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ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION SERVICE QUALITY IN UNIVERSITIES BASED ON SERVQUAL MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Educational service quality is determined by investigating the gap between students' expectations (desired status) and perceptions (status quo). This study aimed at evaluating the quality of entrepreneurship education services in universities of Kermanshah, Iran based on the SERVQUAL model. The present study is practical research in terms of objective and it is a cross-sectional survey in terms of data collection. The study population of 212 involved undergraduate students of an agricultural college who have taken an entrepreneurship course as an elective. Based on the Morgan Table 132 students were randomly investigated. Data were gathered through a standard SERVQUAL questionnaire containing 22 items about 5 dimensions of physical, responsiveness, empathy, reliability, and assurance. The results indicate that the highest service quality gap was in the responsiveness dimension (-1.916), followed by assurance and guarantee (-1.701), empathy (-1.039) and reliability dimensions (-1.015) with the smallest gap in the physical dimension (-0.718).

Keywords*: *Entrepreneurship, Education Service Quality, SERVQUAL Model, Higher Education, Iran

INTRODUCTION

Higher education systems in communities play an important role in economic, social and cultural development. Higher education is responsible for training specialized skilled manpower required in industry, agriculture and services (Bazargan, 2001). Because of this important mission, service quality in higher education has attracted increasing attention over the past two decades and it has become an important goal (Chin & Pun, 2002).

Given the importance of quality in higher education, research on quality is increasing in higher education institutions and among external stakeholders (Al-Hawaj & Elali, 2008). Stakeholders of higher education consist of students, staff, science committee, industry and society; students have attracted the most attention, because their unmet expectations are key factors in rejecting mentioned institutions (Fitri et al., 2008). The first essential step in improving service quality is knowing the customers' perceptions and expectations of service quality and determining the service quality gap, then adopting required strategies to reduce the gap and ensuring their perspectives are realized (Karydis et al., 2001). Continuous improvement in the quality of science, university and higher education as one of the main challenges of the competitive world in the age of information and knowledge economy requires endogenous development of evaluation culture (Ferasatkhah, 2006). During the last two decades the number of students in Iran has multiplied but along with this increase, other factors of higher education including educational and research facilities did not keep up with the student population (Bazargan et al., 2000). Studies conducted show that graduates produced by the Iranian higher education system lack the necessary skills. They seek employment instead of creating employment opportunities, entrepreneurship and participating in national development (Pezeshkirad & Mohtasham, 2003).

On one hand, attending to the quality of higher education is essential in order to prevent waste of human resource, material, financial resources and ensure coordination between educational system development and performance. On the other hand, reforming the structure, practices and goals of higher education, regardless of the quality, is a superficial modification that would not generate fundamental transformation. On this basis, in order to improve themselves, universities require appropriate practice and devices for evaluation and assurance from procedures, efficiency and effectiveness of graduates in the job market (Radai, 2013). The development of higher education and its increasing costs coupled with the increasing number and diversity of applicants shifts attention to quality issues (Brennan & Shah, 2000).

Planners aim at raising the quality issue is awareness of the level of success of the educational system to perform their goals, identifying and removing potential problems and finally finding ways to better realize their goals (Rogers & Rachlin, 2001). In educational assessment there are many interpretations. Like monitoring, the purpose of evaluation is collecting data in order to improve the planning process. Evaluation is seen as a process of providing the necessary data for decision-making. In other words the outcome of the educational system should be judged based on the changes of knowledge, attitude and abilities (Windham & Chapman, 2003). Dubois (2001) says that universities are evaluated and evaluate themselves so they can manage better, achieve their goals, realize their mission and achieve the best quality.

Higher education evaluation is the process of determining, providing and gathering data and information in order to judge higher educational system factors for decision-making to improve evaluation in educational systems. The evaluation of higher education could be used to realize the objectives of the higher education system (Ghourchian et al., 2004).

