



Identifying Service Encounter Failures in University Settings : A Research Agenda

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INTRODUCTION

Researchers have empirically examined service quality within a wide array of settings. However, higher education is one area which has been relatively neglected in service quality research (Shank, Walker and Hayes, 1995). In today's competitive environment, where all students have many options opened to them, factors that enable educational institutions to attract and retain students should be seriously studied. Even though learning remains the university's mission, changing conditions make new demands, satisfying these demands is key to marketing the institution in the educational market place (Pioquinto, 1995).

One approach for examining educational institutions is to analyze them beyond their conventional social functions (usually in public sector). In the case of educational institutions operating within the private sector, their characteristics are not dissimilar to other service industries. This view is a departure from past practice, and giving the researcher a new perspective on assessing the quality of educational experience (Piquinto, 1995). Sometimes students bring their concerns to the immediate attention of the administration, faculty members, or student government. But often their complaints are not heard. Many complaints are not expressed promptly or do not come to the attention of the administration. Whispers and moans about class size, inattentive professors, financial aid problems or other concerns can undermine a school's reputation among students or the larger community, leading to fewer applicants, lower financial support from alumni and other difficulties (Pioquinto., 1995).

Private higher education institutions which want to have a competitive edge in the future may need to begin searching for new and creative ways to attract, retain and foster stronger relationships with students. Higher education students today are different



from the students of the past. Those entering higher education have more information, greater needs and more choices from previous students (Hermawan, 2009).

Many studies in service recovery have been conducted primarily with the emergence of service economies and customer focused strategies employed by the service organizations (Johnston and Michel, 2008). Since service operations are complex in nature, number of problems and failures, because of expectation and perception mismatch, reveal during the service encounters, which result in service failure (Swanson and Kelley, 2001).

The effective handling of complaints and service recovery efforts result in satisfaction, trust, commitment, positive word of mouth and consumer retention (Brown, 2000 and Voss, 2009) and also considered to improve learning and teaching experience in the education sector (Hart and Coates, 2011).

Although service failure and recovery issues have received significant attention in service marketing, however little study has been found in higher education settings.

Rotalsky (1995); Hocutt, Bowers and Danovan (2006); Dalziel, Harris and Laing (2011) and Edvardson, Tronvoll and Hoykinpuro (2011) state that there is a need to investigate service failures and service recoveries in other service industries in the field in which human interactions play an important role. Furthermore, Voss, Gruber and Reppel (2010) recommend the need to study service failure and service recovery in the educational settings.

For education settings, the service encounters failure can be traced in three aspects of education service: (1) Instructions (e.g. instructional quality, accessibility of professors, content of the course, fairness of testing and grading, etc); (2). Academic support (e.g. library, lab facilities, class scheduling, etc); (3). Non-academic (e.g. convenience location, attractiveness of campus, parking, safe campus, food service, sport programs, social and cultural activities, etc).

The purpose of the paper is to propose a study to explore various service failure incidents in the Indonesia higher education setting. The study should focus on three service dimensions of higher education that encompass: (1) Instruction cues; (2). Academic Supports and (3) Non-Academic dissatisfied incidents.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Service failure can be defined as a mismatch between service performance and customer's expectation perception which lead to dissatisfaction. This concept is



applicable in service as well as manufacturing sectors. Based on this concept service failure occurs when consumers are dissatisfied with service when performance/quality of product falls below their expectations (Zeitham, Bitner and Gremler, 2013; Lewis and Spyropoulos, 2001 and Gye-Soo Kim, 2007). Higher education institutions are realizing that they could be regarded as a business like service industry (Davis and Swanson, 2001). Cooper (2007) emphasizes that educational success primarily depends on the efforts of both students as consumers and professors as service providers. Service failure may relate to teaching, examination, library, laboratories, administration, infrastructure and miscellaneous such as canteen and hostel facility. Based on the studies such as Swanson and Davis (2000); Voss (2009); Voss, Gruber and Reppel (2010), service failure in education sector can be categorized under three groups: (1) failures which are related to professor's response to service delivery system failure. This category includes failures in the core services that would expect to receive such as delay services in classroom, faculty who is not available during office hours or delay to scheduled meetings with a student; (2) failures which are related to faculty's response to students' needs and requests. For example – request for an extra attempt for missed exam or request for additional lecture. And (3) failures which are related to unprompted and unsolicited actions like rudeness etc.

Service failure provides an opportunity to recover from the mistake and a second chance to provide a positive service experience (Berry and Parasuraman 1992; Miller, Craighead and Karwan 2000 and Li, 2011).

Bell and Zemke (1987); Zemke (1993); and Edvardson, Tronvoll and Hoykinpura (2011) described several aspects to manage consumer complaining behavior in service failure situation to change a consumer dissatisfaction to a satisfaction. Relevant Literature also highlights service recovery dimensions, which include process and outcome.

The process of service recovery refers to the manner in which service providers handle a service failure during the course of service recovery (i.e. how it was delivered) whereas the outcome of service recovery is expressed in terms of satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Weun, Beatty and Fones, 2004).

Bell and Zemke (1987) and Edvardson, Tronvoll and Hoykinpura (2011) regarded service recovery as a behavioral/action perspective which refers to meeting expectation or grievances of customers by the concerned teachers/ employees/ principal to make the students satisfied.



Miller, Craighead and Karwan (2000); Li (2011) viewed service recovery as a process which identifies service failures, make classifications of root causes of failures, resolves consumer's problems effectively, change negative attitude of dissatisfied consumers and retaining consumers. Professors can create satisfaction among students by identifying what their students expect from them. To create effective service recovery, professors should possess most important attributes of good service recovery i.e. knowledgeable,

empathetic, friendly, helpful, reliable, responsive and expressive (Swanson and Davis, 2000; Voss, 2009; and Voss, Gruber and Reppel, 2010).

PROPOSED METHOD

We propose a mixed methods initiated using a qualitative method, followed by quantitative method. For qualitative approach, **Critical Incident Technique (CIT)** procedure could be proposed which is used to collect, analyze and classify observations of human behavior that allows researchers to gain valuable insights into phenomena that have not been documented well (Grenler, 2004). CIT involves following steps: Determining general purpose of the activity; Formulating plans and specifications for the collection of critical incidents; Data collection; Analyzing the data; and Interpretation. A follow up survey to a larger sample can be conducted to get more information concerning the specific dimensions of university service. The study findings will provide information and implications for higher education marketers concerning service encounters failure that need to be recovered.

DATA COLLECTION

All these incidents need to be memorable well by the students. Students can be asked to think of a specific service failures in term of academic, academic and non-academics situations

Briefly students can describe the incident, when and where did the incident happen?

What specific situation made the students feel extremely dissatisfied with the professor/employee/servicescape in the particular situation?

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