


“International postgraduate students’ perceptions of service quality”

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INTERNATIONAL POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY

Abstract

South African universities have embraced a drive to internationalize in view of globalization. One of the widely adopted measures towards internationalization has been the recruitment of international postgraduate scholars. The rationale is to draw diverse knowledge and expertise from the international students. However, the University of KwaZulu Natal's Westville campus has not managed to attract a significant number of international scholars. The trend suggests that the university is unable to meet the expectations of international postgraduate students with regards to service delivery. The suggestion is premised on the argument that the previous and current international postgraduate students have not been satisfied with the service quality to stimulate other foreign postgraduate student enrolments through positive word of mouth. The main objective of the study was to confirm the assertions while exposing the gaps between their expectations and perceptions of service delivery at the university. The SERVQUAL model was used to guide the assessment of service quality among the research participants. The study adopted quantitative methodologies and data was drawn from international postgraduate students who were enrolled at the institution during the academic year 2016. The findings revealed that the international postgraduate students were dissatisfied with the levels of service at the university. Specifically, the study exposed gaps across all the five dimensions of service quality, namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. It was concluded that the management at the university should institute deliberate measures to improve service quality, especially towards international postgraduate students.

Keywords

university, students, accommodation, services, quality,
empathy, dimensions

JEL Classification

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INTRODUCTION

The significance of internationalization is with the understanding that international students are incorporated in the institution and their inclusion is dependent on their perceptions consequent on services received. This paper deals with the service quality perceptions of international postgraduate students at the University of KwaZulu Natal in the Westville campus. The teaching and learning, as well as research in universities in South Africa, have been aiming at internationalization.

With respect to internationalization, the University of Kwazulu Natal (UKZN) harbors ambitions of attracting a significant number of international postgraduate students as a measure towards drawing lessons from diverse cultural experiences and perspectives (UKZN, 2013). According to Higher Education South Africa (HESA), a representative body of higher education institutions of the government in South Africa, internationalization of public universities is an important step towards improving teaching, learning and research (HESA, 2016). In agreement with the assertions, Habib, Price, and Mabelebele (2014)

observed that internationalization of public universities in South Africa presents an opportunity for South Africa to retain skilled international graduates who could work in highly specialized occupations. Habib et al. (2014) further posited that international students share their experiences with domestic students, thus, facilitating the learning process of the South African public university communities.

HESA (2016) observed that the enrolment of international students in South African public universities had been lower than in private education systems from 2005 to 2015. In fact, they established that international students comprised only 7.5% of the South African public university body, while private education systems had up to 30% enrolment of international students. As an extension, the body also deduced that international students accounted for only 17% of the public university postgraduate student body.

In relation to UKZN's Westville campus, the statistics from 2005 to 2015 indicate that an average of 13% of postgraduate students were non-South Africans (UKZN, 2016). The low enrolment of international postgraduate students could adversely impact on the university's aspirations towards internationalization. In other words, the low enrolment frustrates the accumulation of diverse knowledge necessary for internationalization (UKZN, 2013).

In view of the existing problem, Baines, Fill, and Page (2011, p. 397) found that there is a mismatch between the expectations of international postgraduate students and their perceptions of the actual services delivered by the university. They suggested that previous and current cohorts of international postgraduate students have not been satisfied adequately with the service quality to stimulate further enrolments through positive word of mouth. In fact, Naidoo (2011) contended that a university's global recognition and its international students' enrolment are among the indicators that determine service quality at a tertiary institution. The perception that a public university does not meet the expectations of international students may negatively affect its reputation. As a result, aspiring international students may not consider the institution as a destination for quality education.

The study is considered significant, as it attempts to expose the service quality gaps at UKZN's Westville campus. It is envisaged that the revelations from the study will serve as a springboard towards achieving excellence in services aimed at the international postgraduate student community.

1. THEORETICAL AND CONTEXTUAL ISSUES SURROUNDING SERVICE QUALITY AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

1.1. Service quality at a glance

Several writers have presented varied perspectives in relation to the description of service quality and how service providers including public universities can achieve it.

Lovelock and Wirtz (2011, p. 404) described service quality as an attitude or overall impression adopted by customers about the relative inferiority or superiority of the organization and its services.

