

## **SERVICE QUALITY, CUSTOMER SATISFACTION TOWARDS CUSTOMER LOYALTY ( A CASE OF ILA VIETNAM)**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The quality of service has become an aspect of customer satisfaction and has been proved that it comes from the combination of the excellent learning process and public satisfaction on the service delivered. The main purpose of this study is to examine what factors that play an important role in satisfying customers, and which one has the biggest impact on that mission, particularly at ILA Vietnam. A mixture of qualitative and quantitative research are used to collect data from customers of ILA Vietnam in 17 centers to get their satisfaction levels and meaning of service quality which were substituted in the SERVQUAL model. The findings suggest providing quality service in order to satisfy customers, organizations in this kind of service sectors need to improve on the dimensions of service quality. This study contributes to existing theories by confirming or adding value to the relationships that are involved in customer satisfaction and service quality. Besides, the provided results could be useful for managers at ILA in strategic planning.*

**KEY WORDS:** Customer satisfaction, Service quality, SERVQUAL, service sectors.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Education is one of the most important industries and playing a vital role in national development. In relation to the importance of education, there is a correlation between education and economic growth, also the education sector provides the society with human resources. Besides, the information and analysis on the education market play an important role for both government and commercial organizations.

Customer satisfaction is not only a part of market research but it is also one of the main factors that ensure the existence and survival of a business brand. It is very important for a business organization to consider offering what the customers want rather than offering quality goods and services, which may not meet up with the customer's expectation. In today's competitive business environment, the financial performance of service organizations relies on the generation of high levels of customer satisfaction (Heskett et al, 1994; Vandermerwe, 2000). Satisfying a customer today leads to retention and attraction of new customers as a result of the current customers of the business organization being satisfied. The expectations of customers are to get the value of what they are being offered and to be cared for in the best way by the business organization. More and more organizations emphasize service quality due to its strategic role in enhancing competitiveness especially in the context of attracting new customers and enhancing the relationship with existing customers (Ugboma et al., 2007).

Moreover, service quality is one of the most important research topics for the past few decades (Gallifa and Batalle, 2010). Consumers are not only concerned with how a service is being delivered but most importantly with the quality of output they receive. Positive perception of the quality of services being delivered occurs when it exceeded customers' expectations. In the

context of ensuring sustainability of higher learning, institutions require them to continuously strive towards meeting and exceeding students' expectations (Anderson et al., 1994).

In the context of fierce competition in the Vietnamese market, many language centers have been widely opened (especially English Language Center). Therefore, most parents are facing some difficulties in how to choose the school, where provides the best teaching quality, internationally qualified programs, as well as having suitable tuition-fee for their children. Particularly, International Language Academy (ILA) has been improving and developing in order to provide the best teaching quality as well as the most attractive educational environment for their students. However, in fact, ILA has lost many customers to other centers with similar programs and lower school fees. Therefore, this paper focuses on analyzing the customer satisfaction towards service quality to help the school have an overview of their situations and recommendations to improve their service quality.

When customers have good perceptions about a brand, they will always choose to go for the brand, because consumers form their preferences relative to perceptions and attitudes about the brands competing in their minds. (Larreche, 1998, p. 152). To get these loyal customers, companies must create relationships with the customers. To create a relationship with customers, companies need to conduct research to answer questions on how the customers make their purchasing decision and whether they are pleased with what the organization provides to them as an offer in terms of product quality, service quality, price, etc.

Thus, customers will always prefer a product or service that gives them maximum satisfaction. But how will the organization know whether the consumers' consumption habits have changed, or if they are well served? How will the organization know if competitors' brands are doing better than theirs, which can trap their customers? With the increasing number of businesses and growing competitions today, each company wants to be the customers' first choice. To achieve this, organizations need to answer the questions above via continuous research in this area so as to lead the organizations to their twin objective of satisfying their customers and making profits.

