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The Effect of the Service Quality Provided by Saudi Universities on Students' Satisfaction: A Marketing Approach

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Abstract. Service quality, informed by a detailed understanding of students' needs and demands, has become an increasingly important concept in the marketing of higher educational institutions worldwide. Currently, however, the Saudi higher education sector, which has grown rapidly since its formal inception in 1975, is receiving criticism that its teaching provision is inadequate and its research output limited. To throw light on this situation, and remedy to some extent the dearth of extant research in this area, this paper examines Saudi students' satisfaction with the quality of various aspects of their university experience and the relationship of those aspects to their perceived learning outcomes, by means of a survey based on the SERVQUAL model carried out among 364 students attending 5 universities in Saudi Arabia. Among the findings, it was discovered that although instructor characteristics, course content and classroom environment influenced students' perceived learning outcomes to a similar degree, only instructor and classroom environment influenced student satisfaction; course content was seen as less important than either, albeit the curricula offered for humanities subjects were generally perceived as more satisfactory in terms of primary knowledge provided than those offered for sciences. Satisfaction ratings were lowest for instructors and for the notion that, given the choice of repeating their studies, respondents would choose the same university. These latter results in particular suggest that at least some of the criticism leveled at Saudi universities may be valid, and that there is much the universities can do to improve their service quality and thus attract more students.

Keywords: Service quality, SERVQUAL, customer satisfaction, Saudi Arabia, higher education, universities, students.

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia

It may be said that higher education in Saudi Arabia, as it is now, is characterized by two overarching factors: enormous growth over a very limited timeframe, and the country's cultural norms and values. The latter, which include the centrality of Islam, didacticism, isolationism, gender segregation and a profound respect for tradition, are increasingly at odds with the country's desire to establish itself as a globally-recognized center of academic excellence.

Sixty years ago there were no universities in Saudi Arabia; today there are thirty-three, most of which were founded in the last decade, many being still under construction (Smith and Abouammoh, 2013). From the opening in 1957 of King Saud University in Riyadh, with just twenty-one students, the number of students in higher education in Saudi Arabia grew to over a million in 2012 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012), and continues to increase. Teaching provision has likewise expanded but at a lesser rate, largely because of the time involved in training enough teachers, who themselves are former students, sufficiently rapidly and thoroughly so as to meet the ever-growing demand for their instructional services. This gap between service demand and its provision is exacerbated by the Ministry's current policy of dramatically increasing the number and range of postgraduate courses on offer, and may also be affected by the mode of teaching employed in Saudi Arabia.

In western universities, teaching is student-based; the onus is on the student to acquire knowledge and interpret it so as to form opinions and theories, the tutor/lecturer facilitating this process rather than dominating it. In developing countries, however, teachers play a far more active role, and this is particularly the case in Saudi Arabia, where rote-based learning is the norm: 'for most Saudi academics, this is the only pedagogical paradigm to which they have ever really been exposed' (Smith and Abouammoh, 2013, p 186). This method of teaching, with its emphasis on factual knowledge and its necessarily rigid curriculum, is not only resource-heavy and inappropriate in a higher education context, but is argued to have a negative effect on Saudi students' learning outcomes (as of 1990, 25-30% were estimated to have failed their courses (Smith and Abouammoh, 2013) and, inevitably, on the country's academic publication rates, which are lower than those for most Middle Eastern countries (Smith and Abouammoh, 2013).

Alongside rigidity in teaching and curricula, there is rigidity in governance. Most universities in Saudi Arabia (twenty-four in 2010) are publicly-owned, and all are governed by the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education, established in 1975; policy decisions are therefore made centrally, rather than by individual universities. Although there are advantages to this, such as that higher education is free to all (which brings its own problems, in that the universities struggle to provide adequately for the growing numbers of

students) and generous funding is readily available, it limits universities' entrepreneurial activities and their responsiveness to the needs of their students.

There are, however, considerable grounds for optimism, not least in the numbers of Saudi young people signing up for university courses in education (39% of enrolments in 2013 (Smith and Abouammoh, 2013)), which may point to a future narrowing of the gap between the demand for student teaching and its provision. From a governmental policy perspective, too, there have been great improvements. Women, for example, are increasingly well-served by Saudi higher education, as is reflected by their accounting for more than half of the enrolments in 2009-10 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012), and by the founding in 2007 of the all-female Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman University. There are also various initiatives in place, both across universities and within individual institutions, aimed at enhancing the country's higher education provision, particularly in terms of teaching. A further factor is the willingness of the government to provide scholarships enabling students to further their studies abroad in areas as yet uncovered for by Saudi universities, thus widening the country's curricular remit and exposing its students to less didactic forms of learning, and its drive to involve foreign academics in teaching and research. Underpinning all these strategies is the money and effort that is being put into the expansion and improvement of Saudi higher education, so as to better equip students for the demands of working life and also provide a system which balances cultural tradition and global progress.

1.2. Rationale for the Research

Despite, and to a great extent because of, its rapid expansion, the education sector in Saudi Arabia faces many challenges in creating a highly qualified workforce to meet workplace needs, both within and beyond the sector itself. In the past decade there has been increasing demand from Saudi educators that the efficiency of the education system be enhanced to meet current requirements (Smith and Abouammoh, 2013), both in the quality of its teaching and in the range of courses provided. Rising student numbers in Saudi Arabia, especially of undergraduates, have resulted in a high demand for well-qualified teachers and lecturers, which is accentuated by the introduction by many new universities of postgraduate programs such as Master's degrees and doctoral studies. However, because certain courses are as yet unavailable in Saudi universities, many Saudi students wishing to study computing, marketing or sciences prefer to take their degrees in foreign institutions (Smith and Abouammoh, 2013). The onus is therefore upon Saudi universities to address both the quality and breadth of the education they provide and their appeal to prospective students.

Because of increasing competition among universities worldwide, marketing has become an important concept for any institution of higher education. It has been recognized that a successful university is one which understands students' demands, wants and needs, which may be determined by examining students' satisfaction with the quality of services they receive. As

Hadikoemoro (2002) notes, in the education market, the service provided is the unique factor that differentiates a university from its competitors.

As knowledge of the perceived and desired levels of service can help institutions to develop appropriate competitive strategies, it is necessary for those levels to be measured if institutions are to formulate effective competitive strategies in international markets and target appropriate market segments (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2008). Moreover, because students are engaged directly in the education process, their observations on all aspects of their higher education experiences are crucial in examining the quality of education (Wan, 2009); the information and data obtained can help service suppliers and stakeholders to draw conclusions about the standard of service quality (SQ) in particular universities (Powell, 2007).

There has been to date no academic examination of students' opinions of the higher education they receive in Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, this study will examine service quality in Saudi universities from the perspective of Saudi students. It will explore Saudi students' learning outcomes and their satisfaction with Saudi universities, and determine whether or not Saudi students are content with their level of achievement. It also will identify the factors that affect Saudi students' satisfaction with the service quality provided by Saudi universities.

