SERVICE QUALITY AT VARSITY COLLEGES IN WESTVILLE AND DURBAN NORTH: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

PRAVESH DEVNARRIAN

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SERVICE QUALITY AT VARSITY COLLEGES IN DURBAN NORTH AND WESTVILLE: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

By

Pravesh Devnarrian
(Junior Secondary Education Diploma, University Education Diploma in Resource Centre Management, IMM Diploma in Marketing Management, B.Tech: Marketing)

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Department of Marketing, Retail and Public Relations
Durban University of Technology

Prof. S. Penceliah
Supervisor

Dr J. P. Govender
Co-supervisor

DECLARATION

I, Pravesh Devnarrian, hereby declare that this research dissertation is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted to the best of my knowledge has been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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P. Devnarrian

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ABSTRACT

Customer satisfaction, customer value and service quality have become the primary focus of service organisations in today's customer era. The higher education industry is no different.

As higher education institutions strive for competitive advantage, customer service and service quality are becoming driving forces. Today, service quality is recognized as one of the most important factors in developing and maintaining successful relationships. Superior service quality leads to enhanced customer satisfaction and increased loyalty. Institutions that focus on superior quality service can enjoy a distinctive competitive edge since improved levels of service quality are linked to higher revenues, higher customer retention and increased market shares.

The aim of this research study was to evaluate customer service quality at Varsity Colleges in Westville and Durban North. The SERVQUAL questionnaire was used as the instrument to measure students' expectations and perceptions according to five quality dimensions. Four hundred and fifty one respondents were selected from the two campuses using non-probability sampling and convenience sampling. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used to analyse the data. Conclusions and recommendations were made from the findings of the research study.

The study revealed that students' expectations of service quality exceeded their perceptions on the five service quality dimensions used in the SERVQUAL questionnaire. Improvements are necessary in certain dimensions of service quality. In order to improve service quality, it is recommended that Varsity Colleges close these gaps by ensuring that apt strategies are put into place in order to improve service quality.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The worldwide trend towards service quality had its origins in the 1980's when businesses realized that a quality product in itself is not guaranteed to maintain competitive advantage (Van der Wal, Pampallis & Bond, 2002: 233). Service quality is now being linked to increased profitability, customer satisfaction (Harris & Goode, 2004:140) competitive advantage, differentiation and a continual flow of value (Patterson, Cowley & Prasongsukarn, 2006: 263).

Intense competition, changing technologies and continuous shifts in the regulatory environment has led to increasing customer awareness and sophistication. Customers are now demanding higher standards of services. Therefore customer satisfaction, customer value and service quality have become the primary focus of service organisations in today's customer era (Wang, Hing-Po & Yang, 2004: 325).

The higher education environment in South Africa is no different. As higher education institutions strive for competitive advantage, customer service and service quality are becoming driving forces. In the current marketplace service quality is recognized as one of the most important factors in developing and maintaining successful relationships (Svensson, 2002: 158). Superior service quality leads to enhanced customer satisfaction and loyalty. Institutions that focus on superior quality service can enjoy a distinctive competitive edge since improved levels of service quality are linked to higher revenues, higher customer retention and increased market shares.

Varsity College entered this highly competitive industry in 1991 to provide higher education with a difference. Varsity College maintains that it does not simply focus on providing higher education for a student. It regards itself as an institution that is driven by a philosophy of developing students towards a career. This is achieved

through its focus on academic excellence, social interaction and practical experience resulting in the holistic development of the student (The IIE Institutional Self Evaluation Portfolio, 2007: 2). However, Varsity College in its quest to become the service provider of choice in this field must promote and maintain superior service quality.

1.2   PROBLEM STATEMENT

As services now constitute approximately 70 percent of the gross domestic product, researchers recognise a paradigm shift in marketing from an exchange of goods towards a service-centred model of exchange in which the customer plays a pivotal role (Lovelock & Gummesson, 2004: 20). Marketers have now become aware of service quality and its importance for long-term survival. Service quality is a fundamental asset in any organisation. Lasser, Manolis & Winsor (2000:181) concur that service quality can lead to increased customer satisfaction and can thus contribute significantly to organisational performance. Presently there is no validated, formal measurement to evaluate service quality at Varsity Colleges. Against this background, the present study has been undertaken with the objective of measuring and evaluating students' perceptions of service quality at Varsity Colleges in Durban North and Westville.

1.3   THE GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

The goal of this study is to evaluate service quality at Varsity Colleges in Westville and Durban North.

The objectives of this study are stated below:

- To identify student expectations of service quality.
- To identify student perceptions of service quality
- To measure service quality at Varsity Colleges, using the SERVQUAL instrument.

1.4   RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Varsity College has enjoyed considerable success and growth as a higher education institution in the five years. The substantial growth in student population at Varsity Colleges in Durban is indicative of this. However, as an industry grows and competition becomes more intense, there is a need to measure and evaluate the service quality offered . The increase in the number of study options available to students, including the use of virtual technology also places immense pressure on higher education institutions to provide unique learning experiences to students as a means to capture market share (Gapp & Fisher, 2006: 156). This research study would enable the researcher to ascertain the extent to which service quality is embraced at Varsity Colleges in Durban. By measuring service quality, Varsity College will be able to identify and close any gaps that may exist in service quality. Consistent and regular measurement of students' perceptions of service quality will help management to improve customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, thereby making Varsity Colleges more competitive in this industry. This conveys the intention to study at a higher level and the willingness to recommend the institution to a friend (Douglas, Douglas & Barness. 2006: 251). The study will also contribute to increased academic knowledge concerning service quality and customer service. Ultimately, it is envisaged that the results of this nature will contribute to the assurance of service quality at higher education institutions.

1.5   LIMITATIONS

This study is limited to Varsity Colleges in Durban. The results of this study can only be representative of service quality at these two colleges. It cannot be generalised to service quality at Varsity Colleges countrywide. The results are only valid for the period in which research is conducted due to fluctuations in this environment.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.6.1 Study type

This research study is a quantitative and descriptive study and evaluates service quality at Varsity Colleges in Durban . The study used a cross-sectional methodology. Cross-sectional designs involve the collection of information from any given sample of population elements at approximately the same time (Welman & Kruger, 2005: 86).

1.6.2 Target population selection

The Westville campus has a population of 950 students including both full-time and part-time students. There are 636 full-time students and 314 part-time students. The Durban North campus has a population of 1100 students. This includes 756 full-time students and 344 part-time students. The students were selected proportionately. Non-probability sampling was used as access to the register had been restricted. Convenience sampling was used in the selection of respondents.

1.6.3 Data collection

A self-completed SERVQUAL questionnaire was used to determine students' perceptions of service quality at both campuses. The SERVQUAL instrument was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry as an instrument to collect information regarding service quality. The data was collected in class. The questionnaire consisted of 44 questions from the SERVQUAL instrument. Twenty two questions were used to assess both students' expectations and perceptions of service quality and two demographic questions was posed. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the attitudinal variables with 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Four trained fieldworkers were used to administer the questionnaires. Reliability was measured using Cronbach Alpha. The research results were analysed using the latest version of SPSS and the appropriate statistical testing was administered.

1.7   CHAPTER OUTLINE

This research study comprises five chapters. These chapters cover the following:

CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

Chapter one provides an introduction to the study. The motivation for the study, together with the objectives, limitations and research methodology is presented here. The structure of the dissertation is also discussed here.

CHAPTER 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will provide the literature review of published materials relative to the study necessary to establish a theoretical foundation for the study. This chapter will address service quality literature related to the higher education industry.

CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter will focus on the research methodology. The procedures that will be used in conducting the research will be explained. The data collection method and sampling will be described.

CHAPTER 4 : DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This chapter will present the results of the study using tables and graphs.

CHAPTER 5 : CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will contain a summary of the previous chapters and the conclusions and recommendations based on empirical findings. Recommendations for future research will also be made.

1.8   CONCLUSION

Chapter one focused on the background to service quality at Varsity Colleges. This chapter also provided the rationale for investigating students' perceptions of service quality at Varsity Colleges and outlined the objectives.

Chapter two will present a literature review relating to service quality in the higher education industry.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter two provides an overview of higher education in South Africa. A brief history of Varsity Colleges is also provided. In addition to this the chapter provides a review of the appropriate literature on service quality relating to higher education. The chapter examines higher education as a service, the four characteristics of services and service quality in higher education. Different definitions of service quality , the SERVQUAL instrument as well as the quality gaps is explained in this chapter. The relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction is also highlighted. These service quality dimensions will be discussed and related to the investigation of students' perceptions of service quality at Varsity Colleges.

Service industries are playing an increasingly vital role in the economy of many nations. In today's world of intense domestic and global competition, the ongoing increase in customer expectations and customers' subsequent demands for better service quality, providing quality service is the key to success. Many experts agree that the most powerful competitive trend currently shaping marketing and business strategy is service quality (Abdullah, 2006:31). Since the 1980's, service quality has been associated with increased profitability and superior competitive advantage. Service quality has been suggested as a means of developing a competitive advantage (Landrum, Prybutok & Zhang, 2007: 104).

Hence, the concept of service quality is therefore taking more importance in decision-making world-wide. Service quality is now seen as a means of creating value for the customer. The increasing focus and emphasis on service quality stems from this.

2.2   HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

In the past 15 years, the world has slowly evolved from the ideological confines of the post World War 11 structures to a more interdependent society and economy. However, the world is still divided into the developed and developing worlds. The end of Apartheid in South Africa created a new environment where competition for resources and strategic interests is intense. The greatest challenge for developing countries lies in the mobilisation of and equipping their people with knowledge to exploit the advantages of globalisation. The information age has provided developing countries with an opportunity to play catch-up in a world where knowledge is a prerequisite for any society (Michael, 2004: 118-137).

Education has for a long time been recognised as the means to achieve change, create new ideas and initiate new practices that move a country towards increasing prosperity (Wheatley, 2001:46-49). Higher education institutions are educating those who will create and shape the future world as well as inform today's world. This makes the role of higher education vital in today's rapidly changing environment. Therefore, higher education institutions have a responsibility to many (Freeman & Thomas, 2005: 153-177).

Higher education in South Africa is a complex and contested space (The Independent Institute of Education (IIE) Institutional Self Evaluation Portfolio HEQC Audit, 2007:2-29). The higher education landscape in South Africa has experienced increasing transformation over the last ten years. Higher education institutions in South Africa have experienced drastic changes in their structuring, funding and student numbers. Matula (2001: 44) advocates that the decline in subsidies has had an adverse impact on the quality of teaching and research and has led to overcrowding in many institutions. This, in turn, has resulted in a deterioration of physical facilities and a lack of resources such as text books, educational material and maintenance. The perceived quality has also had an effect on the choice of institution by prospective students. The challenges faced by higher education in South Africa is made more difficult through the integration of equity goals of national

policy as a means of redressing inequalities of the inherited educational system (Badat, 2003).

The globalisation of higher education is also bringing in new competitors. Some of these strong, credible international providers have come into the South African market , bringing together a different level of integrity to the market to augment the effective providers that already operated (The Independent Institute of Education (IIE) Institutional Self Evaluation Portfolio HEQC Audit, 2007:2-29). The government's policy to change higher education in South Africa and the challenges brought about by globalisation has resulted in new challenges facing higher educational institutions. These new challenges have included various mergers and the transformation of Technikons into Universities of Technology. This change has not only led to a change of status for these institutions but has also brought about the merging of intrinsically different institutions. The increasing access to higher education in South Africa under the existing government policy has led to a growth in the number of applications to higher education institutions (Bunting & Cloete, 2004).

According to Cooper & Subotzky (2001: 22), South Africa has experienced a 'revolution' relating to the increase in the number of black student enrolments for higher education where the majority have been black since the mid 1990's. This necessitates a re-evaluation of the needs of current students in higher education. Higher education has experienced a drastic decline in government funding and an increase in student fees in countries including the United Kingdom and Australia (Souter &Turner, 2002: 40-45) that have educational systems which are common to South Africa. This is the result of numerous changes in the respective environments. Higher education institutions are facing increasing market and financial pressures in various countries. A consequence of this has been a more competitive educational environment.

In the light of the above, the effects of competition on institutions of higher education can be viewed as having far-reaching consequences. In the past, technikons and universities have been involved in indirect competition. Today, the entire scenario has changed. These institutions now compete directly for the same market. The

influence of technology and the demand for a technologically literate workforce has also led to the dramatic increase in private higher education institutions that also compete for both school leavers and post-graduate level students. These private providers are meeting a specific demand and are often more highly responsive and provide credentials in areas that the public sector does not (Kruss, 2002). Private higher education continues to have a significant role to play in South Africa and internationally, in meeting the skills demands of growing and changing economies. In many countries private higher education provides some of the best research output, while in others private education took advantage of gaps in legislation to provide inferior education. In South Africa there is still some scepticism and maybe even stigma attached to private education. (The Independent Institute of Education (IIE) Self Evaluation Portfolio HEQC Audit, 2007:2-27).

The traditional students and their expectations have changed and are still changing . Today's students in higher education institutions consist not only of young and mature students, but also more working class people, an increase in the number of women and more part-time students. They are more demanding in terms of service delivery, (Wright & O'Neill, 2004: 23-39). Quality as a component of service quality is at the forefront as one of the major aspects influencing student decision-making for education (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007: 58-61). The quality of the overall experience for students is crucial to the success of the programmes (Desoff, 2006: 24-30).

A study by Ben-Ami (2005) concluded that approximately one-third of South African students across ten institutions indicate that academic expectations are not met, thus confirming a gap between expectations and perceptions. This study also confirmed the importance of highly qualified and skilled staff to deliver programmes (De Jager & Soontiens: 2009: 285-300).

2.3   COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION (CHE)

The South African Council on Higher Education (CHE) is statutorily responsible for advising the Minister of Education on all higher education policy issues, and for quality assurance in higher education and training. To comply with the rules stipulated by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), all learning programmes offered by South African higher education institutions must be accredited. Public and private higher education institutions apply for accreditation of programmes through the HEQC-online accreditation system.

The Council for Higher Education CHE has the following responsibilities:

- Advising the Minister of Education on all policy matters related to higher education.
- Assuming executive responsibility for quality assurance and quality promotion within higher education and training, including programme accreditation, institutional audits, programme evaluation, quality promotion and capacity building
- monitoring and evaluating whether the vision, policy goals and objectives for higher education are being realised, including reporting on the state of South African higher education
- contributing to the development of higher education by taking initiatives to provide guidance on key national and systemic issues, producing publications, holding conferences and conducting research to inform government and stakeholders about immediate and long-term challenges of higher education (CHE, 2010).

The South African higher education system includes 23 public higher education institutions:

- 11 universities
- 6 comprehensive universities
- 6 universities of technology

As of January 2010, there were also 78 registered and 22 provisionally registered private higher education institutions (CHE, 2010).

2.4 BRIEF HISTORY OF VARSITY COLLEGE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Varsity College started in the 1990's as a tuition centre for UNISA programmes. This was the core focus of Varsity College. The increase in student enrolments created new opportunities and realities and Varsity College decided to introduce its own qualifications. From this, the strategic key drivers in establishing Varsity College were born: to provide higher education with a difference i.e. developing a student towards a career (The Independent Institute of Education (IIE) Institutional Self Evaluation Portfolio HEQC Audit, 2007:2-27-2-47).

Over the last 18 years Varsity College has grown to eight campuses in South Africa with an enrolment exceeding 12 000 students . Varsity College programmes are focused towards students entering the commercial sector. This can be done through tuition programmes for external providers such as UNISA (University of South Africa) and IMM (Institute of Marketing Management) as well as internal programmes accredited through the Independent Institute of Education (IIE). The IIE Institutional Self Evaluation Portfolio HEQC Audit, (2007:2-27-2-47) states that Varsity College does not simply focus on providing an higher education for a student. It is an institution driven by a philosophy of developing students towards a career. This is achieved through its focus on academic excellence, social interaction and practical experience resulting in the students' holistic development.

It is envisaged that feedback from this research study will be used as a management tool to attain greater insight into student satisfaction and service quality and to address any issues impacting on the delivery of quality higher education at these two institutions.

2.5   HIGHER EDUCATION AS A SERVICE

Services have grown tremendously in recent years. Services now make up approximately 64% of the gross world product (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010: 268). Masmanidis, Vassiliadis & Mylonakis (2006: 81) define a service as any act or performance that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. It is not tied to a physical product. This view is also shared by Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, Boshoff & Terblanche (2004: 438) who elaborate that services are deeds or performances that one entity offers to another or efforts that cannot be physically possessed.

Behavioural attributes such as acts, deeds, performances or efforts and activities or processes characterise services (Smith, Smith & Clarke, 2007:334-351). According to Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler (2006: 4), service is 'deeds, processes, and performances.' These authors explain that services cannot be stored, saved, resold or returned. Brink & Berndt (2004: 3) define service as any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. The definition suggests that service, in general, is not a tangible object that can be felt or touched, which distinguishes services from tangible products.

Higher education is a fast growing service industry and every day it is more and more exposed to globalisation processes (O'Neil & Palmer, 2004:39-52). Service quality, focusing on student satisfaction, is a newly emerging field of concern. Services can be differentiated from products in terms of the level of tangibility. Higher education is regarded as a service since it possesses the classical characteristics of services.

The following characteristics of services also make services different from goods as shown below (Woo & Ennew, 2005: 1180). The four characteristics of services is clearly illustrated in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1 Characteristics of Service

INTANGIBILITY

Services cannot be seen, tasted, felt, heard or smelled before purchase

VARIABILITY

Quality of service depends on who provides them and when, where and how

CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVICES

PERISHABILITY

Services cannot be stored for later sale or use

INSEPARABILITY

Services cannot be separated from their providers
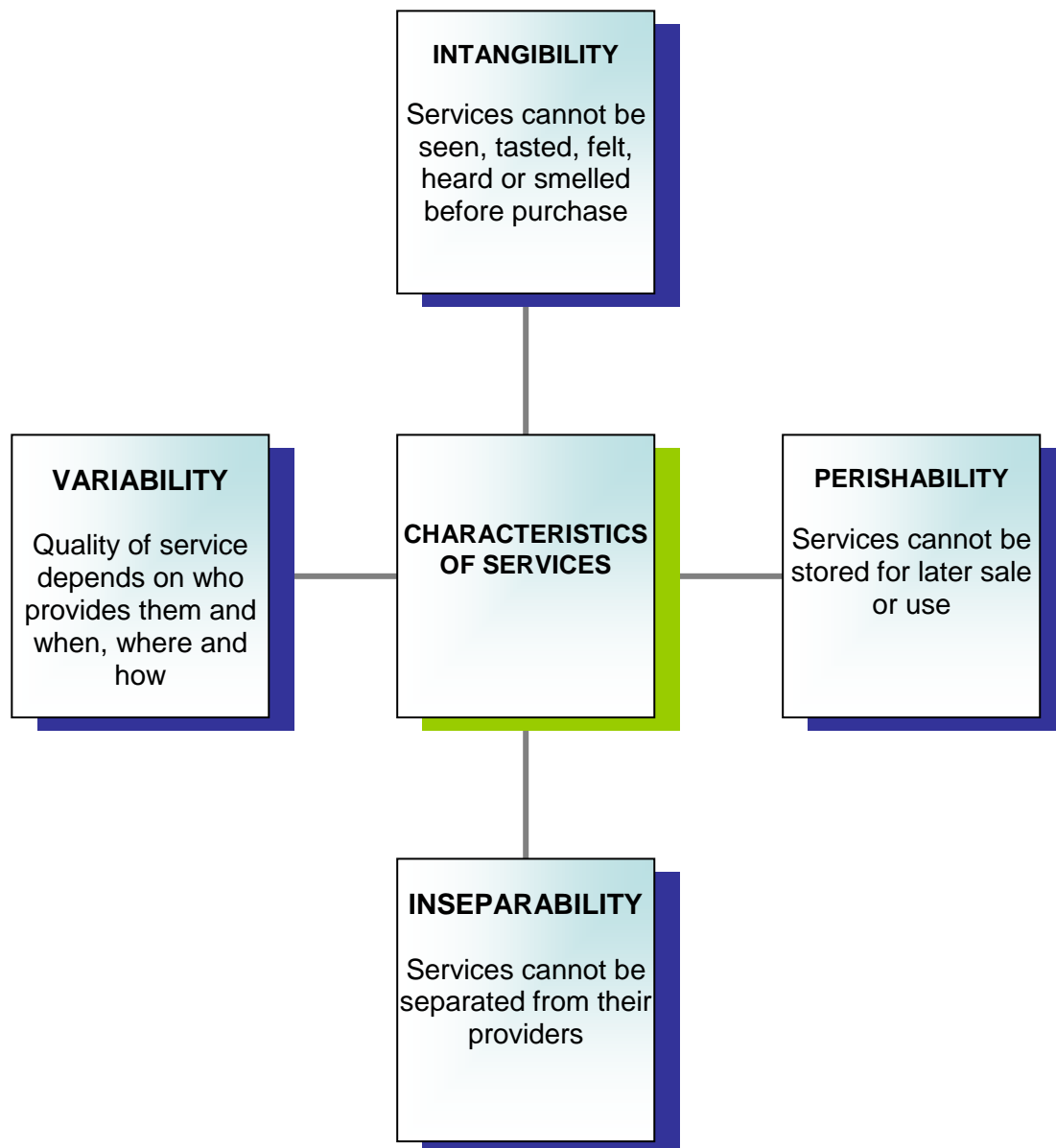
Source: Kotler, Bowen & Makens (2006: 42)

• Intangibility

Intangibility refers to the absence of tangible assets which cannot be seen, touched, smelled, heard or tasted prior to purchase (Bruhn & Georgi, 2006: 13). Services cannot be seen, touched, tasted or felt in the same manner in which physical goods can be sensed. Also, services cannot be stored and are difficult to duplicate (Kotler,

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2000: 429). Doyle & Stern (2006: 351) describe services as experiences and processes. Higher education is a service. As such, it cannot be inspected or tested in advance and it cannot be brought to the customer which, in this case, is the student. Intangibility suggests that services are performances only experienced by the customer. The higher education offering is an experience rather than a physical good.