Although there are other factors such as price, product quality etc. other than service quality that determines customer satisfaction (Wilson et al. 2008, p. 78-79), this paper only focuses on service quality is because service quality has been proven to be the best determinant of customer loyalty when it comes to service sectors. Last but not least, providing quality services is one of the main targets when it comes to management with respect to customer loyalty in the business environment of today, meaning it is a very vital topic.

From those reasons, this paper aims to evaluate the service quality and its relationship with customer satisfaction towards customer loyalty in the case of ILA Vietnam. The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides the literature review. Data and methodology are introduced in Section 3. The results and conclusion are found in Section 4 and 5.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Service quality measurement**

Probably the most famous service quality model is SERVQUAL, developed by Parasumaran et al. in 1985. The researchers say that quality is a comparison between expectations and

performance, i.e. how well the service that is delivered matches customers' expectations. Gronroos (1982), whose model will be discussed later, also made similar conclusions. The SERVQUAL-model measures discrepancy between what customers expect from the service and how the customer perceives it. To measure perceived service, Parasumaran et al. (1985) identify ten key determinants of service quality, which impact both expected and perceived services, and through those, perceived service quality.

Next, Gronroos presented another famous service quality model in 1982. He defined two types of service quality: technical and functional. Technical quality is what a customer is receiving a service. He adds that the customer is interested not only in the result of the service process but also in a process itself. Thus, functional quality is a manner in which the service is delivered, or how a customer receives technical quality. In addition, there is image quality, i.e. corporate image (for example, an image of a local office, how the customers perceive the service provider). Both technical and functional quality aspects contribute to image quality. In addition, such factors as word-of-mouth, ideology as well as marketing activities influence image quality.

Another approach to measuring service quality is systems approach by Johnson et al. (1995). Here, a measure of overall service quality should include judgments of all dimensions of service: inputs, processes, and outputs, all of which play important roles in a company's operations.

### **Customer satisfaction**

Measuring customer satisfaction could be very difficult at times because it is an attempt at measuring human feelings. For that reason, some existing researchers presented that "the simplest way to know how customers feel, and what they want is to ask them" this applied to the informal measures (NBRI, 2009).

There exist two conceptualizations of customer satisfaction; transaction-specific and cumulative (Boulding, et al., 1993; Andreassen, 2000). Following the transaction-specific, customer satisfaction is viewed as a post-choice evaluation judgment of a specific purchase occasion (Oliver, 1980) until the present date, researchers have developed a rich body of literature focusing on this antecedents and consequences of this type of customer satisfaction at the individual level (Yi, 1991). Cumulative customer satisfaction is an overall evaluation based on the total purchase and consumption experiences with a product or service over time. (Fornell, 1992; Johnson and Fornell, 1991) This is more fundamental and useful than transaction specificity customer satisfaction in predicting customer subsequent behavior and firm's past, present and future performances. It is the cumulative customer satisfaction that motivates a firm's investment in customer satisfaction.

### **Customer loyalty**

According to Jacoby and Keyner (1973), "loyalty is the behavioral reaction based on prejudice as the function of psychological processes by the decision maker in the existence of one or more alternative in time". Besides that, loyalty is the commitment to purchasing a product or service in the future (Bennett et al., 2005). Zeithaml and Bitner (1996) stated that factors of loyalty are an organization's most reliable success. Zeithaml et al. (1996) defined customer loyalty as the willingness to stay with the current service provider.

### **The link between service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty**

Since customer satisfaction has been considered based on the customer's experience on a particular service encounter, (Cronin and Taylor, 1992) it is in line with the fact that service quality is a determinant of customer satisfaction, because service quality comes from the outcome of the services from service providers in organizations. Although it is stated that other factors such as price and product quality can affect customer satisfaction, perceived service quality is a component of customer satisfaction (Zeithaml et al. 2006, p. 106-107).

