

A study on Importance of ‘Service Quality’ in Higher Education with special reference to MBA for Sustainable Development in exceptional COVID – 19 Pandemic situation.

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Abstract:

The education Industry is a part of the Service industry and includes all kinds of education right from schooling to doctoral and post doctoral research. Higher education or Post Graduation is common trend for the current generation. “Higher education is tertiary education leading to award of an academic degree. It is also called as **post-secondary education** or third-level education, and it is an optional final stage of formal learning that occurs after completion of secondary education.”¹

One of the popular Post graduate programmes in India as well as around the world is the MBA programme. Since there are a large number of Institutions offering the MBA programme, there is huge competition among institutions, as they try to attract potential customers i.e. students, in various ways. To survive in this competitive environment, the quality of the service can be an important differentiating parameter. Thus, Service quality can be a part of strategic policy of an institution.

The definition of services given by Philip Kotler is “**A Service is an act or performance that one party can offer to another, that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Its production may or may not be tied to a physical product**”

The very fact that services are intangible, make it difficult to measure the quality of the service. Hence, Service quality is measured in terms of customer satisfaction.

This research paper looks at customer satisfaction as a parameter for sustainable development of an educational institute in Higher education sector with special reference to MBA programme in the unusual situation of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Introduction:

The year 2020 will be marked in history as an unusual year for the entire world. The Novel Corona Virus has created a havoc in the whole world and its rampage is still on the rise. On 23rd March 2020, a nationwide lockdown was announced in India to combat the deadly virus. A lockdown, which meant everything except essential and medical services, were shutdown. Schools, Colleges and educational institutions were amongst the first to be shut down even before the lockdown considering that proximity and crowding were the main reasons for the spread of the virus.

Most schools and colleges shifted to online classes and online form of instruction to ensure that the students did not suffer in this unusual situation where uncertainty was a given.

Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction in education:

Basically, Service quality is linked to the customer satisfaction. As services are intangible, measuring the quality can be done by measuring the satisfaction of the Customers. The service quality is the combination of two words service and quality. Service means the offering of the organization that will satisfy the need of the customer and quality pertains to the satisfaction level of the customer with respect to the service provided. Here in our scenario, service means education that is provided to students in higher education sector.

“Services are the non-physical, intangible parts which we cannot touch or handle. Services such as banking, education, medical treatment and transportation, make up the majority of the economies of the rich nations”². Similarly According to Business Dictionary.com, “Services are: Intangible products such as accounting, banking, cleaning, consultancy, education, insurance, expertise, medical treatment or transportation”³. In the education sector, the major chunk of the service consists of the teaching-learning processes provided to the students. So, when we talk of Customer satisfaction, it is actually the measurement or understanding of the satisfaction level of the Students with regards to the teaching learning processes. Also, when we say teaching learning processes, it includes all aspects of academics like examinations and evaluations as well.

Common Misconception about education:

A common misconception about education system, is that education system is linked only with the teaching process i.e. delivering the lectures to the students in the classroom. But delivering lecture actually

constitutes just 1/3rd part of teaching-learning process. The other 2/3rd part of education system consists of academic administration, research, outreach programmes, community services, extracurricular and co-curricular activities and consistent effort on the part of the teacher to achieve the good quality work, so as to ensure the overall development of pupils. Quality education can be comprehended as one that is pedagogically and developmentally sound and the output of which should be students who become active and productive members of the society.

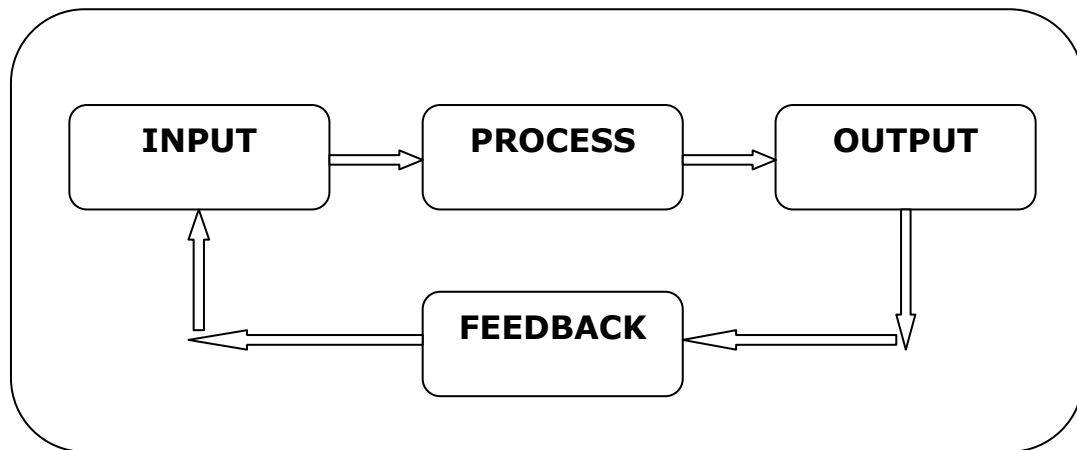
Quality of education or Quality Education:

In the statement, EI (Education International (EI), based in Brussels, Belgium) defined a quality education: *“A quality education is one that focuses on the whole child—the social, emotional, mental, physical, and cognitive development of each student regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or geographic location. It prepares the child for life, not just for testing.”*

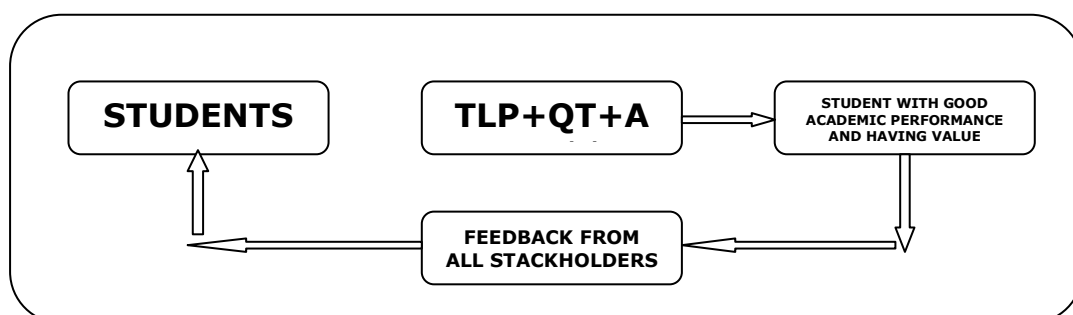
Quality of higher education according to Longanecker and Blanco is “by who and how students are taught rather than by what students learn.”⁴ This definition emphasizes the role of both the main stakeholders of the education system i.e. students as well as teachers. The teaching learning processes are key factors in an institution for giving quality education to all students. The systems and processes must be in line with the standards set by the accreditation authorities such as NAAC,NBA in case of higher education sector. Use of Innovative teaching learning process helps students to get better education. Mentoring is also important aspect of teaching learning process. As a mentor, faculties can understand the students in formal as well as in informal way.

In higher education sector, Quality education can be said to comprise of three components. These are a. Competent teachers b. Availability of quality teaching and learning tools/aids for professional development and c. A safe and supportive quality learning environment.

As any system consists of following elements:



Higher Education System of an institution for sustainable development will be depicted as per following diagram:



**** Teaching Learning Processes + Quality Teacher + Activities such as Co-Curricular, Extra Curricular Activities + Value System**

COVID 19 and Quality education:

The year 2020 earmarked as one of the exceptional year for all the countries and a world ! The arrival of the NOVEL Coronavirus in March, 2020 has affected all walks of life in the world as well as in India. From 23rd of March 2020 a complete lockdown was announced by the Government and only essential services were allowed and all other services and operations were stalled or halted. "Isolation" is the ONLY solution to fight against this enemy.

In the education sector, for MBA institutions this year March and April was very difficult. As per Government orders students were not allowed to attend classes due to social distancing. This was very crucial period from academic point of view, as teachers were trying to complete the syllabus and students were getting ready for submissions and for preparation of Midterm and Final Examinations. The pandemic put everyone in an exceptional and unprecedented situation giving rise to fear and uncertainty. Classroom teaching was suspended, scheduled exams were called off and in general the situation was one of chaos and uncertainty.

Most of the Educational Institutes in the Higher Education domain, responded to this unusual challenge with commitment and dedication. Technology was the main savior. With the extensive use of technology the institutions were able to continue with the teaching and delivering of online lectures reaching out to almost all the students. Online mode of education was also adopted in many higher education institutions providing the MBA program. Apps such as Freeconferencecall, zoom, google meeting, Microsoft teams were used for this online education. A Big Thanks to electricity providers and telecom industry for making this attempt successful.