Research has shown that educational system quality in Iranian universities is not acceptable and desirable (Mohammadi et al., 2005). Existing weaknesses and deficiencies in teaching and learning processes as well as academic research activities of the country imply the lack of adequate mechanisms to guarantee the quality of higher education (Bahrami,2007). Customer satisfaction is often synonymous with quality and it is frequently defined in accordance to customer expectations (Sirvanci, 2004).

Considering the increasing importance of education quality in universities and higher education institutions, this study was conducted in order to improve the quality of education in the nascent field of entrepreneurship at the University of Kermanshah. It is hoped that the results of this study will be considered by the authorities and those involved in higher education to improve the quality of entrepreneurship education in universities and higher education institutions. Therefore, the main research questions are:

1. Is there a significant difference between perceptions and expectations of the quality of educational services in the physical dimension?
2. Is there a significant difference between perceptions and expectations of the quality of educational services in the responsiveness dimension?
3. Is there a significant difference between perceptions and expectations of the quality of educational services in the empathy dimension?
4. Is there a significant difference between perceptions and expectations of the quality of educational services in the reliability dimension?
5. Is there a significant difference between perceptions and expectations of the quality of educational services in the assurance and guarantee dimension?

Kebriaei and Roudbari (2005) conducted a study on the gap of educational services quality of Medical Sciences from the perspective of students in Zanjan University. In this study, 386 students of Medical Sciences were selected using stratified random sampling. The results showed gaps in the physical dimension (-1.31), responsiveness (-1.73), empathy (-1.55), reliability (-1.10), and assurance (-1.54).

Agha Mollaei et al. (2006) onducted a study on the gap in educational services quality of Medical Sciences from the perspective of students in Hormozgan University. In this study, 300 students were randomly selected and studied. The results showed that gaps existed in the physical (-0.84), responsiveness (-1.14), empathy (-0.95), reliability (-0.71), and assurance (-0.89) dimensions. The result of this study is coordinate with the results of Kebriaei and Roudbari (2005). In both studies there is a negative gap in all dimensions of the SERQUAL model.

Arboni et al. (2008) conducted a study examining the gap between expectations and perception of educational services among students in Zanjan University. In this descriptive study, 362 students of Medical Sciences were selected. The results showed gaps occurring in the physical dimension (-1.52), responsiveness (-1.62), empathy (-1.67), reliability (-1.54), and assurance (-1.46). The results of this study align with the results of the Agha Mollaei et al. (2006) study. In both studies there is a negative gap in all dimensions of the SERQUAL model.

Meng Git and Shaharin (2012) conducted a study on service quality of engineering courses. Their study concluded that a gap existed in the physical dimension (-1.13), responsiveness (-0.59), empathy (-0.41), reliability (-0.64), and assurance (-0.62). Bradly (2007) also conducted a study using the SERVQUAL method to determine the perceptions and expectations of Chinese students from educational services and quality in a graduate studies course. This study found a gap in physical dimensions (-0.36), responsiveness (-0.86), empathy (-1.23), reliability (-1.01) and assurance (-0.80). The results of this study comply with the results of Meng Git and Shaharin's research. In both studies there is a negative gap in all dimensions of the SERQUAL model (Radaei, 2013).

METHOD

This study using the cross-sectional survey research method was carried out in 2014-2015. The population in this study consisted of agricultural engineering undergraduate students in Kermanshah province in Iran who had taken the entrepreneurship course as one of their electives. Hence the population size in this study is 212 persons that according to Morgan Table, 132 persons were selected. In this study in order to collect data was used Standardized questionnaire SERVQUAL which was categorized in five dimensions include physical, reliability, empathy, responsiveness, assurances and guarantees dimension.

The measuring instrument SERVQUAL was introduced by Parasuraman and his colleagues in 1985 to assess the quality of services. The questionnaire consisted of two parts of demographic characteristics and specific items related to quality measurement, in two areas of student's expectations and perceptions. The questionnaire was used in two phases; in the first phase, students were asked to express their views on the quality of services already provided (perception) and in the second phase, they were asked how the quality of services should be provided (expectation).