It is anticipated that the results of this paper will give the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia valuable strategic information concerning Saudi students' learning outcomes and their perceptions of SQ within Saudi universities. It is also expected that Arab and foreign universities, both inside and outside the Kingdom, could use this research to improve their service quality so as to satisfy their students, particularly those from Saudi Arabia, and thus attract more customers. The detailed nature of the findings is expected to help academic institutions to determine areas in which they need to improve performance and utilize their resources more effectively. Finally, it is anticipated that this research will by these means help universities in Saudi Arabia to raise their quality standards and enhance their learning and teaching environments.

1.3. Approaches to Measuring Service Quality in Higher Education (HE)

Because 'service' is intrinsically intangible, it is difficult to measure the quality of any particular service; however, measurement is vital in a services market, as service quality is the most important way of distinguishing between competitors (Ham, 2003).

In this context, 'quality' can be identified in terms of an innate standard of excellence or with reference to customer satisfaction (Wicks and Roethlein, 2009). Whichever approach is adopted, transcendent or "innate" quality or user-based quality, it is important to recognize that, as Welch (2000) argues, the concept of quality cannot be separated from the set of values and form of culture prevailing in a society. This means that conceptions of quality are socially constructed, differ in different periods and vary according to their political and

cultural context. Even within a given society, and at the same period, there are differences in customer needs and expectations in different contexts. Since these contexts necessarily include the various industries that cater to customers, there arise industry-specific variations in the concept of quality. According to Piscopo (2013), it is important to define quality by the specific industry attributes that generate customer satisfaction for that particular industry or for the specific business in which an organization within that industry is engaged. Taking the argument further, it therefore follows that the definition of quality within the context of a specific organization depends on the organization's purpose, customer base and other relevant factors (Brooks, 2005).

Quality in the education industry has therefore been evaluated in different ways. Hoy et al. (2000) define quality in education as "an evaluation of the process of educating which enhances the need to achieve and develop the talents of the customers of the process, and at the same time meets the accountability standards set by the clients who pay for the process or the outputs from the process of educating" (p.10). This emphasis on “customers” and “clients’ implies that quality in education is strongly related to students' achievements. From this perspective, it can be argued that education quality is achieved when students acquire appropriate skills and enhanced mental, physical and social abilities (Ochuba, 2009). However, this definition of education quality may be overly simplistic. Worthen and Berry (2002) contend that the term ‘quality’, as it is used in the context of higher education, is not neutral, nor does it denote a single, homogeneous construct, but is rather an operative term encompassing a range of potentially competing values. They argue that unless quality is broken down into its constituent parts, there is a danger that it will be selectively interpreted and measured so as to serve the interests of the stronger party in any negotiation.

Given the intangibility of ‘service’ and the variability in the definition of ‘quality’ as it applies to higher education, it is important that service quality in relation to Saudi universities be measured as precisely as possible. There are two commonly-used approaches when measuring service quality, of which SERVQUAL, developed by Parasuraman et al. (1991, 1994), is the most popular. SERVQUAL identifies SQ as being composed of five dimensions: tangibles, responsiveness, assurance, reliability, and empathy. The difference between the expectations and the service perceived by the customer is the measure of service quality that a firm delivers to its customers, which affects customer satisfaction (Figure 1).

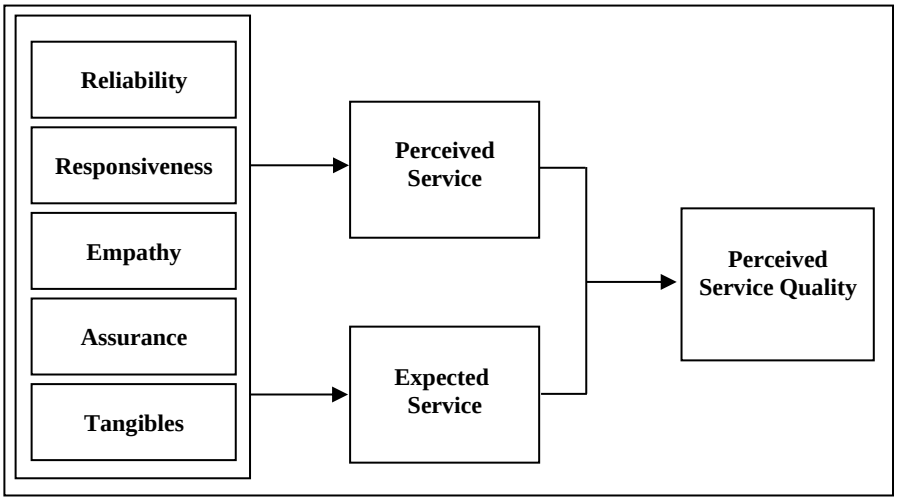

Figure 1: The SERVQUAL model
(source: Parasuraman et al. 1991, 1994)

The second frequently-used means of measuring service quality is SERVPERF, which is simpler and more straightforward, evaluating only the current level of performance. Both SERVQUAL and SERVPERF have been used extensively in higher education (HE) settings. Most of these studies have examined only perceived performance, although Hadikoemoro (2002) and Barnes and Bradley (2007) have also investigated expectations. When SERVQUAL has been used in an HE context, the instruments have contained additions and or modifications, resulting in some differences in dimensionality. For example, Jusoh et al. (2004) found six dimensions, of which two (Tangibles and Reliability) corresponded to SERVQUAL, two (Competence and Attitude) were similar, but not identical to SERVQUAL's Assurance and Empathy, and the other two (Content and Delivery) were new. The dimensionality of Yang's (2003) study corresponded to SERVQUAL, except that Responsiveness was replaced with Commitment, while Barnes and Bradley (2007) created two new dimensions, Guidance and University. Such changes demonstrate the adaptability of SERVQUAL and SERVPERF to different contexts, but increase the difficulty of comparison across studies.

The study conducted by Yang (2003) involved students, teaching staff and managers. It was found that although perceptions varied significantly between students and service providers, particularly in relation to Tangibles, the competence and care of staff was generally seen as important. In contrast, Mai (2005) found IT facilities to be the most important tangible service and that Tangibles were the second most important dimension after students and teaching staff.

A few studies have examined SERVQUAL and SERVPERF ratings in relation to student characteristics. Jusoh et al.'s (2004) research among students in Malaysia found significant effects on perceptions of SQ of both year of study and race, but no relationship between students' SQ perceptions and their academic performance, while Stodnick and Rogers (2008), working in America, found that perceived SQ in higher education was linked to student learning.

Table 1, below, summarizes the most relevant studies that have used SERVQUAL and/or SERVPERF in a higher education setting.

Table (1). Summary of studies using SERVQUAL/SERVPERF.