Therefore, service intangibility raises a number of issues including students' sense of risk and uncertainty, divergence of expectations, need to search for information through interpersonal and word-of-mouth approaches (Tan, 2005: 72-77). Nadiri, Kandampully & Hussain (2009: 525-535) state that higher education institutions are actively seeking to determine what student expectations and perceptions of the educational service are provided. George (2004:23) states that students are unaware of exactly what they are buying. To reduce the uncertainty caused by service intangibility, students look for tangible evidence that will provide information and confidence about the service. The only tangible component for the student is the lecture facilities or equipment used on campus. Tangibles provide signals or cues regarding the quality of the intangible service (Kotler & Keller, 2006: 43). The challenge of intangibility can be overcome by ensuring that the tangibles of the service indicate the quality of service at the institution.

- Perishability

Services are usually short-lived since they are consumed as long as the activity or process lasts. Therefore, service processes are perishable and cannot be stored in the same way as physical products can. The degree of perishability in the quality of service is affected by the degree of intangibility (Bruhn & Georgi, 2006: 14). This characteristic implies that service providers have only one way in that they should provide the right service, the first time. As such, service providers do not enjoy a quality check before the service can be sent to the customers. In terms of the higher education context, the service provided must be right the first time.

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- Inseparability

Services are consumed at the same time as they are produced without any clear transfer of ownership (Perez, Abad, Carillo & Fernandez, 2007: 136). Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, Bishoff & Terblanche (2004: 440) describe consumption and production as two inseparable activities of a service and the customer has to be present during the production of services. Both the customer and employee are central for creating successful exchanges. Since the customer is also present as the service is produced, both the provider and the customer affect the service outcome. Perez, Abad, Carillo & Fernandez (2007:136) explain that the service is produced and consumed simultaneously in most of the service industries.

In the higher education environment, this means that for information to be transferred or communicated in the class, the lecturer and student must be present at the same time. The course content offered by an higher education institution may be outstanding, but if the lecturer has a negative attitude or is not empathetic to student concerns, students will down-rate the overall service experience. They will not be satisfied with the overall service experience (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006: 43). Therefore, the customer plays a vital role in the transaction of most services.

- Variability

This refers to the random levels of service quality that customers receive when they patronize a service because they are produced by humans (Bruhn et al., 2006:14). This is also referred to as heterogeneity. Services are highly variable. Their quality is dependent on who provides them and when and where they are provided. (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006: 44). Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, Bishoff & Terblanche (2004: 440) support the view that services tend to be less standardised and uniform than physical goods. Services involve the human element. The human element is seen as being variable. Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler (2003: 54) highlight the point that no two services will be precisely the same because they are produced by humans. Ganesan-Lim, Russell-Bennet & Dagger (2008: 554) argue that human interaction in services can increase the level of variability, which in turn, affects the service

delivery. Higher education is a high-contact service which involves human interaction and this leads to the possibility for both negative and positive service experiences. Armstrong & Kotler (2006: 224) suggest that the quality of services is dependent on who provides them as well as when, where and how they are provided.

In the higher education environment , no two lecturers will deliver their content in the same manner and no two students will experience the lecturer or the service delivery in the same way. Each customer's expectation of service quality differs since both objective and subjective criteria is used to evaluate service quality. This has resulted in a lack of standardisation as it varies from situation to situation (Douglas, 2006: 251-267). It becomes necessary to limit the differences in performance. This can be accomplished through training and motivation, setting standards and quality assurance programmes.

Higher education service providers can use marketing effectively to position themselves strongly in chosen markets (Kotler & Keller, 2006: 46). These service providers must work to interact effectively with students in order to create superior value during service encounters. Successful and innovative organisations turn their attention to both their employees and customers. They understand the service-profit chain which links service firms with employee and customer satisfaction. This chain consists of five links (Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser Jr. & Schlesinger : 1994: 164-174). These five links are discussed below:

- Healthy services profits and growth
This involves superior service organisation performance.
- Satisfied and loyal customers
Satisfied customers remain loyal, repeat purchase and refer other customers.
- Greater service delivery
More effective and efficient customer and value creation.
- Satisfied and productive service employees
More satisfied, loyal and hard-working employees.
- Internal service quality

Superior employee selection and training, a high quality work environment and strong support for those dealing with customers.

Therefore, realizing service profits and growth goals start with taking care of those who take care of customers.

2.6   THE SERVICE TRIANGLE

Bitner (1995: 246-251) advocates the use of the service marketing triangle which can be seen in figure 2.2. This triangle suggests three types of marketing which relate to making and keeping promises to customers that must be carried out to ensure success of the organisation.

Figure 2.2   The service marketing triangle

Organisation

Internal marketing
'enabling the promise'

External marketing
'setting the promise'

Employees   **Consumers**

Interactive marketing
'delivering the promise'
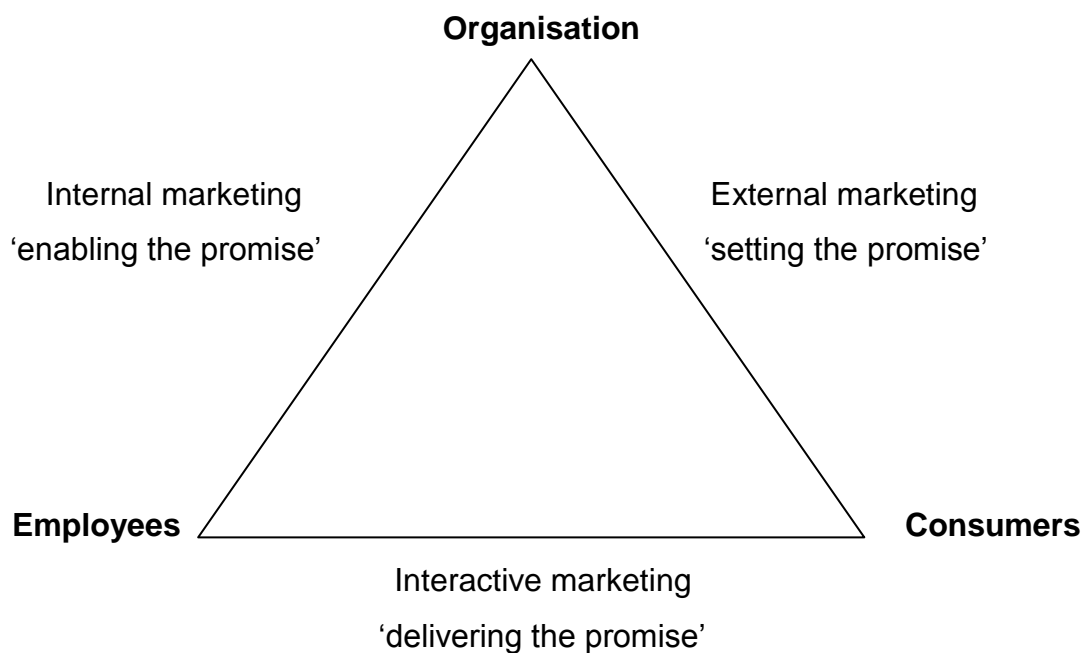
Source: Kotler & Keller, (2006:47)

The left side of the triangle highlights the role of internal marketing. This implies treating employees in the same way as external customers to ensure that the organisation will be successful in delivering its promises to customers. Employees

must be recruited, trained and incentivised for great service so that promises are kept.

The right hand side of the triangle shows the external marketing activities that the organisation should carry out. These activities raise customer expectations and promises to meet them. The organisation's tangibles and its employees are included here. The actual service delivery takes place at the base of the triangle. This is known as interactive marketing. It is where the organisation's employees interact directly with customers and where the promise is delivered. It is where service promises are most often kept or broken by employees.

The above triangle has implications for higher education institutions. All three sides are crucial for successfully marketing higher education institutions. A comprehensive and complete marketing effort needs the support of all three sides of the service marketing triangle.

2.7   SERVICE QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The quality of service in higher education is increasingly important (Abdullah, 2006:71-89). In general, service quality promotes customer satisfaction, stimulates intention to return and encourages recommendations (Nadiri & Hussain, 2005:469-489). Like any other organisation, the higher education sector relies a great deal on quality management to remain competitive. Higher education institutions should continuously focus on the importance of service improvements in establishing a competitive advantage.

The marketization of higher education institutions has led to students being viewed as the primary beneficiaries of education and should be treated as customers. This view arises from the understanding that higher education institutions are highly competitive and use aggressive strategies to satisfy needs in order to attract a sustainable market share (Altbach & Knight, 2007: 290-305). The satisfaction of their learning experience is critical to the popularity and competitive edge over other

institutions. Students become the mouthpiece of institutions as they appear in promotional materials. In this case, they serve as customers endorsing product and service quality offered by the institutions they represent (Mok & Lee, 2003:15-42). For us to provide quality services to these customers, we must initially understand their needs and in order to gain an understanding of their needs, we must, in turn, understand the quality attributes that they desire. People differ in their perception of quality (Chua 2004:42).

Secondary beneficiaries, in the higher education context, would include parents, the marketplace and society at large (Wright & O'Neill, 2002: 23-39). Higher education institutions are attracting more attention to service quality primarily due to the fact that there is a social need for quality evaluation in education. The delivery of service quality has become a vital goal for many higher education institutions (Alves, 2006:14). Universities, faculties and private colleges aspire to provide high quality services for the very reason that they need to compete for their students (Faganel & Macur, 2005). Sigala & Baum (2003:367-376) claim that it becomes increasingly more complex to attract students, since new generation students possess more influence and awareness as consumers. It has been discovered that when choosing a higher education institution, the student looks for evidence of service quality (Donaldson & McNichlolas, 2004:349).

Measuring service quality is therefore, an essential task for institutions that provide a feedback on the dimensions of quality, because it offers them the possibility of important competitive advantages. Service quality literature suggests the importance for higher education institutions to constantly monitor the quality of the services they provide in order to commit themselves to continuous improvements. In the context of this research, Varsity Colleges would be the service organisation and the customers would be the students attending the institution. For its continued sustainability and growth in the market, it becomes essential for Varsity College to evaluate its service quality regularly.

2.8   DEFINITION OF SERVICE QUALITY

Quality is viewed as the degree to which the service, the process and the service organisation can satisfy the customer's expectations, (Brink & Berndt, 2005:46-47). Lovelock & Wright (2002: 14) define quality as the extent to which a service satisfies a customer's needs, wants and expectations. This definition implies that if an organisation does not offer superior service quality to its customers, these customers will switch to competing institutions.

The study of service quality has been highly debated in marketing literature for a number of years (Brady &Cronin, 2001:34-49). There is also a great deal of debate as to the best way to define service quality in higher education (Becket & Brookes, 2006:123-142).

The term service quality can be defined from different perspectives and orientations (Sahney, Banwet & Karunes, 2004:143-166). Dale (2003:55) claims that service quality, per se, is difficult to define and measure and has been widely debated over the last twenty years. Many of the known definitions of service quality highlights the relationship between quality and a customers' need and satisfaction (Zafiropoulos, Fragidis, Dimitriadis & Paschaloudis, 2005:22). Putruzellis , D' Ugento & Romanazzi (2006:351) support the premise that higher service quality results in greater customer satisfaction. Therefore, satisfaction is based on customer's expectations and perceptions of service quality (Ekinci, 2004:197-203).

In the 1990's, Gronroos utilised a two-dimensional model of service quality i.e. technical quality and functional quality to explain and measure service quality (Perez et al., 2007: 137). Technical quality places emphasises the outcome of the service provided whereas functional quality focuses on how it is delivered. Later, Gronroos (2001: 81) highlighted seven specific dimensions on which service quality customers' perceptions could be measured. These dimensions include professionalism and skills, reliability and trustworthiness, attitudes and behaviour, accessibility and flexibility, service recovery, reputation and credibility.

A great deal of the research on the measurement of service quality in education has been influenced by the seminal work of Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler., based on the SERVQUAL model. Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1985: 42) define service quality as the degree and direction of discrepancy between consumers' perceptions and expectations. According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1985: 42-43), service quality can be measured along a continuum ranging from ideal quality to totally unacceptable quality. The position of a customer's perception of service quality depends on the nature of discrepancy between the expected service and the service perceived by the customer. The authors named this the disconfirmation paradigm. It was operationalised as follows:

Service Quality (Q) = Perception (P) – Expectation (E)

Woo & Ennew (2005: 1180) suggest that both the approaches to conceptualizing the dimensions of service quality overlap. Various marketing scholars agree that service quality results from customers' comparisons of their expectations about a service encounter with their perceptions of the service encounter (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985: 41).

 Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler (2006: 49) view expectations as beliefs about service delivery. These beliefs function as standards against which performance is evaluated. These authors further elaborate that customer expectations are not stable and is , indeed, human perceptions based on verbal information, personal needs, experience and commercial information. These researchers also suggest that customer perceptions are subjective assessments of the actual services. This relates to how customers perceive services; how they evaluate the quality of service received; whether they are satisfied and whether they have received good value. In essence, customers' perceptions are the way that people see something based on their experience. Each person's perception of a situation will vary.

Perceptions are usually formed over a period of time and reflect the ways that one has been treated, his/her values, priorities, prejudices and sensitivity to others

(Harris, 2006:16). Customers' perceptions of the quality of service provided determines success (Quintana, 2006).

Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1988:12-40) later defined service quality as a 'global judgement or attitude relating to the overall excellence or superiority of the service.' The researcher views service quality as a measure of how well service delivery meets with customer expectations. This means that any service that is provided must match customers' expectations and satisfy their needs and requirements. If expectations of the service outweigh the performance of the service, then perceived quality is less than satisfactory and thus, customer dissatisfaction occurs. Gaps that exist must be timeously closed in order to improve service quality.

Dhurup & Mohamane (2007: 62) explain that when a company performs a service carelessly, makes avoidable mistakes and when it fails to deliver on promises that it has made to attract customers, it unsettles the customers' confidence and compromises the company's chances of receiving a reputation for service excellence. Varsity Colleges, as a service provider, would also be assessed on a similar basis. If students at the institution perceive service as exceeding expected service, they may continue or further their studies at Varsity Colleges or even recommend it to future students.

2.9   THE SERVQUAL INSTRUMENT

SERVQUAL has been used to measure service quality in numerous industries. These have included the airline industry (Sultan & Simpson, 2000: 188-216); department stores (Alzola & Robaina, 2005: 46-57); the health sector (Kilbourne, Duffy & Giarchi, 2004: 524-533); banking (Arasli, Mehtap-Smadi, Katircioglu, 2005: 41-46); telecommunications (Van der Wal, Pampallis & Bond, 2002: 323-335) and library services (Cook & Thompson, 2001: 585-604). SERVQUAL has also been applied in various countries. These include the United States (Kilbourne, Duffy, Duffy & Giarchi, 2004: 524-533); China (Zhou, Zhang & Xu, 2002: 14-21); Australia

(Baldwin & Sohal, 2003: 207-216); the UK (Kilbourne, Duffy, Duffy & Giarchi, 2004: 524-533) and South Africa (Kgalie & Morris, 2006: 47-68).

The SERVQUAL instrument was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry as an instrument to collect information regarding service quality. The SERVQUAL instrument has played a key role in the evaluation of service quality in marketing research and practice over the last two decades and continues to enjoy widespread acceptance as a measure of service quality. (Furrer, Liu & Sudharshan, 2000: 355; Ahmed, 2009: 21; Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000: 73). Zafiropoulos & Vrana (2007:36-37) proposed SERVQUAL as an appropriate instrument for service quality in the context of higher education. SERVQUAL has now evolved as an effective instrument to measure service quality in higher education.

O'Neill & Palmer (2004:39-52) used SERVQUAL to try and understand the influence of time on students' perceptions of service quality using a longitudinal study. The sample consisted of first year students in two distinct stages:

a)   prior to orientation;

b)   and after one month.

He found that the students' perceptions of quality had changed for the worse with time. This suggested that service quality may be influenced by time. Sherry, Bhat, Beaver & Ling (2004: 2) on the other hand, used SERVQUAL to evaluate the perceptions of international students, with the intention of better serving the needs and expectations of services offered to this group of students. However, they concluded that SERVQUAL presented useful insights and was an excellent starting point to measure education quality.

The advantage of this model is that it includes the whole-person experience rather than the experience of teaching. The above model is one that examines the gap between expectation and perception. Getting students to consider their expectation and experience offers an opportunity for them to reflect on personal desires and contextual limitations. In this way, rating and feedback provided by the students would be more objective.

Brysland & Curry (2001: 395) highlight some of the characteristics that can be analysed by using the SERVQUAL instrument to determine customer service levels:

- The different customers' perceptions and expectations of service quality to highlight present performance levels, by customer segmentation;

- The resultant service gaps;

- An understanding of customer perceptions and expectations over time, thereby making room for further analysis as part of the monitoring process;

- How to manage customer expectations with respect to service planning, design and delivery;

- The impact of service improvement activities which were carried out as a result of customers expectations and priorities; and

- Most vital, the results provide a starting point and helps in the prioritisation of the service improvement activities.

2.10   CRITICISMS OF THE SERVQUAL MODEL

In spite of its popularity in the service quality literature, SERVQUAL has not been without criticisms. Cronin & Taylor (1992:52) claimed that the model lacked adequacy and suggested that the 'expectations' measure was not relevant and confusing. They proposed an alternative to SERVQUAL which was entitled SERVPERV. The SERVPERV model made use of only the 'performance' measurement of service delivery. This model only utilises half the items required of SERVQUAL. Jain & Gupta (2004:25-37) discovered that SERVPERF's 'performance' model could not diagnose shortfalls in desired levels of service quality.

Scholars contend that SERVQUAL only focuses on the service delivery process and does not address the outcomes of the service encounter (Kang & James, 2004: 266-268). Toy, Kerstetter & Rager (2002: 99) evaluated the SERVQUAL model and were critical of Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry because of a lack of explaining the variability of the outcomes of the SERVQUAL model.

Despite the difference between these two models, academics and practitioners agree that SERVQUAL and SERVPERV are the most apt frameworks for measuring service quality across a wide range of industries and disciplines.

2.11   SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSIONS

SERVQUAL has its theoretical foundations in the gaps model and defines service quality in terms of the difference between customer expectations and performance perceptions on a number of 22 items. Customer expectations are beliefs about service delivery that serve as standards against which performance is evaluated whereas customer perceptions are viewed as subjective assessments of actual services experiments through interaction with the providers (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2006: 38).

The SERVQUAL instrument has five generic dimensions. These dimensions express how consumers view service quality. The dimensions include the following:

2.11.1   TANGIBLES

The appearance of physical facilities such as lecture venues, libraries and canteen facilities, equipment such as whiteboards and data projectors, the professional appearance of staff and communication materials such as brochures are crucial to providing a total educational experience (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2006:120). Tangibles provide physical representations that customers will use to evaluate service quality. Dhurup, Sing & Surajlal (2006:42) view tangibles as the facilities, equipment and personal appearance of staff at the institution. The employee' appearance should be neat and tidy. Learning experience and orientation cannot entirely be evaluated by grades alone. Service performance should go beyond tangible forms. Also, learning objectives need not necessarily lead to outcomes that are strictly quantifiable (Yeo, 2008: 270). Most organisations use a combination of tangibles and other dimensions to develop a service quality strategy for the firm (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler., 2006:

120-122). The tangibles at Varsity College must provide added value to customers.

2.11.2 RELIABILITY

Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler (2006: 117) view reliability as the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Yeo (2008:270) states that the discrepancy between promise and delivery is largely the result of inaccurate communication from advertisements and exhibitions. Many organisations tend to oversell their services. This leads to grand promises that misrepresent their actual, potential and academic readiness.

Blose & Tankersley (2004: 78) propose that providing a service and meeting commitments timeously in keeping with the promised service date in a professional manner, will influence a customer's perception in an important way. The employees at the institution should perform the desired service level correctly the first time. It also means the organisation keeps its promises within the specific time frame set out. If this delivery is done in a proper way, it will enhance the perceived quality of the customer (Brink and Berndt, 2005 : 60). Varsity College is a strong brand that has established itself in the higher education environment by being reliable.

2.11.3 ASSURANCE

The competence of the staff in providing a courteous and secure service. Arasli, Mehtap-Smadi & Katircioglu (2005:45) contend that assurance is the employee's knowledge, courtesy and ability to inspire trust and confidence in the customer. These authors also state that this dimension is of crucial importance to services for the very fact that customers are confronted with a high level of risk or uncertainty about their ability to evaluate outcomes. To Dhurup, Singh & Surujlal (2006: 42), assurance represents courtesy, credibility and competence on the part of employees. Bruhn et al., (2006: 56) advocate that assurance is associated with the service provider's capability to deliver the output, especially in terms of

the knowledge, politeness and trustworthiness of the employees. Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler (2006: 120) explain that trust and confidence can be enhanced by the person who links the customer to the company. In an higher education institution the key people that link the customer to the company would be the lecturers and frontline staff. The institution must provide assurance that employees have the ability to convey trust and confidence. Trust and confidence can also be represented by the institution itself. An institution with a strong brand can convey trust and confidence. The evaluation of high and low service quality depends a great deal on how customers perceive the actual performance based on their expectation.

2.11.4   RESPONSIVENESS

The willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. This dimension focuses on attentiveness and promptness in dealing with customers' requests, questions, complaints and problems. Dale (2003 : 240) defines responsiveness as the willingness to assist customers and to provide prompt service on a continuous basis. Responsiveness is present in the time period that customers have to wait for help, receive answers to queries or attention to problems as well as the ability to develop customised solutions for customers.

The staff at the institution must be willing and ready to serve and help customers. It is crucial that the staff at Varsity College be knowledgeable about the service they represent. Blose & Tankersley (2004: 80) contend that whether the interaction occurs face-to face or telephonically, the degree to which the service personnel exhibit the ability to handle such matters effectively and whether they care about attending to the customer's request, will undoubtedly impact on perceptions of service quality. It is imperative that staff at Varsity Colleges be courteous and knowledgeable to students. The learning process is expected to be academically rigorous and flexible in areas pertaining to course selection and assessment (Yeo, 2008: 270). This may include staff responding to a student's request promptly and dealing with customers problems and queries immediately.

2.11.5   EMPATHY

Providing caring and individualised attention to the customer. The focal point of empathy highlights the message that customers are unique and special. Curry & Sinclair (2002: 200) view empathy as providing caring, individualised attention to its customers. It is a major challenge for higher education institutions to exceed customer expectations and demand. The number of customers that the service provider has to deal with at one given time has an influence on the level of individual attention given to each customer.

