectations change with time, changes in the socioeconomic environment, and with competitors' responses to changing environment (Zairi & Leonard, 1994).

As students compare their expectations with actual performance, service quality levels could lead to a combination of positive or negative gaps between expectations and performance. Parasuraman has identified five types of gaps between customer expectations and the perceived performance (Parasuraman *et al*, 1985). When performance fails to meet benchmark expectations negative gaps occur, which can cause frustration. Conversely, positive gaps occur when performance exceeds benchmark expectations and these give rise to customer delight.

The association between customer characteristics and the benchmark expectations of students is found to be very strong. The benchmark expectations are the central quality concerns of the customers. Studies done elsewhere have identified bundles of "benchmark quality attributes" that include access, completeness, responsiveness, communication, courtesy, empathy, and reliability. (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991).

This paper reclassified the above “generic attributes” under five major categories of activities performed by the University. They included, a) day school interactions, b), presentation of study materials, c) assessment and feedback mechanisms, d) internal coordination, and e) the effectiveness of services provided by the other auxiliary departments such as student affairs, and regional services.

For each of the five generic attributes, four statements of expectations were developed. They are given in Table I. A corresponding set of statements was developed setting out performance levels so that the students could indicate their ratings. The students were required to rate each of them on a four-point scale ranging from very good to very poor.

The benchmark expectations identified for the study are given in Table 1 below.

Indicators of Benchmark expectation

- (a). Day school interactions (Responsiveness)**
 - 1. Teacher should be knowledgeable and prepared to discuss topics specified for the day
 - 2. Teacher should be lively and encourage student to seek clarification
 - 3. Teacher should be clear and understandable in his/her explanations
 - 4. Day school teacher should be punctual and consistent

- (b). Presentation of study materials (Completeness & Communication)**
 - 5. Concepts listed in the lessons should be clearly described with examples
 - 6. Topics listed in the lessons should be adequately covered
 - 7. Topics and activities should be directly related to the objectives indicated
 - 8. Technical terms need to be explained in simple language

- (c). Assessment and feedback mechanisms (Communication & Reliability)**
 - 9. The examiner should provide general comments about the expected answer
 - 10. Marked scripts should be received within one month of submission
 - 11. Grading should be justified with comments
 - 12. Grading should be fair

- (d). Internal co-ordination (Empathy & Access)**
 - 13. Co-ordinators should be available to meet and talk
 - 14. Co-ordinators should be friendly
 - 15. Co-ordinator should be understanding/with empathy
 - 16. Co-ordinator should be a prompt informant of changes

- (e). The effectiveness of the services provided by other departments (Courtesy & Completeness)**
 - 17. University should provide library facilities
 - 18. University should provide well arranged lecture halls
 - 19. Administrative staff should be easily reached over the phone and in person
 - 20. Water and other conveniences should be easily accessible

Table 1 - Statements outlining expectations

Methodology

A six-paged questionnaire was administered among the first year (level III) students of the BA program, which consisted of a population of eighty-seven students. The questionnaire contained three parts. Part I covered background information necessary to identify student characteristics. Part II consisted of information on student expectations under the five broad groups of benchmarks (See Table I). Part III contained a set of questions to assess program delivery and administration quality of work in the eyes of the students. This was based on a set of positive statements, which the students were supposed to rank in the order of importance. (See Table II)

However, only thirty returns (34%) were in usable form⁶. Data so gathered was supplemented, with other information collected through discussions with the students who attended day schools, and teachers and the coordinators of the program.

PART II

Characteristics of students

The average age of students surveyed was 37 years and 9 months with a median of 38 years and a standard deviation of 13 years and 2 months. It was seen that on the average the BA degree program caters to a student population of mature-adults. However, the age distribution of students was relatively skewed towards youth in the twenties with a skewed statistic of 0.466 and a standard error of 0.427. The high standard deviation of 13 years showed that this programme catered to a heterogeneous group of students.

Of the students surveyed, about 57 per cent were married; with an average family size of 3.2 members. As many as 65per cent of the students were

employed at the time of the survey, and many of them were found to be holding managerial or supervisory positions in the public, private or non-governmental sectors.