Authors	Topic	Instrument/method Sample	Findings
Oldfield and Baron (2000)	Student perceptions of SQ in UK universities.	Adapted SERVPERF, 24 items. 333 respondents, all business and management students.	3 categories of quality need to be satisfied: Requisite, Acceptable and Functional.
Sohail and Shaikh (2004)	Dimensions used by business students in determining SQ in a Middle Eastern college.	Survey using 32 items reflecting 5 SERVQUAL dimensions. 310 students, representing 23% of the population.	Contact with staff, physical evidence and reputation are crucial to SQ.
Ham (2003)	Students' perceived SQ, satisfaction and behavioral intentions in US universities.	SERVQUAL (expectations and perceived SQ) + satisfaction, behavioral intentions (13 items). 400 students from 2 universities surveyed; 209 responses obtained.	Significant relationships between SQ, satisfaction and behavioral intentions.
Simmons (2006)	Student satisfaction with online courses in US.	22-items SERVPERF. 200 students from a private college. 42% response rate.	Student satisfaction is positively correlated to perceptions of instructor empathy and competence and website reliability. No relationship between satisfaction and students' learning style.
Barnes and Bradley (2007)	Expectations and perceptions of SQ among Chinese post-graduate students in the UK.	19 SERVQUAL-based items used in expectation and perception modes + 2 added dimensions: guidance and university (facilities). 102 Chinese business and management students. 69.39% response rate.	Gap between perceptions and expectations. University and reliability dimensions the most important to students. SERVQUAL appropriate for Chinese post-graduate context.
Jusoh et al. (2004)	Students' evaluation of SQ in education in Malaysia.	43 items covering 6 dimensions: tangibles, competence, attitude, content, delivery, reliability. 229 students at a University of Technology. 100% response rate.	Difference in quality perceptions by race and year of study, but not by course or gender. No significant relationship between academic performance and evaluation of SQ.
Hadikoemoro (2001)	SQ in Indonesian public and private universities.	28 items, modified from SERVQUAL (expectations and perceptions). 900 students surveyed; 611 responded.	Students in public and private universities had similar SQ expectations, but students at private universities rated perceived SQ higher than those at public

Authors	Topic	Instrument/method Sample	Findings
			universities. No significant differences in relation to students' demographic variables.
Mai (2005)	Comparison of students' satisfaction with SQ in the US and the UK.	20 items-19 for aspects of students' experience at university and 1 for overall satisfaction. 332 students from 20 US and 20 UK universities. 322 responses.	Most influential variables were overall impression of the school and overall impression of quality of education. The latter was significantly related to lecturers' capability and subject knowledge, IT facilities, and likelihood of qualification furthering student's career.
Yang (2003)	SQ in college and university physical education department in Taiwan.	22 items (revised SERVQUAL + 1 overall satisfaction). Factor analysis gave 5 dimensions: Commitment, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy, and Reliability. 648 students, 20 professionals, 12 chairmen.	Students and professionals rated Assurance first, followed by Tangibles. Students had negative perceptions of SQ, especially in Commitment. Gap analysis showed negative perceptions of Service Delivery gap, Management gap and Communications gap but positive perceptions of Information gap.
Harris (2002)	Testing viability of measuring education SQ by measuring gap between US student expectations and perceived service.	SERVQUAL (both expectation and perception modes). 460 students. 79% replied to the survey.	Reliability of SERVQUAL confirmed. Responsive, knowledgeable and caring service most important to students.
Greiner (2000)	Testing relationship between expected and perceived SQ and instructional quality in US higher education.	SERVQUAL. 360 students, of which 245 replied to the questionnaire.	Strong relationship between SQ and instructional quality. Instructional quality a separate construct from Educational Service Quality.
Hagy (2001)	Reliability and validity of SERVQUAL to measure perceptions of university housing program in USA.	Mailed questionnaire based on SERVQUAL. 1671 students, 107 managers in non-profit HE institutions. Student response rate: 21.6%. Manager response rate: 100%.	Support for psychometric performance of SERVQUAL. Differences in SQ perception related to gender and year of study. Gap between managers and customers' SQ, value and satisfaction explained 64 per cent of variance in willingness to recommend program.
Stodnick and Rogers (2008)	Student perceptions of SQ in US education.	19 items reflecting the 5 SERVQUAL dimensions (perceived performance only). Survey conducted online. 264 students in 6 classes. Response rate of 75%.	Reliability and validity of SERVQUAL confirmed. Scale explains significant amount of variances in student-related variables, including satisfaction and learning.

A number of the studies went beyond SQ and satisfaction to explore connections between these variables and behavior. Ham (2003) and Hagy (2001) both found SQ and satisfaction to be significantly associated with behavioral intentions (such as positive word-of-mouth), while Stodnick and Rogers (2008) found that perceived SQ in higher education was linked to student learning. Contrary to the latter, however, Jusoh et al. (2004) found no relationship between students' SQ perceptions and their academic performance.

Overall, these studies show that it is possible to modify or expand the instruments to reflect particular contexts, and indicate the scope for further examination of possible relationships between perceived SQ and other variables, including satisfaction and behavior.

1.4. Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Service quality is strongly related to customer satisfaction and thus contributes to the attraction and retention of customers in a competitive environment (Warren, 2011). As higher education has become increasingly globalized, competition between universities has become progressively fierce (Mai, 2005) as each tries to attract customers, in the form of students, onto its courses. In the light of this, students' satisfaction with the service they receive at university is a crucial element in the provision and marketing of higher education; as students are the customers, universities can achieve greater success by understanding their demands and meeting their expectations, particularly in the area of staff approachability, it having been observed that, in higher education, the interaction between students and staff is a powerful determinant of overall satisfaction (Negricea et al., 2012). Students' satisfaction with the service quality provided is an indicator of their future recommendation of the institution they attended, and this can be the best indicator of universities' future success (Cossentino, 2007). There is thus a need to evaluate and understand service quality from the students' point of view and thus help those responsible for education to develop the educational process in such a way as to close the gap between expected and perceived service quality and develop it to enhance students' satisfaction.

1.5. Student Satisfaction and Learning Outcomes

It has been argued that learning effectiveness has two basic aspects: human and design factors (Piccoli et al., 2001). Human aspects are related to students and instructors, while design aspects characterize such elements as technology, learner management, course substance, interaction in the classroom and learning environment (Peltier et al., 2003). Eom and Wen (2006) make a similar distinction between these two fundamental aspects, suggesting that a learning system can be viewed as the purposive interaction of several human and non-human units, which include teachers and teaching methods, curricula, classroom environments and visual aids. In this context, Cashion and Palmieri (2002) and Woods (2002) argue that a high level of instructor-student interaction is crucial to boost a sense of students' satisfaction with instructors and the educational process in general, an argument reiterated by Negricea et al. (2012).

