Sustaining Clients' Index of Satisfaction at the Graduate School Level in a Catholic University in Northern Philippines

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Abstract In a higher education institution that subscribes to the standards of quality and excellence, it normally becomes part of its routine activities to ensure sustaining its stakeholders with high degree of satisfaction and delight through the regular conduct of customer satisfaction surveys (CSSs). In St. Paul University Philippines (SPUP), the first ISO 9001-certified private university in the Philippines, CSSs are regularly done to assess how well it has succeeded in providing quality services and products both to its internal and external customers. This study is conducted in the Graduate School level of the University to primarily assess the extent of the graduate school student graduates' satisfaction with respect to the quality of services and products provided to them by SPUP using a questionnaire based survey tool. Generally, the graduate participants in both the master's and doctoral programs are very satisfied with the academic services and products that the University has provided them with, in areas such as general services, quality of service given by its academic and non-academic support staff, learning support facilities, learning experience and research related concerns. This study noted that despite the high ratings given by the participants on almost all areas, the University needs to improve its lodging and accommodation services for its foreign students as well as the services of the University Canteen and its other food satellites, its computer laboratory facilities and its document reproduction/duplicating facilities.

***Keywords:** customer satisfaction, graduate school, quality and excellence*

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1. Introduction

A lot of higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world regularly perform evaluation on the multifaceted aspects of their students' school-based experience. The evaluations done often go beyond the confines of the assessment of the quality of teaching and learning [1]. Customer satisfaction surveys (CSSs) are done to identify areas as well as to measure the extent of satisfaction as well as dissatisfaction based on students' school-based experiences. When these two-pronged assessments are done, they serve the dual purpose of showcasing the institution's best services and flagging down grey areas that necessitate improvements and interventions. Reducing the number of dissatisfying experiences among students may not be an easy task, but if made successful, improved student recruitment, retention and ultimately financial stability for any institution ensues [5]. When academic institutions seriously use the results from student satisfaction surveys to better their manifold educational products and services, they often end up seeing the value of student satisfaction approach in ensuring their sustainability and competitive advantage.

Indeed, as Harvey [6] pointed out, the student satisfaction approach goes hand-in-hand with the development of a culture of continuous quality improvement. Highly sustainable and competitive HEIs normally subscribe to the requirements of continual improvement, more so when these institutions have in-placed quality management systems and processes.

St. Paul University Philippines is among the few HEIs in the northern most part of the Philippines that had maintained its niche as a lead private University in the country and in Asia. It has lived up to its uncompromising stance to quality and excellence as enshrined in its vision – mission statement and quality policy. Being an ISO 9001 certified institution, it has for decades kept its promise of providing the highest degree of satisfaction that it can possibly give to all its stakeholders from basic education to graduate school. In a study conducted by Bansig and Pizarro [2], the results revealed that students were generally very highly satisfied with the University's services and facilities as well as their relationship with their teachers, fellow students, administrative personnel

and office staff. The participants in the said study are very impressed with the overall quality of their academic experience in the University. In this said CS survey, it also noted certain areas of assessment that were rated lowest by the participants. This study is a sequel of the said research done by Bansig and Pizarro [2]. It is replicated to find out whether there are improvements on the ratings on certain identified areas rated as relatively low and to find out, too, whether the University has sustained its effort in the provision of quality services, products and facilities to its major clients, the students.

This study sought to assess the graduates' extent of satisfaction on the educational services and products provided to them by St. Paul University Philippines. The assessment is focused on the University's general services, quality of service given by its academic and non-academic support staff, learning support facilities, learning experience, and research related concerns. Furthermore, the study sought to test for significant difference in the assessed extent of satisfaction of the participants when they are grouped according to program and student category. And lastly, this research sought to elicit the participants' feedback and recommendations concerning the educational services and products provided to them by the University.

2. Methods

The descriptive research design was utilized in this study as it assesses the graduate school students' extent of satisfaction with respect to the quality of services and products received by them during their stay in the University.