Auh and Johnson (1997) provide a theoretical explanation for this proposed increase in the effect of satisfaction on loyalty. They argue that categorical changes in customer problem solving, and associated changes in a customer's evoked set of acceptable brands, drives the effect. This argument is based on Howard's (1977) distinction between extensive problem solving (EPS) and limited problem solving (LPS) on the one hand, and routinized response behavior (RRB) on the other. In problem-solving behavior, customers consider a variety of available alternatives. They use decision strategies and rules to weight the costs and benefits of the alternatives to identify those that best meet their needs. Bettman and Zins (1977) refer to these as constructive processes.

## **DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Data**

Data used for this research paper were collected through the questionnaire administered to 100 parents at ILA Vietnam English, who have children whose the age of 2.5 – 15. A sample of the respondents is taken in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The primary data was collected by following steps: interview, pilot study, and the main study. After all of those steps, the data from the opinions and evaluations and its customers would be used to analyze the factors which affect customer loyalty in ILA Vietnam Ho Chi Minh office. The data from the result of the questionnaire was analyzed by SPSS software (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The independent variables were evaluated by descriptive statistics in Table 1.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The general idea from the past literature is that there is a relationship between customer satisfaction, service quality, and customer loyalty; also that service quality could be evaluated with the use of five service quality dimensions and the most usable is the SERVQUAL scale. However, SERVQUAL model will be modified based on the qualitative research. The dimensions of the independent variable were tangibility, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, convenience and product quality as illustrated in Figure 1.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics**

Variable	Description	N	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.
<b>Tangible</b>						
T1	ILA is providing good educational equipment	301	1	5	4.1595	0.88005
T2	ILA is having enough educational facilities for all	301	2	5	4.1628	0.84266
T3	ILA's staff appearance is professional and neatly	301	1	5	4.186	1.04814
T4	Facilities are very excellent	301	3	5	4.3854	0.69112
T5	The intimate and dynamic relationship at ILA is	301	3	5	4.3455	0.6784
<b>Reliability</b>						
R1	ILA is providing safe and reliable services	301	3	5	4.3455	0.6784
R2	Advisors have sufficient knowledge to respond to	301	2	5	4.515	0.67127
R3	Personnel have good knowledge, skills, and	301	3	5	4.3821	0.71429
R4	Necessary knowledge to perform educational	301	2	5	4.2957	0.76743
R5	ILA's employees have reliable behavior	301	3	5	4.4352	0.70708
<b>Responsiveness</b>						
Re1	ILA have the interest to solve problems of	301	1	5	4.0598	0.98137
Re2	ILA is willing to help learners	301	3	5	4.2724	0.73408
Re3	ILA is providing required information to the	301	1	5	4.2226	0.95234
Re4	ILA is well- prepared to answer the learners	301	1	5	4.3189	0.80702
Re5	ILA is having convenient work hours	301	1	5	4.1495	1.03967
<b>Assurance</b>						
A1	ILA is keeping promises when providing services	301	3	5	4.3123	0.64458
A2	ILA is providing services without mistakes and	301	1	5	4.2392	0.86944
A3	ILA is confronting all learners equally	301	3	5	4.2824	0.7371
A4	ILA is having services provision at the	301	1	5	4.1429	0.93605
A5	The speed in operation of ILA is fast	301	2	5	4.1561	0.86344
<b>Empathy</b>						
E1	ILA is creating a peaceful environment	301	1	5	4.1661	0.93398
E2	ILA is having personal attention to students	301	1	5	4.2492	1.02683
E3	ILA is having respect for learners' feedback	301	1	5	4.1661	0.85964
E4	ILA's students are interested in hearing	301	1	5	4.1628	0.90004
E5	ILA is responding the students in a patient way	301	2	5	4.2492	0.80893
<b>Customer Satisfaction</b>						
Recom1	Customers are satisfied with the provided	301	1	5	4.2159	0.8698
Recom2	Customers are satisfied with your child's performance and improvement when studying at	301	1	5	4.1163	0.8397
<b>Customer Loyalty</b>						
Recom3	Customers' children will continue to study at ILA	301	1	5	4.0698	0.95836
Recom4	Customers will recommend ILA to other people	301	1	5	4.1693	0.94735