The need for optimal enrolments at institutions have witnessed an increase in class sizes, thus compromising the lecturer-student ratio. This increased ratio has a negative impact on the level of individual attention and empathy given to each student. Brink &Berndt (2005: 60) state that higher education institutions and its employees must try to understand the customers' problems and strive to carry out duties with the customers' best interests in mind. Yeo (2008: 275) states that there is a greater need for managers to adopt a customer-orientation by showing a human dimension to their interaction with customers. Listening, understanding and communicating with the customer forms the cornerstone of empathy. Students should be addressed by names and not by student numbers. This makes the student feel special.

Lovelock & Wirtz (2002: 266-267) state that reliability is the most important factor in customers' judgement of service quality. Chowdhary and Prakash (2007: 495), also concur that reliability is the most important dimension of service quality attributes. They state that reliability affects the assessment of quality dimensions. Reliability improvements are at the heart of service quality enhancement efforts because unreliable service means promises not being met on the attributes that customers care about the service received. If the main service is not performed reliably, customers may assume that the company is incompetent and may switch to another institution.

2.12   THE SERVQUAL MODEL

The SERVQUAL instrument consists of twenty two statements used to assess service quality on the above five dimensions. Each statement is used twice: one measures expectations and the other measures perceptions. Expectations are what customers assume about the service before the service experience and perceptions are what the customer thinks he or she has actually received after the service experience (Klopper, Berndt, Chipp, Ismail, Roberts-Lombard, Subramani, Wakeham, Petzer, Hern, Saunders & Myers-Smith, 2006: 204). Respondents are asked to rate their level of agreement and disagreement with the given statements on a five-point Likert scale. A negative rating represents expectations which are unfulfilled and a positive rating represents expectations which have been exceeded. The gap differences between expected and perceived services are calculated. This enables the researcher to identify what items of service quality meet , exceed or fall short of user perception.

The nature of services poses major challenges to consistent delivery across employees in the same organisation. The extent to which customers are willing to accept this variation or difference is called the zone of tolerance (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2004:55). A performance that falls below the adequate service level may cause dissatisfaction. On the other hand, a performance that exceeds the desired service level will please the customer. When service falls outside this zone, customers will either react in a positive or negative manner.

Students at Varsity Colleges may expect test results feedback within two weeks, which would fall in their zone of tolerance. If they receive their results much later, this would fall below their adequate service level, resulting in dissatisfaction.

2.13   THE QUALITY GAPS

The development of the Gap Model of service quality by Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1985:41-50) opened new horizons to the understanding of service quality. This model has been extensively used by many researchers when analysing the gaps between customers' expectations and perceptions (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988: 40-55). The Gap Model of service quality serves as a conceptual framework for understanding service quality delivery. The Gap Model depicted in figure 2.3 shows how service quality emerges. The top part includes factors related to the customer, while the bottom part shows factors related to the service provider. Expected service is a function of the customers' past experiences and personal needs and word-of-mouth communication. The marketing communication activities of the organisation also influences expected service.

The perceived service or the service experienced is the result of a series of internal decisions and activities. Management perceptions of customer expectations guide decisions about service quality specifications to be followed by the organisation, when service delivery takes place. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985: 44-45) identified five gaps that can lead to dissatisfaction with service delivery.

2.13.1   Gap between the customer's expectations and the marketer's perceptions. (Gap1)

This gap means that management perceives the quality expectations inaccurately. Managers may think that they are aware of what customers want but in reality, customers expect something different. In relation to Higher education, institutions are not prepared for the shifting needs of their customers in providing courses and programmes that are relevant in subject matter and teaching approaches. Often, learning processes are compromised. This shortcoming can be overcome by always doing better research, so that the needs and wishes of the customer are better observed and appreciated (Gronroos, 2002: 102).

Figure 2.3   The Gap Model of Service Quality

CONSUMER

| Word of mouth communication | Personal needs | Past experience |

Expected service

GAP 5

Perceived service

MARKETER

GAP 1

Service delivery   GAP 4   External communication to customers

GAP 3

Service standards

GAP 2

Management perception of consumer expectations
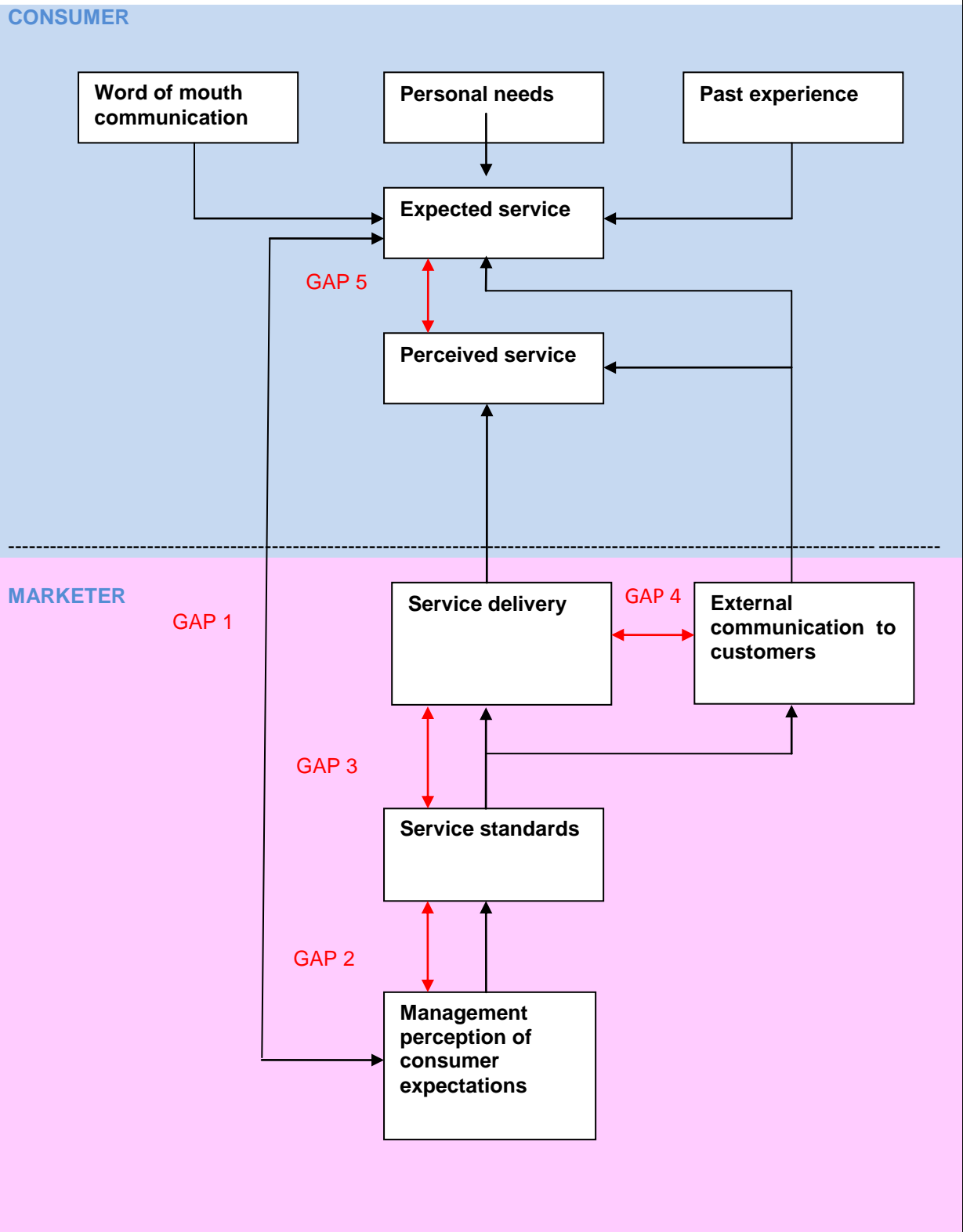
SOURCE: Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, (2006:46)

2.13.2 Gap between management perceptions and service quality perceptions. (Gap 2)

This gap means that service quality specifications are not in keeping with management's perceptions of quality expectations. This gap may result due to planning mistakes or insufficient planning procedures, bad management planning and insufficient support for planning for service quality from top management. A reason for this shortfall may be a lack of real commitment to service quality from top management because quality is not considered a high priority issue.

Institutions may not be able to come to terms with the shortage of lecturing staff when they are confronted with the pressure of meeting increased enrolments to remain competitive. Hence, class sizes are increased, thereby adversely impacting on lecturer-student ratio. This has a negative effect on the level of individual attention given to each student. A solution to this problem is to change an organisation's priority as quality as perceived by customers is an important factor in service competition today (Groonroos, 2002 : 102).

2.13.3 Gap between service quality specifications and service delivery. (Gap 3)

Bruhn & Georgi, (2006: 226) claim that service delivery is the process of transferring available service products for consumption or use. This gap means that quality specifications are not met by performance in the service and delivery process. This limitation is due to specifications being too complicated and not being in line with the existing corporate culture, bad management of service operations and a lack of sufficient internal marketing. The issue of internal marketing is crucial.

Institutions fail to identify appropriate specifications that would meet customers' expectations in terms of content, delivery and application. The remedy to the above problems can be found in improving recruitment processes so that poor decisions can be prevented, clarifying the tasks of all personnel and finding a solution where

necessary tasks are dealt with, without interfering with quality performance (Gronroos, 2002: 104-105).

2.13.4 Gap between service delivery and service communications. (Gap 4)

Gronroos (2002: 105) contends that the market communication gap will occur when the service provider's external communications do not match the actual service delivery. Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler (2006: 43) suggest four main reasons for this. Firstly, internal and external communications are not effectively integrated in the service delivery by the service provider. Secondly, customers' expectations are not effectively employed and managed by management. Thirdly, service providers overpromise in order to maintain competitive advantage during the organisation's external communications process. Lastly, there is ineffective horizontal communication between the organisation's external communications and the front office employees.

This gap means that promises made by market communication activities are not in keeping with the services delivered. This gap is due to market communication planning not being integrated with service operations, insufficient coordination between traditional external marketing and operations, the organisation failing to perform according to specifications and a propensity to exaggerate and thus, promise too much.

Higher education institutions tend to oversell their services. This results in exaggerated promises that misrepresent their actual potential and academic readiness. A major issue here is the excessive promotion of facilities and support services yet in reality this is absent. Solutions here include creating a system that coordinates planning and execution of external market communications campaigns with service operations and delivery.

2.13.5   Gap between perceived service and expected service. (Gap 5)

This gap represents the difference between actual performance and the consumers' perceptions of the service. This is also known as the service gap and results when one or more of the preceding gaps occur. It provides a distinct indication of the level of service quality in an higher education institution. The expected quality is what the customer expects to receive from the company and the perceived service is what the customer perceives he or she received from the company. If the customer receives less than he expected, he or she is dissatisfied (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006: 435).

Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, (1985: 41-50) argue that the most important gap is between the customers' expectations and their perception of the service quality actually delivered. Zeithaml & Bitner (2003: 41) concur with the above by stating that in order to manage service quality, it is important to manage the gaps between expectations and perceptions on the part of management, employers and customers. Mullins, Walker, Boyd & Larreche (2005: 424) also contend that organisations must close these gaps in order to improve customer satisfaction and build long-term relationships.

Skalen & Fougere (2007: 118) stress the point that the gap-model should not be used as a once-off exercise but instead be used on a number of occasions in order to produce the customer orientation that it promises. Gap 5 forms the basis of this research, evaluating students' perceptions of service quality at Varsity Colleges. In the light of the above, the SERVQUAL instrument will be used to measure service quality at Varsity Colleges in Westville and Durban North.

2.14   THE BENEFITS OF SERVICE QUALITY

Kotler & Keller, (2006: 409) suggest that superior service quality in an organisation can have the following positive benefits :

- Customer retention

Superior service quality builds a core of loyal customers and creates positive word-of-mouth. It determines customer satisfaction which impacts on repeat business and word-of-mouth. Research has revealed that it costs four to six times more to acquire new customers than to retain present customers. Hence, the significance of customer retention. A contented customer will also spread a word-of-mouth recommendation. On average, one satisfied customer will inform five others while one dissatisfied guest will tell ten or more people.

- Avoidance of price competition

A higher education institution that has a reputation for excellent quality service commands a stronger competitive position than one with that has a reputation for inconsistency and poor quality. A higher education institution with a superior image depends on positive word-of-mouth and repeat customers to bring in new business. On the other hand, an institution with a poor reputation will not be able to secure a fair share of repeat customers and will receive negative word-of-mouth than positive word-of-mouth.

- Retention of good employees

Excellent service quality helps to retain good employees. Recruiting becomes more simplified and training costs are cut down. Poor service quality can lead to employee absenteeism, turnover and loss of employee morale.

- Reduction of costs

These costs refer to costs that are linked to customer experiences. These can be very costly especially when the customer decides not to return because of a service problem. In the case of a service, it is more difficult to come across errors before they reach the customer because of simultaneous production and consumption in

this higher education environment. A high-quality service system is costly but the merits of this system outweighs that of a poor quality service system.

2.15   SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Lovelock & Wright (2002:87) define customer satisfaction as a kind of emotional reaction that arises from an actual experience. Metters, King-Metters, Pullman & Walton (2006: 443) also concur that satisfaction is the customer's fulfilment response. Satisfaction is the customer's assessment of a product or service in terms of whether that product or service has met customer's needs and expectations (Bruhn & Georgi, 2006: 443).

Fen & Lian (2007: 62) propose that while customer satisfaction and service quality are two distinct concepts, these two constructs are closely correlated. Several studies in marketing literature have discovered positive relationships between service quality and customer satisfaction (Jaiswal, 2008: 407).

Bigne, Moliner &Sanchez (2003: 420-442) suggest that even in the higher education environment , there is a significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. The higher the service quality, the more satisfied the customers. Thus, satisfaction is based on customer expectations and perceptions of service quality (Ekinci, 2004: 197-203). The quality of service is produced at the same time as the service supply and consumption. It is precisely in this important moment that customer satisfaction and quality of service exists.

Customers may experience varying degrees of satisfaction. Customers are satisfied when the service meet their expectations or even delighted when service exceeds expectations. On the other hand, customers will be dissatisfied when the service is below expectations (Kotler & Keller, 2006: 16). Service quality should be viewed as an antecedent of customer satisfaction (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2006: 107). Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler, (2006:45) support the view that delighting the customer with service encounters that outweigh their expectations to a surprising

degree can improve customer satisfaction, thus providing the organisation with a competitive edge.

Highly satisfied customers spread positive word-of-mouth and lead to becoming a walking, talking advertisement for a firm, which lowers the cost of attracting new customers (Lovelock & Wright, 2002: 274-275). Truong & Foster (2006:843) claim that customer satisfaction occurs in two situations. One is the consequence of a product or service that meets the customer's expectation and the other is the consequence of exceeding the expectation. Dissatisfaction occurs when the actual service is below the expected level.

Lovelock & Wirtz (2007: 61) state that in all types of services, managing service quality effectively is the key to creating satisfied customers who will be willing to enter into long-term relationships with the service provider.

According to George (2008: 374), customers perceive services in terms of the quality of service provided and the satisfaction level accomplished. Service quality and customer satisfaction should, therefore, be the focus of attention of higher education institutions so that they can differentiate themselves by means of providing better quality service and overall customer satisfaction.

The association between service quality and customer satisfaction can be seen in figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4 The association between service quality and customer satisfaction

Customer's perceptions of specific dimensions of service	SERVICE QUALITY	Situational factors
• Reliability • Responsiveness • Assurance • Empathy • Tangibles	Product quality	CUSTOMER SATISFACTION
	Price	Personal factors
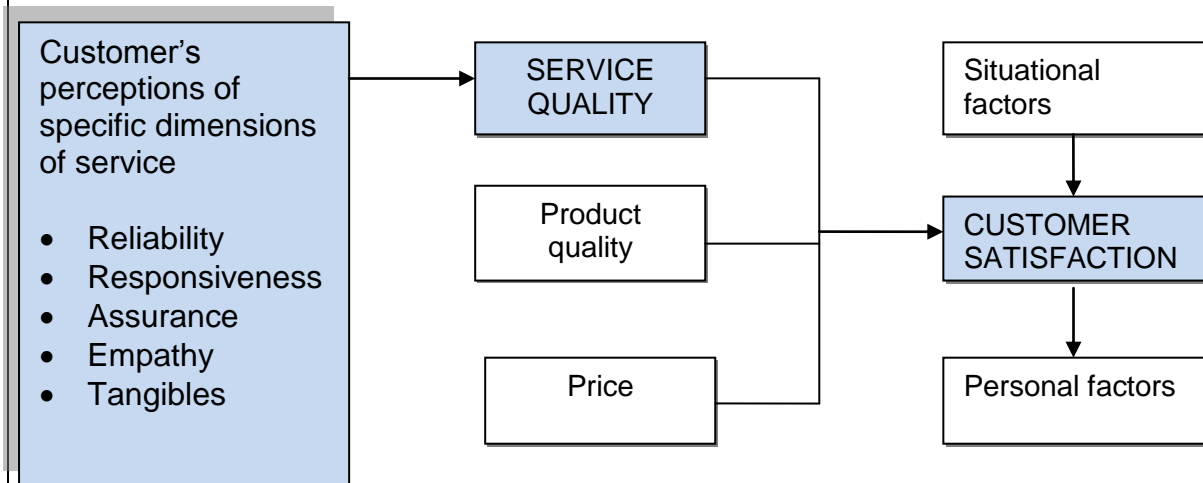
Source: Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler (2006:107)

The above figure shows that perceived service quality is a component of customer satisfaction. Satisfaction is a more broader concept while service quality focuses specifically on the dimensions of customer satisfaction. Satisfaction is influenced by perceptions of service quality, product quality and price as well as situational and personal factors (Zeithaml , Bitner & Gremler, 2006: 107).

Customer satisfaction at a higher education institution will be influenced by perceptions of service quality, perceptions of the fees for a course, personal factors such as the student's emotional state and even uncontrollable situational factors such as transport problems and experiences to and from the institution.

2.16   CONCLUSION

A review of higher education in South Africa was discussed. Service quality in higher education institutions in South Africa was the focus of attention in the literature review. There is a ample room for improvement in terms of service quality in this

environment. Consistent and superior service is pivotal to meeting needs, wants and demands of customers.

The literature addressed the characteristics of higher education as a service. The merits of expectations, perceptions and satisfaction as a means of assessing service quality has been discussed. The potential gaps in service quality have been addressed. These gaps are essential in evaluating the customers' overall perception of what is expected against what is received. Gap 5 i.e. the difference between customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality is emphasised as the most important service quality gap and forms the basis of this research. This will be used by Varsity College as the instrument to measure student expectations and perceptions.

The SERVQUAL model has also been discussed. The five dimensions of the model was also discussed. In spite of the criticisms leveled at the SERVQUAL model there is no credible alternative to SERVQUAL to measure service quality. This chapter concluded with a discussion showing the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

The research methodology will be discussed in chapter 3.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the research methodology used in this study. The chapter includes instrument design, sampling, data collection procedure and data analysis, questionnaire design and the target population. Instrument evaluation, regarding the reliability and validity of SERVQUAL, is also discussed.

The research proposes to investigate the students' perceptions of service quality at Varsity Colleges in Durban North and Westville. This study is descriptive in nature. The research will use a questionnaire to gather data, make use of appropriate statistical techniques to evaluate data and reach conclusions.

3.2   STUDY TYPE

Primary data was collected using the survey method. A questionnaire consisting of twenty two items was used and pre-tested to gather the needed information. Kotler & Armstrong (2010: 134) agree that the survey method is the most widely used method for primary data collection and is best suited for collecting descriptive information. Naoum (2001: 44) argues that surveys are used to obtain data from a relatively large number of respondents within a limited time frame. The questions were close-ended and a number of alternative choices were provided to respondents. Kotler & Armstrong, (2010: 142) claim that close-ended questions include all the possible answers and respondents make choices among them. The questionnaires were self-administered.

3.3   RESEARCH DESIGN

This research study is a quantitative and descriptive study and evaluates service quality at Varsity Colleges in Durban. Houser (2008: 192) defines descriptive

research as a type of study that tries to find out what, why, who or where. The descriptive part is where the researcher attempts to describe the gaps between 'expectations' and 'perceptions' of Varsity College students. The study uses a cross-sectional methodology. Dabholkar, Shepherd & Thorpe, 2000: 148) support the premise that the majority of empirical studies conducted to measure service quality have been cross- sectional. Cross-sectional designs involve the collection of information from any given sample of population elements at approximately the same time. (Welman & Kruger, 2005: 86).

3.4   POPULATION

Welman & Kruger, (2005: 46) define a population as the study object, which may be made up of individuals, groups, organizations, human products and events. Defining the target population is a vital step in the research project design. The Westville campus has a population of 950 students including both full-time and part-time students. There are 636 full-time students and 314 part-time students. The Durban North campus has a population of 1100 students. This includes 756 full-time students and 344 part-time students. The students were selected proportionately.

3.5   SAMPLE SIZE

Researchers usually draw conclusions about large groups of customers by studying a small sample of the total customer population, (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010: 139). These authors define a sample as a segment of the population chosen for research to represent the population as a whole. Welman, Kruger & Mitchell (2005:71) suggest that a sample size of 451 is adequate if the population size is 1000 000. The sample size in this study comprised 451 students, 210 from the Westville campus and 241 from the Durban North campus. The students were selected proportionately from the total number of students at each campus. Trained students administered the questionnaires at each of the two campuses. Table 3.1 shows the sample dynamics for this study.

Table 3.1 Sample dynamics

Population	• 2 100 students
Sample size	• 451 students
Units of analysis	• Selected students at both campuses
Geographic region	• Durban North and Westville

3.6 SAMPLING METHOD

Non-probability sampling was used as access to the register has been restricted. Kotler (2006:69) states that non-probability samples include elements from the population selected in a non-statistical manner. According to Welman, Kruger & Mitchell (2005: 69), non-probability sampling offers the advantage of being less complicated and more economical in terms of time and financial constraints. Non-probability sampling may be done spontaneously to take advantage of available respondents. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher (Castillo, 2009). Thus, the convenience sampling method was utilized in both the campuses in Westville and Durban North.