A sample of one hundred sixty-four (164) June 2018 graduates of SPUP in the Master's and Doctoral degree programs Academic Year 2017 – 2018 comprised as participants of this study. Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the participants' profile in terms of program and student category. They were randomly selected during their visit in the Graduate School Office when they had their clearances signed in securing their credentials from the Registrar's Office of the University. The graduates' participation was voluntary thus informed consent was obtained from them.
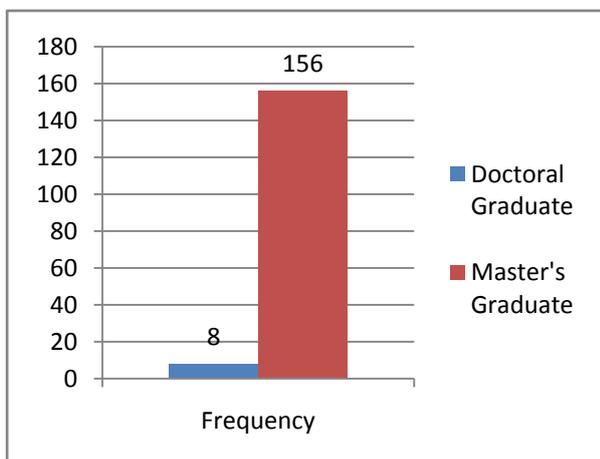
Figure 1. Participants' Profile in terms of their Program Category
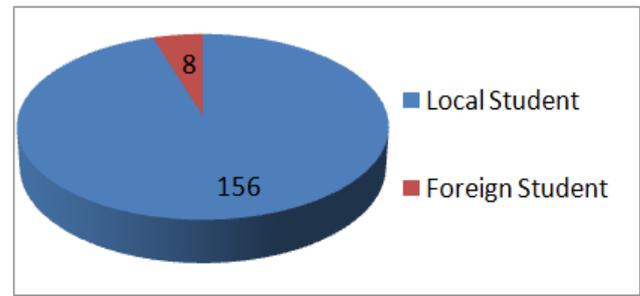
Figure 2. Participants' Profile in terms of their Student Category

Figure 1 and Figure 2 show that majority of the participants are Master's graduate (95.12%) or local students (95.12%). This is due to the fact that in the University's June 2018 graduation, majority of the graduates in the Graduate School are in the Master's degree program covering the Master of Arts in Education, Master of Science in Teaching, Master in Psychology, Master in Business Administration, Master in Public Administration, Master of Science in Nursing, Master of Science in Social Work and Master in Information Technology.

SPUP, being an internationally recognized HEI is also home to one hundred (100) enrolled foreign students as of September 2018. Data concerning these foreign students, available at the Office of the International Relations and Student Services of SPUP reveal that these students are from China, East Timor, United Kingdom, India, Indonesia, Korea, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, USA and Vietnam. Around thirty one (31) of these 100 students are enrolled in either the Master's or Doctorate degree programs. Almost all of these foreign students have opted to have their board and lodging in the dormitory built inside the University campus.

A researcher-made survey questionnaire was utilized by the researcher to gather the needed data for the study. Each item in the questionnaire is answerable using a 4-point Likert Scale: 4 (Very Satisfied), 3 (Satisfied), 2 (Dissatisfied), 1 (Very Dissatisfied). The survey instrument underwent validation and try-out before it was finally administered to the participants to ensure that it is both valid and reliable. The tool yielded a very high internal reliability Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.89. Cronbach's Alpha provides a measure of the internal consistency of a scale. Internal consistency describes the extent to which all the items in a scale measure the same concept or construct and hence it is connected to the inter-relatedness of the items within the scale [10]. The acceptable values of alpha ranges from 0.70 to 0.95 [4], however Streiner [9] recommended a maximum acceptable value of 0.90. The content validity of the questionnaire utilized in this study was obtained by involving the assessment of five (5) content experts and their evaluation yielded a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.94. The content validity index has been recommended as a means to quantify content validity [3] and the ideal CVI coefficient is 0.78 or higher for three or more experts [8] could be considered evidence of good content validity. Given this CVI standard, it can be said that the instrument used in gathering the needed data for this research is valid.