Moreover, it is suggested that instructor communication as perceived by students, and course content as outlined by instructors, have positive effects on the perceived effectiveness of those instructors (Parayitam et al., 2007); it should be noted that teacher friendliness was rated the main factor in a survey of student satisfaction conducted by Hughes (1999), while Tschannen-Moran et al. (2006) found a significant link between teacher professionalism and student achievement; more particularly, Emiliani (2004) found instructor's speaking ability to be an important factor in student satisfaction in a business school context. Hadikoemoro (2002), moreover, postulates a relationship between educational effectiveness and student satisfaction; namely, that "students' achievement may, in turn, influence students' perception on the university's service quality" (p. 110).

Taken as a whole, these studies suggest that students' levels of satisfaction and their learning outcomes, which are extensively cited as measures of the efficiency of education systems (e.g. Hale et al., 2009; Lewis, 2011; Alavi et al., 1995; Graham and Scarborough, 2001; Simmons, 2006; Nyachae, 2011), are significantly affected by a set of interactive variables, which include their teachers' professional and communicative skills, and the various non-human elements in the education process. Among the latter, attention should be drawn to the effects on student achievement of the learning environment.

Whilst such effects may partly be explained by the way facilities or the lack of them practically facilitate or impede learning, there also seems to be an indirect effect through their impact on student behavior and attitudes. Absenteeism and disciplinary incidents, it has been noted, are more common in institutions where building quality is poor (Schneider, 2002). Moreover, the aesthetic qualities of the learning environment can contribute to positive learning outcomes by generating a sense of belonging and enthusiasm for learning (Jarman et al., 2004). Given this evidence of the relationship between building quality and student performance, it is necessary to take account of the physical environment within which learning takes place.

The importance of physical environment as a variable in determining student achievement is further emphasized by the argument that learner-instructor interaction is related to the classroom and to the learning environment in general. Groh and Fraser (1998) point out that the effect of the environment on learning and education has been recognized since the 1930s, since when many theories have been propounded. In writing about learning environments in a university context, Strange and Banning (2001) note that these theories are based on the idea that "variations in the differing aspects of students' environments yields a constructed milieu that, in turn, further influences students' attraction, satisfaction, and stability within the environment" (p. 2).

1.6. Research Framework

The research framework will consist of five interlinked constructs, three pertaining to the university (instructor, course and classroom), and two pertaining to the student (learning outcomes and satisfaction). The relationships between them are hypothesized in accordance with the following diagram (Figure 2):

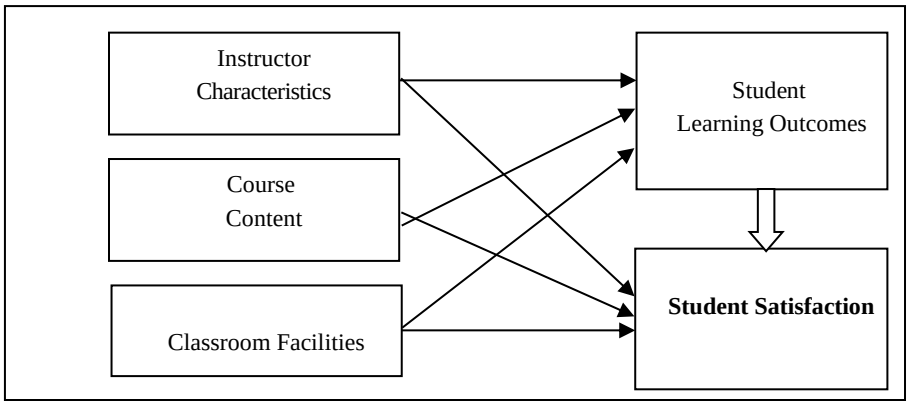

Figure (2). Theoretical Framework.

It can be seen that, while instructor characteristics, course content and classroom facilities are proposed to affect both learning outcomes and satisfaction, learning outcomes acts as a mediating variable in that it is proposed to affect students' overall satisfaction with their higher education experience.

1.7 Hypotheses

In accordance with the research framework, and extrapolating from the foregoing discussion, the following hypotheses will be tested:

H1: Service quality in higher education can be said to fall within three categories: instructor, course and learning environment (classroom);

H2: Students' learning outcomes are affected by service quality;

H3: Students' satisfaction with their university experience is affected by service quality;

H4: Students' satisfaction with their university experience is affected by their learning outcomes.

2. Methodology

2.1. Sample Design

The population of this study consists of Saudi students: preparatory year, undergraduate and postgraduate, who are currently studying at Saudi universities. According to the Ministry of Higher Education website (www.mohe.gov.sa), the number of students in Saudi Arabia in 2012 was 1,165,095.

The sample size was estimated based on similar studies. According to Louis et al. (2012) and a researcher advisory website (2006), an appropriate sample size for this population is 360 to 400, given a margin of error of 5% and a confidence level of 95%.

Both purposive and random sample selection methods were used. Five Saudi universities were purposively selected so as to represent different geographic regions in Saudi Arabia as well as variations in university size. Students' e-mail addresses were then obtained from the Admission and Registration Deanships at the five universities, and a random selection of students made from among those addresses.

Each student was sent an email explaining the research, with a link to an online questionnaire. As expected, the response rate was initially low and therefore the email with its linked questionnaire was sent several times, resulting in a sample size of 364.

2.2. Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was an online questionnaire, designed on Survey Monkey software, which was sent in a link via email to the randomly selected students. The questionnaire elements, in the order in which they appeared on the survey instrument, can be seen in Appendix 1.

2.3. Questionnaire Design

The elements of the questionnaire were selected on the basis of a comprehensive review of the literature, all having been used and evaluated extensively in previous studies (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire contained 44 items modified from the SERVQUAL model, with learning outcomes items added on the basis of previous studies in this field. It should be noted, however, that this research was also modeled on SERVPERF in that it examined only perceived service quality, not expectation. The questionnaire's items, in the order that they appeared on the questionnaire itself, are shown in Appendix 1, which also gives the provenance of each item.

The questionnaire contained two sections; the preliminary section dealt with demographics, in the form of nominal and free-form questions asking for gender, level of study, name of university and name of course. The second section, which formed the main body of the questionnaire, consisted of 44 items with 5-point Likert scale options, from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Students were then thanked and invited to comment.

The items were grouped (but not divided or labeled) under 'instructor', 'course', 'classroom', 'satisfaction' and 'learning outcomes', respectively. This order was chosen because it seemed the most logical in terms of moving from the personal to the general, and from the present to the future. The lack of overt labeling was decided upon so as to reduce response bias.

The 5-point Likert scale was considered the most appropriate format for this research, its popularity ensuring that respondents would be familiar with it, which would both encourage completion and reduce the risk of response error, and the five options enabling subtle, but not unduly complex, variations in response.

