

Relationship among Employee Training, Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction: A Case Study on Private Domestic Airlines in Bangladesh

Rumana Ferdouse¹, Mohammad Tamzid²

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how airlines industry can enhance their service quality to increase customer satisfaction. Three factors, i.e. employee training, perceived service quality, and customers' satisfactions are critical to the success of service firms. This research develops research instruments to measure employee training and development for a shared understanding, perceived service quality and customer satisfaction. Pearson Correlation applied to identify the cause and effect relationship among the variables. T-Test modeling is employed to test hypotheses of the variables. Sample of 100 respondents from 5 private domestic airlines of the country, the results of this research shows that employee training has a positive influence on perceived service quality. A shared understanding would be increased among employees which plays a critical role in enhancing perceived service quality. Also, customer satisfaction mediates with perceived service quality. This research may help service firms understand how the important elements (i.e. employees, perceived service quality, and customers' satisfaction) interact to influence the overall performance.

Keywords: Workplace Training, Customers Perceived Services Quality, Customer Satisfaction

¹ Assistant Professor, Green Business School, Green University of Bangladesh.
rumana.bus@green.edu.bd

² Senior Lecturer, Green Business School, Green University of Bangladesh.
tamzid.bus@green.edu.bd

1. Introduction

In the last 25 years, the aviation industry has been growing rapidly. In addition to its technological developments, the growing of airline industry due to its role as supporting the world trade, international investment, and tourism activities (Shuhartanto & Noor, 2012). Because of these roles, it is often said that the aviation industry is the center of globalization for other industries (Hanlon, 2000). Moreover this emergent airline industry provides opportunities as well as challenges to the business entities in this industry. In one hand the increasing demand for the airline services is the opportunities on the other hand the challenges are not only the high level of competition between the airlines, but also the constant growing consumer demands for better services.

Service is the new trend in business. However in 1980's the service industry has started to flourish and the importance of quality for business performance in service sector has been widely recognized in the literature through the great impacts on different dimensions of business performance but now it's in its zenith. The quality of service is of fundamental importance to a number of firms as customers expect high-quality services and are willing to pay a premium for them (Yoo and Park 2007). Although services are a large segment of the economy, research on service quality is not as well conducted as that of product quality (Sousa and Voss, 2002; Douglas and Fredendall, 2004; Ghobadian et al., 1994; Chen and Ting, 2002). Because services have the multiplicity of tangible and intangible elements, and the subjectivity of customer evaluations in nature, its concept is more evasive than that of product quality (Takeuchi and Quelch, 1983; Silvestro, 1998). Despite of every hurdle, airlines have the endless pressure of providing high-quality services and meeting/exceeding customer needs in the global competition. Now, how can firms (airline in our case) enhance their service quality that escalates customer satisfaction? To answer this question researchers try to find out effecting factors. Three of the factors include employees, perceived service quality, customer satisfaction, (Meyer and Collier, 2001; Hays and Hill, 2001; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Douglas and Fredendall, 2004;). For the effectiveness of service firms, employees have been widely emphasized –curtesy, empathy, and responsiveness (Parasuraman et al., 1988), commitment (Farber and Wycoff, 1991), satisfaction (Meyer and Collier, 2001; Voss et al., 2005), contact (Soteriou and Chase, 1998), and motivation and vision (Hays and Hill, 2001). And research has established that the relationship between service quality and customers satisfaction is generally positive (Liang and Zhang, 2009). Never the less many of the research have been conducted in this field; however we have found that not much attention has been paid to employee training and a shared understanding in light of perceived service quality. So to fill the gap and build on the literature, the first objective of this research is to exhibit that employee training and a shared understanding is a critical determinant of perceived service quality and the second objective of this research is to test the mediating relationship of customer satisfaction with perceived service quality.

2. Literature Review

With the expansion of service industries in Bangladesh the need to consider the perceived service quality became important as customers expect high level of services from them. Most services, however, are delivered through employees, who are at the frontline and form the interface between customers and firms (Schlesinger & Heskett, 1991). As employees directly conduct with the customers it is of utmost importance that employees receive superior training to satisfy customers accordingly. A lot of service firms have understood the importance of employee training and provide with diversified training programs to their employees. But very few researches have been conducted to identify whether employee training leads to higher level of greater customer satisfaction.