The frequency and percentage were utilized to describe the profile of the participants in terms of student and

program category. The mean was used to describe the assessment of the participants with respect to their extent of satisfaction on the services and products provided by the University to the graduate school participants and the independent samples t-test was utilized to test for significant difference in the graduate school participants' assessment on their extent of satisfaction on the services and products provided to them by the University when they are grouped according to program and student category. To ensure the accuracy of quantitative data analysis, SPSS Version 17 was utilized.

3. Results and Discussion

The following tables present the results of the data obtained from the use of the questionnaire administered to the participants.

Table 1. Mean Distribution of Participants' Assessment on their Level of Satisfaction with respect to the General Services Provided by St. Paul University Philippines

Item GENERAL SERVICES	Overall Mean	
	Mean	Description
1. Admission and Retention policies and practices	3.67	VS*
2. Guidance and testing services	3.78	VS
3. Registration process during enrolment	3.55	VS
4. Registrar services (requests for student records, etc)	3.54	VS
5. Business Affairs Office services (payment of fees, etc)	3.72	VS
6. Security Policies and Services	3.70	VS
7. Canteen and Food Services	3.31	VS
8. Health services provided by the University Clinic	3.42	VS
9. Library and Knowledge Information services	3.75	VS
10. Lodging and accommodation services (For foreign students only)	3.00	S**
Category Mean	3.60	VS

*Very Satisfied
**Satisfied.

Table 1 shows the mean assessment of the participants with respect to the general services of St. Paul University Philippines. The figures in the table reveal that the participants both in the Master's and Doctoral program are generally very satisfied with the general services provided for by the University which include admission and retention, guidance and testing, enrolment registration process, Registrar, Business Affairs Office, security, food, health and library services. The participants had their highest mean assessment in the University's guidance and testing services by both participants in the doctoral and master's level.

However, for the foreign students who are graduates of the Master's program and who have availed of the lodging and accommodation services of the University, they have assessed their extent of satisfaction as merely "satisfied". In addition, the participants in the master's level had low ratings of satisfaction in the services of the canteen and its food satellites which is the second lowest mean next to the school's lodging and accommodations services. This second lowest mean rating on the University's food services run similar to the findings obtained by Bansig and Pizarro [2] in their study in 2017.

Despite however of the relatively low assessment on the said area of service, it is worthy to note that the overall category mean is high described as "very satisfactory".

Table 2. Mean Distribution of Participants' Assessment on their Level of Satisfaction with respect to the Quality of Services Provided by the Office Staff of St. Paul University Philippines

Item QUALITY OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE OFFICE STAFF	Overall Mean	
	Mean	Description
1. Guidance Office	3.85	VS
2. Registrar's Office	3.74	VS
3. Business Affairs Office	3.75	VS
4. Graduate School Office	3.74	VS
5. University Canteen and other Food Satellites	3.36	VS
6. University Boutique	3.63	VS
7. University Clinic	3.41	VS
8. Research and Publications Office	3.64	VS
Category Mean	3.65	VS

Table 2 presents the mean assessment of the participants on the quality of services provided by the different offices of the University. Generally, the participants are very satisfied with the services uniquely provided by each office in the University which include the Guidance, Registrar, Business Affairs, Graduate School, Boutique, Clinic and Research and Publications Offices. Among the stated offices, the Office of the Graduate School got the highest rating from among the Doctoral graduates while the Guidance Office was rated highest by the participants from the Master's level. The University Canteen and its Food Satellites got the lowest rating from both type of participants.