SERVQUAL standard questionnaire consists of 4 demographic questions and 22 pairs of questions related to the measurement of quality of educational services in terms of physical characteristics, responsiveness, empathy, reliability and assurance and guarantee. This questionnaire was based on a 5-point Likert scale: very little (1), low (2), mediocre (3), high (4), very high (5). To analyze the data SPSS 21 had been used. Inferential statistics were used to determine the gap in each dimension of the SERVQUAL model. Differences in averages between the status quo and the status desired were calculated. Then the gap of quality was identified using paired *t*-test (comparative) in each dimension. Then using one-way variance analysis, the degree of expectations and perceptions of students of different universities in each dimension of the model were compared together. Then structural equation model was depictured using Amos 21 to show the impact of each component on the overall dimensions of SERVQUAL. This study used Cronbach's alpha to measure reliability; the coefficient rate was .85 and content validity was evaluated by five professors of management.

FINDINGS

Table 1 presents the findings on perceptions and expectations of students in each of the components of physical dimension.

Table 1
The average of perceptions and expectations of student in each of the components of physical dimension

Row	Physical dimension components	Average of status quo	Average of status desired	The gap	Degree of freedom	Sig (two-sided)	Assurance distance 95%	
							Lower line	upper line
1	Attractive and adorned appearance of entrepreneurship professors	3.867	4.019	-0.151	131	.022	-0.282	-0.021
2	Visual attractiveness of physical facilities and equipment (classroom construction, chairs, etc.)	3.014	4.029	-1.014	131	.000	-1.184	-0.844
3	Effectiveness and new educational facilities (Internet, library, overhead, etc.)	2.980	3.970	-0.990	131	.000	-1.158	-0.822

According to Table 1 it can be concluded that in the first item of physical dimension the gap was equal to -0.151. Since the significance in this item is (0.022), at 5% error there is a significant difference between status quo and status desired in the first item of the physical dimension. In simple terms, the appearance of entrepreneurial university professors and teachers is not satisfactory for the students. In the second item of physical dimension the gap (-1.014) exists; there is a significant difference between status quo and status desired in the second item of physical dimension. In other words, the appearance of physical facilities and equipment of universities is not desirable. In the third item of the physical dimension the gap (-0.990) is present, with a significant difference between status quo and desired condition. In simple terms, educational facilities and equipment are not up to date or efficient. Table 2 gives the results for average of perceptions and expectations of student in each of the components of responsiveness dimension

Table 2
The Average of Perceptions and Expectations of Students in Each Component of Responsiveness Dimension

Row	Responsiveness dimension components	Average of status quo	Average of status desired	The gap	Degree of free-dom	Sig (two-sided)	Assurance distance 95%	
							Lower line	upper line
1	Ease of student's access to professors and authorities for transferring their comments on entrepreneurship education of students	2.46	4.23	-1.76	131	.00	-1.92	-1.60
2	The possibility of applying student's comments for provision of educational programs in entrepreneurship lessons	2.38	4.00	-1.61	131	.00	-1.86	-1.36
3	Assigning some hours for consultation and guidance about business	1.96	4.33	-2.37	131	.00	-2.53	-2.21

According to Table 2, it can be concluded that in the first item of the responsiveness dimension the gap will be equal to -1.76. Since the significance in this item is (0.00), at 5% error there is a significant difference between status quo and desired. In other words, student access to professors and authorities in the field of entrepreneurship education does not take place simply. In the second item of responsiveness dimension the gap was -1.61, with a significant difference between status quo and desired. In other words, applying the comments of university students in devising and setting appropriate educational schedules in the field of entrepreneurship is not possible. In the third item of responsiveness the gap was -2.37, accompanied by a significant difference between status quo and desired condition. In other words, students are dissatisfied with the devotion of some hours to get advice and guidance on business from entrepreneurship professors.