Demographic information was collected to enable cross-referencing of responses. Table 3, below, shows the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table (3). Respondents' demographic profile

Demographic	Number	Percentage
Gender:	297	81.6%
Male		
Female	67	18.4%
Level of Study:	268	73.6%
Undergraduate Postgraduate		
PhD		
English Course	96	26.4%
Specialty:	158	43.4%
Humanities	89	24.5%
Natural science	70	19.2%
Computer science Medical science	47	12.9%
University type:	35	9.6%
Private	156	42.9%
Government (small)		
Government (large)	173	47.5%

3. Data Analysis and Findings

Data analysis was performed using SPSS software. Inferential statistics were used to test the hypotheses. The mean scores for the five constructs were used as the basis for analysis of correlations among the constructs, factor analysis was performed to validate the structure of the questionnaire, and multiple regression was employed to identify the contributions of individual constructs to learning outcomes and students' satisfaction.

3.1. Correlation Analysis

The relationship between learning outcomes, satisfaction, instructor characteristics, classroom and course was examined using a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There is a strong correlation between the five dimensions, as is shown below in Table 4.

Table (4). Correlations.

		Learning Outcomes	Course	Instructor	Classroom	Satisfaction
Learning Outcomes	Pearson Correlation	1				
Course	Pearson Correlation	**.656****	1			
	N	364				
Instructor	Pearson Correlation	**.648****	**.643****	1		
	N	364	364			
Classroom	Pearson Correlation	**.566****	**.456****	**.451****	1	
	N	364	364	364		
Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	**.548****	**.412****	**.581****	**.512****	1
	N	364	364	364	364	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

3.2. Factor Analysis

Factor analysis showed the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy value to be .958, and therefore significant, being above .6 (Pallant, 2007). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded a significant value (P=000), determining that factor analysis was appropriate. According to the Rotated Component Matrix, it was necessary to decide which factor model should be applied and the number of items that should be excluded. All components loaded quite strongly (above .4). However, items that loaded lower than .5 were deleted. Having established the factors, the mean of each component was calculated so as to be used in correlation analysis and multiple regression. As Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is considered reliable when it is above .7 (Pallant, 2007), the Alpha values of all the factors (Learning 0.93; Course content 0.90; Classroom 0.88; Instructor characteristics 0.89; Satisfaction, 0.80) were judged reliable. The results of the factor analysis are given in detail at Appendix 2.

3.3. Multiple Regression

Multiple regression was used to test the general model; this yielded a value of below R squared .574, which indicates that the model explains 57.4% of the variance in Saudi students' learning outcomes. The Beta value indicates the significance of each variable in explaining the dependent variable (learning outcomes). The ‘Course’ dimension showed the highest value affecting Saudi students' learning outcomes (beta = .329, t =, 7.111, p >. 001), explaining 6% of the variance in learning outcomes (the squared value of the part correlation; 0.402). The second-highest dimension affecting Saudi students' learning outcomes was ‘Instructor’ (beta =.312, t = 6.764, p >. 001), representing 5% of the variance in

learning outcomes among Saudi students. The dimension having the least effect on Saudi students' learning outcomes was found to be 'Classroom' (beta = .275, t = 6.926, p >. 001), which accounted for 4% of the variance in students' learning outcomes.

Table (5). Coefficientsa for Learning Outcomes

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	.905	.141		6.409	.000					
Course	.297	.042	**.329**	7.111	.000	.656	.351	.245	.552	1.813
Instructor	.287	.042	**.312**	6.764	.000	.648	.336	.233	.555	1.802
Classroom	.267	.039	**.275**	6.926	.000	.566	.343	.238	.749	1.334

a. Dependent Variable: Learning Outcomes _Factor ANOVA = 161.830 Sig = 000 R^2= .574

Adjusted R^2 = .571 Durbin-Watson = 2.174

N = 364

Table 6 below shows that the value of R2 = .416. Thus, this model explains 41.6% of the variance of Saudi students' satisfaction with the quality of service provided by Saudi universities. The highest value of beta is for 'Instructor' (beta = .452, t = 8.367, p > .001). This variable makes the strongest unique contribution towards explaining Saudi students' satisfaction. It explains 11% of the variance. 'Classroom' comes next in the contribution to variance in Saudi students' satisfaction (beta = .3 19, t = 6.846, p > .00 1). It explains 7% of the variance (the squared value of the part correlation: .276). Finally, the 'Course' dimension does not have a significant impact on Saudi students' satisfaction (beta = -.024, t =-.444, sig = .657).

Table (6). Coefficients for Satisfaction.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	.816	.193		4.237	.000					
Course	-.025	.057	**-.024**	-.444	.657	.412	-.023	-.018	.552	1.813
Instructor	.485	.058	**.452**	8.367	.000	.581	.403	.337	.555	1.802
Classroom	.360	.053	**.319**	6.846	.000	.512	.339	.276	.749	1.334

Dependent Variable: Satisfaction _Factor ANOVA = 85.409. Sig = 000 R2 = 416

Adjusted R^2 = 411 Durbin-Watson = 1.983 N = 364

3.4. Discussion

The research model and hypotheses were evaluated using the t-test, ANOVA, factor analysis, reliability tests, multiple regression, and Pearson correlation. It was found that all three factors - instructor, course, and classroom - significantly influenced students' learning outcomes. This is consistent with the previous reported findings on students' learning outcomes. Of the three factors hypothesized to affect Saudi students' learning outcomes, it was found that course content had the greatest impact on Saudi students' learning outcomes, accounting for 6% of the variance, followed by instructor (5%) and finally, classroom (4%), although these differences are admittedly minor.

This result indicates the importance of the design and preparation of course material. Course content and planning should be appropriate and match Saudi students' needs, since this is the component which most affects Saudi students' learning outcomes. Moreover, ANOVA revealed significant differences in learning outcomes related to three variables:

1- Saudi students' level of study
2- Saudi students' course type
3- University size

3.4.1. The effects of instructor characteristics, course content and classroom on Saudi students' learning outcomes, cross-referenced by level of study

'Level of study' contained four categories: preparatory, undergraduate, Master's and PhD. The ANOVA test showed a significant association between Saudi students' level of study and their perceptions of service quality received in terms of the knowledge and dependability of their instructors (items 4, 6). Master's and PhD students perceived better service quality from instructors than did students attending undergraduate courses. Although Marzano et al. (2005) found that instructional quality has a considerable probability of enhancing students' outcomes for all students at all levels, it is suggested that this result highlights the greater intensiveness and interactivity of postgraduate instruction.

In addition, significant differences were found between the same two groups in terms of their judgment on the modernity of the classroom (item 17). This could perhaps affect the university's image negatively, as it has been suggested that the overall impression of the learning environment is a reflection of the personality of a place (Tanner, 2000; Earthman, 2004). Another significant result to be found here is that undergraduate students found physical facilities in the classroom less visually appealing (item 20) than did PhD students, who showed the highest mean ranking scores for this item. Item 24 ('The classroom size is comfortable and suitable') showed significant differences among all the four groups, undergraduate students and preparatory year students being less happy with the classroom size, which may be a reflection of the different teaching methods employed (in this case, larger classes) in preparatory and undergraduate courses as opposed to postgraduate.