3.7 QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

Collis & Hussey (2003: 173) claim that a questionnaire consists of carefully structured questions, selected after considerable testing, with a view of eliciting reliable responses from a chosen sample. The questionnaire was adapted from the SERVQUAL instrument developed by Parasuraman, Zeihaml & Berry (1988:33). The questionnaire consisted of the standard 22 item questionnaire for expectations and perceptions, designed to cover the five dimensions of service quality i.e. tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Kotler & Keller, 2006: 414). A five point Likert scale, where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree was used. (Refer to appendix 1)

The five dimensions and their respective statements in the questionnaire is shown in the following table.

Table 3.2

DIMENSIONS	RESPECTIVE STATEMENT
Tangibles	Statements 1-4 Representing the service physically
Reliability	Statements 5-9 Delivering on service
Responsiveness	Statements 10-13 Willing to help
Assurance	Statements 14-17 Inspiring trust and confidence
Empathy	Statements 18-22 Caring, individualised attention

The researcher made use of questionnaires as it offered the following advantages over personal interviews, focus groups and mail surveys:

- It is less expensive in terms of time and money;
- Respondents enjoy a greater sense of anonymity;
- Each respondent is asked the same question;
- The format is standard for all respondents and does not depend on the mood of the interviewer; and
- A large quantity of data over a broad range of topics may be collected (Cargan, 2007: 116-117).

The questionnaire consisted of nine pages (see Annexure 1). The research questions were simply formulated, allowing them to be easy understood by each respondent. A covering letter was also attached which informed respondents of the nature and purpose of the research study. In Section A, questions relating to the

gender of the respondent and the name of the campus which he or she attended, was asked. The first part of Section B was designed to measure the respondents' expectations regarding service quality at Varsity Colleges in Durban North And Westville. The second part was designed to evaluate the respondents' perceptions of service quality at these two campuses.

3.8   DATA COLLECTION

A self-structured SERVQUAL questionnaire was used to determine students' perceptions of service quality at both campuses. Third year marketing students were used to administer the questionnaires. They were fully trained on matters relating to the questionnaire in order to answer any questions that arose. Permission was sought from the Principals of both the campuses to visit classes. The trained students introduced themselves to students in the class and explained the purpose of the research. The questionnaire and its contents were carefully discussed and reviewed with respondents.

3.9   DATA ANALYSIS

This is the step after the data has been collected. The objective of the analysis is to interpret and draw conclusions from the large quantity of collected data. Welman & Kruger (2003: 194) propose that once research has been performed, the results obtained must be interpreted. In this study, the collected data was analysed using the latest SPSS package. This reflected the data as graphical representations. Use was made of frequency tables to contribute to the accuracy and efficiency of processing the data.

3.9.1 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Descriptive statistics is used to identify or summarise the general nature of all the responses obtained. Kotler & Armstrong, (2010: 130) contend that the objective of

descriptive research is to describe things such as the potential of a market for a product or the demographics or attitudes of consumers who buy the product. In this study, descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used.

3.9.2 FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES

A frequency is a numerical value which represents the total number of observations for a variable under study. Welman, Kruger & Mitchell (2005: 229) state that frequencies determine if the distribution is even across categories or if they cluster around one or two categories. Frequencies can be shown on pie charts or bar diagrams. Percentages are used to simplify data into a standard numerical range and they interpret the data into a standard form that can be compared. Graphs were used in this study to depict the results.

3.9.3 INFERENTIAL STATISTICS

Inferential statistics are used to draw conclusions about a complete population by quantitative data collected from a sample (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005: 30). Inferential statistics were used to test the chi-square and also calculate the expectation and perception mean.

3.9.4 CHI-SQUARE TEST

According to Welman, Kruger & Mitchell (2005:231), chi-squares determine if the discreet classes into which an interval or ratio variable are grouped, are statistically significantly related to another variable and that the relationship is not caused by chance. Chi-square was used to calculate the expectation and perception mean of all five dimensions used.

3.9.5 CRONBACH'S ALPHA

The Cronbach Alpha test was computed to measure the internal consistencies of the factors used in the questionnaire.

According to the Academic Technology Services at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA Academic Technology Services: 2002), the Cronbach Alpha measures how closely related a set of items are as a group. Cronbach's alpha is not a statistical test - it is a coefficient of reliability (or consistency).

Cronbach's alpha can be written as a function of the number of test items and the average inter-correlation among the items. The formula for the standardized Cronbach's alpha is shown below:

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{r}}{1 + (N-1) \cdot \bar{r}}$$

Here N is equal to the number of items, r-bar is the average inter-item correlation among the items. One can see from this formula that if you increase the number of items, you increase Cronbach's alpha. Additionally, if the average inter-item correlation is low, alpha will be low. As the average inter-item correlation increases, Cronbach's alpha increases as well . A reliability coefficient of 0.8 or higher is seen as being acceptable (UCLA Academic Technology Services: 2002).

3.9.6 FACTOR ANALYSIS

Factor analysis is used as a statistical technique to reduce data. Factor analysis is used in survey research, where a researcher wishes to represent a number of questions with a small amount of hypothetical factors. Each question, on its own, would be inadequate in measuring attitude towards environmental policy, but together they may provide a more superior measure of attitudes. Factor analysis

aims at establishing whether the three measures do represent the same thing (Field, 2005).

3.10   VALIDITY

Leedy & Ormrod (2005:28) define validity as the degree to which the research findings accurately represent what it is actually intended to measure. Brysland & Curry (2001: 390) contend that SERVQUAL benefits from being a statistically valid instrument due to the fact that it underwent extensive field testing and refinement. SERVQUAL, therefore does not have the disadvantage of being perceived by service users and providers as a questionnaire that has been skewed to elicit certain kinds of responses. SERVQUAL is a generic and universally applicable instrument that can be administered on a repeated and regular basis.

3.11   RELIABILITY

Welman & Mitchell (2005:145) view reliability as the consistency of performance of a measuring instrument. This means that the measuring instrument must deliver similar results consistently.

The SERVQUAL questionnaire was chosen as the instrument of choice for this research project. This was based on the fact that the SERVQUAL questionnaire was proven to be the most extensively used instrument in the field of service quality study (Dhurup, Singh & Surujlal, 2006 : 41). SERVQUAL and adaptations have been utilised in various contexts. This included hospitals, banks and real estate brokers (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2006 : 153).

3.12   PRE-TEST

Pre-testing of the questionnaire is an essential step in the research process. Welman, Kruger & Mitchell (2005: 145) claim that when a new measurement instrument is designed, it is vital to test it before administering it to the actual sample.

Pre-testing involves administering the instrument to a limited number of subjects from the same population as that for which the eventual projected is meant. These authors also support the premise that the purpose of a pilot study may be used to detect possible flaws in the measurement procedures and identify vaguely formulated items.

The researcher tested the questionnaire before it was used to collect information to ascertain whether the content and sequencing were correct. Changes were made before the research was conducted.

The results of the pre-test offered valuable insight for avoiding ambiguous questions and the instrument was refined accordingly for the final stage in the questionnaire construction.

3.13   CONCLUSION

This chapter covered the research methodology used to investigate students' perceptions of service quality at Varsity Colleges in Durban North and Westville. The purpose was to analyse the data and identify any gap between the expectations and perceptions of the respondents.

The findings from the research study will be discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1   INTRODUCTION

The research methodology was discussed in chapter 3. The objective of this chapter is to present, analyse and provide a discussion of the findings of this study. The data from the SERVQUAL questionnaires were analysed using the appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics.

This chapter begins with an analysis of demographic information obtained from the 451 respondents at Varsity Colleges in Westville and Durban North. A detailed analysis of the findings relating to Section A and Section B of the questionnaires is presented. This is done using graphical and numerical representations of the data. This is followed by a discussion of the findings.

4.2   RESPONSE RATE

The SERVQUAL questionnaires were administered at Varsity Colleges in Westville and Durban North. A total number of 451 respondents completed the questionnaires. Table 4.1 illustrates the responses from the two institutions.

TABLE 4.1   Response rate from Westville and Durban North campuses

NAME OF COLLEGE	PLANNED SAMPLE	ACHIEVED SAMPLE	RESPONSE RATE
Westville	210	210	100%
Durban North	241	241	100%
TOTAL RESPONSES	451	451	100%

451 questionnaires were distributed, 210 at Westville and 241 at Durban North. All the questionnaires were completed achieving a response rate of 100 percent.

4.3 DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

This section describes the demographic profile of respondents.

4.3.1 Distribution of respondents according to campus

Of the 451 students selected for the study, 53% of the students were from the Durban North campus and 47% from the Westville campus. This is illustrated in figure 4.1.
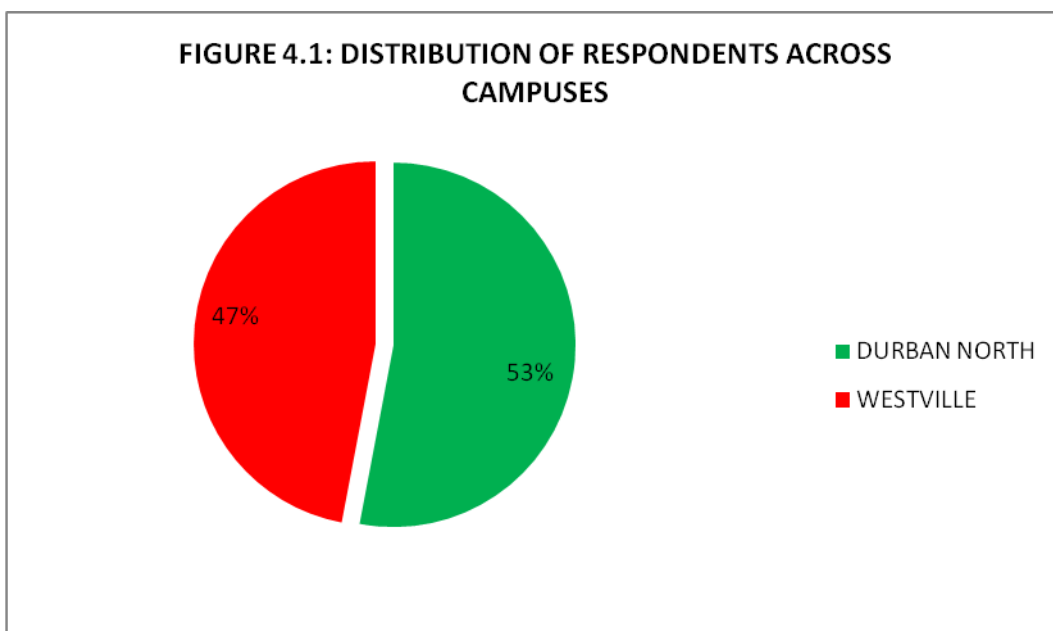
4.3.2 Gender of respondents

Figure 4.2 provides an illustration of gender dispersion at the Westville campus. From the selected sample, the percentage of male respondents was 55%, while the percentage of female students was 45%. This finding reveals an almost 1:1 ratio of men to women.

Figure 4.2: Gender dispersion at Westville

FIGURE 4.2: GENDER DISPERSION AT WESTVILLE

45% 55%
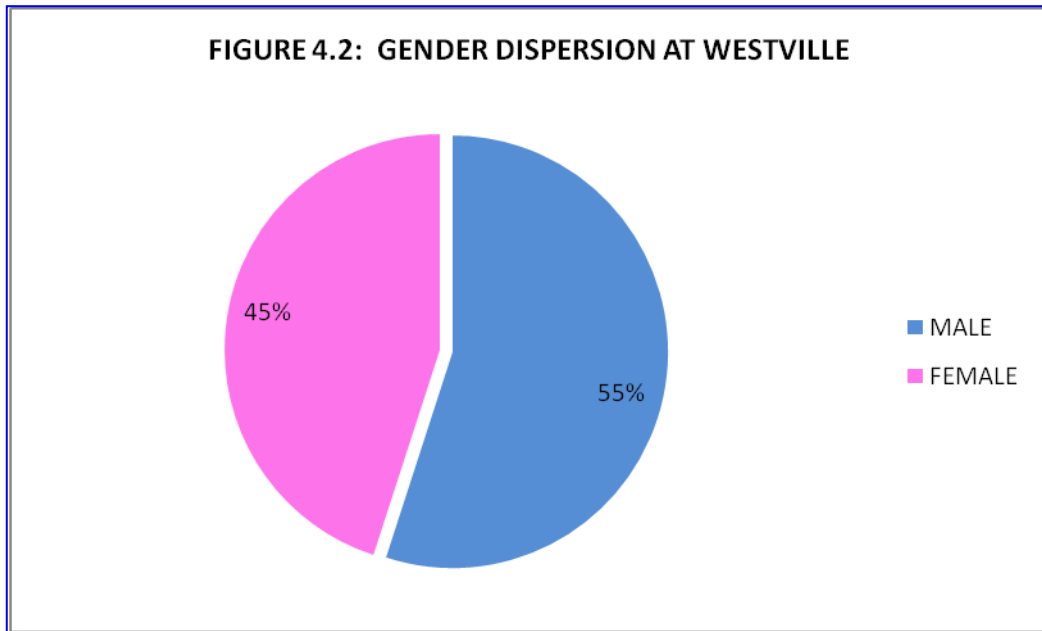
■ MALE
■ FEMALE

Figure 4.3 provides an illustration of gender dispersion at the Durban North campus. Here, the percentage of male respondents was 52% while the percentage of female respondents was 48%.

Figure 4.3: Gender dispersion at Durban North

4.3: GENDER DISPERSION AT DURBAN NORTH

48% 52%
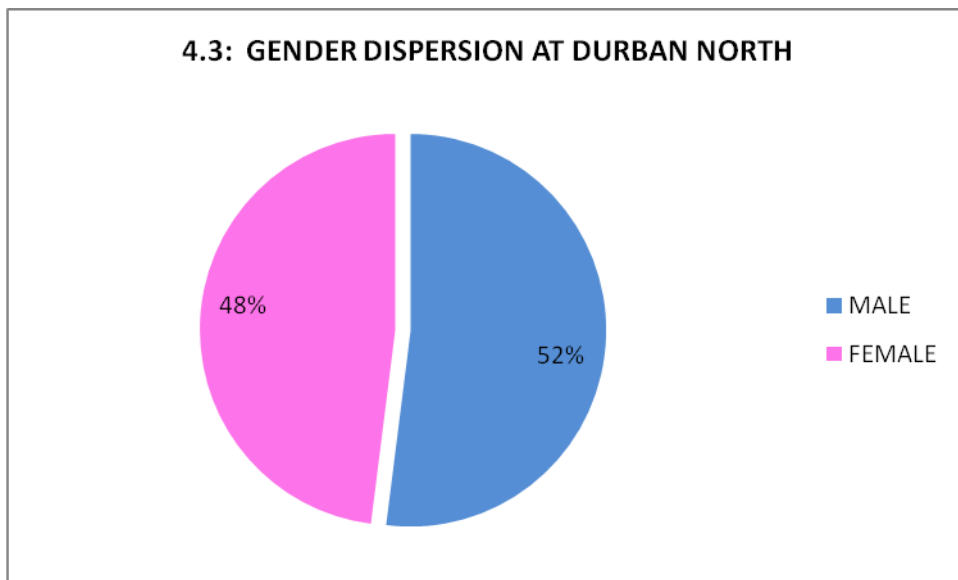
■ MALE
■ FEMALE

In Figure 4.4 the gender dispersion across both the campuses is shown. The percentage of male respondents was 53% and the percentage of female respondents was 47%.

Figure 4.4: Gender dispersion across both campuses

FIGURE 4.4: GENDER DISPERSION ACROSS BOTH CAMPUSES

47%
53%
■ MALE
■ FEMALE
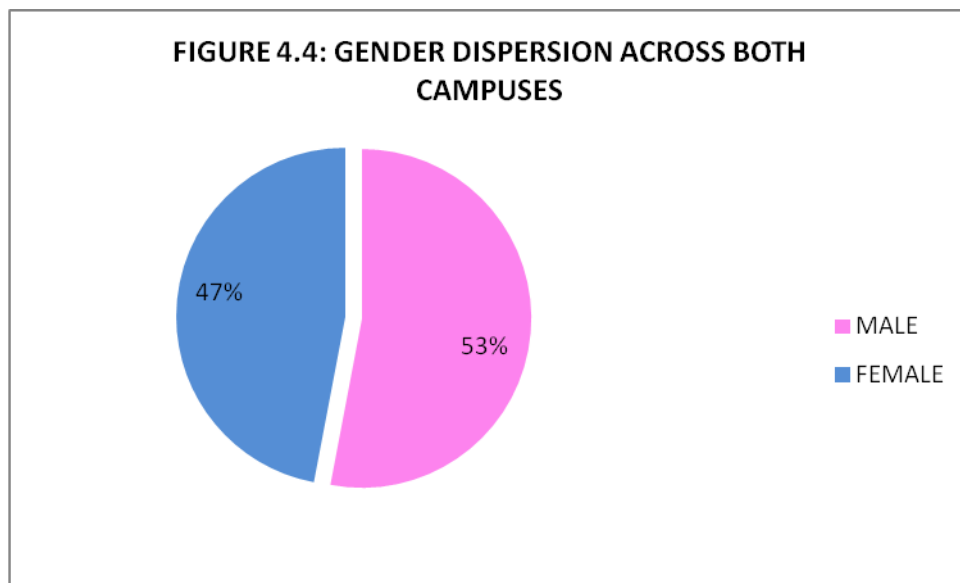
4.4 GRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS AT WESTVILLE AND DURBAN NORTH

The researcher made use of bar graphs and tables to display the respondents' responses to the expectation and perception questions.

4.4.1 Varsity College has modern-looking equipment.

FIGURE 4.5: VARSITY COLLEGE HAS MODERN-LOOKING EQUIPMENT
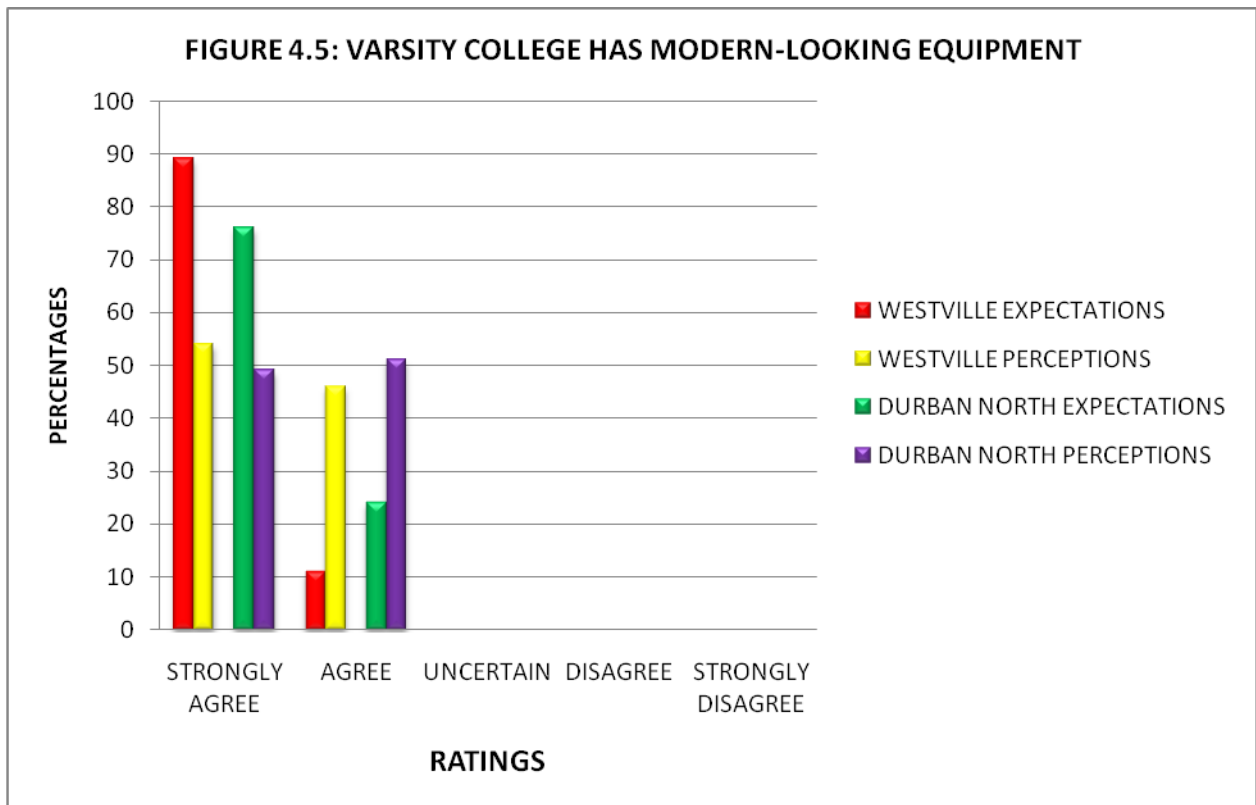
As indicated in Figure 4.5, all students at both campuses (100%) concurred with the statement that Varsity College should have modern-looking equipment. Respondents are in agreement that Varsity College should have modern-looking equipment so that a higher level of customer value is delivered to students. It is interesting to note that both campuses scored high in terms of modern-looking equipment. 100% of the students at both campuses perceived Varsity Colleges to have modern-looking equipment. It can be concluded that students are very content with the equipment at Varsity colleges. Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler (2006: 120) reaffirm that the appearance of physical facilities is crucial to providing a total educational experience. It can be concluded that students are very content with the equipment at Varsity College. Kotler & Keller (2006:43) maintain that tangibles provide signals and cues regarding the quality of the intangible service.