Table 3. Mean Distribution of Participants' Assessment on their Level of Satisfaction with respect to the Learning Support Facilities of St. Paul University Philippines

Item LEARNING SUPPORT FACILITIES	Overall Mean	
	Mean	Description
1. Science laboratory facilities	3.53	VS
2. Computer laboratory facilities	3.63	VS
3. Internet access	3.38	VS
4. Document reproduction/duplicating facilities (Xerox, etc.)	3.34	VS
5. Classroom ventilation and lighting	3.44	VS
6. Classroom cleanliness and physical set-up	3.56	VS
7. Conference	3.61	VS
8. School Ground cleanliness and general ambiance	3.68	VS
9. Cleanliness of Restrooms	3.54	VS
Category Mean	3.53	VS

Table 3 shows the assessed level of satisfaction of the participants in terms of the University's learning support facilities. The data reveals that the participants are generally very satisfied of the University's learning support facilities which include the science laboratories, their access to the school's internet hub, the overall classroom and school ground quality and ambiance. Furthermore, the table also shows that the lowest mean value assessments (M=3.00) lie on the school's computer laboratory facilities as well as on its document reproduction or duplicating facilities.

Table 4. Mean Distribution of Participants' Assessment on their Level of Satisfaction with respect to their Learning Experience at St. Paul University Philippines

Item LEARNING EXPERIENCE	Overall Mean	
	Mean	Description
1. Graduate School faculty's teaching competence for Professors teaching General Education subjects (Research, Statistics, etc)	3.83	VS
2. Graduate School faculty's teaching competence for Professors teaching the Major subjects	3.85	VS
3. Professors' use of diverse and updated teaching approaches	3.79	VS
4. Professors utilization of technology assisted or technology-based teaching approaches	3.79	VS
5. Professors' use of fair assessment or grading practices	3.71	VS
6. Professors' communication and facilitating skills	3.85	VS
7 Professors' overall rapport with students	3.84	VS
8. Professors' general behavior and decorum	3.80	VS
Category Mean	3.81	VS

It is important for any HEI to assess its students' level of satisfaction relative to their learning experiences as this area is the core or central service that it provides to its student clients. Table 6 shows that the participants are "Very Satisfied" in all the facets of their learning experiences in the Graduate School which include their professors' teaching competence and use of varied updated teaching approaches or strategies. In addition, the participants too are very satisfied with their professors' use of technology assisted forms of instruction, fair use of assessment practices, their communication and facilitating skills, overall rapport with their students as well as in their teachers' general behavior and decorum. These results imply that SPUP has succeeded providing its graduate school clients with high level of satisfaction relative to its reason for being, teaching. It is good to note that the participants' professors demonstrated high level of teaching competence where instruction given are enhanced by technology use and varied pedagogical approaches. Peterson [5] mentioned in her online article titled "The 3 Qualities of an Exceptional Professor" that professors need to be "Knowledgeable about their subject matter". She said that although knowledge is a basic requirement for teachers, it's one of the most significant characteristics. In order for a student to learn, his mentor must know more than just textbook definitions of important terms. His teaching style should be engaging rather than a list of facts and rants, and therefore professors should demonstrate a vast understanding of his material that goes beyond the syllabus topics.

What makes an HEI a university is its Graduate School. The hallmark of a University's Graduate School on the other hand lies on its overall research climate and research manpower and support structures. The journey of any graduate school student reaches its pinnacle through the conduct of a full-blown thesis or a dissertation. It is then crucial for the University to provide the thesis and dissertation writers in the graduate school with advisers, data consultants and panel of oral examiners who would bring out and further deepen their knowledge, skills and attitude to develop in them a culture of inquisitiveness and passion for scholarly research and creative work. It is the advisers' mentoring role, particularly in providing graduate students with different types of practical help that affects their research productivity and student satisfaction. Tenenbaum, et. al. [11] found that the level of instrumental help statistically predicted the student's products with the advisor and the receipt of psychosocial

help increased satisfaction. The graduate students expressed more satisfaction with their advisors and their graduate experience with the reception of more psychosocial help. Their study concludes that socio-emotional mentoring increases student satisfaction and instrumental help increases student productivity.