Perhaps the most important result in this section is that preparatory year students perceived instructor characteristics and classrooms not to be as they desired, which

affected their learning outcomes considerably. They had lower learning outcomes than either Master's or PhD students. In this context, it should be noted that, according to the ANOVA analysis, there was a significant difference between PhD students and preparatory year students regarding the perception that they had acquired a great deal of knowledge (item 37). Other differences between the same groups were in achieving learning outcomes from the course and the acquisition of knowledge and skills relevant to the job (items 41 and 42). It can be argued, however, that these results accurately reflect the respective knowledge and achievement levels of the two groups in general.

Across all three constructs (instructor, course and classroom), preparatory year students had lower mean ranking scores than PhD, Master's, and undergraduate students. Moreover, they felt they did not have adequate knowledge and skills to apply in a future job. In addition, preparatory year students had the lowest learning outcomes. This may indicate the existence of a considerable problem with those courses in terms of instructors' knowledge and dependability, as well as classroom size, comfort and modernity; however, it may also be a reflection of the preparatory nature of the students' studies, which are not intended to equip them for working life but rather for further study. Similarly, preparatory year students' learning outcomes are *ipso facto* lower than the outcomes of more advanced students.

3.4.2. The effect of instructor characteristics, course content, and classroom on Saudi students' learning outcomes, cross-referenced by course type

The ANOVA analysis for course type shows that humanities students agreed that the curriculum they received provided the primary knowledge they required, whereas natural science students disagreed. This result may bear out Muralidharan's contention that there are many problems facing science education in developing countries, keeping it in a critical state (Muralidharan, 2007). However, this difference did not significantly affect the two groups' learning outcomes.

On the other hand, responses to other items were found to show significant association between courses and learning outcomes. The data reveal a significant difference between humanities students and medical science students in terms of improvement in the ability to use English (item 40). Similarly, humanities students perceived themselves to have lower levels of IT and computing skills compared to medical students.

3.4.3. The effect of instructor characteristics, course content, and classroom on Saudi students' learning outcomes, cross-referenced by university size

The ANOVA test revealed that large universities are distinctive and outclass small universities. Students who attended large universities agreed that they had a positive perception of instructor, course content, and classrooms. This affected their learning outcomes positively, and they reported better outcomes than students in small universities. In addition, students in large universities perceived better achievement with regard to having "gained a great deal of knowledge from the course", "the ability to apply what they learned", "the ability in using English", and having "gained a good understanding of the material of the course".

3.4.4 Saudi students' satisfaction

Multiple regression revealed that instructor characteristics and classroom affected the Saudi students' satisfaction, and hence that the third hypothesis, that students' satisfaction with their university experience is affected by service quality, is at least partially confirmed. This result is consistent with many studies. For example, Stodnick and Rogers (2008) conclude that students' satisfaction is considerably influenced by instructor and classroom environment, while Moor (2002) found both prompt interaction and feedback by the instructor to be strongly linked to students' satisfaction. Kinney (2009) also confirms the importance of the instructors' role in school environment, which results in student satisfaction. However, it was discovered that course content does not affect Saudi students' satisfaction. This contradicts the findings of Eom and Wen (2006) and Simmons (2006), who argue that course structure and delivery affect the perceived satisfaction of students. This result can be explained by differences in expectations, and hence satisfaction, among different cultures. Russell (2005), for example, found that Asian learners had a cultural preference for teacher-centered learning rather than the student-centered method implemented in the West. This implies that Saudi students are likely to depend more on the teacher to obtain information.

The results showed that the construct most affecting Saudi students' satisfaction is instructor characteristics, accounting for 11% percent. This is supported by many studies indicating the importance of instructor interaction for students' satisfaction, notably the questionnaire survey conducted by Hughes (1999), which found that 'Friendliness of teachers' came top of the ratings for learner satisfaction.

The classroom came in second place, accounting for 7% of Saudi students' satisfaction, consistent with findings in various contexts. For example, in conceptualizing a five-dimensional construct of service quality, one of the major dimensions proposed and validated by Parasuraman et al. (1994) was Tangibles, meaning physical elements. In an educational context, classroom layout, lighting, and overall cleanliness were found to contribute significantly to students' satisfaction with service quality (Sohail and Shaikh, 2004).

It was unexpected to find the classroom rated as more important than the course in terms of Saudi students' satisfaction. However, this result can be explained by suggesting that the classroom environment directly and daily affects students' psychological state. Arambewela and Hall (2006) found the Tangibles construct had the greatest impact on students' general satisfaction. In the same vein, Smith et al. (2002) suggest that the main concern of students is that institutions have not developed or modernized their facilities in line with the rise in the numbers of student registered in universities. Although course was the construct with the highest impact on Saudi students' learning outcomes, it did not affect their satisfaction. This indicates that although a factor may have a significant effect on learning outcomes, this does not mean that it will definitely affect satisfaction to the same degree. This confirms that satisfaction is a different outcome and separate from learning outcomes in a higher education context.

Mean ranking tests showed that the lowest-ranked Satisfaction items were "If I had to do it all over again, I would enroll in the same university", and "Overall I am satisfied with the efforts of the instructor of this course", indicating that the respondents were not

wholly satisfied with either their instructors or their university as a whole. While this finding appears, on first sight, to suggest a vote of no confidence in Saudi universities and the instructors they employ, it should be viewed within the context of the other Satisfaction items and within the overall findings, which are considerably more positive. Nonetheless, it is recommended that this point be explored further in future studies, to understand Saudi students' expectations of instructors and Saudi universities. In addition, this study found that the second of the two items was ranked lower by male students than by female students, and that this pattern was repeated for the item "Administrative staff are consistently willing to help me when needed"; again, these are issues that can be explored in more detail in future research.

3.4.5. Learning Outcomes and Satisfaction

It is clear from the data that students with high learning outcomes are happier than other groups, which confirms the fourth hypothesis, that students' satisfaction with their university experience is affected by their learning outcomes. The results of the ANOVA test showed that students who attended larger universities were generally more satisfied, especially with respect to "the course [they were] taking", "learning experience at the university", " the efforts of the instructor of the course", and "the quality and accessibility of reference materials". It can therefore be inferred that it is important for the universities to enhance students' learning outcomes so that they may reach a sufficient level of satisfaction.

4. Conclusion

The present study investigated the satisfaction of Saudi students studying in Saudi Arabia with aspects of their university experience. A theoretical framework was developed in which students' satisfaction was hypothesized to be influenced by aspects of the instructor's attitudes and behavior, of the course content and planning, and of the physical characteristics of the classroom environment. To investigate the hypothesized relationships, a survey was conducted among Saudi students attending preparatory year, undergraduate, Master's, or PhD studies in Saudi universities: 44 perception items were developed based on SERVQUAL (Cronin and Taylor, 1992), supplemented by measurements of learning outcomes based on the literature. The survey was distributed to randomly selected students from 5 Saudi universities. 364 responses were received and subjected to various forms of statistical analysis.