2.1 Employee Training

The quality of service is considered the most important factor for a service industry. But in most of the times, it is difficult to supervise the service quality as it is of intangible nature, perishable, heterogeneous and produced and consumed simultaneously (Schneider & Bowen, 1985). As most of the services are provided by the frontline employees, it is deemed that if these employees are well trained they can provide quality services. According to Yoo & Park (2007), Employee training refers to the extent to which employees are disciplined to increase their capabilities of delivering quality service and to understand customers. These increased skills help them serving customers better and alleviating customer satisfaction which in turn increase the financial performance. But with the rapid change in the business environment, skills of employees are becoming obsolete more quickly than ever (Gattiker, 1995). To keep employees up to date with the new skills employees' training has become a crucial factor. Through in-job training employees not only can improve skills but also develop new ones (Mathieu et al., 1992; Schlesinger and Heskett, 1991).

In recent years researchers and practitioners have paid much interest in employees training and development, as it has strong correlation with employee performance and organizational effectiveness (Asfaw, Argaw, & Bayissa, 2015). It is important to remember that skills that employees can implement in their job are the skills that are most effective. In that matter, not only employee performance, employees' training is strongly correlated with organizational commitment, turnover intention and commitment-turnover relationship (Jehanzeb, Rasheed, & Rasheed, 2013). For a developing economy like Bangladesh, it is highly necessary that firms put weight on employee training to better serve the customer needs over time.

2.2 Perceived Service Quality

Parasuraman et al. (1985) describes service quality as the evaluation of the general quality of services being provided to customers. Thus, it can be noted that service quality is the differentiation between the customer's expectation and perceptions of services delivered by firms. Expanding this definition, service quality is the overall evaluation of a specific service, comparing that performance with the customer's general expectations of what performance should be like (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). The firm's ability to create and provide a high level

of service quality is a key to sustaining competitive advantages amid severe competition (Yoo & Park., 2007). In spite of the difficulties, Parasuraman et al. (1988) present five sub-dimensions of service quality – reliability, tangibles, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. SERVQUAL, developed and tested by Parasuraman et al. (1988, 1991, 1994), is a widely used measure for service quality. Though Researchers provide slightly different definitions of service quality, but agree with the emphasis on customers. Reeves and Bednar (1994) depict quality as excellence, value, conformance to specifications, and meeting/exceeding expectations. Zeithaml et al. (1990) define service quality as the extent of discrepancy between the customers' expectations and their perceptions. Dabholkar et al. (2000) view service quality as a set of sub-dimensions such as reliability and responsiveness that precede customer satisfaction.

The intangibility nature of service, however, makes it hard to set standards (Yoo and Park, 2007). The simultaneous production-delivery-consumption element of service makes it difficult to detect and correct defects in service encounters (Yoo and Park, 2007).

Ineson *et al.* (2011) pointed out that key indicators for excellent service include employees with a passion for service and for their work, as well as employee honesty, trustworthiness and ability to deal with emergencies. Often customers judge the quality of the service they receive largely on their assessment of the people who provide the service (Lovelock and Wright, 2002). Unfortunately at times, organizations find difficulty in maintaining superiority based on the tangible elements of the service encounter, as competitors can easily replicate these elements of the service offer. However, a positive personal interaction with an obliging employee can readily demonstrate a firm's superior service (Kandampully, 2002).

In the service industry, employees strive to satisfy customers' needs by delivering service which is considered as a performance being rendered by one party to another (Berry, 1984; Mills & Morris, 1986). Borman and Motowidlo (1993, 1997) suggested an employee's overall performance has two facets: task performance and contextual performance. While contextual performance facilitates social and psychological relations with an organization, task performance "reflects how well an individual performs the duties required by the job" (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011.). And in this context Saks, (1995) suggested that training is strongly related job performance. Service employees will demonstrate better performance outcomes when they perceive that management is committed to service quality manifested by training and other HRM practices (Babakus, Yavas, Karatepe, & Avci, 2003). This research defines perceived service quality as the extent to which a firm's service employees' ability to successfully serves the purpose of customers.

2.3 Customer Satisfaction

In marketing literature the concept of customer satisfaction is the main outcome of marketing practices and occupies an important position in both theory and practice (Churchill and Surprenant, 1982). More precisely, Customer satisfaction is an important concept in the service literature (Douglas and Fredendall, 2004). It is almost impossible to find a firm's mission statement that does not mention a commitment to enhancing customer satisfaction (Babakus et

al., 2004). Satisfaction is the consumer's good judgment about pleasure versus displeasure (Moliner, Sa'nchez, Rodri'guez and Callarisa, (2007).