Table 3 illustrates average of perceptions and expectations of student in each of the components of empathy dimension.

Table 3
The Average of Perceptions and Expectations of Student in Each Component of Empathy Dimension

Row	empathy dimension components	Average of status quo	Average of status desired	The gap	Degree of free-dom	Sig (two-sided)	Assurance distance 95%	
							Lower line	upper line
1	Respectful attitude of professors toward entrepreneurship students	3.970	4.431	-.460	131	.000	-.614	-.306
2	Professor's flexibility in facing special conditions possible for every student.	3.289	4.098	-.808	131	.000	-.966	-.651
3	Offering appropriate and innovative solutions in order to remove students' educational problems.	2.446	4.078	-1.63	131	.000	-1.79	-1.46
4	Special attention of professors toward each single student for detection of their talents and abilities.	2.318	3.946	-1.62	131	.000	-1.79	-1.46
5	Creating a peaceful environment in class	3.402	4.068	-.66	131	.000	-.838	-.494

According to Table 3, it can be concluded that in the first item of empathy, the gap was -.460, so at 5% error there is a significant difference between status quo and what is desired by students. In other words, students feel slightly dissatisfied with the behavior of entrepreneurship professors. In the second item of empathy, the gap was -.808, so at 5% error there is a significant difference between status quo and student desires. In other words, students perceived that entrepreneurship professors in universities are not flexible enough in facing certain conditions. In the third item of empathy, the gap reached -1.63, with a significant difference between status quo and that desired by students. This suggests that entrepreneurship professors lack the required ability to provide appropriate and innovative solutions for solving students' problems.

In the fourth item of empathy, the gap was -1.62, again with a significant difference between status quo and student desires. In other words, entrepreneurship professors do not dedicate enough time to identify talents and abilities of students in different fields. In the fifth item of empathy, the gap was -.66, so at 5% error there is a significant difference between status quo and what is desired among students. In other words, entrepreneurship professors cannot restore full order in class.

Table 4
The Average of Perceptions and Expectations of Student in each Components of Reliability Dimension

Row	Reliability dimension components	Average of status quo	Average of status desired	The gap	Degree of free-dom	Sig (two-sided)	Assurance distance 95%	
							Lower line	upper line
1	Presenting lessons in an innovative way which is attractive and perceptible for student.	2.519	4.156	-1.637	131	.000	-1.795	-1.478
2	Presenting lessons of each session in a regular and linked form	3.397	3.960	-.563	131	.000	-.706	-.421
3	Giving feedback and informing students from evaluation results and corrective guiding them	2.730	3.911	-1.181	131	.000	-1.334	-1.028
4	Stable and confident behavior of professors	3.362	4.044	-.681	131	.000	-.840	-.522

According to Table 4 it can be concluded that in the first item of reliability dimension, the gap was equal to -1.637, so at 5% error there is a significant difference between status quo and what students desire. In other words, presenting the lessons in relation to entrepreneurship fundamental unit in universities is not innovative for students and lacks attractiveness, so the presentation does not stimulate students to launch new businesses. In the second item of reliability dimension, the gap was -.563, with a significant difference between status quo and what students desire. In other words, in entrepreneurship fundamental classes, the contents of each session are presented regularly along the material of previous session. In the third item of reliability dimension, the gap registered -.1.181; there was a significant difference between status quo and what is desired by students.