All three investigated constructs: instructor characteristics, course content and classroom, were found to influence perceptions of student learning outcomes, contributing 6%, 5% and 4% of variance respectively to student satisfaction, while instructor and classroom contributed 11% and 7% respectively. There were differences among students related to their level of study, course type specialization, and university size. Preparatory year students perceived the lowest learning outcomes. Natural science students were less inclined than humanities students to finding the curriculum adequate for their needs, while humanities students perceived less improvement in English than medical students. More favorable perceptions of instructor, course and classroom were expressed by students in large universities than those in other universities. Overall, the

findings revealed satisfaction with service quality and favorable perceptions of learning outcomes. However, they point to a few areas where service could be improved.

Accordingly, it is hoped that this research will help Saudi universities to improve their service quality with regard to instructors, course content, and classroom, thus enabling their students to achieve higher learning outcomes and hence satisfaction with their university experience.

Among the elements requiring particular attention are preparatory year programs, which need to be developed to reach a satisfactory level. Universities should also pay particular attention to the quality of instructors' communication with the students, and attempt to resolve problems of classroom size, modernity, comfort and physical facilities, which this study has shown to be important to Saudi students.

This research has to some extent been limited by time constraints, in that its methodological remit might profitably have been wider. Qualitative methods such as focus groups and other sources of data could have provided deeper insight into students' perceptions, while objective observation of facilities in individual universities would also have helped in aiding understanding as to exactly which conditions affect students' perceptions. In addition, it has concentrated on three dimensions of service quality: instructor characteristics, course content, and classroom; but these together accounted for only 57.4% of variance in learning outcomes and 41.6% in satisfaction, which suggests that other factors may contribute to service quality and students' satisfaction, and that H1 is therefore a null hypothesis.

However, the limitations of this study leave scope for various issues to be pursued in future work. Further research could, as well as use the qualitative methods and objective observation outlined above, and consider other dimensions of service quality, examine students in other countries and compare their learning outcomes and satisfaction. This might be followed by a comparison of the satisfaction felt by students of different nationalities, as it may well be that their expectations of the service quality provided within higher education are significantly influenced by their culture.

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APPENDIX (1). The Qu estionnaire Elements

Construct	Item	Source(s)
Instructor	Instructors are friendly towards individual students	Emanuel and Adams (2006); Hadikoemoro (2002); Holdford and Reinders (2001)
	The instructor gives the students individual attention	Ugboma et al. (2007); Kouthouris and Alexandris (2005)
	The instructor encourages and motivates students to do their best	Stodnick and Rogers (2008); Greiner (2000)
	The instructor is knowledgeable in his/her field	Johns et al (2004); Emanuel and Adams (2006); Khantanapha (2000).
	Instructor's explanations are clear	LaBay and Comm (2003); Holdford and Reinders (2001)
	The instructor is dependable	McAlexander (1994); Markovic (2006); Khantanapha (2000)
	The instructors grade and return tests and assignments by the time they promise to do so	Emanuel and Adams (2006), Siu et al. (2001); Markovic (2006)
Course	Course materials are well prepared and carefully explained	Greiner (2000); Arambewela and Hall (2006)
	The curriculum provides primary knowledge required by the students	LaBay and Comm (2003); Jusoh et al (2004)
	The curriculum is well-designed and planned	Sahney et al. (2006); Khantanapha (2000)
	The course material was organized into logical and understandable components	Northrup (2002); Swan (2001)
	I found my course to be a good learning experience	Cao et al. (2008); Colaric and Jonassen (2001) Alavi et al. (2002)
	My interest in the subjects has increased as a consequence of the courses	Greiner (2000)
	The lectures & course work given are in compliance with the module requirement	Jusoh et al (2004)
	Course content is up to date	Emiliani (2004); Williams (1998)
	The timetable is well-planned	Franceschini and Terzago (1998) ; Roffe (2002)
	The classroom is modern	Ugboma et al.(2007); Simmons (2006);Yang (2003)
Classroom	The classroom is equipped with all the necessary equipment to aid learning	Emanuel and Adams (2006); Hadikoemoro (2001)
	The classroom is kept clean	Chen and Lee (2006) ; Stodnick and Rogers (2008_
	The physical facilities at the classroom are visually appealing	Pariseau and McDaniel (1997); Silvestro (2005)
	The classroom is equipped with computer sets for learning purpose	Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2009); Hill (1995)
	The university has good class management/schedule	Hadikoemoro (2001); Sahney et al.(2004)
	The lighting in classrooms is sufficient	Sohail and Shaikh (2004); Uline and Tschannen-Moran (2008)
	The classroom size is comfortable and suitable	Arambewela and Hall (2006); Barnes and Bradley (2007); El Ansari and Oskrochi (2006)

Construct	Item	Source(s)
Satisfaction	Overall I am satisfied with the course I am taking	Harris (2002); Navarro et al. (2005); Taran (2006); Ham (2003)
	Overall I am satisfied with the efforts of the instructor of this course	Gremler and McCollough (2002); Stodnick and Rogers (2008)
	I am satisfied with the quality and accessibility of reference material	Mai (2005); Barnes and Bradley (2007)
	Administrative staff are consistently willing to help me when needed	Kuo et al. (2005); Kuo (2003)
	Administrative staff have the student's best interest at heart	Ham (2003); Siu et al. (2001)
	The university has a modern library with completed collection	Hadikoemoro (2001); Oldfield and Baron (2000)
	If I had to do it all over again, I would enrol in the same university	Griffith (2004); Athiyaman (1997); Helgesen and Nesset (2007)
	I am satisfied with the quality and accessibility of IT facilities in the university	Mai (2005); Barnes and Bradley (2007)
Learning Outcomes	I believe the services offered by this university positively impacted my achievement	Muñoz et al.(2008); Tam (2006)
	I feel that I learned more in the university	Eom and Wen (2006); Boyer (2003); Tereseviciene et al. (2007)
	The quality of the learning experience in university courses is good	Eom and Wen (2006); Slotte and Herbert (2006)
	I learned a great deal of knowledge from this course	Gremler and McCollough (2002); Guo et al. (2007); Banwet and Datta (2002)
	I will be able to apply what I learned in this course	Kartha (2006); Rossin et al. (2009)
	I have become more aware of different philosophies, cultures, etc	Tam (2002); Miller et al. (2007)
	My ability of using English language has improved	Tam (2006)
	I achieved the learning outcomes of my course	Greiner (2000); Lawrence and McCollough (2001)
	My skills in IT and computing have developed	Tam (2006); Harrington et al. (2009)
	I gained a good understanding of the course material of this course	Alavi et al. (2002); Devinder and Datta (2003)
	My ability in critically analyse and evaluate issues was improved	Alavi et al. (2002); Darby (2008)
	I have acquired new knowledge and skills which will be relevant to my job	Mai (2005); Sahney et al. (2004)