The place of residence of students showed that about 63 per cent were from Colombo while 17% were from Gampaha, 13%, from Kandy, and 7% Matara. About 60 percent of the students have had their pre university education in IAB category of schools⁷. Most of the students were exempted (53%) from following additional English courses while others (47%) were following part two and part one of the English for Social Sciences course.

The significance of these characteristics could be viewed in two contexts. First, the majority of the students who were in the first year of the BA degree program had a middle class urban outlook. Second, these students were very different from those following the first and second years of the Foundation Program, which is one of the main entry routes to the degree program. For instance students who enrolled in the Foundation Program in the first three years, according to Gamaathige and others, were largely rural based in terms of residence (60%) and their medium of study was Sinhala (76%) (Gamaathige & Dissanayake, 1999; Jayatileke *et. al*, 1997).. One reason for this difference could have been the direct recruitment of students with other qualifications for the academic year 1999/2000.

It was found that the age of students had an important bearing on student characteristics. For instance, age affects occupational and civil status, positions held, income levels, family size, stage of family life cycle, and expectations of students. Therefore it was thought that student typologies based on age distribution and average age data could provide some useful insights into student profiles and resultant expectations. This exercise yielded three discernible student groups as follows.

Group A

Group A included those students who were below 35 years, with a mean age of 26 years and 5 months and a standard deviation of 5 years and 3 months. About 78 per cent of these students were females and about 64 per cent of them were single. This group signified a large number of young students (50%) who are below 24 years, and about 42 per cent of them were unemployed. About 50 per cent of them were from the Colombo district with about 78 per cent having studied in IAB schools.

Many of these students followed the program primarily to earn a degree, to enhance their social status. The meetings the researchers had with them showed that this group of students was different in terms of their attire, (denim jeans, and bright colored T-shirts and other garments) appearance, speech, behavior, and priorities in terms of their expectations. They were more sociable, and extrovert, and use English in their general conversation.

Group B

Group B consisted of a rather mixed group of students who were between 36 to 50 years of age with the mean age of 42 years and 2 months, and a standard deviation of 3 years and 9 months. This was basically a group of male students (70%) from Colombo (70%) married (80%) employed (80%) and in the middle of their family life cycles. Many of them were fathers of young children. They were mostly from IAB schools and these students held responsible jobs in the public or private sector.

They tend to be more formal both in their choice of dress and their attitude to teachers and fellow students. For instance they wear light colored attire, and they are more formal in their approach. Their aim in following the

degree programme was to enhance career mobility in their places of work and/or elsewhere in the same industry.

Group C

This group of students was above 51 years of age with the mean age of 57 years and 7 months and a standard deviation of 6 years and 5 months. This group consisted mostly of married-males (90%), living in Colombo (60%), and employed in the non-governmental sector. Many of them had got exemptions in the English grading test. They too had attended either IAB schools. Unlike in the other two groups, the main objective in enrolling in the BA program was acquisition of knowledge.

The expectations of the students were presented in the form of the twenty positive statements given in Table 1, where the students were requested to rank them in terms of order of importance. The weighted average scores of these ranks are given in Table II. It indicates the broad groups of expectations i.e., day school teaching (9.3) continuous assessment (8.8), auxiliary services (8.6), study material (8.57) and internal coordination (6.18) in terms of order of importance. Also it presents a list of fourteen benchmark expectations having more than 2.5 weighted average scores.

Benchmark expectation	Weighted average scores
1. The examiner to provide general comments about the expected answer	3.40
2. Coordinators are available to meet and talk	3.33
3. Teacher to be knowledgeable and prepared to discuss topics specified for they day	3.30
4. Concepts listed in the lessons should be clearly described with examples	3.20
5. Teacher to be lively and encourage student to seek clarification	3.17
6. University to provide library facilities	3.10
7. University to provide well arranged lecture halls	2.93
8. Topics listed in the lessons should be adequately covered	2.87
9. Teacher to be clear and understandable in his/her explanations	2.87
10. Coordinators are expected to be friendly	2.83
11. Marked scripts to be received within one month of submission	2.70
12. Grading to be justified with comments	2.70
13. Administrative staff to be easily reached over the phone and in person	2.57
14. Topics and activities should be directly related to the objectives indicated	2.50
15. Coordinator to be understanding/empathic	2.47
16. Coordinator to be a prompt informant of changes	2.30
17. Technical terms need to be explained in simple language	2.23
18. Grading should be fair	2.17
19. Water and other conveniences should be easily accessible	1.93
20. Day school teacher should be punctual and consistent	1.47