4.4.2 Varsity College has visually appealing physical facilities

FIGURE 4.6: VARSITY COLLEGE HAS VISUALLY APPEALING PHYSICAL FACILITIES
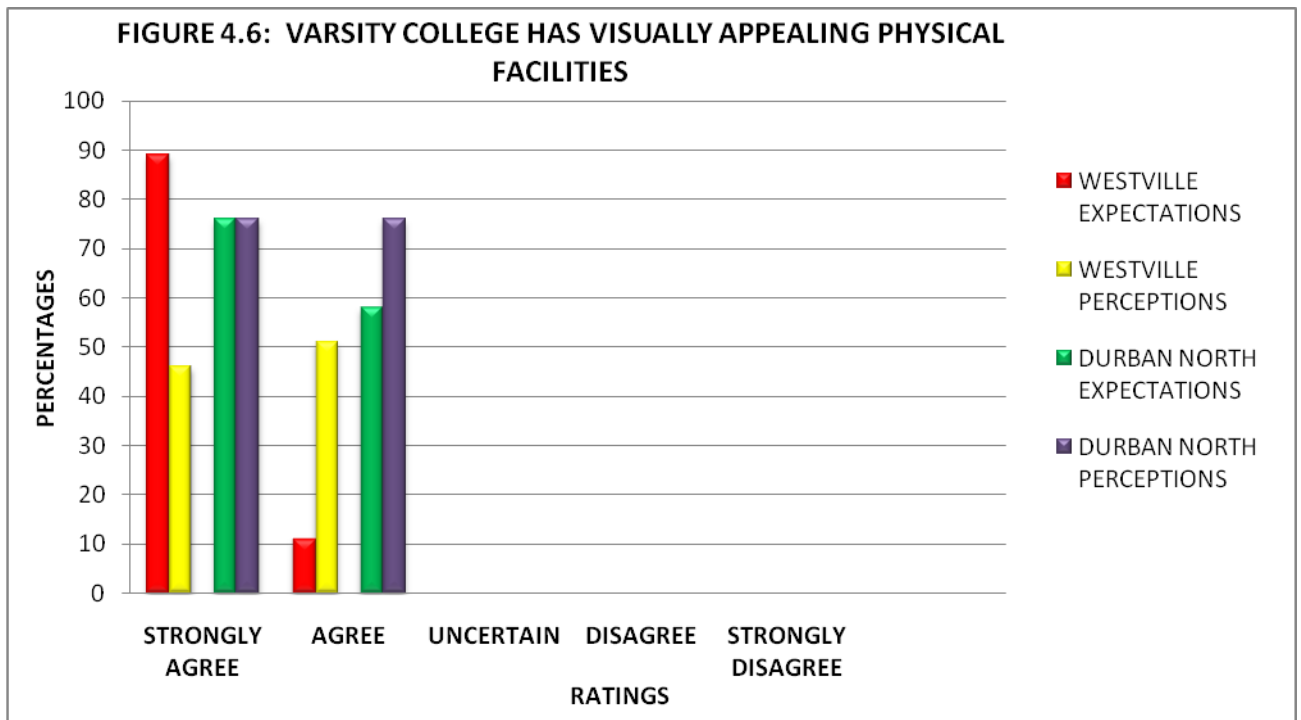
The vast majority of the students at Westville (89%) and Durban North   (76%) strongly agree that an excellent educational institution should have visually appealing physical facilities. 11% of the students at Westville and 24% of the students at Durban North agree that excellent educational institutions should have visually appealing facilities. 54% of the respondents at Westville and 49% of the respondents at Durban North strongly agree that Varsity Colleges have visually appealing physical facilities while 46% and 51%   respectively agree that Varsity Colleges have physically appealing facilities. This is depicted in Figure 4.6. Once again, a very favourable perception of Varsity Colleges having visually appealing physical facilities. Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler (2006:120) claim that visually appealing physical facilities are crucial in providing a total educational experience.

4.4.3 Materials associated with the service are visually appealing.

FIGURE 4.7: MATERIALS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SERVICE IS VISUALLY APPEALING
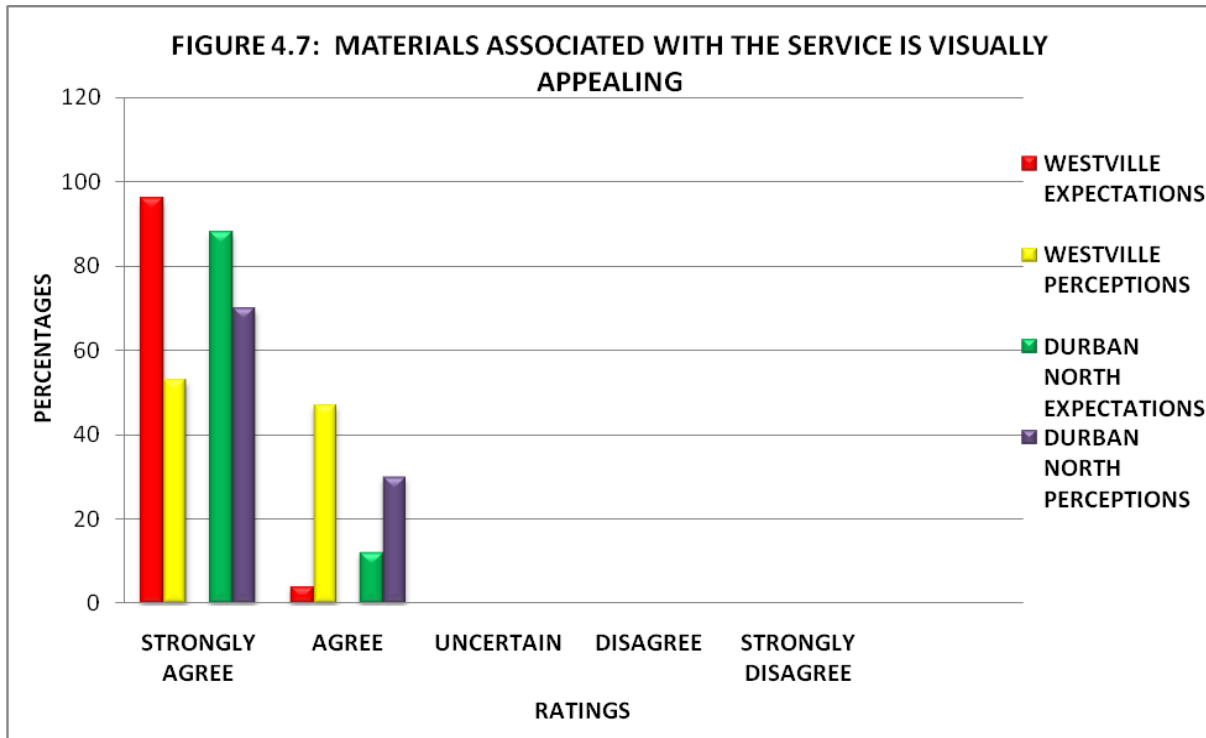
Figure 4.7 illustrates the high percentage of respondents' expectations at both campuses (100%) in terms of the materials associated with the service as being visually appealing. Once again, respondents at both the campuses (100%) perceive that the materials such as promotional brochures and pamphlets used to communicate with customers are visually appealing. It can be deduced that respondents' expectations concur with their perceptions. Dhurup, Singh & Surujlal (2006:47) stress that materials associated with the service are essential in the evaluation of a service.

4.4.4 The staff at Varsity College is always well dressed and neat appearance.
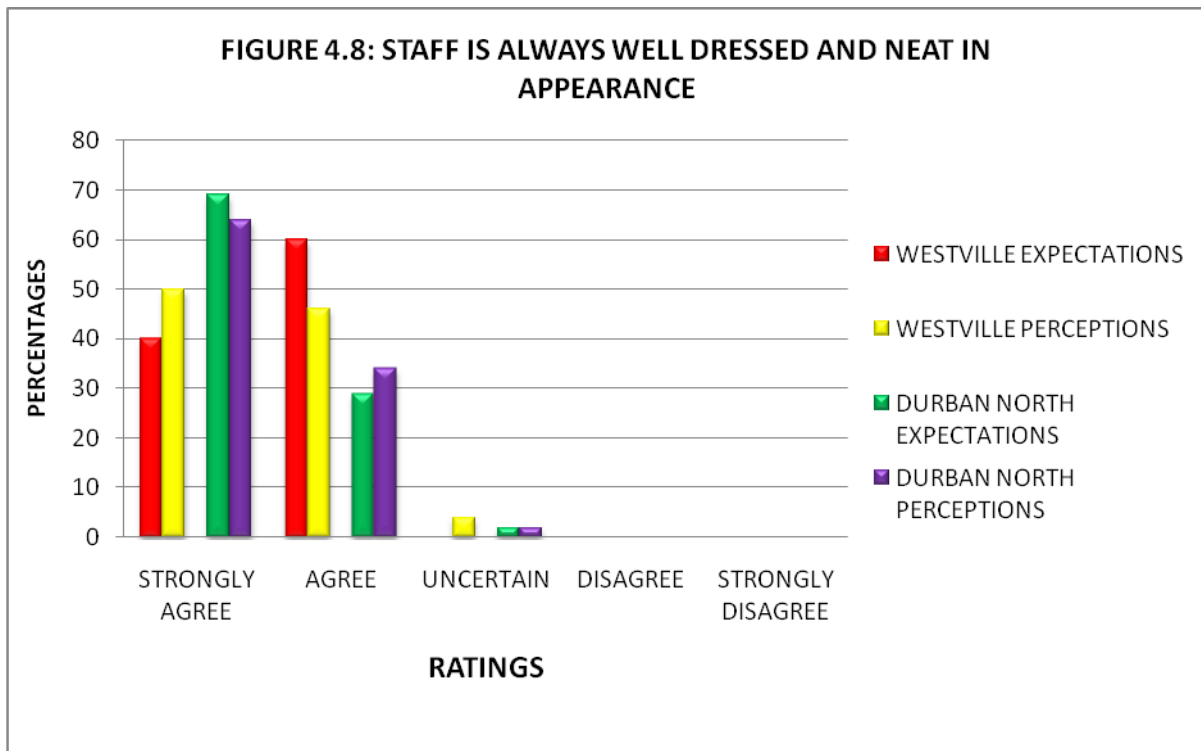
The findings as shown in Figure 4.8, reflect that 100% of the respondents at Westville and 98% of the respondents at Durban North expect staff at Varsity Colleges to be well dressed and neat in appearance. 96% of the respondents at Westville and 98% of the respondents at Durban North agree that the staff are well dressed and neat in appearance. Only 8% of the respondents at Westville and 5% at Durban North were uncertain as to whether the staff at both the campuses were well dressed and neat in appearance. The result indicates that Varsity College employees' are neat in appearance. This supports the view in the literature of Dhurup, Singh & Surujlal (2006:42) that the appearance of the staff is an essential element in evaluating the service provider.

4.4.5 When Varsity College promises to do something by a certain time, they do so.

FIGURE 4.9: PROMISES ARE CARRIED OUT TIMEOUSLY
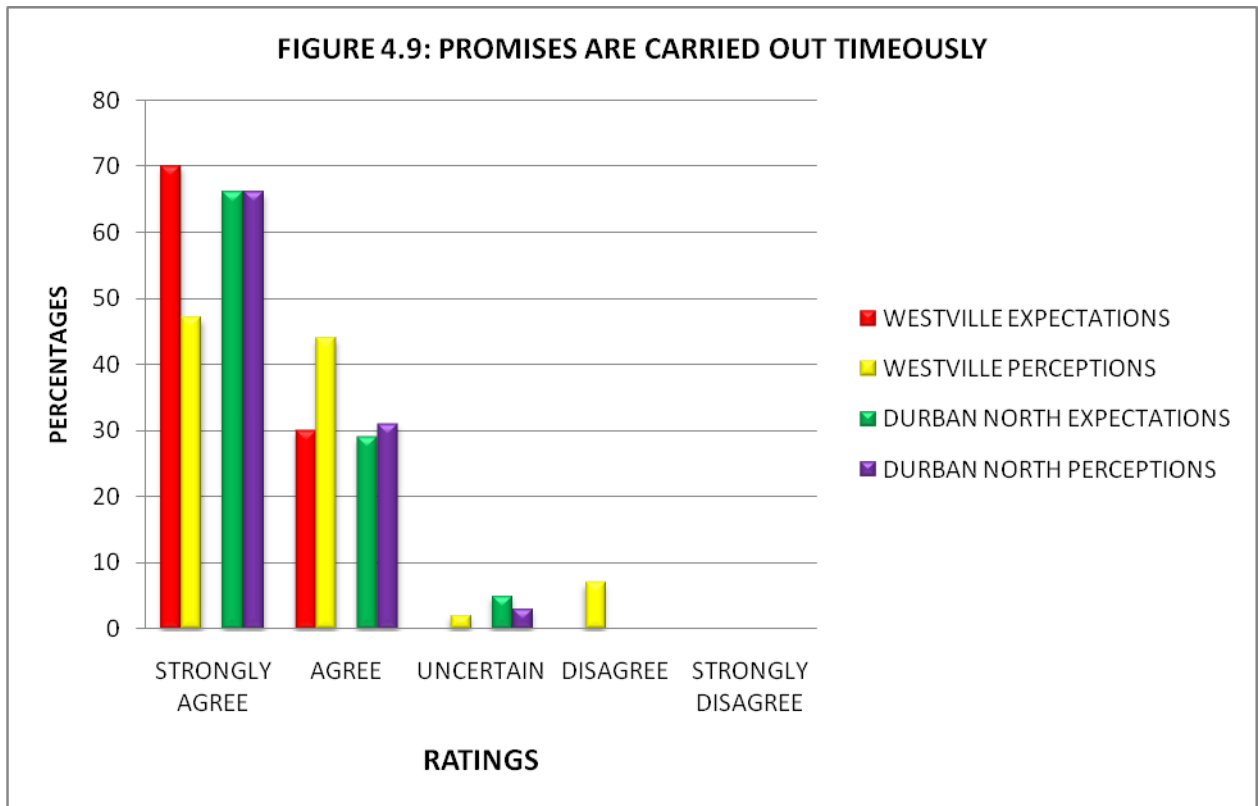
The institution's ability to perform the promised services dependably, accurately and timeously is crucial to customers in evaluating the service provided. As indicated in Figure 4.9, 100% the respondents at Westville expect Varsity College to honour its promises timeously while 95% of the respondents at Durban North expect Varsity College to honour its promises timeously with just 5% being uncertain. The majority of students at Westville and Durban North i.e. 91% and 97% respectively perceive Varsity College as being able to honour its promises timeously. Only a small minority at Westville (7%) disagreed with this statement while 3% of the respondents were uncertain at Durban North. This bodes very positively for Varsity College and also supports the view that reliability is an essential determinant of perceptions of service quality.

4.4.6 Varsity College shows a sincere interest in solving problems.

FIGURE 4.10: VARSITY COLLEGE SHOWS A SINCERE INTEREST IN SOLVING PROBLEMS
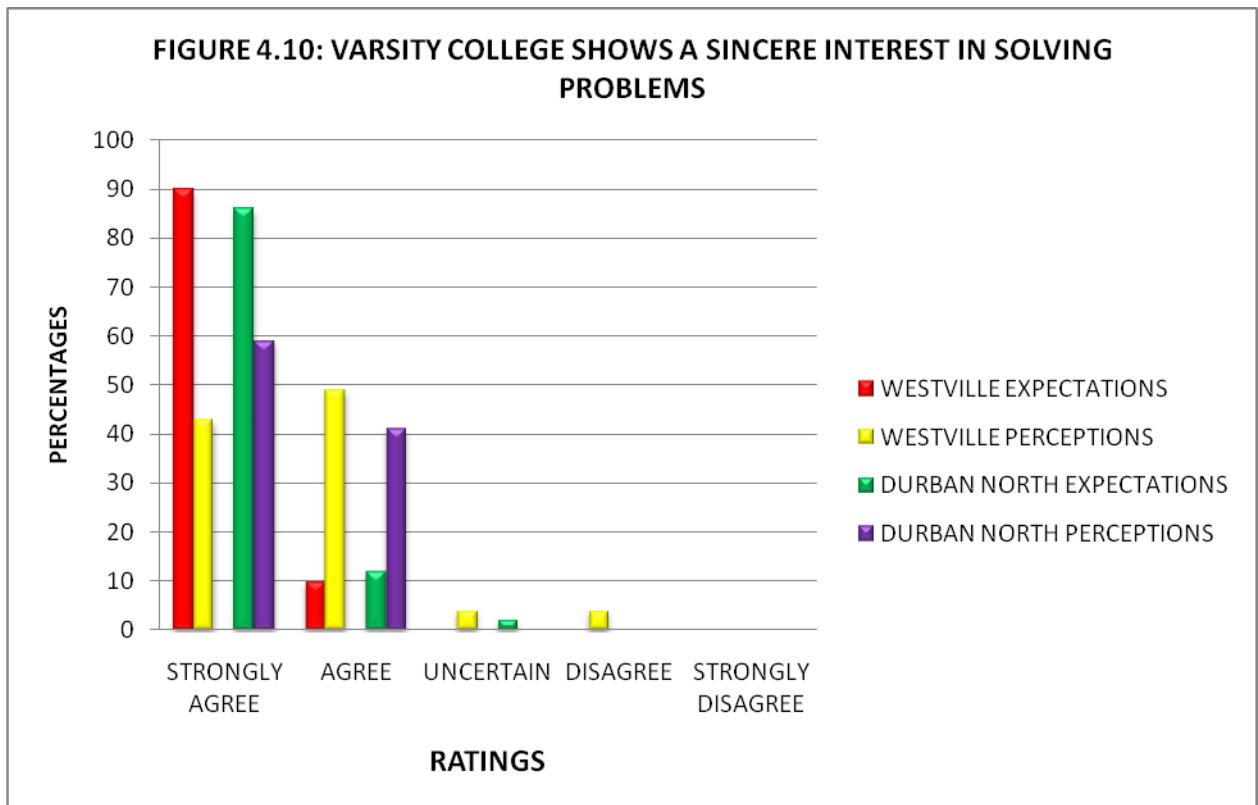
The findings in Figure 4.10 reflect that the majority of the respondents at both Westville and Durban North campuses i.e. 100% and 98% respectively expect Varsity Colleges to show a sincere interest in solving students' problems. Only 2% of the respondents at Westville were uncertain. The perception at Westville is that 92% of the respondents agree that Varsity Colleges show a sincere interest in solving students' problems while 100% at Durban North perceive this. Only 8% of the respondents at Westville disagreed that Varsity College shows a sincere interest in solving students' problems. The expectation result coincides with the perception result indicating that Varsity Colleges do show a sincere interest in solving problems.

4.4.7 Varsity College delivers its services at the times it promises to do so.

FIGURE 4.11: VARSITY COLLEGE DELIVERS ITS SERVICES AT TIMES IT PROMISES TO DO SO
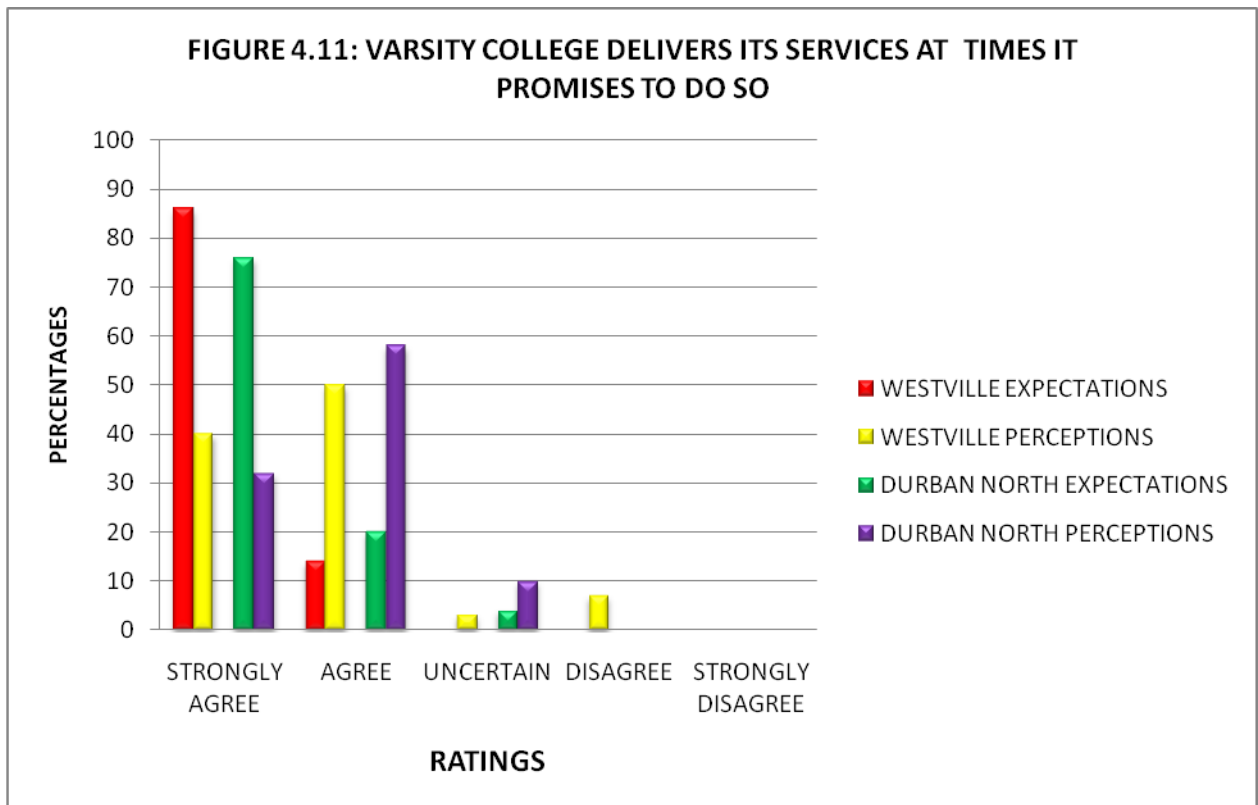
The above statement aims to ascertain whether Varsity Colleges deliver its services at the times it promises to do so. Figure 4.11 reveals that all respondents (100%) at the Westville campus and 96% of the respondents at Durban North expect Varsity College to deliver its services at the times it promises to do so. A small 4% of the respondents at Durban North were uncertain. The perceptions of the respondents showed that 90% of the respondents at Westville are content with the statement that Varsity College delivers its services at the time it promises to do so. 90% of the respondents at Durban North were satisfied with the above statement. Only 7% at Westville showed that they were not satisfied with the above statement. Once again, this highlights the point that Varsity Colleges are on top of its game in delivering its services at the time it promises to do so. Blose &Tankersley (2004:78) claim that providing a service and meeting commitments timeously in keeping with a promised service date in a professional manner, will influence a customers' perception in an important way.