Customer Satisfaction:

Having successfully implemented the online system, the researchers felt it necessary to understand the Students (i.e. the customers) and faculty members perspective about the online mode of education. For this the researchers undertook an empirical survey.

Objectives of the study:

1. To understand the satisfaction of the students with respect to the online mode of teaching learning adopted in wake of the COVID 19 pandemic.
2. To understand the effective use of technology for sustainable development of an Institution.
3. To understand the perspective of the faculty with respect to online mode of teaching learning adopted in wake of the COVID 19 pandemic.
4. To study the issues faced by students with respect to the online mode of teaching learning adopted in wake of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Research Methodology:

Both Primary and secondary research methods have been used. Primary research has been done in Pune.

Respondents:

The respondents were students pursuing their MBA programme and faculty members who are using online teaching-learning mode for teaching.

A draft questionnaire was prepared and pre-tested. After making a few changes the final questionnaire was administered in an online mode through a Google form.

Sampling Method:

Non Probability convenience sampling was used to conduct the survey

Sample Size – In all 143 responses were collected, out of which 11 responses were discarded as they were incomplete. So the final sample size was 132 respondents.

Data Analysis & Findings:

A survey was conducted to find out the feedback and satisfaction of the students and faculty members with respect to the online sessions at one of the MBA institutions in Pune. The result of the survey was very positive and it proved that students are tech-savvy and smart phones with internet connectivity is common in this generation. The internet connectivity during this lockdown was excellent in spite of the fact that almost everyone was working in an online mode. According to the department of telecom, which collated reports from service providers, the daily average consumption in this period was 9% higher than 282PB data used on March

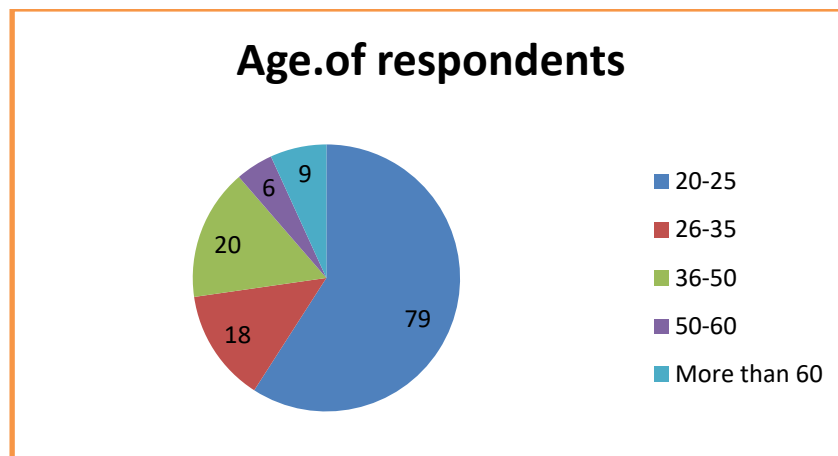
21 (the day the janta curfew was announced) and 13% more than March 19, when consumption was 270 PB. The consumption, according to the official, rose lower than it would have since many streaming services such as YouTube and Netflix decided to downgrade video quality. Attending online lectures during lockdown situation was a welcome initiative for the student community. Very interesting fact revealed from the survey is that many senior teachers who are using this technology for the first time were using this online teaching platform with great enthusiasm and were conducting sessions as per the regular time table. The online survey on online teaching and learning process by the faculty member of the Institute shows that 70% students responded to this survey. Around 45% students and faculty members were using this online teaching and learning pedagogy for the first time. About 41% respondents mentioned that they are using mobile phones for this activity. On the Five scale pointer, 63% respondents responded that they have good and very good experience about online teaching and learning. Regarding issues which respondents faced while using this methodology, apart from internet connectivity, only issue mentioned is of audio quality. 55% of the respondents were satisfied with the attendance of the students for online sessions.