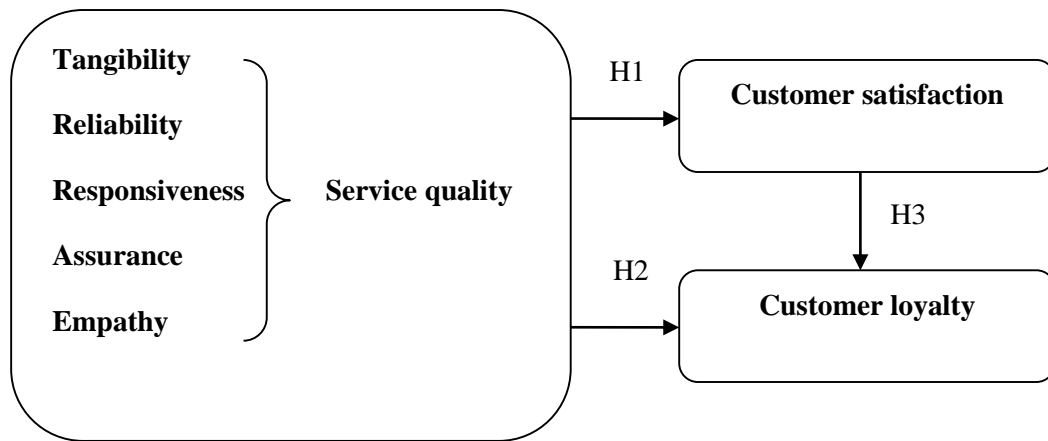


Figure 1

This study investigated 12 hypotheses, as follows:

**H1a:** Tangibles have a significant relationship with customer satisfaction.

**H1b:** Reliability has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction.

**H1c:** Responsiveness has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction.

**H1d:** Assurance has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction.

**H1e:** Empathy has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction.

**H2a:** Tangibles have a significant relationship with customer loyalty.

**H2b:** Reliability has a significant relationship with customer loyalty.

**H2c:** Responsiveness has a significant relationship with customer loyalty.

**H2d:** Assurance has a significant relationship with customer loyalty.

**H2e:** Empathy has a significant relationship with customer loyalty.

**H3:** There is a significant relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

**H4:** Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty.

## RESULTS

### Reliability testing

The descriptive statistics are introduced in Table 1. Moreover, to ensure the internal consistency in the respondents' answers, we use Cronbach's Alpha to test for each measurement. As a consequence, all of the Cronbach's Alpha is higher than 0.6 which shows that the consistency of the given answers is maintained. Moreover, we also test for each item for five groups. The results show that we should eliminate T3, Re2, and A3 from the model to earn a higher Cronbach's Alpha. After performing the reliability test for each group of variables,

it is necessary to perform exploratory factor analysis (EFA) test to determine the correlation between the variables in a dataset. This type of analysis provides a factor structure (a grouping of variables based on strong correlations). In general, an EFA prepares the variables to be used for cleaner structural equation modeling. It can be inferred from the tables that the KMO figure is 0.836 and significant value is 0 which means this model is acceptable according to Hair et al. (1995). Moreover, Anderson and Gerbing (1988) stated that the Cumulative

Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings is higher than 50%. In other words, five factors can explain 79,363% of fluctuation of variables. Last but not least, it is noticeable that the Rotated Component Matrix showed that all 22 variables have significance which higher than 0.5. Thus, based on the EFA test, there are no more variables should be eliminated from the dataset.

### Regression estimation

Following three regression models should be tested: (1) satisfaction will be considered as dependent variable, and service quality as independent variable; (2) loyalty will be considered as dependent variable, and service quality as independent variable; (3) loyalty is considered as dependent variable, and service quality and satisfaction as independent variable. Some preliminary statistics of the three models are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Model Summary**

Model	R	R-squared	Adjusted R-squared	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson	ANOVA
1	0.5380	0.2900	0.2780	0.7391	1.9940	24.0900
2	0.6920	0.4790	0.4700	0.6977	2.1360	54.2160
3	0.7430	0.5530	0.5430	0.6476	2.1730	60.5170