They further observed that consumer expectations determine their perceptions of service quality, especially when they have no prior experience of the service. In agreement, Ferrell and Hartline (2012, p. 349) referred to service quality as the degree of superiority of firm's products relative to competition or internally set standards. They suggested that service providers should understand customers' expectations, translate their expectations into quality standards and uphold the quality standards of service delivery. Further to the above descriptions, West, Ford, and Ibrahim (2010, p. 301) asserted that service quality means conforming to customer's expectations on a consistent basis. They further suggested that service providers should perpetually compare customer expectations and their perception of actual service delivery. Winer and Dhar (2011, p. 440) provided an extensive and more comprehensible explanation of service quality in rela-

tion to customer perceptions. They state that “a customer’s perception of quality is based on a comparison of the quality actually experienced to what he or she expected to occur when the service was delivered”. Similarly, Perreault, Cannon, and McCarthy (2010, p. 232) stated that service quality is the service provider’s ability to determine customer’s expectations correctly and to deliver the service at a level that satisfies their needs or requirements.

While there are various standpoints regarding the attainment of service quality, there are a number of common denominators that can be identified from the authors’ descriptions. It could be argued that service quality places its emphasis on generating a positive attitude or impression of the overall service offering. Generally, there is also an emphasis on ensuring that the services and related processes are superior to those of competition. Another common factor in relation to service quality is its significance to the survival and profitability of the organization. A positive service impression and students’ expectation should correlate with their experience in an institution (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013, p. 241).

Among others, Naidoo and Mutinta (2014) stated that service quality perceptions at public universities could be improved by employing skilled academic staff and improving teaching facilities. They also held that the value of program offered by universities and their relevance to the labor market enhances the students’ perceptions of service quality. In relation to international students, Fisk, Grove, and John (2008) established that a university’s ranking within a country, its global recognition as well its commitment to international students’ enrolment, enhance its service quality perceptions.

1.2. The significance of service quality at a public university

The significance of service quality at a public university cannot be undermined because of several reasons.

Firstly, according to Perreault et al. (2010, p. 232) and Kotler and Keller (2012, p. 162), maintaining service quality is the ability of a public university to constantly and consistently meet the students’

expectations and student retention – Kotler and Keller (2012, p. 162) further observed that student retention is a financially-sustaining avenue for public universities. The observation was founded on the premise that student profit rate tends to increase over the life of a retained student. They stated that acquiring new students can cost five times more than retaining current students.

Secondly, the view was held that maintaining high levels of service quality serves as a credible marketing tool for services. Ferrell and Hartline (2012, p. 20) observed that students are bound to become word of mouth agents of a university to other potential students if they are satisfied with the services. Consequently, it is imperative for a university to consistently exceed the expectations of the present students as a measure towards promoting its services.

Finally, service quality is a key prerequisite for innovation-driven competitive advantage. In view of the competitive business environment and the changing consumer demands, it has become necessary for service providers to be innovative (Hutt & Speh, 2010, p. 233). Through maintenance of service quality and subsequent retention of customers, service providers are empowered to innovate (Keller, 2013, p. 346). In other words, a university’s ability to consistently initiate service innovations serves as an essential step towards gaining a competitive advantage over its competitors.

1.3. A close-up view of the SERVQUAL model

The measurement of service quality in universities has been agreed as something complex by a number of authors such as West et al. (2010, p. 298), Capon (2016, p. 478), Kotler and Keller (2012, p. 378), Winer and Dhar (2011, p. 436), Lovelock and Wirtz (2011, p. 37). The fact that the services are not tangible in a sense that they cannot be felt, seen or patented or inventoried brings about a complication of all sorts.

In light of the problems associated with service delivery, it is essential for public universities to develop appropriate service measurement framework. There are various models that have been developed to measure service quality. These include

the disconfirmation of expectations model developed by Oliver (1997), the three-component model developed by Rust and Oliver (1994), the Nordic model developed by Gronroos (2007) and the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1985). However, the discussion has been limited to the SERVQUAL and gaps model, as it is the framework that guided the study.