Table II - Statements outlining expectations and weighted average scores

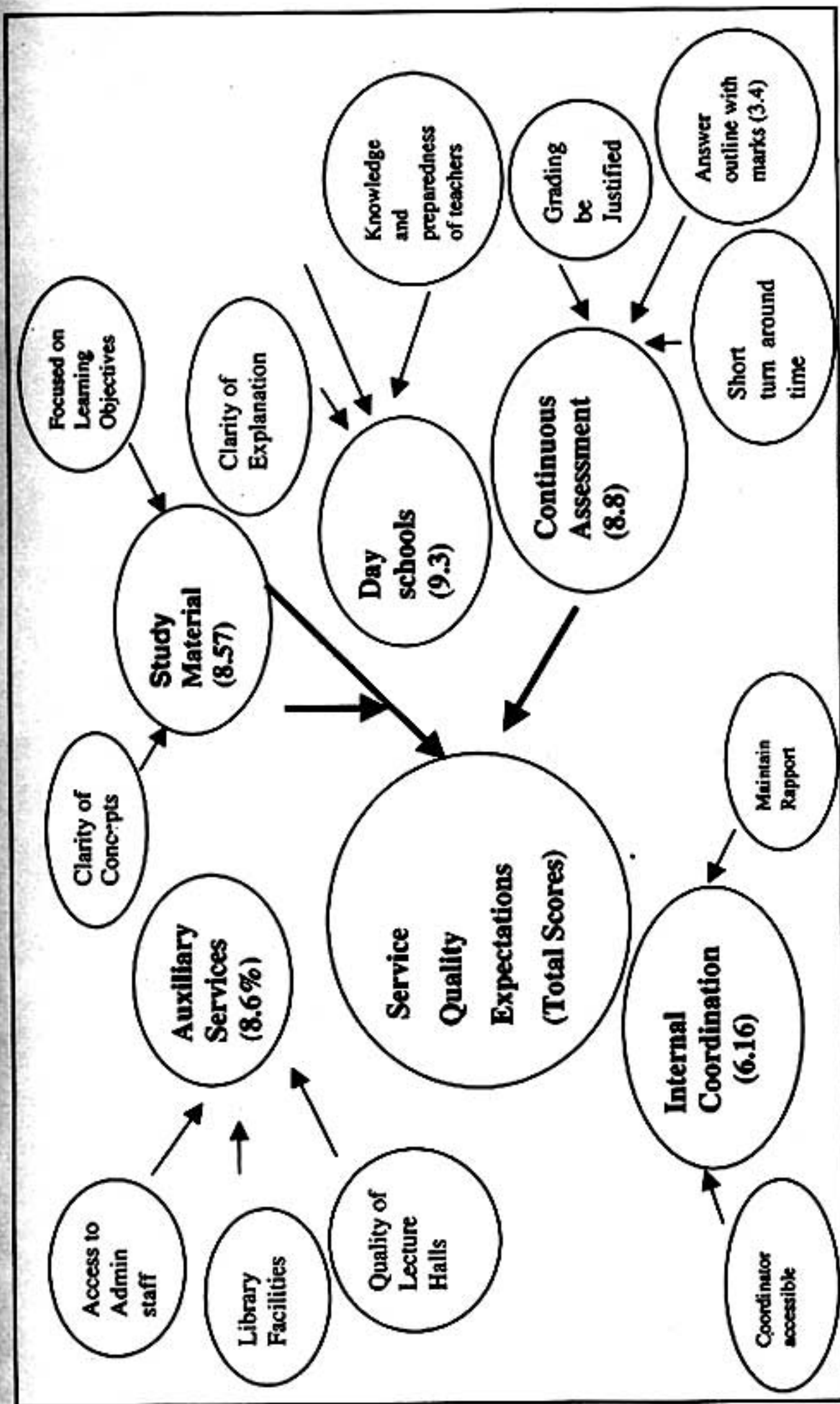


Figure II - Benchmark Expectations, Services and Scores

As given in table II the most important benchmark expectation was feedback from examiners (3.40) outlining major points to be covered in answers to continuous assessment scripts. In respect of continuous assessment, other important expectations were shorter turn around time, explanation of marks assigned and comments of the examiners. Another broad area of expectations which students consider important were, day school interactions, the knowledge and preparedness of the teachers, their teaching styles and clarity of explanations. Students were more concerned about definitions, clarity of description of concepts, suitability of examples, coverage of topics listed and whether they were related to the learning objectives listed in each of the lessons. These were the most important benchmark expectation of the students.

With respect to the auxiliary services provided by the University, students have identified access to library facilities, good lecture halls and access to administrative staff handling students' affairs, regional services and finance department of the university as more important. The discussions with students revealed that confusions often arose in connection with entries in student registration books, calculation of student fees, and location of classrooms and/or distribution of books. These were the services handled by the University administrative departments and it was reported that students often failed to contact responsible officers who could provide reasonable explanation and resolve their problems

Fourteen statements on quality, out of the total of twenty that had received more than 2.5 weighted average scores, were chosen as the benchmark expectations for the BA degree program. It was found that there was a connection between these expectations and student characteristics of the three different groups of students (see, Table III for details). They included changes in the order of importance as well as differences in the weighted-average scores received by the statements. For instance the number of