Table 5
Average of Perceptions and Expectations of Student in Each Components of Assurance Dimension

Row	assurance dimension components	Average of status quo	Average of status desired	The gap	Degree of free-dom	Sig (two-sided)	Assurance distance 95%	
							Lower line	Upper line
1	Preparing students for future jobs with offering theoretical and practical training	1.94	4.402	-2.455	131	.000	-2.61	-2.29
2	Faculty members of academic background as well as experience in entrepreneurship	2.161	4.235	-2.073	131	.000	-2.23	-1.90
3	Involving students in research affairs and practical work	2.132	4.049	-1.916	131	.000	-2.10	-1.73
4	Discussion on the subject of the lesson in class by professors.	3.181	4.102	-.921	131	.000	-1.07	-.763
5	Skills in teaching practical courses	2.399	4.211	-1.812	131	.000	-1.96	-1.65
6	Using different educational methods (lectures, group discussions, visits, screenings, etc.)	2.696	4.254	-1.558	131	.000	-1.89	-1.22
7	Presenting and introducing appropriate and updated sources of information for teaching	2.823	3.985	-1.161	131	.000	-1.31	-1.00

In other words, students are not satisfied enough with the evaluation system and feedback received from educational activities as well as educational guidance by entrepreneurship professors. In the fourth item of reliability dimension, the gap was registered as -.681, so at 5% error there was a significant difference between status quo and student desires. In other words, students somehow feel dissatisfied with entrepreneurship professors' and instructors' stable behavior in the university.

For the first item of assurance dimension, the gap will be equal to -2.455, so at 5% error there is a significant difference between status quo and what is desired by students. In other words, curricula offered in entrepreneurship fundamentals cannot meet students' career needs in future market and will not guide them through entering business related to their specific major. In the second item of assurance dimension, the gap was equal to -2.073, with a significant difference between status quo and student desires. In other words, professors and instructors of entrepreneurship in universities lack of background experience in entrepreneurship and business and also lack entrepreneurial and business set up experience. In the third item of assurance dimension, the gap was equal to -1.916, indicating a significant difference between status quo and students' desires. In other words, entrepreneurship professors and instructors rarely involve their students in practical work and are satisfied with providing theoretical lessons.

In the fourth item of assurance dimension, the gap was -.921, so at 5% error there is a significant difference between status quo and what is desired by students. In other words, the degree of discussion on lesson subject by entrepreneurship professors in class is not desirable from the students' perspective. In the fifth item of the assurance dimension, the gap was -1.812, with a significant difference between status quo and student desires. In other words, professors and instructors of entrepreneurship in higher education institutions lack expertise in teaching practical courses.

For the sixth item of the assurance dimension, the gap was equal to -1.558, so at 5% error there was a significant difference between status quo and students' desires. In other words, entrepreneurship professors and instructors do not use new and varied teaching methods to transfer material. In the seventh item of assurance dimension, the gap was equal to -1.161, with a significant difference between status quo and what students desired. In other words, higher education institutions do not use new and updated resources to teach entrepreneurship concepts.

Table 6

Average of Perceptions and Expectations of Students in Each Component of SERVQUAL Model

Row	SERVQUAL Model components	Average of status quo	Average of status desired	The gap	Degree of free-dom	Sig (two-sided)	Assurance distance 95%	
							Lower line	upper line
1	physical dimension	3.287	4.006	-0.718	131	.000	-.832	-.605
2	responsiveness dimension	2.272	4.189	-1.916	131	.000	-2.047	-1.785
3	empathy dimension	3.085	4.124	-1.039	131	.000	-1.145	-.933
4	reliability dimension	3.002	4.018	-1.015	131	.000	-1.119	-.912
5	assurance dimension	2.477	4.179	-1.701	131	.000	-1.804	-1.599
6	Total	2.792	4.116	-1.324	131	.000	-1.401	-1.247

In the physical dimension, the gap was equal to -.718, so at 5% error there was a significant difference between status quo and what students desire. In other words, the degree of students' expectations is more than the degree of their perceptions. In the responsiveness dimension, the gap was -1.916, again with a significant difference between status quo and what students desired. In other words, the degree of students' expectations is more than the degree of their perceptions. In the empathy dimension, the gap was -1.039, with a significant difference between status quo and students' expectations. In other words, the degree of students' expectations is more than the degree of their perceptions.