The model was developed by Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml in 1985 as an instrument to evaluate the expectations and perceptions of service quality among customers. The developers asserted that service quality is the difference between customer's expectations of a service and their actual perception of the service. They described customer expectations as standards or reference points that customers bring into the service experience. In other words, customer expectations are the intimate desired levels of service before an actual service is experienced. They explained that expectations are largely affected by word of mouth communications from previous customers and the external communications that the service providers relay to the target customers about the benefits of the service. They stated that expectations are also affected by the customer's personal needs and their past experiences of the service. On the other hand, they described customer perceptions as an intrinsic judgment or impression that customers derive after experiencing a service offering. Parasuraman et al. (1985) observed that if the perceived service is equal to or better than the expected service, customers are generally satisfied with the service. Customer satisfaction, thus, drives repurchase, positive word of mouth and enhances shareholder value. The authors further noted that if the perceived service is worse than their expectations, customers are bound to be dissatisfied. Effectively, the dissatisfied customers are more likely not to repurchase a service and would settle for alternatives. In addition, dissatisfied customers would drive negative publicity about the service, thus, dissuading potential customers. In summary, they showed that customer perceptions of service are determined by reliability and responsiveness of staff, their empathy and level of assurance, as well as the appearance of physical facilities, equipment and other tangible materials within and outside the service premises (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988).

1.4. Reliability

Parasuraman et al. (1988) described reliability as the extent to which the service provider delivers the service consistently, accurately and dependably. Under this dimension, the critical variables also include evaluating whether services are performed correctly the first time and whether the services are delivered within the promised timeframes. According to the developers, reliability also embodies keeping error-free records, accuracy in billing and being able to honor promises (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

1.5. Responsiveness

According to the model developers, responsiveness focuses on the willingness or readiness of the service staff to help customers and provide prompt service. Responsiveness is linked to the service providers' ability to resolve ambiguities and reacting promptly to customer requests, problems, questions and complaints (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler (2012, p. 80) further stated that responsiveness captures the extent to which service staff exhibit flexibility in service delivery and their ability to precisely address the pertinent needs of a customer.

1.6. Assurance

Parasuraman et al. (1988) described assurance as the extent to which the service personnel demonstrate courtesy and are able to convey trust and confidence to the customers. Assurance also includes measuring how knowledgeable the service staff are with respect to the services and associated benefits. Wilson et al. (2012, p. 80) found that assurance is a key dimension, especially for services that customers perceive as high risk or ambiguous, such as university education.

1.7. Empathy

The construct represents the degree to which employees provide care and individualized or personalized attention to customers. The dimension focuses on service employees' ability to pay attention and to understand customers' specific needs. It also captures the extent to which the employees have their customers' interest at heart (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

1.8. Tangibles

The developers of the model suggested that the tangibles construct embodies the physical evidence of the service. It focuses on the appearance of the physical facilities, service staff, service apparatus, and physical representations of the service, as well as other customers within the service premises (Parasuraman et al., 1988). It should be emphasized that due to the intangible nature of services, tangible facilities are essential, as they provide customers with cues that could assist them in evaluating a service.

According to Parasuraman et al. (1985), the SERVQUAL model contains a scale of 22 perception items and a related set of expectation items, reflecting the five dimensions of service quality explained above. In principle, they held that service providers including public universities should engage efforts that will ensure that customer perceptions match or exceed their expectations.

In spite of the criticisms laid against the use and application of the SERVQUAL scale, Walter and Tontini (2011) explained that the model is suitable for evaluating service quality at a public university, as it focuses on all aspects of service delivery, including the non-education aspects, such as the physical environment. While there are a number of models specially developed to evaluate service quality of university education, such as the 5Qs and the HedPerf models, they have been widely adjudged to be limited in respect of the education aspects (Shah, 2013; Mung'uyi, 2015; Icli & Anil, 2014; Sharif & Kassam, 2012).

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study on the perceptions of postgraduate international students at the Westville campus in the University of KwaZulu Natal employed quantitative research methodologies, as it focused on measuring the magnitude of the difference between service expectations and service perceptions among postgraduate international students. The study employed the five service quality dimensions as measurable constructs as propounded by Parasuraman et al. (1985). The nature of the research problem

and its objectives guided the determination of the methodology used. Broadly, the research involved collection of quantitative data, reducing it into meaningful statistics and analysing it using quantitative techniques to draw inferences (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 35). The study used a descriptive research design, as the analyzed data provided an elaborate picture of the service quality discrepancies (Kowalczyk, 2014).