statements with weighted expectation scores exceeding 2.5 changed from ten, through fifteen, and to sixteen with respect to groups A, B and C respectively. Also teaching quality ranked number one for group A, while examination feedback ranked number one for group B. Conversely, study material ranked number one for group C.

The variations were extremely noteworthy for group C, where both groups A and B considered the expectation of greatest importance to this group the least important.

Statements denoting Benchmark Expectations*	Scores for the entire Sample	Scores for Group A	Scores for Group B	Scores for Group C
1. The examiner to provide general comments.	3.40 (1)	3.23 (3)	3.5 (1)	2.83 (5)
2. Coordinator's availability.	3.33 (2)	3.15 (4)	3.5 (2)	2.76 (10)
3. Preparedness and knowledge of teacher.	3.30 (3)	3.3 (1)	3.2 (8)	2.5 (11)
4. Clarity of study material.	3.20 (4)	3.3 (2)	3.4 (4)	2.83 (9)
5. Teacher to encourage interaction.	3.17 (5)	2.64 (8)	3.2 (9)	2.5 (12)
6. Need for library facilities.	3.10 (6)	3.0 (5)	3.3 (7)	3.0 (3)
7. Need for better lecture halls.	2.93 (7)	2.84 (7)	3.3 (6)	3.0(4)
8. Listed concepts should be described.	2.87 (8)	2.61 (9)	3.4 (5)	2.83 (8)
9. Ability of the teacher to explain lessons.	2.87 (9)		3.1 (8)	
10. Coordinator's willingness to help.	2.83 (10)	2.53 (10)	3.0 (11)	3.5 (2)
11. Short turn around time of assignments.	2.70 (11)		3.0 (12)	2.83 (6)
12. Grading of CA to accompany comments	2.70 (12)		3.1 (10)	2.83 (7)
13. Access to administrative staff to resolve problems	2.57 (13)	2.92 (6)		2.5 (13)
14. Learning objective to be covered by topics.	2.50 (14)		2.9 (13)	3.6 (1)

*An abridged version of the statements is given for want of space.

Table III - Benchmark Expectations and Student Typologies

Each of the above scores pertaining to benchmark expectations was then compared with the actual performance scores.

The actual performance scores given in column two of table II, were calculated by converting the student ratings of performance made on a four point scale of "excellent", "good", "fair", and "poor" having scores of four (4), three (3), two (2), and one (1) respectively. Table III presents comparison of performance scores, against benchmark expectation scores and the consequent gaps.

