



# Brewing service quality in higher education

## Characteristics of ingredients that make up the recipe

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The paper seeks to explore the influences of service quality in higher education and the perceptions associated with the implementation of a Singapore tertiary institution. It draws on the underpinnings of SERVQUAL, and discusses the dichotomy and interrelation between customer perception and expectation.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Qualitative methodology was employed and data were collected by means of structured in-depth interviewing with both internal (18 academics and ten current students) and external samples (ten graduates and five industry representatives). Content analysis was utilized to examine three key aspects of service standards: customer orientation, course design/delivery, and support services.

**Findings** – The way students are perceived, whether as customers or products, will have an influence on the type of learning dynamics that develop both within and outside the classroom. Service quality, therefore, needs to be evaluated based on an integrated experience which occurs in a network of learning spaces created to promote dialogue, inquiry and reflection.

**Practical implications** – Management of student expectations is fundamental to ensuring appropriate service quality in higher education. Closer working relationship with industry partners should be encouraged to serve as an audit on curricula relevance. Long-term quality of support services can be achieved by short-term measures such as training staff to be student-centered rather than task-driven.

**Originality/value** – This paper is based on an actual framework developed by the engineering school as part of their strategic plan in achieving excellence in both quality of courses and learning experiences.

**Keywords** Higher education, SERVQUAL, Service quality assurance, Singapore

**Paper type** Research paper

### Introduction

Quality means doing it right when no one is looking (Henry Ford, 1863-1947).

Quality improvement is no longer an organizational buzzword that resides in the practices of quality control circles. It goes beyond examining products and processes as influencing final outcomes that would contribute towards the competitive advantage

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