Table 5. Mean Distribution of Participants' Assessment on their Level of Satisfaction with respect to their Research Related Concerns at St. Paul University Philippines

Item RESEARCH RELATED CONCERNS	Overall Mean	
	Mean	Description
1. Quality of research consultation (advising, guidance and mentoring)	3.69	VS
2. Knowledge and skills of research advisers	3.82	VS
3. Knowledge and skills of data consultants	4.00	VS
4. Knowledge and skills of the panel of oral examiners	3.82	VS
5. Approachability of research advisers	3.82	VS
6. Approachability of data consultants	3.82	VS
Category Mean	3.96	VS

Table 5 presents the participants' mean rating of assessment with respect to the level of satisfaction derived from the services provided by their research advisers, data consultants and panel of oral examiners. The data reveals that the participants are very satisfied with the quality of research consultation as well as the demonstrated knowledge, skills and the social attribute of their advisers, data analysts and panel of experts during their oral defenses. The results imply that the Graduate School of SPUP is blessed with high caliber research mentors and consultants who can provide technical and scholarly support for thesis and dissertation writers in the University.

Table 6 and Table 7 present the test for significant difference in the extent of satisfaction of the graduate participants in terms of the different areas of assessment when grouped according to type and program level of the participants. The two tables generally reveal that there exists no significant difference in the assessed level of satisfaction of the participants along general services, quality of services provided by office staff, their learning experiences and their research related concerns. It means that the participants who are either graduates of the Master's or Doctoral degree program as well as either local or foreign participants have relatively the same extent of satisfaction (i.e., very satisfied) covering all four stated areas of assessment.

Table 6. Test for Significant Difference in the Extent of Satisfaction of the Graduate Participants in terms of the different Areas of Assessment when Grouped According to Type of Participant

Area of Assessment	Type	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-test Value	P-value	Remarks
General services	Local	3.61	0.37375	1.390	0.167	Not Significant
	Foreign	3.43	0.40267			
Quality of Services Provided by the Office Staff	Local	3.65	0.38829	0.603	0.547	Not Significant
	Foreign	3.56	0.35733			
Learning Experience	Local	3.83	0.27433	3.782	Less than 0.001	Significant
	Foreign	3.44	0.47716			
Research Related Concerns	Local	4.00	1.25158	1.146	0.256	Not Significant
	Foreign	3.50	0.53452			

Table 7. Test for Significant Difference in the Extent of Satisfaction of the Graduate Participants in terms of the different Areas of Assessment when Grouped According to Program Level of the Participants

Area of Assessment	Program Level	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-test Value	P-value	Remarks
General Services	Doctoral Level	3.70	0.37052	0.695	0.488	Not Significant
	Master's Level	3.60	0.37703			
Quality of Services Provided by the Office Staff	Doctoral Level	3.50	0.24858	-1.074	0.284	Not Significant
	Master's Level	3.65	0.39114			
Learning Experience	Doctoral Level	3.97	0.05555	1.560	0.121	Not Significant
	Master's Level	3.80	0.30262			
Research Related Concerns	Doctoral Level	3.96	0.07869	-0.002	0.998	Not Significant
	Master's Level	3.96	1.27574			

4. Conclusion

It is the duty of any academic institution to ensure providing its stakeholders with the best services, products and facilities that it can possibly offer, if it is indeed bent to live up to its set standards of quality and excellence. St. Paul University Philippines being identified by CHED and by other quality certifying bodies as an advocate of quality assurance has consistently sustained its promise of providing customer satisfaction and delight to its major stakeholders, the students, specifically, the graduate school students. The University has not been remiss in obtaining customer feedback as part of its commitment to continual improvement. Constructive feedbacks that are either positively or negatively stated serve to make the University be in a better position to serve its clients with enhanced services and products.

Acknowledgements

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