	List of Benchmark expectations	Expectation	Performance	Gaps
1	The examiner to provide general comments about the expected answer	3.40	2.83	-0.57
2	Availability of Coordinator	3.33	3.27	-0.07
3	Teacher should be knowledgeable	3.30	3.27	-0.03
	Concepts listed in the lessons should be clearly described with examples	3.20	2.86	-0.34
5	Teacher should be lively and encourage student to seek clarification	3.17	3.33	-0.17
6	Provision of library facilities	3.10	2.83	-0.27
7	Provision of well arranged lecture halls	2.93	2.93	0.0
8	Topics listed in the lessons should be adequately covered	2.87	3.56	0.69
9	Teacher should be clear	2.87	3.03	0.17
10	Friendliness of Coordinator	2.83	3.33	0.50
11	Turnaround time of one month	2.70	2.83	0.13
12	Grading to be justified with comments	2.70	2.8	0.10
13	Contact with administrative staff over the phone and in person	2.57	2.67	0.10
14	Topics and activities should be directly related to the objectives indicated	2.50	3	0.50
15	Understanding Coordinator	2.47	2.57	1.10
16	Prompt information on changes	2.30	3.27	0.97
17	Technical terms need to be explained in simple language	2.23	3.1	0.87
18	Fairness in terms of grading	2.17	2.93	0.77
19	Access to toilet and other facilities	1.93	2.9	0.97
20	Teacher should be punctual and consistent	1.47	2.23	.77

Table IV - Benchmark expectations, performance and weighted average scores

As given in table IV above the BA programme has failed in six out of twenty benchmarks, to meet or exceed customer expectations in terms of performance.

These negative gaps have occurred in the more important service quality elements with high expectation scores and include aspects such as detailed feedback from markers of assignments, access and availability of coordinators and preparedness of teachers to conduct dayschools. In the case of more important benchmark expectations, which were ranked from one to six, the performance scores have been below the level of expectation scores. For instance, with respect to continuous assessment marking, students had an expectation rating of 3.40, while the mean performance rating was 2.83 indicating a gap of 0.57. From the point of view of the students the university has failed to perform adequately in an area, which students considered as "very important".

However, the BA program has been successful in exceeding student expectations, in thirteen out of twenty service areas. More importantly, of the fourteen-benchmark expectations with scores of more than 2.50, the BA program has either equaled or exceeded student satisfaction in seven areas. A summary of expectation-performance scores and the test results are given below.

	No. of elements	Mean rank	Sum of ranks
Positive ranks	13	10.92	142.00
Negative ranks	5	8.00	48.0
Ties	1	--	--

Table V - Summary of analysis

Evaluation of performance of the study programme in relation to the identified expectations has been recognized as one of the main objectives. Therefore, this study uses a non-parametric test - the Wilcoxon signed-rank test to statistically identify the process of service delivery in meeting the student expectations.

This test was carried out on the total sample of 30 students. The probability value of the total test score 0.059 is less than 0.1 level of significance. This shows that there is a difference between what is perceived and what is expected. But if individual differences between the expected and the perceived are further analysed, a great number of the differences take positive values. By this one can conclude that services quality provided in general has exceeded the expectation.

Accordingly the Wilcoxon signed rank test was significant at .05 per cent level with a Z value of 1.892 and observed value of 0.059. This in other words, implies that the BA program has been successful in providing a high quality service in the chosen areas of lesson material development, day school interactions, continuous assessment and feedback, internal coordination and the overall administration of the programme.

PART III

This part discusses the significance of the findings of the study in terms of the conceptual model, study methodology, and limitations of the study.

The conceptual model presented in figure 1 showed the underlying variables that affect student expectations and the level of performance in benchmark services provided by the university. These variables determine the nature and intensity of student expectation pertaining to the study programme. It

was seen that with respect to the BA degree program, a host of student characteristics consisting of age, previous education, employment, sex, civil status etc. had contributed to development of three discernible typologies of student groups.

The study identified twenty expectations under five broad categories of service quality i.e. study materials, teaching, assessment and feedback, coordination and auxiliary services. Of them, fourteen (14) were short-listed based on the averaged weighted-scores received by them. However, student expectations seemed to be greatly influenced by the absence of major service elements. For instance, internal coordination received low scores partly because the students did not experience any breakdown of service during the recent past. In contrast, there was much anxiety among students about administrative lapses, which affected distribution and delivery of books, assignments, etc.