4.4.8   Varsity College performs the service right the first time.

FIGURE 4.12: VARSITY COLLEGE PERFORMS THE SERVICE RIGHT THE FIRST TIME
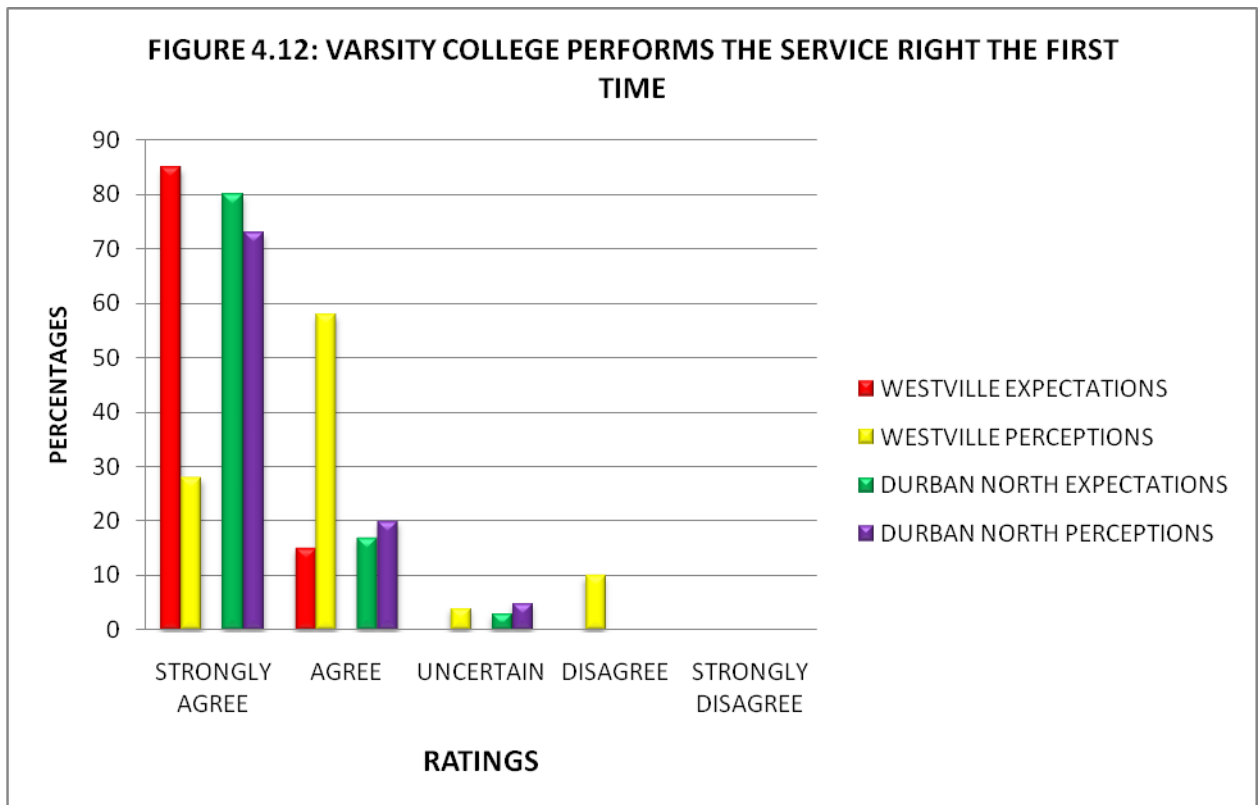
Figure 4.12 highlights the point that all respondents at Westville (100%) and 97% of the respondents at Durban North expect Varsity Colleges to perform the service right the first time. 86% of the respondents at Westville and 95% at Durban North agreed that Varsity Colleges perform the service right the first time. 10% of the respondents at Westville disagreed and 5% at Durban North were uncertain about the above statement. Varsity Colleges have shown very positive results on this dimension by being very reliable. Brink & Berndt (2006:60) suggest that if the organisation keeps its promises within the specifications frame set out, it will enhance the perceived quality of the customer.

4.4.9   Varsity College insists on error free records

Table 4.2 Varsity College insists on error-free records				
	WESTVILLE		DURBAN NORTH	
OPTION	EXPECTATION %	PERCEPTION %	EXPECTATION %	PERCEPTION %
STRONGLY AGREE	89	26	76	62
AGREE	11	58	20	31
UNCERTAIN	0	5	4	4
DISAGREE	0	11	0	3
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 4.2 illustrates that over 90% of the respondents across both campuses expect Varsity Colleges to insist on error-free records. 94% and 83% of the respondents at Westville and Durban North respectively perceived that Varsity Colleges insist on error-free records. 11% of the respondents at Westville and 3% at Durban North disagreed. The high percentage of consensus across both the campuses is testimony that Varsity College insists on error-free records. According to the literature, Chowdhary & Prakash (2007:495) claim that reliability is the most important determinant of perceptions of service quality.

4.4.10 The staff should inform exactly when services will be performed

Table 4.3 The staff should inform exactly when services will be performed				
	WESTVILLE		**DURBAN NORTH**	
OPTION	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**
STRONGLY AGREE	45	8	62	5
AGREE	55	62	36	21
UNCERTAIN	0	29	2	64
DISAGREE	0	1	0	10
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

The results as exhibited in 4.4 show that 100% and 98% of respondents at Westville and Durban North respectively agree that the staff at Varsity Colleges should inform students when services will be performed. At the Westville campus 70 % of the respondents perceived that the staff inform students exactly when services will be performed. 26% of the respondents at the Durban North campus perceived the above. It is interesting to note that 29% of the respondents at Westville were uncertain and 10 % disagreed while 64% of the students at Durban North were uncertain on the above statement. Blose & Tankersley (2004:80) support the premise that responsiveness will undoubtedly impact on service quality perceptions. Thus, it becomes vital for the staff of Varsity Colleges to be courteous and knowledgeable.

4.4.11   Varsity College should give prompt service to customers

Table 4.4 Varsity College should give prompt service to customers				
	WESTVILLE		**DURBAN NORTH**	
OPTION	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**
STRONGLY AGREE	80	59	70	50
AGREE	18	36	28	44
UNCERTAIN	2	0	2	0
DISAGREE	0	5	0	4
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	0	0	2
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

As indicated in Table 4.4, 98% of respondents at Westville expect Varsity Colleges to give prompt service to customers while a small percentage (2%) of the respondents were uncertain. 98% of respondents at Durban North also agree that Varsity Colleges should give prompt service to customers. On the perception side, the table reveals that 95% of the respondents at Westville and 94% at Durban North agreed that Varsity Colleges give prompt service to customers. 5% of respondents at Westville and 6% of respondents at Durban North disagreed with the above statement. This finding shows that Varsity Colleges have scored very positively on this dimension.

4.4.12 Varsity College should always be willing to help customers

Table 4.5 Varsity College should always be willing to help customers				
	WESTVILLE		**DURBAN NORTH**	
OPTION	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**
STRONGLY AGREE	74	0	76	37
AGREE	24	29	24	49
UNCERTAIN	2	65	0	0
DISAGREE	0	6	0	8
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	0	0	6
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

The findings in Table 4.5 reveal that the majority of respondents at Westville (98%) and Durban North (100%) agreed with the above statement and expect Varsity Colleges to willingly assist students. However, only 29% of the respondents at Westville perceived that Varsity College have staff who are willing to help students. 65% of the respondents at Westville were uncertain while 6% disagreed. At Durban North 86% of the respondents agreed with the above statement while 14% disagreed with the statement.

4.4.13 Staff should never be too busy to respond to customer requests

Table 4.6	Staff should never be too busy to respond to customer requests			
	WESTVILLE		DURBAN NORTH	
OPTION	EXPECTATION %	PERCEPTION %	EXPECTATION %	PERCEPTION %
STRONGLY AGREE	70	11	72	11
AGREE	18	12	25	47
UNCERTAIN	12	69	3	42
DISAGREE	0	8	0	0
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

As depicted in Table 4.6 88% and 97% of the respondents at Westville and Durban North respectively agree that the staff at Varsity Colleges should never be too busy to respond to customers requests. 23% of the respondents at Westville and 58% of the respondents at Durban North agree that the staff at Varsity Colleges are never too busy to respond to customer requests. A majority of 69% at Westville were uncertain in their response to the above statement. 42% of respondents at Durban North were uncertain. This is depicted in Table 4.6. Lovelock & Wirtz (2006:57) maintain in the literature that customers look to customer services' representatives for advice or assistance and are frustrated if they cannot obtain it. It is expected that the staff should never be too busy to respond to customer requests.

4.4.14   Behaviour of staff instils confidence in customers

Table 4.7 Behaviour of staff instils confidence in customers				
	WESTVILLE		**DURBAN NORTH**	
OPTION	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**
STRONGLY AGREE	64	0	72	7
AGREE	36	43	24	31
UNCERTAIN	0	57	4	50
DISAGREE	0	0	0	12
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

With reference to Table 4.7, 100% of the respondents at Westville and 96% at Durban North agreed that the behaviour of staff instils confidence in students. At Westville 43% of respondents agreed with the statement while 57% of the respondents were uncertain. 38% of the respondents at Durban North perceived that the behaviour of staff instils confidence in customers. 50 % of the respondents were uncertain and 12 % of the respondents disagreed with the statement. According to Arasli, Mehtap-Smadi & Katircioglu (2005: 45) in the literature, they claim that this dimension is of crucial importance to services for the very fact that customers are faced with a great deal of risk or uncertainty about their ability to evaluate outcomes.

4.4.15 Customers feel safe in transactions with Varsity College

Table 4.8 Customers feel safe in transactions with Varsity College				
	WESTVILLE		**DURBAN NORTH**	
OPTION	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**
STRONGLY AGREE	98	27	92	41
AGREE	2	70	8	58
UNCERTAIN	0	0	0	0
DISAGREE	0	3	0	1
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 4.8 reveals that 100% of respondents at both Westville and Durban North expect students to feel safe in their transactions with Varsity Colleges. 97% of the respondents at Westville and 99% at Durban North agreed with the statement that students should feel safe in their transactions with Varsity Colleges. Only a small 4% of respondents at both the campuses perceived that customers do not feel safe in their transactions with Varsity Colleges. Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler (2006:120) support the premise that trust and confidence can be supplemented by the person who links the customer to the company. Hence, frontline staff and also lecturers play an integral role in ensuring that customers feel safe in their transactions with Varsity Colleges.

4.4.16   Staff is consistently courteous to customers

Table 4.9 Staff is consistently courteous to customers				
	WESTVILLE		**DURBAN NORTH**	
OPTION	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**
STRONGLY AGREE	87	0	58	7
AGREE	13	33	39	47
UNCERTAIN	0	57	3	40
DISAGREE	0	10	0	6
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

The findings as reflected in Table 4.9 show that 100% and 97% of the respondents at Westville and Durban North respectively agree that staff should be consistently courteous to customers. On the perception side, the findings reveal that 33% of the respondents at Westville perceived the staff to be consistently courteous with 57% being uncertain and 10 % not in agreement. At Durban North 54% of the respondents perceived staff to be consistently courteous with 40% being uncertain and 6 % not in agreement.

4.4.17   Staff has knowledge to answer customers' questions

Table 4.10 Staff has knowledge to answer customers' questions				
	WESTVILLE		DURBAN NORTH	
OPTION	EXPECTATION %	PERCEPTION %	EXPECTATION %	PERCEPTION %
STRONGLY AGREE	53	6	61	9
AGREE	37	18	36	36
UNCERTAIN	10	68	3	55
DISAGREE	0	8	0	0
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

The data as depicted in Table 4.10 shows the expectations and perceptions related to the staff at Varsity Colleges being knowledgeable to answer customers' questions. A high percentage of respondents at both Westville (90%) and Durban North (97%) campuses expect staff to be knowledgeable in order to answer customers' questions. 24% of the respondents at Westville and 45% of the respondents at Durban North perceived the staff at Varsity Colleges to be knowledgeable to answer respondents' questions. A substantial percentage of respondents at Westville (68%) and Durban North (55%) were uncertain in their responses. It becomes imperative for the staff of Varsity Colleges to become more knowledgeable in order to answer respondents' questions.

4.4.18   Staff gives personal attention to customers

Table 4.11 Staff gives personal attention to customers				
	WESTVILLE		**DURBAN NORTH**	
OPTION	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**
STRONGLY AGREE	63	13	81	5
AGREE	21	22	15	27
UNCERTAIN	16	58	4	61
DISAGREE	0	7	0	7
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

As indicated in Table 4.11, 84% of the respondents at Westville and 96% of the respondents at Durban North expect the staff at Varsity Colleges to give personal attention to customers. 16% and 4% were uncertain at Westville and Durban North respectively. 35% of the respondents at Westville and 32% of the respondents at Durban North perceived that the staff gives personal attention to customers. 58% and 61% at both Westville and Durban North respectively were uncertain with just 7% at both campuses not being in agreement. This finding indicates that Varsity Colleges should focus greater emphasis on this element of service quality. This finding supports the view of Yeo (2008:275), who maintains that there is a greater need for staff to show a more humane dimension in their interaction with customers.

4.4.19   The staff should understand students' specific needs

Table 4.12 The staff should understand students' specific needs				
	WESTVILLE		**DURBAN NORTH**	
OPTION	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**
STRONGLY AGREE	74	0	86	10
AGREE	22	43	11	56
UNCERTAIN	4	47	3	25
DISAGREE	0	10	0	9
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

The findings in Table 4.12 reveal that 96% of respondents at Westville and 97% at Durban North are in agreement that the staff should understand students' specific needs. However, in terms of perceptions, 43% at Westville and 66% at Durban North agree that the staff should understand students' specific needs. 47% were uncertain at Westville and 25% were uncertain at Durban North. 10% of respondents at Westville and 9% at Durban North disagreed . This result suggests that the staff should devise strategies to enhance customer empathy. Brink & Berndt (2004:60) claim that employees at institutions try to understand the customers' problems and strive to carry out duties with the customers' best interests in mind.

4.4.20 Varsity College should have the best interests of customers at heart

Table 4.13 Varsity College should have the best interests of customers at heart				
	WESTVILLE		DURBAN NORTH	
OPTION	EXPECTATION %	PERCEPTION %	EXPECTATION %	PERCEPTION %
STRONGLY AGREE	84	39	74	17
AGREE	16	53	26	64
UNCERTAIN	0	8	0	14
DISAGREE	0	0	0	5
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

As indicated in Table 4.13, 100% of the respondents at both Westville and Durban North expect Varsity Colleges to have the best interests of customers at heart. 92% of the respondents at Westville perceived that Varsity College does have the interests of customers at heart with just 8% being uncertain. 81% of the respondents at Durban North perceived Varsity College to have the best interest of customers at heart while 14 % were uncertain and 5% disagreed.

4.4.21   Varsity College should have operating hours convenient to customers

Table 4.14 : Varsity College should have operating hours convenient to customers				
	WESTVILLE		DURBAN NORTH	
OPTION	EXPECTATION %	PERCEPTION %	EXPECTATION %	PERCEPTION %
STRONGLY AGREE	75	42	84	11
AGREE	25	24	16	59
UNCERTAIN	0	10	0	18
DISAGREE	0	15	0	7
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	9	0	5
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 4.14 reveals that 100% of the respondents at both campuses expect Varsity Colleges to have operating hours convenient to customers. At Westville 66% of the respondents perceived Varsity College to have operating hours convenient to customers. 10% were uncertain while 24% disagreed. 70% of the respondents at Durban North perceived Varsity College has operating hours convenient to customers while 18% were uncertain and a small percentage (12%) disagreed.

4.4.22 Varsity College should have staff who give customers personal attention

Table 4.15 Varsity College should have staff who give customers personal attention				
	WESTVILLE		**DURBAN NORTH**	
OPTION	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**	**EXPECTATION %**	**PERCEPTION %**
STRONGLY AGREE	65	17	71	10
AGREE	35	62	29	72
UNCERTAIN	0	10	0	12
DISAGREE	0	11	0	6
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

As shown in Table 4.15, 100% of the respondents from both the campuses expect the staff at Varsity College to give personal attention. In terms of perceptions 79% of the respondents at Westville perceived Varsity College to have staff who give customers personal attention. 10% were uncertain and 11% disagreed with this statement. At Durban North, 82% of the respondents perceived that the staff give personal attention to customers. 12% were uncertain and 6% disagreed. According to the literature, Curry & Sinclair (2002:200) view empathy as providing caring, individualised attention to its customers. This highlights a major challenge for higher education institutions to provide caring, individualised attention to its customers.

4.5   RELIABILITY

The researcher made use of Cronbach's alpha as part of the reliability test to evaluate the validity of the total results. Cronbach's alpha for the questions relating

to expectation i.e. 0.7 indicates a high degree of internal consistency amongst the questions and confirms that the questions together measure the common construct of expectation These results are shown in Table 4.16.

Table 4.16 : Reliability statistics for expectations

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.670	22

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
E1	99.31	12.978	.195	.664
E2	99.21	13.623	.014	.678
E3	99.11	13.645	.044	.673
E4	99.49	12.913	.165	.668
E5	99.37	12.750	.209	.663
E6	99.15	13.165	.201	.663
E7	99.25	12.973	.186	.664
E8	99.22	12.803	.266	.657
E9	99.23	12.959	.202	.663
E10	99.50	13.335	.053	.679
E11	99.31	12.455	.312	.652
E12	99.29	12.290	.402	.643
E13	99.40	11.653	.419	.636
E14	99.37	12.322	.335	.649
E15	99.08	13.369	.238	.663
E16	99.33	12.804	.217	.662
E17	99.52	11.984	.342	.647
E18	99.40	12.014	.304	.652
E19	99.26	12.360	.348	.648
E20	99.24	13.366	.092	.672
E21	99.23	12.947	.243	.659
E22	99.35	12.476	.339	.649

Similarly, the Cronbach's alpha for the questions relating to perception i.e. 0,7 indicates a high degree of internal consistency and confirms that the questions together measure the common construct of perception. These results are shown in Table 4.17.

Table 4.17 : Reliability statistics for perceptions

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.724	22

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
P1	83.55	35.212	.361	.712
P2	83.75	36.945	.027	.729
P3	83.64	35.813	.226	.718
P4	83.72	34.724	.357	.710
P5	83.79	33.368	.426	.703
P6	83.80	35.095	.251	.716
P7	84.03	34.506	.286	.714
P8	83.88	32.632	.457	.698
P9	83.98	32.615	.429	.700
P10	84.79	36.476	.046	.732
P11	83.87	34.908	.179	.724
P12	84.61	32.802	.319	.711
P13	84.77	34.270	.297	.713
P14	84.89	35.469	.187	.721
P15	83.95	34.293	.413	.706
P16	84.84	33.865	.376	.707
P17	84.87	33.635	.412	.704
P18	84.91	34.163	.307	.712
P19	84.75	34.074	.317	.711
P20	84.16	35.612	.154	.724
P21	84.56	33.251	.208	.728
P22	84.41	34.998	.204	.720

The above results reveal that the questionnaire has internal consistency and reliability.

4.6   GAP ANALYSIS

Table 4.18 shows the expected and perceived scores in addition to the gap for each service quality dimension.

Table 4.18 Comparison of service quality dimensions.						
	WESTVILLE			DURBAN NORTH		
	EXPECTATION	PERCEPTION	GAP	EXPECTATION	PERCEPTION	GAP
TANGIBLES	4.7524	4.5476	-0.2048	4.7490	4.6452	-0.1038
RELIABILITY	4.8419	4.1771	-0.6648	4.7344	4.5320	-0.2024
RESPONSIVENESS	4.6286	3.6869	-0.9417	4.6784	3.8091	-0.8693
ASSURANCE	4.7286	3.5202	-1.2084	4.6826	3.7147	-0.9679
EMPATHY	4.6838	3.7305	-0.9533	4.7768	3.6830	-1.0938

An examination of the scores for expectations and perceptions at Westville shows that 'tangibles ' produced the smallest gap. The dimension of 'assurance' produced the largest gap. The gap at Durban North also reveals 'tangibles' to have the smallest gap and empathy to have the largest gap.

4.7 DIMENSION ANALYSIS WITH GAP SCORES

Tangibles

FIGURE 4.13 TANGIBLES
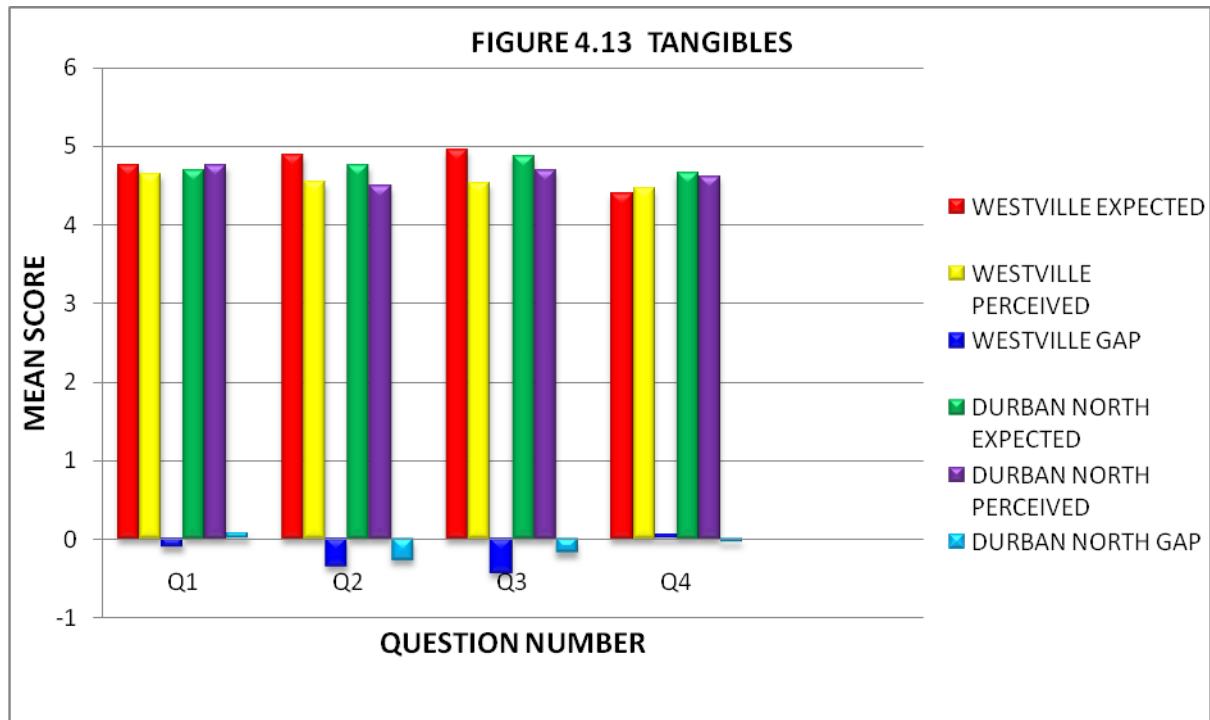
Figure 4.13 illustrates the tangible factors expected and perceived by students at Westville and Durban North as well as the relevant gaps for each question. It can be seen that the mean score for expectation for the above dimension was 4.75 at Westville which reveals that an overwhelming majority concur with the statements that constitute this dimension. At Durban North the mean score for expectation was also 4.75. This also shows that the majority of students agreed with the statements that make up this dimension. These findings reveal that the respondents in both campuses are in agreement that Varsity Colleges should have high levels of acceptable tangibles. The mean score for perception at Westville was 4.55 and 4.65 for Durban North indicating a high level of satisfaction with the tangibles at both the campuses. The mean gap score was -0.2 and -0.1 respectively. These results imply that both the campuses have attained this service quality dimension of tangibles.