As for the reliability dimension, the gap of -1.015 existed, so at 5% error there is a significant difference between status quo and what students desired. In other words, the degree of student's expectations is more than the degree of their perceptions. In the assurance dimension, the gap was -1.701, so at 5% error there is a significant difference between status quo and what is desired by students. In other words, the degree of students' expectations is more than the degree of their perceptions. And generally, the average degree of students' perception is 2.792 and the average degree of their expectations is 4.116; accordingly, the gap would be equal to -1.3242, so it can be said that, at 5% error, there is a significant difference between the status quo and status desired in all aspects of SERVQUAL. Therefore, it can be concluded that students who have taken entrepreneurship course as an elective are not satisfied enough with the quality of services in entrepreneurship education and such education would not encourage them to undertake entrepreneurship.

Structural Equation Model

Structural Equation Modeling is one of the techniques of statistical modeling in recent years used in the behavioral sciences as well as research on management, organization and economics. This statistical modeling technique that covers regression, factor analysis and path analysis. The main focus is on the latent variables as defined by obvious variables. This method can tease out causal relationships between variables that are not directly visible; the correlation and effectiveness variables on each other were analyzed. Unlike regression parameters that show empirical correlations, structural parameters explain the causal relationships. In the following model, ED is the symbol of students' perception and EN is the symbol of their expectations from quality of educational services. In this model, the physical dimension is displayed with symbol F, responsiveness with symbol P, empathy with symbol H, reliability with symbol E, and assurance and guarantee with symbol T. The symbol "e" also indicates errors incurred on each of the items. For example, e1 is the error incurred on the first item of physical dimension.