Data Analysis:

1. Profile of Respondents

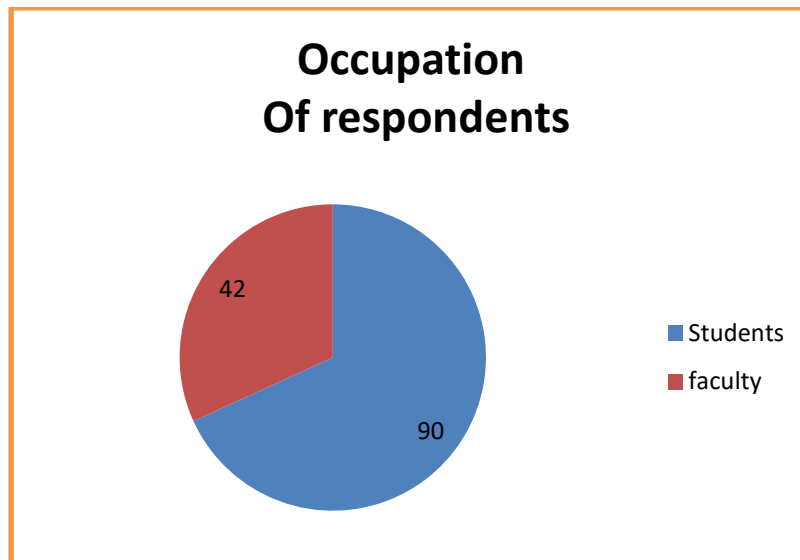
a. Age Group

Age Group	No.of respondents
20-25	79
26-35	18
36-50	20
50-60	6
More than 60	9



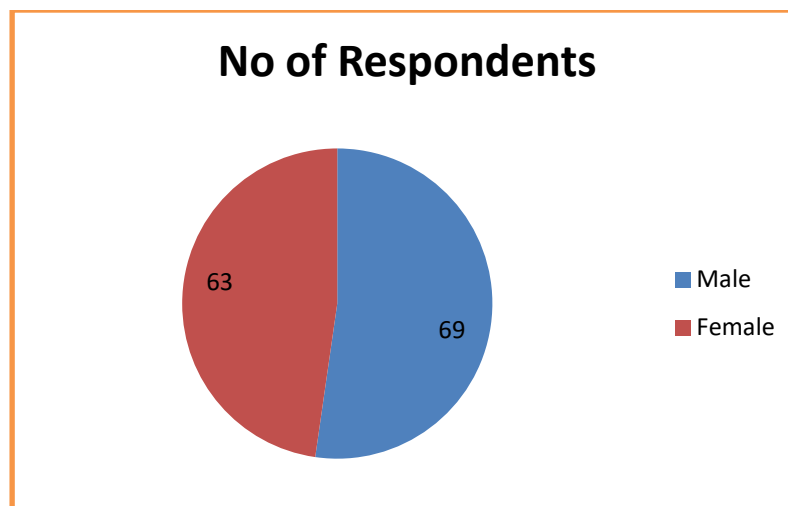
b. Occupation of respondents

Occupation	No Of respondents
Students	90
Faculty	42



c. Gender of respondents

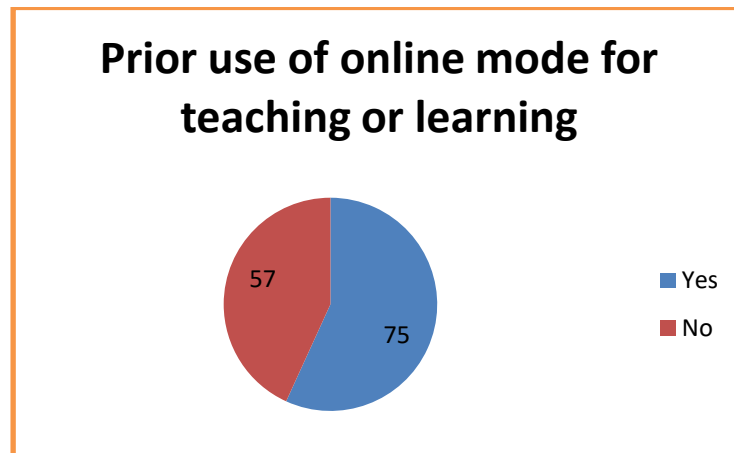
Gender	No of Respondents
Male	69
Female	63