2.1. Target population

The international students that were registered for postgraduate courses at the university during the academic year 2016 comprised the target population. The target population included first time entrants into the university, as well as continuing students pursuing the honors, masters and PhD degrees on full time and contact bases. The sampling frame was obtained from the international students' office at the university. The researcher verified the sampling frame with the university's institutional intelligence office. Both offices confirmed that 223 international postgraduate students had been registered for various courses at the university during the 2016 academic year.

2.2. Sampling method

Probability sampling was used to allow for generalization of results, since the study's target population was large (Bryman & Bell, 2010, p. 185). In particular, a simple random sampling technique was used to select the participants. The technique involved selecting the participants at random from a sampling frame using a computer program (Bhattacharjee, 2014, p. 65). Each student from the sampling frame was assigned a number and a computer program (Microsoft Excel) was used to randomly select research participants until the desired sample size was attained. Simple random sampling was selected, because the generated sample was representative of the target population. Accordingly, the sample was deemed to be unbiased, since the sampling frame was not subdivided or partitioned (Bryman & Bell, 2010, p. 185).

2.3. Sample and sample size

The university had registered 223 international postgraduate students in 2016. The sample size

was arrived at using Krejcie and Morgan's sample determination tables. According to the tables, a sample size of 132 was suitable for a target population of 223. Effectively, the sample comprised of 132 of the international postgraduate students registered at the university during the relevant academic year. The rationale was to ensure 95% certainty that the data collected from the selected sample represented the target population (Gill & Johnson, 2010, p. 130).

2.4. Data collection instrument design

The instrument used for collecting data during the study was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was adapted from the SERVQUAL scale developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985). The questionnaire initially sought to capture the demographic profiles of the respondents. The researcher focused on the respondents' gender, age bracket, country of origin and type (level) of postgraduate study being undertaken at the university. The rationale was to capture the accurate profile of the sample and to enable the researcher to draw inferential statistics.

The questionnaire also contained two sets of statements, which sought to draw responses from the respondents concerning their expectations and perceptions of service quality at the university. Each set had 22 statements covering the five dimensions of service quality, as propounded by the developers of the SERVQUAL model. The statements were close-ended which implied that respondents had to choose their responses from a predetermined set of options on a 7-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was reviewed by peers and pilot tested before it was used to collect data. The rationale was to refine the questionnaire so that the respondents did not encounter challenges when responding to the questions and to ensure that the collected data addressed the research questions (Bryman & Bell, 2010, p. 262). Both exercises yielded worthwhile suggestions that were incorporated into the final questionnaire before the actual data collection.

2.5. Data collection process

The researcher decided to personally administer the data collection process. The researcher approached selected participants, generated the data

and recorded the responses on the questionnaires. The main reason was to reduce errors and ensure that all the questions were attempted by the respondents. Bhattacharjee (2012, p. 74) concurs with justification by suggesting that interviewer-administered questionnaires generate a high response rate, as the researcher ensures respondent's participation by guiding them through the questionnaire.

2.6. Data analysis methods

The study used descriptive and inferential analyses to obtain meaning from the quantitative data that were collected. From each questionnaire, SERVQUAL expectation and perception scores were obtained across the 22 statements. The differences (gaps) between the expectations and perceptions ratings from each participant were calculated across the five dimensions of service quality. The mean gap scores for each of the five dimensions was, then, calculated to evaluate the sample's service quality gap ratings. The process enabled the researcher to generate tabular illustrations, thus, facilitating the drawing of meaningful deductions from the data. In addition to the above, correlation analyses were conducted to ascertain whether the gap scores were different across the participants' gender, age and their levels of study.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Sample profile

Of the 132 research respondents, 25% were from the 20-30 years age group 52% of the respondents were from the 31-40 years age group. The remainder of the sample (23%) were above the age of 40. In relation to gender, 60% of the respondents were male international postgraduate international students, while 40% were female. With respect to the levels of study, the majority of the respondents (61%) were doctoral students, while 36% were enrolled for master's courses. The remainder of the respondents (3%) were honor's students.