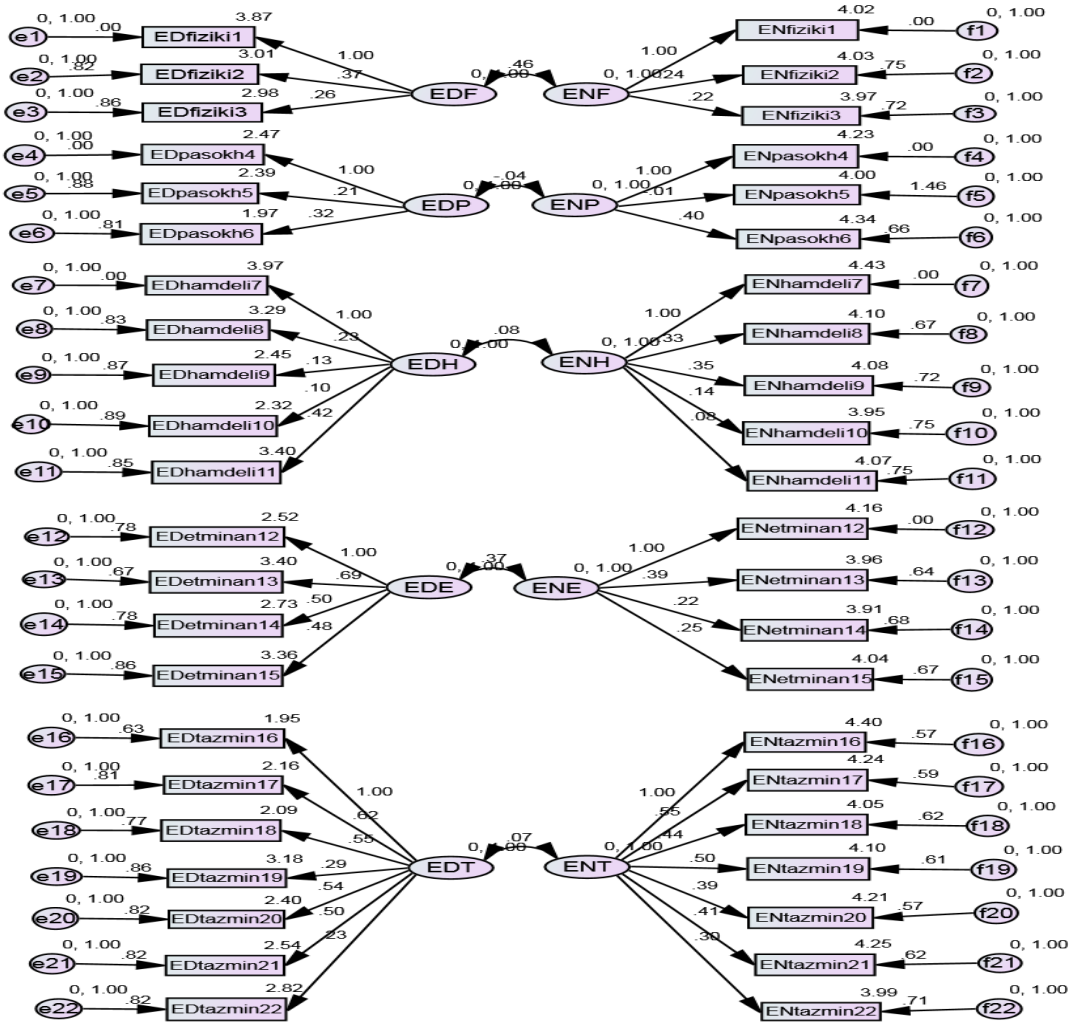

Figure 1. Structural equation model of entrepreneurship education in the study.

In the model, each of the rectangles is related to different items of the SERVQUAL model dimensions and circles are also related to the overall average of students' perceptions and expectations in each dimension of SERVQUAL. For example EDfiziki1 is related to the first item of the physical dimension and EDF is related to the overall average of physical dimension. Arrows also represent the effect of different items on each dimension of SERVQUAL.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

According to the findings, the largest quality gap in the entrepreneurship course in an Iranian university is observed in the responsiveness dimension. This quality dimension emphasizes demonstrating the sensitivity and alertness to the requests, questions and complaints from students. The presence of gap in this dimension implies that entrepreneurship professors and instructors are less available when needed by students.

A larger gap is observed in this dimension because students endure a long waiting time to find answers to some questions or to transfer their viewpoints to professors and educational authorities. So it is recommended to pay more attention to the aforementioned points to reduce the quality gap, and improve general customer orientation. The smallest gap was observed in the physical dimension of facilities, equipment, personnel and appropriate communication channels. Because the physical dimension often has a major effect on service, despite the smaller gap, attention to it and provision of proper physical condition is of particular importance. Also the quality gap in other dimensions and components suggests that fulfilling obligations and promises and meeting students' expectations are not performed well, and universities have failed to give students a sense of trust and confidence in effectiveness of services provided. Therefore, it is suggested to consider schedules to facilitate discussion on the subject in class, prepare students for future careers, assign a determined time by professors to respond and explain the contents to students outside class hours, professors' flexibility in facing specific condition of each student, provide peaceful environment in class, offer lessons in each session regularly, give students feedback on evaluation results and offer the material in an innovative, attractive and understandable way.

The results of this study are consistent with that of all studies conducted in Iran on quality evaluation of educational services on the basis of SERVQUAL; in all these studies mentioned, a negative quality gap existed in all dimensions of the model, yet these studies are different in terms of ratings and prioritizing the mentioned model. The results of this study are consistent with those in Kebriai and Roodbari (2005) Agha Mullai et al. (2006) on responsiveness dimension, yet are not consistent in other dimensions. The results of this study contradict the results of Meng Git and Shaharin (2012). The results of Bradly's study are also consistent with that of this study, yet they are different in other dimensions. The result of Karydis et al (2001) in physical dimension are opposite to results of the study; results from Costas and Vasiliki (2008) are also inconsistent with the result of this study.
According to the results of this study, there is a gap between the existing situation and the desired situation in physical dimensions of SERVQUAL (-0.718); in responsiveness (-1.916), in empathy (-1.039), in reliability (-1.015), and also in the assurance dimension (-1.701). Finally, there is a gap (-1.324) between the existing situation and the overall desired situation in quality of educational services.

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