2. Prior Use of Online mode for Teaching or Learning

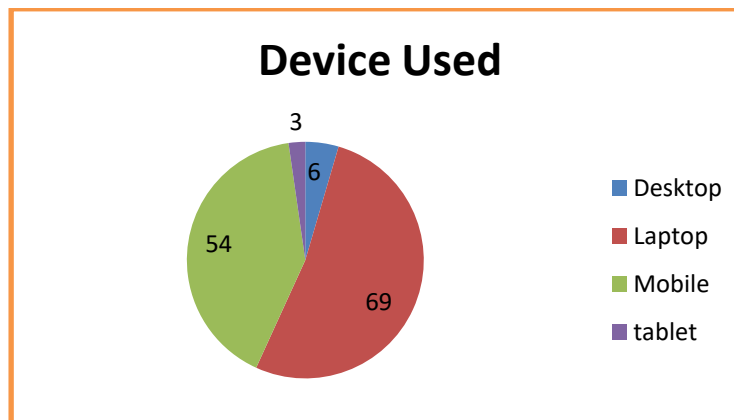
Prior use of online mode for teaching or Learning	No Of respondents
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Yes	75
No	57



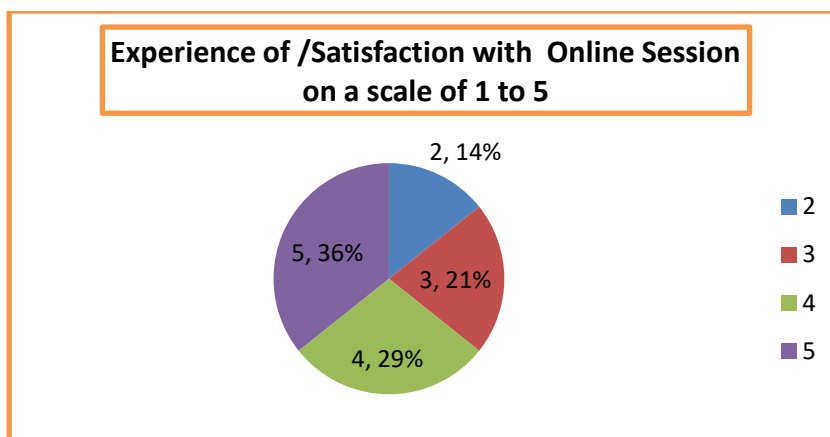
3. Device used for online mode of teaching or learning

Device Used for Online Mode of teaching or learning	No Of respondents
Desktop	6
Laptop	69
Mobile	54
tablet	3



4. Experience or satisfaction regarding online session on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being very bad and 5 being very good)

Experience of /Satisfaction with Online Session on a scale of 1 to 5	No Of respondents
2	3
3	45
4	57
5	27



Findings:

From the survey, it was found that

1. Students are tech-savvy and were able to switch to online mode with ease.
2. After a small in-house training program, faculty members ably started their teaching using online mode as per scheduled time table.
3. Students are highly satisfied with the online mode of teaching. This is also evident from the increased percentage of attendance of students as compared to actual classroom teaching
4. Many of the faculty members were first time users of this technology. Senior teachers as well as junior teachers adapted to the online mode rather quickly and were able to complete syllabus in an efficient and time bound manner.
5. Faculty also found that students' attendance was good as compared to face to face sessions in classroom.
6. The institute could conduct online mid - term examination and tutorials using online mode and student were able to get their result quickly.
7. A few students did face internet connectivity issues at certain times and a few mentioned regarding audio quality.

Conclusions:

The COVID 19 pandemic has changed the world in a number of ways and the education sector is no exception. Whenever, such life changing situations occur, those organizations/individuals who are quick to adapt are the ones who are able to cope with the situation and come out successfully.

1. The finding that faculty and students were able to easily switch to the online mode of education proves that the online mode of education is the new normal and is here to stay.
2. Students now have a need to learn at their own pace and in their own space. The improved attendance is testimony to this fact.
3. Technology enabled teaching learning processes are the need of the hour.

Recommendations:

1. Institutions of Higher education should certainly look at not just online lectures, but complete pre-recorded online modules for various subjects enabling students learning in own space as well as at own pace.
2. Institutions of higher education also need to invest in technology and ensure updated and upgraded technology to enable quality in online mode of education.
3. Training and faculty Development Programmes in the area of use of online mode for teaching learning will definitely empower the faculty.
4. The higher education institutions can thus ensure satisfaction to students, faculty members and society as a whole with good service for overall sustainable development.

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