

ASSESSING A FIVE-COMPONENT MODEL OF SERVICE QUALITY EXPECTATIONS AT A MUSIC COLLEGE: THE PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS AND STAFF

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ABSTRACT

German music colleges offer various programs to educate musicians and music teachers. Music education research suggests both similarities and differences in the service demands required in each of these college programs. To date, however, little is known about what students and staff expect from the service quality with respect to specific programs.

On the basis of qualitative data collected prior to this study, the aim of this explorative study was to quantitatively investigate the expected service quality of different music programs at a German music college. A further goal was to highlight any differences of service quality dimensions with respect to staff and students and with respect to different age levels among students. The survey was conducted at the “College of Music and Performing Arts” in Frankfurt, Germany. The so-called SERVQUAL model, a commonly accepted business research tool, was adapted as the framework for this study. This model comprises five dimensions of service quality.

It can be concluded that service quality expectations among members of a music college differ widely with respect to music program and students/staff, respectively. Specifically, performance majors seem not to expect the same service quality at their college than students of the other two programs. Interestingly, the expectations of service quality also differ between students and staff depending on the SERVQUAL-dimension.

1. INTRODUCTION

Music education programs aim at qualifying both musicians and music teachers for their prospective careers. Obviously, demands from professional musicians differ considerably from teaching music at public or music schools. However, to date to our knowledge no systematic research has taken place to assess the implications of the diverging interests of students and staff at music college, who prepare for their individual careers in their specific field of study. For example, it is unknown, whether and to what extent quality demands differ between students in artistic and educational music programs.

German music colleges offer various programs to educate professional musicians and teachers. Also in these curricula the educational focus differs with respect to instrumental and educational training. Ideally, artistic programs place high demands on instrumental skills, whereas educational programs are designed to emphasize pedagogical skills and teaching expertise. In terms of service quality to meet these specific demands, questions arise as to whether such expectations and perceptions are similar or different among staff and students in these various programs.

Since a few years, German music colleges have started considering aspects like student satisfaction and retention as performance indicators (German Music College Presidents Council 2000, Behne 2003), mostly due to the growing public interest in scientific evaluation (Spiel 2001) and the change of the job market for musicians (Bastian 2001). The implementation of college quality indicators, however, seems difficult to promote in the absence of relevant data to guide decision making for the development of music programs.

The present study sought to contribute to the current service quality discussion at college level by identifying patterns of service quality expectations in prospective musicians (music program), instrumental teachers and schoolteachers at different education levels from undergraduate to graduate.

A Model for Assessing Service Quality

To determine commonalities and differences in service quality expectations, a scientifically established approach was needed. Business research has recently begun to address the qualitative and quantitative analysis of customer satisfaction. (Hill, Alexander, 2000; Kotler, 1999; Bruhn, 2003) This research shows that it is possible to analyse the expectations and perceptions of customers with high reliability and validity. A widely accepted approach for this analysis is the SERVQUAL-Model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988; Parasuraman Zeithaml & Berry, 1991; Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1992), which allows service providers to identify and differentiate aspects of customers' (dis)satisfaction. In particular, the model comprises five independent dimensions, namely Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. Due to its perspective on services, and the lack of comparative data from other college

programs notwithstanding, this model seems also applicable to music programs. Also, the SERVQUAL model has been found to be useful in other non-business environments like sports events (Kelley & Turley, 2001) or public administration (Wisniewski & Donnelly, 1996).

In the context of music college programs, the five SERVQUAL-dimensions might be interpreted and operationalized as follows: (1) *Tangibles*: students' and staffs' material working environment, (2) *Reliability* of the college's education program, (3) *Responsiveness* of faculty and staff to students' questions and problems, (4) *Assurance* of the college's excellence, and (5) *Empathy* of faculty and staff to understand students' needs. It should be noted that in the present study, we only consider expectations rather than actual perceptions, which are addressed elsewhere.

Research questions and hypotheses

First of all, it seems important to establish, whether and to what extent the SERVQUAL approach proves applicable to the music college environment. Therefore, as a first step in the data analysis, a reliable discrimination of the five SERVQUAL-dimensions is to be shown.

Given the applicability of SERVQUAL and by focusing on expectations, we might observe idealized (subjective) stereotypes of music programme service quality. For lack of relevant data from previous research, the subsequent working hypotheses concerning similarities and differences of service quality expectations in the experimental groups are primarily based on anecdotal evidence from narrative interviews in a similar population (Koch, in preparation). For example, these data suggest shifts of service quality expectations between younger and older students. Therefore, we hypothesise that older students demand greater Reliability and Responsiveness than younger students, and that this shift is more pronounced in music students in the artistic programme.

Obviously, staff ratings of expectations of service quality can be seen in part as self-evaluations. Given a low staff/student-ratio throughout music colleges, one might expect at first sight converging expectations of service quality. But again, there might be diverging patterns of expectations (as presumed by Mantel, 2003), indicating far less than ideal matches of mutual interest in specific service needs.

2. METHOD

The SERVQUAL-Model is based on a set of twenty-two questions within the five dimensions, which check different aspects of service quality in a business environment. As these questions did not seem ideal for the presented research purpose, various qualitative group interviews were conducted to adjust the questions to the needs of a music college. Overall, 51 questions based on the SERVQUAL-dimensions were developed through

this method and transferred into a quantitative questionnaire, using a 7-point Likert-type rating-scale for each item.

This questionnaire was then distributed to all students and faculty at the "College of Music and Performing Arts" in Frankfurt, Germany, in three steps. First, students were asked to fill out questionnaires in class, second, students were contacted by their teachers and last, students were approached and handed out questionnaires between classes in hallways. These multiple distribution methods were chosen to provide music students with ample opportunities to fill out questionnaires.