Reliability
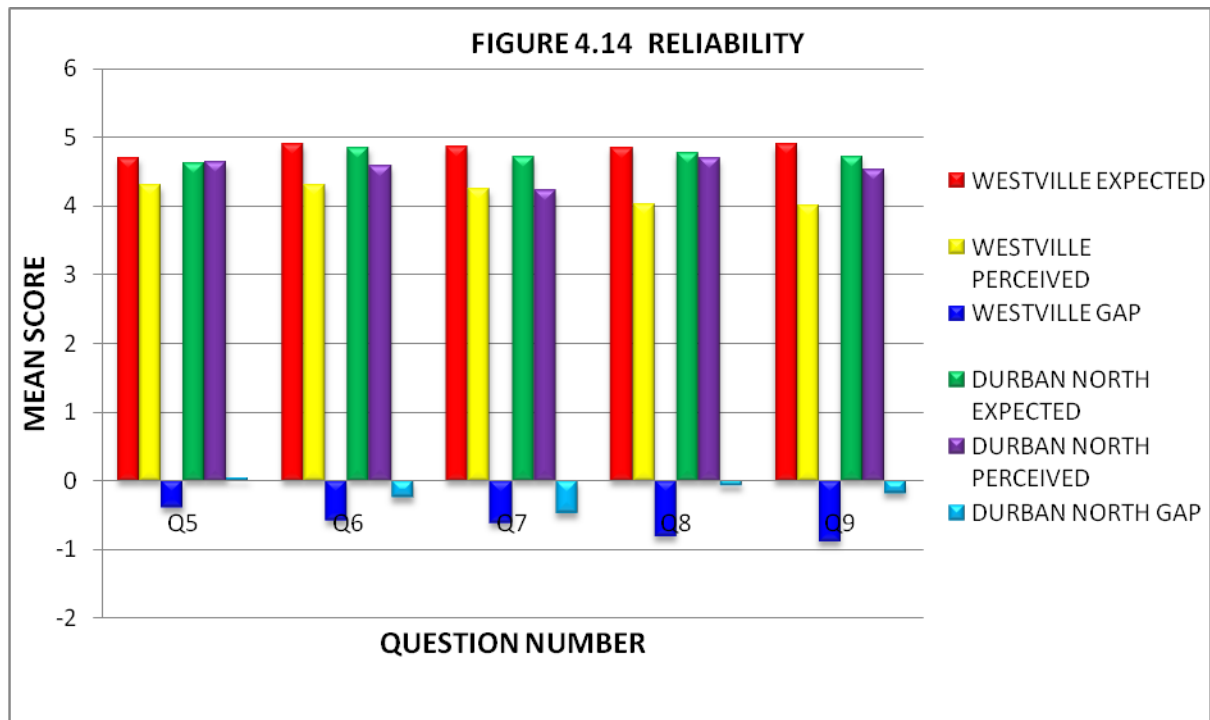
As reflected in Figure 4.14, the expected and perceived scores for the reliability dimension and the gap for each question are presented. The mean score for reliability at Westville was 4.84 and 4.73 at Durban North for expected values. These scores are very similar across both campuses revealing that students at both campuses expect Varsity Colleges to be reliable . The perceived mean score at Westville was 4.18 and 4.53 at Durban North. The gap mean score was -0.66 and -0.2 respectively. This findings shows that a large number of students are more than satisfied with the reliability of Varsity College as expressed in the statements that make up this dimension.

Responsiveness

FIGURE 4.15 RESPONSIVENESS
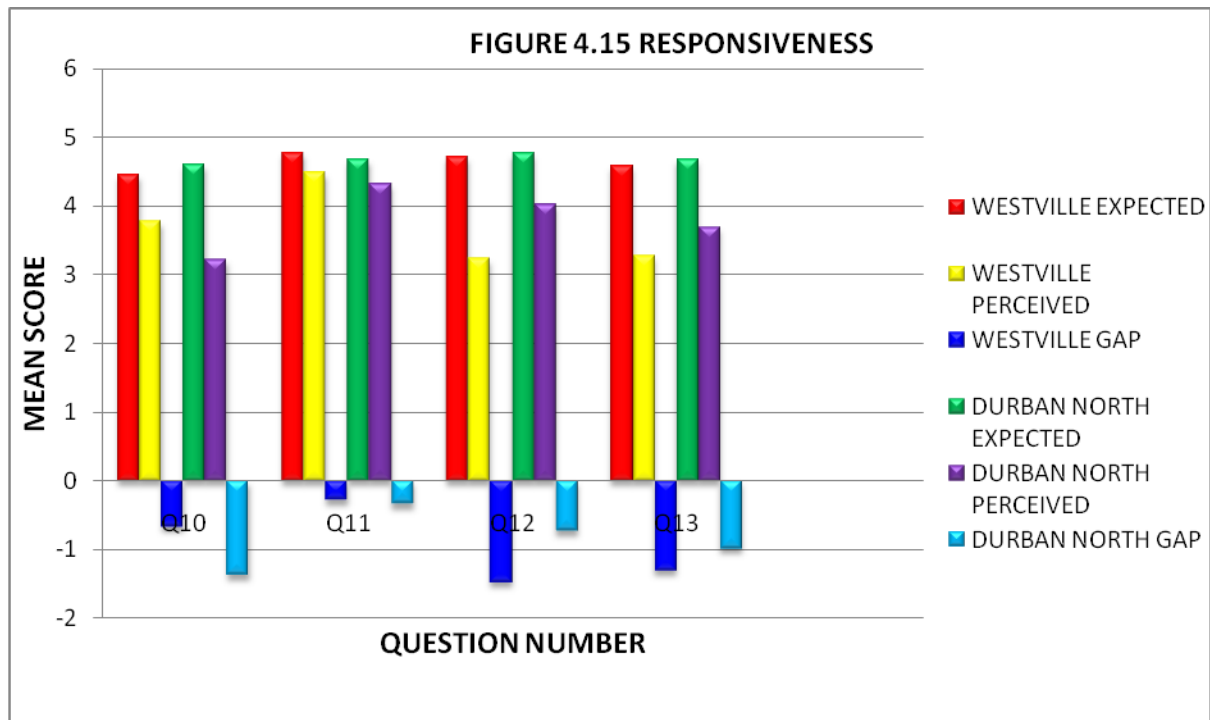
As depicted in Figure 4.15, the expected and perceived scores across both campuses for the responsive dimension, in addition to the gap for each question are shown. The expected mean score for responsiveness was 4.63 at Westville and 4.68 at Durban North. This expectation coincides with the responsiveness dimension for expected values as students want excellent service promptly and willingly. All these scores are similar. The perceived mean score was 3.69 and 3.81. The gap mean score was -0.94 and -0.87 at Westville and Durban North respectively. The findings imply that more respondents agreed with the statements that constituted this dimension at both the campuses. Although the statements point to agreement, there are areas of concern at both the campuses relating to staff always being willing to help customers and staff being never too busy to respond to customer requests.

Assurance
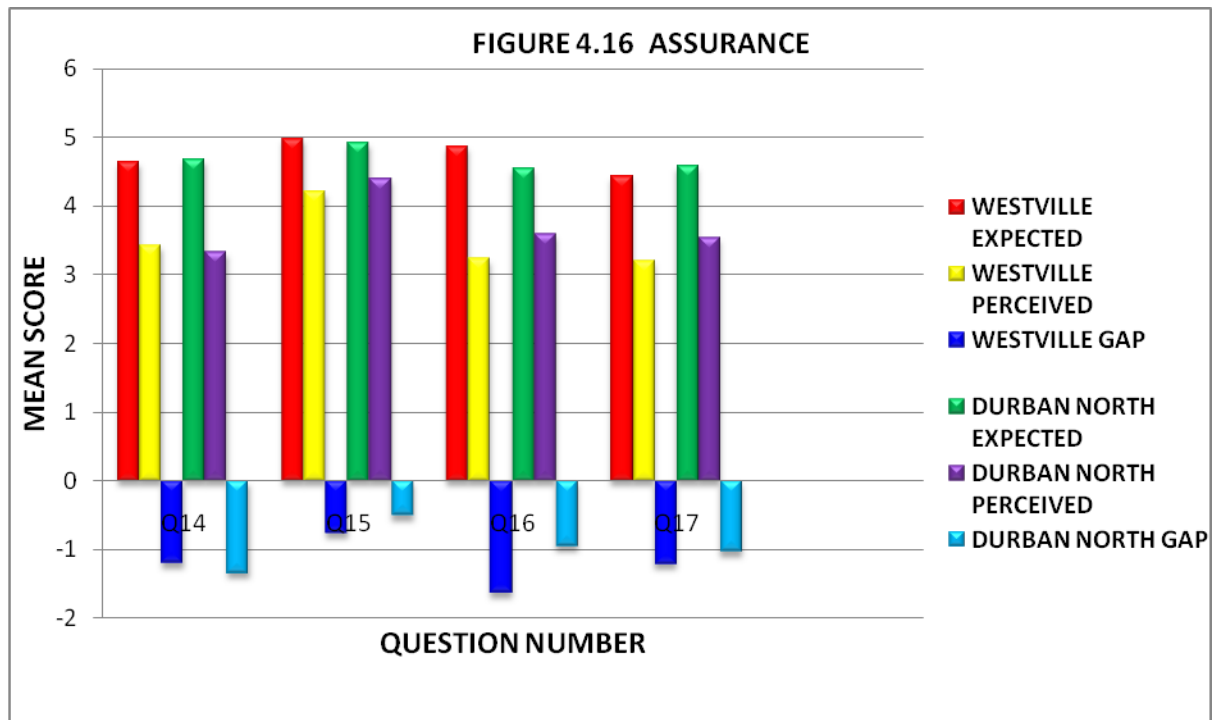
Figure 4.16 depicts the expected and perceived Varsity Colleges' mean scores for the assurance dimension as well as the gap for each question. The overall combined expected mean score for this dimension was 4.75 at Westville and 4.75 at Durban North. The overall combined perceived mean score was 3.52 at Westville and 3.71 at Durban North. The gap mean score was -1.03 at Westville and -0.97 at Durban North. These scores were lower than the agreement level and also lower than the reliability and responsive dimensions at both the campuses. These gaps reveal that although the staff is satisfying some of the assurance criteria, they are lacking in others. At Westville attention needs to be directed to question 16 which concerns itself with staff being consistently courteous to customers while at Durban North, focus needs to be directed to question 14 which relates to the behaviour of staff being able to instil confidence in customers.

Empathy
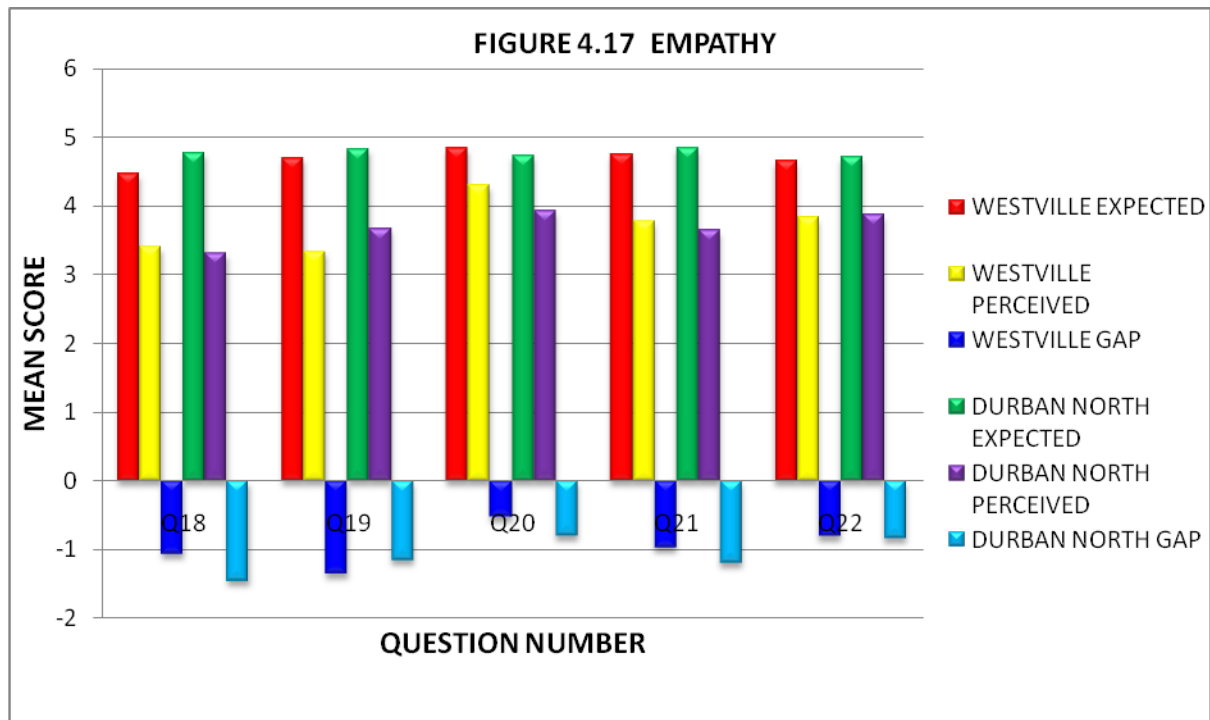
FIGURE 4.17 EMPATHY

The expected and perceived mean scores for the empathy dimension and the gap is depicted in Figure 4.17. While Westville had an expected mean score of 4.69, Durban North had an expected mean score of 4.78. The perceived mean score at Westville was 3.73 and 3.68 at Durban North. The gap mean score at Westville was -1.09 and -0.95 at Durban North. Specifically, the Westville campus needs to address question 18 which is related to staff being able to understand students' specific needs. The Durban North campus, on the other hand, needs to focus greater attention in giving personal attention to customers. Being empathetic is crucial to the delivery of excellent service quality.

4.8   FACTOR ANALYSIS

Factor analysis is a statistical tool that seeks to reduce data. Table 4.19 shows that the principle component analysis was used as the extraction method. The rotation method was Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation. This method reduces the number of variables that have high loadings on each factor.

4.8.1 Factor analysis – expectation

Bartlett's test is significant which indicates that there are significant relationships amongst the items. However, only 57.8% of the variance in expectation is explained by the 8 factors generated.

Factor/Component 1 accounts for 9.3% of the total variance and includes items 11,12, and 13. This factor relates to Responsiveness.

Factor/Component 2 accounts for 8.0% of the total variance and includes items 17,18 and 19. This factor includes items from Assurance & Empathy.

Factor/ Component 3 accounts for 8.0% of the total variance. It includes items 6, 8 and 16 and includes items from Reliability and Assurance.

Factor/ Component 4 accounts for 7% of the total variance. It includes items 4 and 5 and includes items from Tangibles and Reliability.

Factor/ Component 5 accounts for 7% of the total variance. It includes items 2 and 3 and includes items from Tangibles.

Factor/ Component 6 accounts for 7% of the total variance. It includes items 1, 15 and 22 and includes items from Tangibles, Assurance and Empathy.

Factor/ Component 7 accounts for 6% of the total variance. It includes items 20 and 21 and includes items from Empathy.

Factor/ Component 8 accounts for 6% of the total variance. It includes items 7, 9 and 14 and includes items from Reliability and Assurance.

Table 4.19 depicts that it was only for the responsiveness dimension that the four variables that made up the component loaded perfectly in one factor for the expected (E) scores. This finding reveals that the questions or variables that made up this dimension perfectly measured the dimension. All other dimensions have overlapping factors, which shows a mixing of factors.

TABLE 4.19 FACTOR ANALYSIS- EXPECTATION

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.636
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1367.937
	df	231
	Sig.	.000

Total Variance Explained

Component	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.051	9.323	9.323
2	1.762	8.010	17.333
3	1.710	7.773	25.106
4	1.546	7.027	32.133
5	1.509	6.860	38.993
6	1.467	6.670	45.663
7	1.358	6.172	51.835
8	1.332	6.054	57.888

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotated Component/Factor Matrix(a)

	Component/Factor							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
E12	.777	.144	-.081	.048	.156	.045	.068	-.015
E13	.697	.039	.006	.138	-.008	.195	.073	.139
E11	.616	.055	.347	-.016	.013	-.240	-.046	.100
E10	.456	.028	-.012	-.269	-.431	-.069	-.031	-.102
E19	.048	.746	.108	.074	-.004	-.091	.209	.138
E18	.011	.710	-.012	.008	.142	.230	.083	.095
E17	.311	.695	.048	-.072	-.202	.161	-.138	-.074
E6	-.057	.036	.673	-.053	.076	.132	-.038	.048
E8	.088	.022	.642	.139	.039	.006	.212	-.037
E16	.017	.094	.514	.228	-.147	.104	-.089	.050
E4	.057	.069	.052	.835	-.069	-.027	-.038	-.050
E5	.049	-.056	.184	.685	.167	.008	-.024	.118
E3	.068	-.024	-.165	.121	.768	.034	.103	.117
E2	.099	.060	.256	-.146	.727	-.019	-.256	-.187
E1	-.009	.107	.042	-.131	.024	.669	.014	.108
E22	.171	.099	.046	.034	-.081	.638	.472	-.115
E15	.019	.048	.285	.175	.068	.536	-.156	-.012
E20	-.029	.106	.020	-.162	.041	-.056	.769	.141
E21	.192	.084	.123	.229	-.195	.196	.509	-.352
E7	.024	.198	.058	.008	.037	-.030	-.008	.680
E9	.103	-.284	.441	.004	-.068	.066	.210	.532
E14	.405	.084	-.112	.191	-.023	.242	-.019	.523

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
A Rotation converged in 10 iterations.

4.8.2 Factor analysis – perception

Bartlett's test is significant which indicates that there are significant relationships amongst the items. 68.2% of the variance in perception is explained by the 7 factors generated.

 Factor/Component 1 accounts for 11.3% of the total variance and includes items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. This factor relates to Tangibles.

Factor/Component 2 accounts for 11.2% of the total variance and includes items 19, 20, 21 and 22. This factor relates to Empathy.

Factor/Component 3 accounts for 11% of the total variance and includes items 6, 7, 8 and 9. This factor relates to Reliability.

Factor/Component 4 accounts for 10 % of the total variance and includes items 13, 14 and 15. This factor relates to Responsiveness and Assurance.

Factor/Component 5 accounts for 10 % of the total variance and includes items 16, 17 and 18. This factor relates to Assurance and Empathy.

Factor/Component 6 accounts for 8 % of the total variance and includes items 11 and 12. This factor relates to Responsiveness.

Factor/Component 7 accounts for 6 % of the total variance and includes item10. This factor relates to Responsiveness.

Table 4.20 shows that no dimension loaded perfectly in one factor for the perception (P) scores. This means that the dimensions have factors that overlap. This reveals a mixing of factors.

The findings for expectations and perceptions mean that the questions in the overlapping dimensions did not specifically measure what it intended to measure,

indicating that the respondents did not clearly distinguish between the questions that comprised the dimensions.

TABLE 4.20 FACTOR ANALYSIS- PERCEPTION

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.673
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	4050.500
	df	231
	Sig.	.000

Total Variance Explained

Component	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.487	11.306	11.306
2	2.471	11.231	22.537
3	2.327	10.576	33.113
4	2.283	10.375	43.488
5	2.281	10.370	53.858
6	1.859	8.452	62.310
7	1.306	5.939	68.249

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotated Component/Factor Matrix(a)

	Component/Factor						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
P3	.806	.033	.012	.039	-.170	.074	.035
P4	.804	-.065	.131	.101	.060	.121	.062
P5	.654	-.013	.436	.038	.078	.095	.049
P2	.600	-.340	-.122	.063	.026	-.088	-.103
P1	.520	.112	.111	.022	.328	.120	-.217
P21	-.081	.831	.019	.087	.045	-.040	.084
P22	-.007	.793	.129	.059	-.111	-.089	-.137
P20	-.065	.692	-.196	-.140	.372	-.039	.128
P19	-.030	.586	.062	-.114	.576	.076	-.181
P8	.031	.123	.782	.049	-.001	.393	.079
P7	.124	-.066	.648	.168	-.069	-.056	.470
P6	.137	-.055	.644	-.168	.153	-.065	-.144
P9	.094	.169	.611	.128	-.152	.471	.175
P15	.001	.078	.172	.813	.226	-.047	.068
P14	.158	.082	-.199	.699	.138	-.107	.001
P13	.091	-.150	-.008	.684	.004	.433	-.163
P18	.042	.265	-.207	.138	.749	.050	.178
P17	.063	-.053	.155	.418	.739	-.073	-.075
P16	.022	-.157	.203	.536	.648	-.059	-.175
P12	.181	-.081	.091	.098	.052	.828	-.175
P11	.039	-.079	.143	-.178	-.022	.711	.327
P10	-.056	.007	.078	-.075	-.012	.061	.807

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a Rotation converged in 17 iterations.