For the first model, adjusted  $R^2 = 0.27$  was obtained, and it can be said that 27 percent of the dependent variable changes is explained by the model. In the second model, adjusted  $R^2 = 0.479$  was obtained, thus almost 47 percent of the dependent variable changes is shown by the model. As shown, adjusted  $R^2 = 0.55$  was obtained in the third model which can be considered that 55 percent of the dependent variable changes is explained by the model, in other words, a high percentage of dependent variable changes are identified by the mentioned model. As a result, customer satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. Moreover, it is noticeable that the Durbin – Watson figure shows that there is no autocorrelation among the variables.

In general, considering the applied models, the third model is better, since the  $R^2$  in this model is a higher figure compared with other models. Although the  $R^2$  in the second model is close to the third one but compared with the third model, it is less appropriate, since one of the independent variables has been ignored in this model.

On the other hand, it is necessary to examine whether there any linear relationship between the variable pair understudy in the model. Thus, single factor variance analysis test (ANOVA) is used. The test statistic  $F = 60.517$  and test meaningfulness level are zero. This means that the zero assumption in 0.05 level is denied, in other words, there is a meaningful linear relation between the dependent variable (Y) and at least one of the independent variables.

Regression results are shown in Table 3. There are only Tangible, Assurance, Responsiveness, and Satisfaction have the correlation with dependent variable Loyalty which has significance level lower than 5%. Firstly, it can be inferred from the equation that Tangible variable which represent the facility, the outside appearance of teachers and teaching assistants has a positive correlation with Customer Loyalty. In order words, client do care about the facility that ILA brings to their children's education. Secondly, relating to the Assurance variable, there is a positive correlation between the Assurance and Loyalty. It means clients need an assurance of services provided to them such as an equally treat or an in-time service provided. Thirdly, Responsiveness has a significant positive correlation with Loyalty which means, for a level of solving problems of customers, they will increase their loyalty to ILA. Last but not least, there is an obvious link between Satisfaction and Loyalty. If clients are satisfied with the services that ILA brings, they will continue to study in ILA.

To sum up, we got a hypothesis testing results table which showed the conclusion in Table 4.

**Table 3: Regression estimation**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for $\beta$	
	$\beta$	Std. Error	$\beta$			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Tangible	0.2610	0.1240	0.1530	2.1070	0.0360	0.0170	0.5050
Reliability	0.0470	0.1130	0.0280	0.4130	0.6800	-0.1760	0.2700
Assurance	0.2670	0.0950	0.1670	2.8240	0.0050	-0.4530	-0.0810
Responsiveness	0.7620	0.1390	0.5900	5.4770	0.0000	0.4880	1.0360
Empathy	0.1060	0.1210	-0.0840	-0.8800	0.3800	-0.3440	0.1320
Satisfaction	0.3550	0.0510	0.3220	6.9600	0.0000	0.2550	0.4550
Constant	0.3700	0.3290		-1.1250	0.2620	-1.0170	0.2770

<sup>a</sup>Dependent Variable: Customer loyalty

**Table 4: Hypothesis testing results**

Hypothesis	Descriptions	Results
H1a	Tangibles have a significant relationship with customer satisfaction	Rejected
H1b	Reliability has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction	Accepted
H1c	Responsiveness has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction	Rejected
H1d	Assurance has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction	Accepted
H1e	Empathy has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction	Accepted
H2a	Tangibles have a significant relationship with customer loyalty	Accepted
H2b	Reliability has a significant relationship with customer loyalty	Rejected
H2c	Responsiveness has a significant relationship with customer loyalty	Accepted
H2d	Assurance has a significant relationship with customer loyalty	Accepted
H2e	Empathy has a significant relationship with customer loyalty	Rejected
H3	There is a significant relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty	Accepted
H4	Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty	Accepted



## CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to find out and analyze the factors which had an impact on Customer loyalty at ILA Vietnam among 17 branches in Ho Chi Minh City in 2014. According to the purposes of the research, quantitative methods were employed to determine clearly customers' evaluation about each factor which may influence on Customer loyalty at ILA. The theoretical framework of this study consisted of five independent factors which were Tangible, Reliabilities, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. Moreover, there are two dependent variables which were Customer Satisfaction and Customer loyalty. There were 300 questionnaires from the parents who have kids studying at ILA from 2.5 – 18 years old at any branch of ILA in HCMC.