Faculty received the questionnaire through the internal mail system of the music college. Overall, 265 students and 104 members of faculty returned valid questionnaires, respectively. A more detailed view over the data (Koch, in preparation) revealed that the different instrument- and age-groups were distributed proportionally to the basic population.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

The reliability of the data was tested using Cronbachs' Alpha for each SERVQUAL-dimension, each college program and each group (students and faculty). The alphas for the five factors varied between 0.60 and 0.92 with an average value of 0.77, which suggests a successful adaptation of the SERVQUAL approach to this research environment. The validity was tested using the face- and construct-validity concept. The face-validity was suggested by experts within the music college (alumni, staff, student administration), construct-validity was evidenced by comparing the results of the SERVQUAL-dimensions with a global satisfaction question. These data provide evidence that students who are overall satisfied also tend to rate the individual SERVQUAL-questions higher than unsatisfied students (Koch & Kreutz, conference paper No. 2).

Responses to each SERVQUAL-dimension were scored and submitted to multi-factorial analyses of variance (ANOVA) Music program (musicians, instrumental teachers, school teachers) and group (younger students, i.e. first- and second-year students; older students, i.e. third- and fourth-year students, and staff) served as between-subject variables.

4. RESULTS

Tables 1 and 2 show the means and standard deviations for the five SERVQUAL dimensions, differentiated by the two between-subject factors. Note that most mean values fall into a relatively narrow range toward the more positive end of the scale, indicating high service quality expectations in general in all programs and groups.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations for each SERVEQUAL-dimension, differentiated by music program

Dimension	Music performance		Instrumental education		Music education	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Tangibles	5,96	0,65	6,09	0,79	6,22	0,71
Reliability	6,02	0,54	6,30	0,55	6,24	0,58
Responsiveness	5,96	0,79	6,05	0,78	6,33	0,71
Assurance	5,88	0,98	6,27	0,67	6,06	1,08
Empathy	5,95	0,64	6,14	0,75	5,83	0,89

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations for each SERVEQUAL-dimension, differentiated by subject group

Dimension	Younger Students		Older Students		Staff	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Tangibles	6,27	0,66	6,05	0,66	5,91	0,87
Reliability	6,18	0,53	6,27	0,41	6,04	0,82
Responsiveness	5,85	0,87	6,11	0,60	6,66	0,77
Assurance	6,30	0,50	6,45	0,42	4,96	0,83
Empathy	5,91	0,73	6,09	0,74	5,79	0,92

A summary of main effects for each SERVQUAL dimension is given in Table 3. With the exception of the Responsiveness dimension, significant main effects of music program and group factors (and interactions thereof) are observed across the four remaining dimensions of model. In particular, the specific music program differentiates the Tangibles, Reliability and Assurance ratings, whereas the group factor affects Tangibles, Reliability, Assurance, and Empathy ratings. In addition, significant interactions were observed with respect to Tangibles, Assurance and Empathy.

Considering both music program and subject groups, posthoc analyses reveal complex patterns of similarities and differences.

Music education majors had greatest expectations in the Tangibles dimension. Younger students also had greater expectations in the same dimension than older students and staff.

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Table 3: Main Effects (F-values) of program and group factors on SERVQUAL dimensions

Dimension	Between-subject factors		
	Music program	Subject group	Interaction
Tangibles	3,139 *	5,700 **	4,375 **
Reliability	6,916 **	3,840 *	1,585
Responsiveness	1,291	1,392	1,587
Assurance	6,100 **	94,620 **	3,683 **
Empathy	2,100	4,063 *	7,516 **

*p<0,05; **p<0,01

Expectations regarding the Reliability dimension were greatest for music education students, but there was still a significant difference between instrumental educators and performers. Reliability was also more important for older students, whereas ratings of this dimension did not differ between younger students and staff.

Considering the Assurance dimension, instrumental teaching students have greater expectations than the performers and music educators. Notably, all students also expected greater Assurance than their staff.

Finally, the expectations regarding the Empathy dimension were significantly different between instrumental and school teaching students, the former having far greater expectations than schoolteachers. Just as in the Reliability dimension, older students also had significantly higher expectations here than staff and younger students

5. CONCLUSIONS

First of all, considering the high reliability and validity of the SERVQUAL model it can be concluded that this (originally business-customer oriented) model proves applicable to a college environment after qualitative adaptation. Second, the results of the SERVQUAL model show that the expectations among members of a music college differ widely with respect to music program and student group/faculty, respectively.

The observation that performance majors had almost consistently weaker expectations that education oriented students may be explained in several ways. For example, to achieve goals in these latter programs more communication and acquisition of a broader range of both musical and non-musical skills are required than in plain performance programs. Yet, the lower Tangibles scores in performance majors is somewhat surprising, as accurate practice rooms, instruments and a decent concert hall should be among the priorities in this group.

Interestingly, the expectations of service quality differ considerably between younger and older students. With the exception of expectations toward the Tangibles, awareness of service needs apparently increases as educational maturation proceeds. The by far most prominent difference arises from the Assurance ratings, which differentiates students and staff. The latter group places markedly weaker Assurance in music college education, which is perhaps due to a more realistic assessment of students' job perspectives as seen by members of the faculty. At this point, questions arise whether the communication between students and staff can under these prevailing stereotypes be as exhaustive and efficient as the college decision makers (e.g. dean, president) often believe and claim.

These results invite further investigation as to whether and to what degree service quality stereotypes affect both politics in developing individual programs as well as actual music learning at music colleges. Also it invites further research on communication processes between students and staff.

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