In addition those students who were relatively young (Group A) wanted marking schemes or outlines for assignment questions. They found it more difficult to understand study material and were more dependent on teachers' explanations given in the classroom. In contrast the relatively older group C was concerned about the learning objectives and the coverage of study materials, and non-availability of library facilities.

Another important finding was that not only did the expectations vary depending on student profiles, but also varied overtime. Therefore it may be wrong to assume that older students always had a set of expectations, which contrasted with young students who had a different set of expectations. The possibility that expectations would change based on changing circumstances should not be discounted. For instance, although students were happy about the fairness of the marks they received, this could change overnight if something happened to undermine the credibility

of the examiners. Therefore there could be some expectations that are more issue based than typology based.

The study revealed the need for constant monitoring of the expectations-performance gaps by the university to make service quality improvements a reality. It was also found that the issues pertaining to service quality could be as important as issues pertaining to accreditation and other aspects of the quality assurance drives initiated by the university. The fact that the clientele of this programme consists of employed adults who make their own way in meeting the cost of education has a strong bearing on the future demand for courses, like the BA degree program. This in other words means that these students are the customers and it is the task of the university to provide a qualitatively superior service that can ensure a sufficient student numbers in the future.

The following figure spells out a set of four alternative strategies that could be pursued by the university to address those issues as pertaining to the BA degree program. It is seen that different expectations should be treated differently depending on the performance standards of the university.

		Performance levels	
		Poor	High
Expectation Priorities	High	<p>A Concentrate 1 4 6</p>	<p>B Keep up good work 2 3 5 7 9 11 12 13</p>
	Low	<p>C 8 10 14 16 17 18 19 20 Low priority</p>	<p>D 15 Possible over skill</p>

Figure 3 - Strategies for improving service quality [after Kotler (198)]

Quadrant A of the above figure deals with important service quality elements that need additional attention. For instance, students want a feedback in the form of a model answer that could enable them to secure full marks. Quadrant B shows important service quality elements and expectations where the university has been performing satisfactorily. The University should attempt to improve on the current level of services of these elements.

Quadrant C provides a list of low priority expectations, which the university had been performing well, while quadrant D provides a service quality element, which was given excessive attention in relation to its low expectation values. The matrix given above provides a useful window to select service quality priorities and improve on the current service levels of the BA degree programme.

One of the serious limitations of this study was the small size of the sample. However, as there were a number of questions on day school teaching, only those students who attended more than two days-schools were chosen for the sample. The second limitation arose from the fact that the students had to answer two similar questions, i.e. one on expectations and another on performance, which was somewhat confusing. This had an adverse impact on the number of usable returns.

This study concludes that the Open University of Sri Lanka needs to investigate the service quality issues of its study programmes, which require continuous monitoring by the departments and faculties that administer them. The framework used in this paper provides a methodology for such monitoring. In a context where distance education for adult students has become an intensely competitive affair than ever before, the need for a fresh approach with a focus on service quality can be imperative for the survival of most of the programmes offered by the Open University of Sri Lanka.

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- ¹ For instance, the Association of Commonwealth Universities launched the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education with a view to attain this objective.
 - ² Service quality deals with living up to and exceeding customer expectations by way of providing high quality services.
 - ³ Two batches of students completed this program in 1999 and 2000. These students studied Economics, Mass Communication and Sociology
 - ⁴ "Worker" refers to all actors in the customer supplier chain and, in the context of distance education this covers academic staff members, direct support staff and staff members providing auxiliary services as well
 - ⁵ The majority of the OUSL students are employed adults who pay for their education.
 - ⁶ The questionnaire was posted to the entire population of 87 registered students at level III. Many students did not return the questionnaire despite numerous reminders. Of the returns only 30 were complete and in usable form
 - ⁷ The list of reputed schools includes Anula Vidyalaya, Holy Family Convent, Ladies College, St. Bridget Convent, Methodist College, St. Clare's and Ananda Balika. The fairly known schools include Vidyarthi, St. Xavier's, Sujatha, St. Benedicts, and Yasodara Balika

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Vidanapathirana, Morais and Dorabawila**