3.1.1. Perceived service quality gaps**Table 1.** Service quality gap mean scores

Dimension	Perceptions mean score (P)	Expectations mean score (E)	Gap score (P-E)
Reliability	2.82	6.08	-3.26
Responsiveness	2.63	6.28	-3.65
Assurance	2.87	6.05	-3.18
Empathy	2.74	5.96	-3.22
Tangibles	3.04	6.09	-3.05
Mean scores	2.82	6.09	-3.27

Table 1 consolidates the results obtained from each of the five service quality dimensions to deduce the overall perception of service quality among the international postgraduate students at the university. The results were interpreted by comparing the mean scores of expectations and perceptions across the dimensions. Subsequently, the analysis calculated the overall gap score by calculating the average of the gap scores of the dimensions under scrutiny.

The table illustrates that the expectations' mean score was 6.09. The respondents' responsiveness expectations score was the highest (6.28), while their empathy expectations score was the lowest (5.96). In relation to perceptions, the data indicate a mean score of 2.82. The respondents' tangibles score was the highest (3.04), while the responsiveness score was the lowest (2.63). The illustration also indicates that the overall average of the gap scores across the 5 dimensions was -3.27. The responsiveness dimension recorded the widest gap (-3.65), while the tangibles dimension recorded the narrowest gap (-3.05). The gap score reflects that there is an overall significant gap between respondents' expectations and perceptions. The observation that all the dimension gap scores are negative suggests that the expectations of the respondents are higher than their perceptions. The study reveals that international postgraduate students were dissatisfied with the quality of services at the university.

3.1.2. The variances in service quality gaps across the respondents' gender**Table 2.** Gap scores and respondents' gender

Dimension	Gender	
	Male	Female
Sample representation, %	60	40
Reliability	-3.22	-3.4
Responsiveness	-3.7	-3.57
Assurance	-3.21	-3.14
Empathy	-3.18	-3.29
Tangibles	-3.08	-3.01
Average gap score	-3.28	-3.26

Table 2 shows the results of cross tabulations conducted to evaluate the variances in service quality across the respondents' gender. Summarily, the analysis established that the male respondents had a slightly higher average gap score than the female respondents. The average gap scores across the five dimensions shows that males had an average gap score of -3.28, while the females had an average gap score of -3.26. The deductions suggest that the male respondents had a slightly higher service quality gap score than the female respondents. The difference between the male and female gap scores was a mere -0.02. The statistics confirm that there is not much difference between overall perception of service quality among male and female international postgraduate international students at the university. Based on the data, it can be inferred that both male and female international postgraduate students are equally dissatisfied with the overall service quality at the institution.

3.1.3. The variances in service quality gaps across the respondents' age groups**Table 3.** Gap scores and respondents' age groups

Dimension	Age bracket (years)		
	20-30	31-40	Above 40
Sample representation, %	25	52	23
Reliability	-3.13	-3.27	-3.19
Responsiveness	-3.3	-3.64	-3.73
Assurance	-3.58	-3.08	-3.18
Empathy	-3.39	-3.28	-3.21
Tangibles	-3.12	-3.04	-3.02
Average gap score	-3.31	-3.26	-3.26

Table 3 shows the results of cross tabulations conducted to evaluate the variances in service quality across the respondents' age groups. The calculation of average gap scores confirmed that all the three age groups have overall negative gap scores across the 5 service quality dimensions. Thus, service quality is generally perceived as unsatisfactory across all the age groups. The findings revealed that the 20-30 years age group recorded the highest average gap score of -3.31, while the other two age groups had equal average gap scores of -3.26. In broad terms, the study revealed that the average gap scores are higher in the younger age bracket and decline as the respondents grow. The study found that as international postgraduate students grow in age, the gap between their service quality perceptions and expectations tends to diminish.

3.1.4. The variances in service quality gaps across the respondents' levels of study

Table 4. Gap scores and respondents' levels of study

Dimension	Enrolment level		
	Honors'	Master's	Doctorate
Sample representation, %	3	36	61
Reliability	-2.7	-3.16	-3.3
Responsiveness	-3.38	-3.51	-3.69
Assurance	-2.88	-3.03	-3.24
Empathy	-2.85	-3.12	-3.27
Tangibles	-3.06	-3.14	-2.97
Average gap score	2.79	-3.19	-3.26

Table 4 shows the results of cross tabulations conducted to evaluate the variances in service quality across the respondents' levels of study. The average gap scores across the 5 dimensions for each of the levels of study confirm that there is general dissatisfaction with regards to service quality among international postgraduate students. The study found that the honors' students recorded the least average gap score of -2.79, while the doctoral students had the highest average gap score of -3.26. Master's students had an average gap score of -3.19. The study thus observed that service quality perceptions are diminishing as international postgraduate students advance with their studies. This is because there are positive relationships between respondents' levels of study and the gap scores of the 4 of the 5 dimensions, namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from the study call for the management at the university to seek redress measures concerning service quality, especially towards international postgraduate students. In addition, the study suggests the institution should employ deliberate strategies to address the realized gaps across the five service quality dimensions.