APPENDIX (2). The Questionnaire Elements and Factor Analysis

Factors and variables	Descriptive statistics		Factor components & loading					h2	%vari-	Reliability ance	
	Mean	Std.	1	2	3	4	5	CE	VE	IIC	CAV
Learning outcomes											**0.93**
44 I gained a good understanding of course material of this course	3.8187	.84962	**.732**					.769	.346	.805	.919
42 I have acquired new knowledge and skills which will be relevant to my job	3.6951	.97228	**.728**					.715	.373	.783	.919
37 I learned a great deal of knowledge from this course	3.8462	.98667	**.725**					.788	.517	.835	.916
39 I have become more aware of different philosophies, culture, etc	4.1071	.87641	**.720**					.651	.432	.713	.924
43 My ability to critically analyse and evaluate issues was improved	3.9258	.91663	**.694**					.653	.241	.714	.924
41 I achieved the learning outcomes of my course	3.7445	.93485	**.690**					.726	.382	.807	.918
40 My ability in using the English language has improved	4.1731	.85618	**.665**					.603	.419	.690	.925
35 I feel that I learned a good deal in the university	3.7747	1.21914	**.641**					.775	.556	.675	.929
38 I will be able to apply what I learned in this course	3.7995	.95398	**.621**					.591	.460	.714	.924
Course content:											
10 The curriculum is well-designed and well-planned	3.3462	1.10892		**.788**				.758	1.804	.809	.873
11 The course material was organized into understandable components	3.3489	1.03211		**.742**				.744	1.768	.811	.873
9 The curriculum provides primary knowledge required by the students	3.4698	.99124		**.718**				.654	1.930	.706	.889
8 Course materials are well prepared and carefully explained	3.3187	1.05370		**.702**				.685	2.024	.723	.887
14 The lectures & course work are in compliance with the module requirement	3.4808	.96333		**.675**				.617	1.336	.686	.892
13 My interest in the subject has increased as a consequence of the course.	3.4890	1.07175		**.637**				.651	1.441	.669	.895
Instructor characteristics:											
2 The instructor gives the students individual attention.	3.2033	1.13176			**.726**			.687	6.138	.717	.852
3 The instructor encourages and motivates students to do their best.	3.3269	1.11352			**.716**			.659	4.791	.737	.848
1 Instructors are friendly towards individual students	3.6978	.99137			**.714**			.633	42.720	.686	.857

Factors and variables	Descriptive statistics		Factor components & loading					h2	%vari-	Reliability ance	
5 The instructor's explanations are clear	3.4038	98702			**.625**			.677	2.921	.649	.863
6 The instructor is dependable	3.5385	.97413			**.614**			.631	2.467	.618	.868
27 Overall I am satisfied with the efforts of the instructor of this course	3.3269	1.12827			**.602**			.685	.784	.704	.854
Classroom:										**0.88**	
19 The classroom is kept clean.	4.0467	.89720				**.730**		.645	1.090	.692	.856
18 The classroom is equipped with all the necessary equipment to aid learning	3.7418	1.03881				**.725**		.743	1.102	.752	.847
20 The physical facilities at the classroom are visually appealing	3.4121	1.04735				**.692**		.658	1.016	.700	.854
21 The classroom is equipped with computer sets for learning purposes	3.6099	1.13619				**.686**		.543	1.008	.612	.866
24 The classroom size is comfortable and suitable	3.4725	1.12415				**.672**		.598	.869	.595	.868
23 The lighting in classrooms is sufficient	3.8764	.91127				**.659**		.609	.904	.599	.867
17 The classroom is modern	3.4918	1.11461				**.645**		.710	1.179	.688	.855
Satisfaction:										**0.81**	
30 Administrative staff are consistently willing to help me when needed	3.7280	1.03129					.670	.659	.675	.765	.614
31 Administrative staff have the students' best interest at heart	3.5659	1.10523					.648	.724	.660	.758	.615
29 I am satisfied with quality and accessibility of reference material	3.8187	1.01779					.624	.736	.731	.463	.913

KMO = .958
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = 000
H2 = communalities
CE= Extraction
IIC= inter-item correlation
CAV= Cronbach's Alpha value

تأثير جودة الخدمة المقدمة من الجامعات السعودية على رضا طلابها: منهج تسويقي

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جامعة الملك خالد

المملكة العربية السعودية

ملخص البحث. أصبح مفهوم جودة الخدمة مهما في التسويق لمؤسسات التعليم العالي حيث يقدم فهماً واضحاً لاحتياجات ومتطلبات طلاب الجامعات والمستفيدين من خدماتها. ومع ذلك، فإن قطاع التعليم العالي في المملكة العربية السعودية والذي نما بسرعة ملفتة في السنوات الأخيرة يواجه انتقادات حول جودة الخدمات التعليمية المقدمة في الجامعات السعودية. لذا يتناول هذا البحث مدى رضا الطلاب السعوديين عن مختلف جوانب الخدمات المقدمة لهم خلال تجربتهم الجامعية وعلاقة تلك الجوانب بنتائج تحصيلهم استنادا إلى تطبيق نموذج جودة الخدمات SERVQUAL ومن خلال مسح أجري لعدد ٣٦٤ طالبا يمثلون خمس جامعات سعودية مختلفة. ومن بين النتائج العديدة والمثيرة التي توصلت لها الدراسة: أن كلا من خصائص أعضاء هيئة التدريس، ومحتوى المناهج والمقررات، وبيئة الفصول الدراسية تؤثر على نتائج التحصيل العلمي بدرجات متفاوتة، إلا أن خصائص أعضاء هيئة التدريس وبيئة الفصول الدراسية فقط تؤثر على رضا الطلاب؛ وكانت محتويات المناهج والمقررات للتخصصات الإنسانية أكثر إرضاءً من عدة جوانب من محتويات المناهج والمقررات للتخصصات العلمية وإن كان تأثيرها على الرضا أقل بدرجة ملحوظة من العاملين السابقين. وكانت تقديرات الرضا منخفضة حيال أعضاء هيئة التدريس وبيئة الفصول الدراسية بشكل واضح. وظهرت تلك النتائج خصوصا عند اختبار رغبة الطلاب في تكرار تجربة الدراسة الجامعية في نفس الجامعة لو أتيحت لهم الفرصة مره أخرى. وتشير النتائج الأخرى إلى أن بعض الانتقادات الموجهة للجامعات السعودية صحيحة، وأن هناك الكثير من قبل الجامعات السعودية يمكن القيام به لتحسين نوعية الخدمات، وبالتالي جعلها أكثر جاذبية ونجاحا في تسويق منتجاتها التعليمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: جودة الخدمة، جودة الخدمة، رضا العملاء، المملكة العربية السعودية، التعليم العالي، الجامعات، الطلاب.