4.9   INFERENTIAL STATISTICS

The overall expectation and overall perception mean scores of the two institutions were calculated by adding together the responses to the 22 questions and dividing by 22.

TABLE 4.21 OVERALL MEAN SCORES BETWEEN COLLEGES						
	College	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Z	p
Overall Expectation	North	4.7271	241	.13378	-1.771	0.077
	Westville	4.7303	210	.20218		
Overall Perception	North	4.0796	241	.23453	-5.320	0.000
	Westville	3.9344	210	.30285		

As shown in Table 4.21, the overall scores do not follow a normal distribution, so the non-parametric Mann-Whitney test was used to compare the means between Colleges. The results show no significant difference in the overall expectation between Colleges at the 95% level (p>0.05). However, the overall perception is significantly different between colleges at the 95% level (p<0.05). Westville has a higher overall perception score.

TABLE 4.22 OVERALL MEAN SCORES BETWEEN GENDER						
	Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Z	p
Overall Expectation	Female	4.7199	210	.17240	-0.862	0.389
	Male	4.7361	241	.16582		
Overall Perception	Female	4.0104	210	.28757	-0.285	0.776
	Male	4.0134	241	.26965		

The overall scores in Table 4.22 do not follow a normal distribution. Therefore, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney test was used to compare the means between gender. The results indicate that neither overall expectation nor overall perception is significantly different between males and females.

4.10   CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the data analysis and a discussion of the results collected from the survey. The data was analysed by a statistician using statistical methods. A detailed analysis of the results was presented in the form of graphs and tables. Cronbach's alpha figures for expectation (0.67) and perception (0.724) reveal that the items represent reliable measures for each of the five dimensions. This coincides with the SERVQUAL instrument.

Service quality expectations and perceptions for Varsity Colleges at Westville and Durban North were presented. The gaps between expectations and perceptions were also shown. The overall mean gap score at Westville (0.8) and Durban North (0.64) is relatively small showing that both the campuses have attained positive results relating to the five dimensions. However, there is still some room for improvement in respect of certain dimensions relating to the service provided by both the campuses.

Factor analysis for expectations and perceptions revealed that the five dimensions of service quality are interrelated to improve service quality at Varsity Colleges. The Mann-Whitney test was utilised to ascertain whether demographic information impacts on service quality dimensions. While findings revealed no significant difference in overall expectations between colleges at the 95% level, there was significant difference between colleges at the 95% level. There was no significant difference in the overall expectations and perceptions between male and female.

The next chapter will present the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 focused on the analysis of data from the 451 questionnaires. Inferential and descriptive statistics were used. This chapter takes an in-depth look into the results and findings in relation to the objectives of this study. Limitations of this study and important recommendations for improving service quality at Varsity Colleges are also discussed.

5.2   SUMMARY OF THE THEORETICAL STUDY

The focal point of this study was to determine students' perceptions of service quality at Varsity Colleges at Westville and Durban North with the objective of providing management greater insight into improving service quality. This will lead to greater customer retention of existing customers and the acquisition of new customers in order to acquire a greater share of the market.

Chapter two presented an overview of higher education in South Africa and a brief discussion of Varsity Colleges in South Africa. This chapter also reviewed the appropriate service quality literature at higher education institutions in South Africa. This chapter also focused on the characteristics and dimensions of service quality and the importance for higher education institutions to maintain high standards in terms of customer expectations and perceptions. Students' perceptions of service quality at Varsity Colleges in Westville and Durban North were also investigated. The literature review also alluded to the fact that customer service is pivotal for increased customer satisfaction and long-term profitability.

The Gaps Model of service quality indicated how gaps can occur. Gap 5 i.e. the gap between customers' expectations and students' perceptions of service quality was stressed as the most important gap to be closed in order to improve service quality.

The results of the gap analysis in Chapter 4 revealed that students' perceptions was lower than their expectations. The negative gaps show that the delivered service falls below students' expectations of service quality at both the campuses while the positive gaps reflect that delivered service surpassed student's expectations.

5.3 SUMMARY OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

In chapter 4, the results of the study was analysed, interpreted and presented. The study was a quantitative study. A total of 451 questionnaires were used to extract information from students at the two campuses. The results revealed crucial aspects of service quality that needed to be addressed in order to improve customer service and satisfaction.

5.4 ATTAINMENT OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

A discussion of the attainment of research objectives is discussed.

- **To identify student expectations of service quality.**

Chapter two provided the literature overview and understanding of the most important characteristics and the five dimensions of service quality. Students' expectations were identified, tested and analysed in Chapter 4. The gap between students' expectations and perceptions was measured. Measurement was done according to students' expectations of the delivery of the five service quality dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. The results have revealed that students' expectations of service quality at both campuses exceed their perceptions. This means that improvements are necessary across all five dimensions. The gaps pose a challenge to the management of Westville and Durban North to develop strategies to close the gaps.

- **To identify student perceptions of service quality.**

Students' perceptions of service quality was measured at both campuses according to students' perceptions of service quality on the five service quality dimensions. The results indicate negative responses showing that students' expectations exceed perceptions at both the campuses.

- **To measure service quality at Varsity Colleges, using the SERVQUAL instrument.**

As illustrated in Figure 5.1, an analysis of the dimensions shows that there are gaps between expectations and perceptions. However, it must be stated that smallest mean gap score at Westville was in tangibles (0.2) and the largest mean gap score was in assurance (1.2). Durban North recorded the smallest mean gap score (0.1) in tangibles and the largest mean gap score (1.09) in empathy. It is positive to note that while gaps do exist in both campuses, these gaps are not large at both campuses.

FIGURE 5.1 : MEAN AND GAP SCORE FOR EACH SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSION
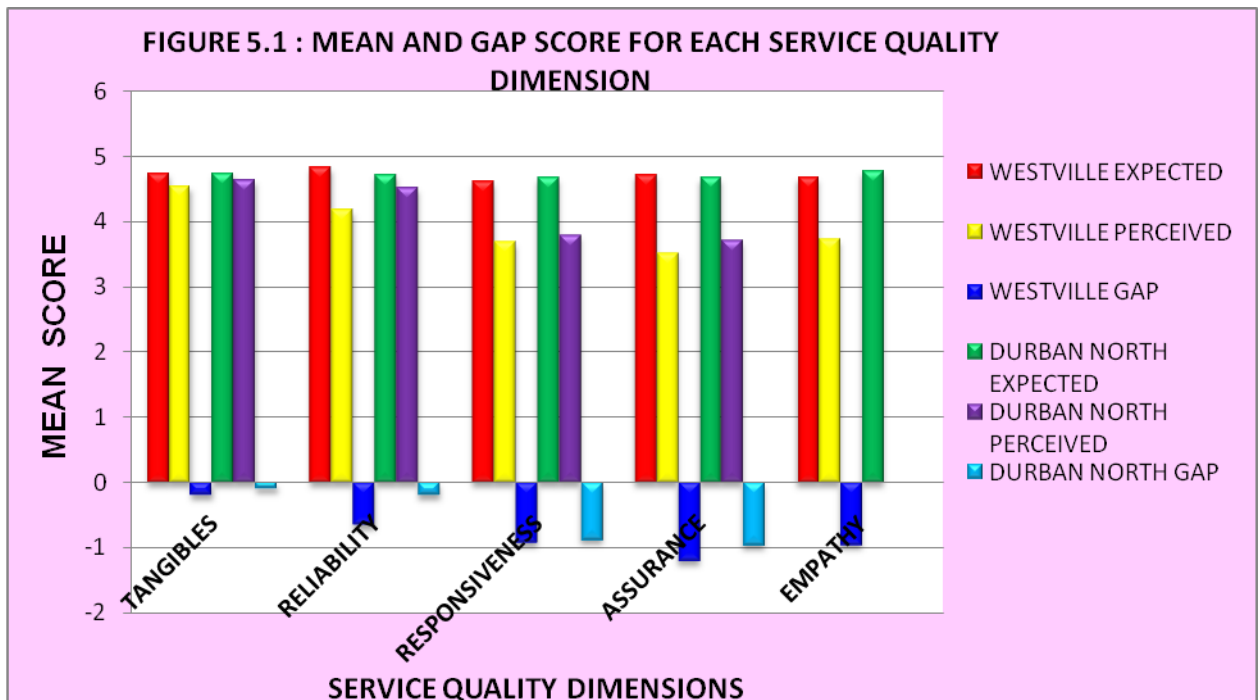
5.5   LIMITATIONS

The present research study had certain limitations:

- The data was gathered at two Varsity Colleges viz. Westville and Durban North campuses in the greater Durban area. As such, the study may have contained information specific only to these two campuses. Thus, the results cannot be generalised to other Varsity Colleges.

- The results of this study may not be representative of the entire population for the very fact that convenience sampling method was utilised.

5.6   RECOMMENDATIONS

By measuring service quality, Varsity College will be able to identify and close any gaps that may exist in service quality. Consistent and regular measurement of students' perceptions of service quality will help management to improve customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, thereby making Varsity Colleges more competitive in the private higher education industry. The following recommendations are suggested:

- Service quality improvement is everybody's responsibility. Each worker has knowledge, resources and authority to provide the right quality. Skilled and competent staff are vital for superior service quality. Staff need formal training in service quality to deal with different types of customers and their needs. Staff need to be comprehensively trained in service quality programmes e.g. Customer's Service Improvement Workshops, Product Knowledge Workshops, Communication Workshops and Interpersonal Skills Workshops. Trained staff should share work practices and problem solving approaches with other staff members in the organisation

- There is a need to enhance the relationship between support-staff , lecturing-staff and students even beyond regular contact time. Regular feedback that highlights positive examples of optimal staff-student rapport and techniques on

improving this relationship would be of paramount importance to staff. Open Days at the campuses, Sports Days for both staff and students and workshops on building relationships with students can help minimise the gap.

- The staff at Varsity Colleges should embrace the concept of empathy in their interaction with students. The lecturing-staff, for example, need to show students that they are interested and care about the students' progress. It is pivotal for staff at Varsity Colleges to add the human dimension in their interaction with students. Management can develop creative strategies to ensure students receive caring, individualised attention. Staff must possess the social skills to approach and understand students' unique needs.

- It is essential to promote the right mindset for delivering the 'right' service quality. Staff should be trained to be student-centred rather than merely task-driven. This means the adoption of customer orientation rather than just rules and regulations. In order to sustain long-term service quality, short-term measures must be developed. This will mean introducing specific measures to evaluate service quality. Some innovative ways of encouraging positive mental mindsets would be to inculcate a shared vision of service excellence. This can be made possible by recognising superior service, regular dialogue and sharing good practices, personal coaching and counselling.

- Varsity College should engage in benchmarking i.e. comparing one's own organisation with others and learning from them and not merely copying them.

- It is crucial to entrench the concept of reliability in the interest of customer satisfaction and of high quality service. This may be translated into adhering to deadlines, solving problems immediately and being faultless. The company can also focus on handling complaints in a professional and objective manner.

- Management must undertake to collect and evaluate customer attitudes, expectations, needs and opinions on a regular basis. This will assist the management to pinpoint areas of concern and thus help to eliminate problem

areas. Employees should encourage customer feedback and respond to identified problems.

5.7 SCOPE FOR FUTURE STUDY

It is suggested that SERVQUAL be used to evaluate the performance across other Varsity Colleges in South Africa. This will enable the management of Varsity Colleges to understand what other students expect and perceive. This should be done annually so that it will allow management to draw yearly comparisons and determine how service improvements have affected customers' expectations and perceptions of service delivery at Varsity Colleges over time.

This study focused on the students' perception of service quality. Future research should focus on the perception of service quality from other stakeholders (internal customers, parents etc.). This will ensure a thorough and comprehensive study which would help Varsity Colleges to review and strengthen its overall service quality.

5.8 CONCLUSION

There are numerous players in the higher education industry in South Africa all competing for increased market share. These players compete on all fronts. The importance of service quality is of paramount importance. Today's business environment is fluid and turbulent. Providing superior service quality can give the company the competitive advantage.

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RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

SERVICE QUALITY AT VARSITY COLLEGES IN DURBAN NORTH AND WESTVILLE: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

June 2010

21 Darjeeling Road

Everest Heights

Verulam

4339

20 July 2010

Dear Student

QUESTIONNAIRE : SERVICE QUALITY AT VARSITY COLLEGES IN WESTVILLE AND DURBAN NORTH

I am currently engaged in a research study towards my Masters degree in Marketing at the Durban University of Technology under the guidance of Prof. S. Penceliah and Dr J.P. Govender. The research is concerned with Students' Perceptions of Service Quality at Varsity Colleges in Durban North and Durban Westville.

Please respond as honestly as possible as the information obtained from this survey will help to improve the service at Varsity Colleges. All information will be regarded as confidential, and no personal details of any respondent will be mentioned in the findings, nor will any of the results be related to any particular student.

I thank you for your co-operation.

Yours faithfully

P.Devnarrian

QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A

GENERAL DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1.   Please select the name of your college by crossing the appropriate box.

Varsity College, Durban North	
Varsity College, Durban Westville	

2.   Please indicate your gender by crossing the appropriate box.

Male	
Female	

SECTION B

EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY

- Please read through each statement carefully before giving your opinion.
- Cross only one number for each statement.
- Please do not discuss statements with anyone.
- Please return questionnaire after completion.
- The rating guide is as follows:

	RATINGS
1	STRONGLY DISAGREE
2	DISAGREE
3	UNCERTAIN
4	AGREE
5	STRONGLY AGREE

- For each of the following statements, please indicate your level of agreement, as they apply to your expectations and perceptions of Varsity College.

	STATEMENTS	EXPECTATIONS (How do you rate the service level you **EXPECT**)				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
1	Varsity College should have modern looking equipment.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Varsity College should have visually appealing physical facilities.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Materials associated with the service (pamphlets, brochures) should be visually appealing.	1	2	3	4	5
4	The staff should be well dressed and neat in appearance.	1	2	3	4	5
5	When Varsity College promises to do something by a certain time, they should do so.	1	2	3	4	5
6	When you have a problem, Varsity College should show a sincere interest in solving it.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Varsity College should deliver its services at the times it promises to do so.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Varsity College should perform the service right the first time.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Varsity College should insist on error free records.	1	2	3	4	5

	STATEMENTS	EXPECTATIONS (How do you rate the service level you **EXPECT)**				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
10	The staff should inform me exactly when services will be performed.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Staff should give prompt service to customers.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Staff should always be willing to help customers.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Staff should never be too busy to respond to customer requests.	1	2	3	4	5
14	The behaviour of staff should instil confidence in customers.	1	2	3	4	5
15	You should feel safe in your transactions with Varsity College.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Staff should be consistently courteous to customers.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Staff should have knowledge to answer customers' questions.	1	2	3	4	5
18	The staff should give personal attention to customers.	1	2	3	4	5
19	The staff should understand students' specific needs.	1	2	3	4	5

	STATEMENTS	EXPECTATIONS (How do you rate the service level you **EXPECT**)				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
20	**Varsity College should have the best interests of customers at heart.**	1	2	3	4	5
21	**Varsity College should have operating hours convenient to customers.**	1	2	3	4	5
22	**Varsity College should have staff who give customers' personal attention.**	1	2	3	4	5

	STATEMENTS	PERCEPTIONS (How do you rate the service level you **RECEIVE**)				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
1	**Varsity College has modern looking equipment.**	1	2	3	4	5
2	**Varsity College has visually appealing physical facilities.**	1	2	3	4	5
3	**Materials associated with the service (pamphlets, brochures) is visually appealing.**	1	2	3	4	5
4	**The staff is always well dressed and neat in appearance.**	1	2	3	4	5
5	**When Varsity College promises to do something by a certain time, they do so.**	1	2	3	4	5
6	**When you have a problem, Varsity College shows a sincere interest in solving it.**	1	2	3	4	5
7	**Varsity College delivers its services at the times it promises to do so.**	1	2	3	4	5
8	**Varsity College performs the service right the first time.**	1	2	3	4	5
9	**Varsity College insists on error free records.**	1	2	3	4	5

	STATEMENTS	PERCEPTIONS				
		(How do you rate the service level you **RECEIVE**)				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
10	The staff informs me exactly when services will be performed.	1	2	3	4	5
11	The staff give prompt service to customers.	1	2	3	4	5
12	The staff is always willing to help customers.	1	2	3	4	5
13	The staff is never too busy to respond to customer requests.	1	2	3	4	5
14	The behaviour of staff instils confidence in customers.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I feel safe in my transactions with Varsity College.	1	2	3	4	5
16	The staff is consistently courteous to customers.	1	2	3	4	5
17	The staff has knowledge to answer customers' questions.	1	2	3	4	5
18	The staff gives personal attention to customers.	1	2	3	4	5
19	The staff understands students' specific needs.	1	2	3	4	5

	STATEMENTS	PERCEPTIONS (How do you rate the service level you **RECEIVE**)				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
20	**Varsity College has the best interests of customers at heart.**	1	2	3	4	5
21	**Varsity College has operating hours convenient to customers.**	1	2	3	4	5
22	**Varsity College has staff who give customers' personal attention.**	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

ANNEXURE 2

Rotated Component/Factor Matrix(a)

	Component/Factor							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
E12	.777	.144	-.081	.048	.156	.045	.068	-.015
E13	.697	.039	.006	.138	-.008	.195	.073	.139
E11	.616	.055	.347	-.016	.013	-.240	-.046	.100
E10	.456	.028	-.012	-.269	-.431	-.069	-.031	-.102
E19	.048	.746	.108	.074	-.004	-.091	.209	.138
E18	.011	.710	-.012	.008	.142	.230	.083	.095
E17	.311	.695	.048	-.072	-.202	.161	-.138	-.074
E6	-.057	.036	.673	-.053	.076	.132	-.038	.048
E8	.088	.022	.642	.139	.039	.006	.212	-.037
E16	.017	.094	.514	.228	-.147	.104	-.089	.050
E4	.057	.069	.052	.835	-.069	-.027	-.038	-.050
E5	.049	-.056	.184	.685	.167	.008	-.024	.118
E3	.068	-.024	-.165	.121	.768	.034	.103	.117
E2	.099	.060	.256	-.146	.727	-.019	-.256	-.187
E1	-.009	.107	.042	-.131	.024	.669	.014	.108
E22	.171	.099	.046	.034	-.081	.638	.472	-.115
E15	.019	.048	.285	.175	.068	.536	-.156	-.012
E20	-.029	.106	.020	-.162	.041	-.056	.769	.141
E21	.192	.084	.123	.229	-.195	.196	.509	-.352
E7	.024	.198	.058	.008	.037	-.030	-.008	.680
E9	.103	-.284	.441	.004	-.068	.066	.210	.532
E14	.405	.084	-.112	.191	-.023	.242	-.019	.523

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a Rotation converged in 10 iterations.

ANNEXURE 3

Rotated Component/Factor Matrix(a)

	Component/Factor						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
P3	.806	.033	.012	.039	-.170	.074	.035
P4	.804	-.065	.131	.101	.060	.121	.062
P5	.654	-.013	.436	.038	.078	.095	.049
P2	.600	-.340	-.122	.063	.026	-.088	-.103
P1	.520	.112	.111	.022	.328	.120	-.217
P21	-.081	.831	.019	.087	.045	-.040	.084
P22	-.007	.793	.129	.059	-.111	-.089	-.137
P20	-.065	.692	-.196	-.140	.372	-.039	.128
P19	-.030	.586	.062	-.114	.576	.076	-.181
P8	.031	.123	.782	.049	-.001	.393	.079
P7	.124	-.066	.648	.168	-.069	-.056	.470
P6	.137	-.055	.644	-.168	.153	-.065	-.144
P9	.094	.169	.611	.128	-.152	.471	.175
P15	.001	.078	.172	.813	.226	-.047	.068
P14	.158	.082	-.199	.699	.138	-.107	.001
P13	.091	-.150	-.008	.684	.004	.433	-.163
P18	.042	.265	-.207	.138	.749	.050	.178
P17	.063	-.053	.155	.418	.739	-.073	-.075
P16	.022	-.157	.203	.536	.648	-.059	-.175
P12	.181	-.081	.091	.098	.052	.828	-.175
P11	.039	-.079	.143	-.178	-.022	.711	.327
P10	-.056	.007	.078	-.075	-.012	.061	.807

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a Rotation converged in 17 iterations.

ANNEXURE 4

20 July 2009

FOR ATTENTION : The Principal
Ms Louise Underhill
Varsity College
Westville

Dear Madam

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT VARSITY COLLEGE : DURBAN NORTH

I am completing my Master's Degree in Marketing at the Durban University of Technology. I am required to conduct research on a topic of my choice that will contribute positively to the body of knowledge and the industry as a whole.

TITLE OF RESEARCH : **Students' perceptions of service quality at Varsity Colleges in Durban.**

The concept of service quality is proving to be a critical component of the competitive advantage of higher education institutions in South Africa. I have chosen services marketing and more specifically service quality at Varsity Colleges in Durban because I lecture and develop material for both these campuses. I have been a lecturer at Varsity College for six years. The research study would enable the management to ascertain the extent to which service quality is embraced throughout the campus and make recommendations on how service quality may be improved.

I hereby request your permission to conduct research at the institution. Responses are highly confidential and will be treated as such.

I thank you in advance for your assistance and co-operation and await a positive response.

Yours faithfully
P.Devnarrian
O846606727

ANNEXURE 5

20 July 2009

FOR ATTENTION : The Principal

Kevin Mottram

Varsity College

Westville

Dear Sir

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT VARSITY COLLEGE : DURBAN NORTH

I am completing my Master's Degree in Marketing at the Durban University of Technology. I am required to conduct research on a topic of my choice that will contribute positively to the body of knowledge and the industry as a whole.

TITLE OF RESEARCH : **Students' perceptions of service quality at Varsity Colleges in Durban.**

The concept of service quality is proving to be a critical component of the competitive advantage of higher education institutions in South Africa. I have chosen services marketing and more specifically service quality at Varsity Colleges in Durban because I lecture and develop material for both these campuses. I have been a lecturer at Varsity College for six years. The research study would enable the management to ascertain the extent to which service quality is embraced throughout the campus and make recommendations on how service quality may be improved.

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P.Devnarrian

O846606727