As a result, all of five dimensions of service quality, especially Service Quality's factors which were Tangible, Responsiveness and Assurance had a strong relationship with Customer Satisfaction towards Customer loyalty. So ILA Vietnam should improve these factors which can make the customer more loyal. In particular, customers think that facilities such as Learning Center, Supplementary Resources are very beneficial and convenience while many customers feel that educational equipment such as iPad and the interactive whiteboard is good but not really necessary. Instead of doing this, ILA should focus on buying or creating more programs to send to learners to improve the students' skills such as listening or writing as well as mock tests for them to practice at home or study online. According to the interviews with the parents, they pay a lot of attention to practicing these skills through the programs so this is a potential that ILA should invest more.

Besides, ILA should focus and improve in building a great and trustworthy relationship with customers. This means the staff not only just gives them the service they want but also guide them use it in an effective way such as introduce more supplementary books or some special days of activities so that learners can have more opportunities to practice and make friends with other people.

Moreover, customers believed in the knowledge of staffs to answer all of the questions. Therefore, ILA must be well- prepared to answer the learners through organizing some skill workshops relating to technology, psychology or how to deal with young learners as they are main customers of ILA to instruct staff and teaching assistant as well as teachers to understand their customers the best and improve their teaching processes.

It can be seen that there were some customers who used ILA's service at many different English Centers and ILA was just one of them. Due to this tough competition, ILA must spend more time and investment in employee training which helps staffs to increase and develop their knowledge about services deeply such as "personal communication" and "customer care" which were the main keys success to satisfy customers. Employees of ILA should communicate to customers with a professional approach, promptly record and recover service mistakes to give the best and exact answers and feedback to learners. Apart from learning a language, ILA should prepare correct information when giving instruction to parents who are interested in letting the children study abroad. This will build the longtime trust between both sides as parents have spent a long time studying at ILA before deciding to choose them as an agency to help their kids go to international schools.

According to the feedback from the learners, ILA needs to make sure that their services are right at the first time and familiar with their promises. It also should guarantee that the staffs

willing to help customers understand what customers need and know clearly about their fields of work. For example, when a learner has a problem while learning such as listening or reading, teacher or teaching assistant should spend more time to help him or her knows what to improve and how to do it such as do similar exercises to practice or learn through songs, games and interesting story to build more interest and have the ability to correct himself/herself. Additional, having stable standards of service all the time which make the customer satisfied to use its services. Especially all of English Schools have different ways to set up and send their services to customers but what the learners choose is based on the standards of education that they want to receive such as improving skills, pass global test as IELTS, TOEFL or have enough ability to study in U.S., UK or any other countries. As in the findings, customers usually use the brand which can keep their promises of services and its employees always help and understand customer's need.

Regarding the managerial implications, Board of Directors should have some certain policies to build a well- trained and committed employees. Good and reliable human resources are essential for the Service industry. Thus, it is necessary for ILA to have some incentive bonus and suitable promotion or recognition process to encourage employees for the mutual long-lasting commitment. In most cases, they will not only perform well on the job based on the accumulated experience but they also help colleagues and inspire the next generation.

There is a range of interesting potential future avenues for this research. Although it is evident that this study has provided fresh insights into what is a very topical issue, additional research could build on this, at the end of next year, there is potential to replicate the study at a later date to assess whether students' opinions change dramatically in the future in response to the satisfaction of the provided services. A repeat study of this kind would need to be carried at least a year on from the current study to monitor and improve their service quality. This will allow English Schools to satisfy not only the students, but also the parents, as the findings from the future study could be compared with the findings from this study.

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