4.1. Strategies for reliability redress

The reliability gap suggests that employees at the university should be trained to embrace integrity and honesty. The survey also exposed the need for the university to recruit and train staff that are intrinsically motivated to address problems of the international postgraduate students. It is recommended that regular surveys be conducted by the institution in understanding the student needs in accordance to Naidoo and Mutinta (2014), as well as ensure consistency through systems and procedure development. In the quest of managing student's expectations, realistic and attainable promises ought to be made (Naidoo, 2011).

4.2. Measures to address the responsiveness gap

In relation to university internationalization, Teferra (2014) argued that it is imperative for management to communicate its vision. It is envisaged that if members of staff understand and embrace the vision, they could be motivated to be more responsive in addressing the concerns of the international postgraduate students. Njie, Asimiran, and Baki (2012) recommended that it is essential for the university to individualize or customize services offered to the international postgraduate students as much as possible especially for non-academic services.

They also suggested that the university should develop and implement standard procedures to maximize responsiveness to situations that may occur reasonably regularly. Cardona and Bravo (2012) established that effective training of staff is necessary, as it guides them in responding accordingly to the students' concerns. In addition, they also recommended that procedural manuals should be developed to further help staff respond to student queries in expeditious manner.

4.3. Measures to improve staff assurance

The staff assurance gap posits that international postgraduate students do not feel safe and confident in their dealings with the university. Naidoo (2011) emphasized the need to create trust and confidence through the knowledge and skills of contact personnel and continuity of service staff. She suggested that this may be augmented by creating an organization-wide image that reflects the core values of the university and building a strong corporate brand image. In addition, Soni (2015) recommended that university should invest in modern and contemporary security-related facilities to ensure that international postgraduate students are assured of security and safety at the institution. Further to the above, Shah (2013) recommended that the university should ensure transparency in its dealings with international postgraduate students. He explained that the institution should clearly communicate its service delivery guidelines to both its members its staff and students. The rationale is to ensure that the students feel safe and assured in their transactions with the university.

4.4. Strategies to improve staff empathy

The empathy dimension is one of the key dimensions with regards to service delivery among international postgraduate students. This is because

they suffer more psychological and social distress due to culture conflicts, financial difficulties, immigration laws and social isolation (Lin & Yi, 2011; Sarkodie-Mensah, 2013). Jager and Gbadamosi (2010) recommended that the university should tailor service offerings to international postgraduate students. This is because the students feel important and the development of long-term relationships with the university is facilitated. Maharaj (2011) further recommended that members of staff should give personal attention to the students. This is premised on the observation that international students from different backgrounds are likely to face different challenges. In this context, it is necessary for management to recognize the challenges and consistently strive towards addressing them. Wherever possible, and in relevant areas, the institution needs to be able to create opportunities for students to obtain personal attention on issues that they seek help, guidance and advice on.

4.5. Measures to address the tangibles gap

In order to improve the appearance of tangible facilities, the university should invest in improving the appearance of campus buildings, equipment, lecture venues, computer laboratories and library facilities. Firdaus (2011) suggested that students should be given visually appealing tangible items, such as teaching and communication materials. These could include brochures, pamphlets and branded novelties.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Service quality is a salient aspect that the university should address in view of its internationalization drive. The study exposes the service quality gaps towards international postgraduate students at the University of KwaZulu Natal in the Westville campus. In light of the above challenges, it is imperative that the university adopts a consolidated and functional mechanism that could close the service quality gaps among international postgraduate students. It is projected that maintenance of high service quality at the institute would increase student satisfaction. Through positive word of mouth from the satisfied international postgraduate community, it is projected that enrolment of international postgraduate students will increase in the future. Subsequently, the trend could aid the university to achieve its objectives with regards to internationalization.

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