Customers assess the elements of service and decide whether or not what they received is quality service (Harvey, 1998; Brady and Robertson, 2001). Service quality is the delivery of services while satisfaction is customers' experiences with services (Malik, 2012). Antecedents of customer satisfaction have widely examined by a number of researchers – employees (Liao and Chuang, 2004), price-based prescriptions (Heskett et al., 1990; Ortmeyer et al., 1991), and perceived quality (Fornell et al., 1996). During the evaluation process if customers' expectations are met with the service; they are more likely to feel satisfied with the service (Malik, 2012). Positive perception of service quality is the indication of the customers' satisfaction (Lenka et al, 2009). Generally, customer satisfaction is affected by customer expectations or hopes prior to receiving a service and can be calculated by the following equation given by Parasuraman et al, (1988): "Customer Satisfaction = Perception of Performance – Expectations". Service perceptions can be defined as a customer's judgments, which narrate to the superiority of a service (Parasuraman et al, 1988). Reimann et al, (2008) concluded this complex concept into an equation which is

$$\text{Service Perception} - \text{Service Expectation} = \text{Perceived Service Quality} \rightarrow \text{Customer satisfaction}$$

In addition to this, according to the framework of the ACSI (American Customer Satisfaction Index) theory and research it was revealed that perceived quality is considered as the first determinant of overall customer satisfaction and research strongly recommends that expectation and experienced services have a direct and positive effect on overall customer satisfaction (Fornell et al., 1996). Based on the above review, in this research, customer satisfaction is defined as the extent to which customers' perception about the firm's services quality with which their needs are being met successfully.

2.4 Hypothesis development

The training of employees creates the ability to support core practices (Anderson, Rungtusanatham, Schroeder, Devaraj, 1995). Employee training in service quality principles and interpersonal skills with customers enables successful service quality implementations (Huq and Martin, 2000; Schlesinger and Heskett, 1991). Service quality should be monitored over time to make necessary adjustments through training (Babakus et al., 2004). Training brings employees the ability to deliver quality services to customers. Additionally, it enables them to quickly respond to the ever-changing needs of customers. Thus we hypothesize:

- H1. Firms with a high level of employee training will have a high level of perceived service quality.

Services are intangible processes, but have a close relationship with customers (Soteriou and Chase, 1998). Superior service quality is related to increased customer satisfaction (Brady and

Robertson, 2001; Dabholkar et al., 2000; Fornell et al., 1996; Voss et al., 2004). Service quality improvements attract new customers, enhance retention and loyalty of existing customers, and lure customers away from competitors whose service quality is perceived lower (Babakus et al., 2004). Since perceived service quality has a strong influence on customer satisfaction, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

- H2. Firms with a high level of perceived service quality will have a high level of customer satisfaction.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study was a survey type in the form of cross-sectional study in which data were collected once across a population through random sampling technique. The target population was 5 domestic airlines of the county. This research developed a set of valid and reliable instruments to measure employee training, perceived service quality and customer satisfaction. Item generation began with a theory development and literature review. The first three variables of the questionnaire were about training and development. The second eight items were about perceived service quality. The third group was about customer satisfaction. Questions were assessed on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 meant “strongly disagree” and 5 meant “strongly agree”. 100 questionnaires were sent and 66 responded to the questionnaire, resulting an overall response rate of 66%.

3.2 Tools for Data Analysis

In order to ensure completeness and logical consistency of responses, data editing was carried out each day by the researcher. Once editing was done with, the data were analyzed using quantitative techniques. The analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS IBM Version 20). The summary of result was presented using frequency distribution and percentages, which was used to determine the proportion of respondents choosing the various responses. Tables, charts and graphs were used to ensure easy understanding of the analyses. Pearson Correlation and T- test model was used to identify the causal relationship with dependent and independent variables.

3.3 Reliability Test

The tool was piloted using 10 (5 males and 5 females) respondents. The responses of respondents were scored and the reliability of the tool was determined using Cronbach’s Alpha. According to the alpha value more than 0.6, shows that the scale can be considered reliable (Hales, 1986). Alpha value more than 0.80 are considered as very good (Nunnally,1978). The tool has 15 questions *i.e.* 3 questions for training and development, 8 questions for perceived service quality and 4 questions for customer satisfaction. As shown in the **Table-1**, the result shows that the Cronbach’s alpha ranges from 0.900 to 0.939 which show the scale had very good reliability.

Table-1: Alpha reliability of the variables

Serial	Variables	No of items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Training and development	3	0.927
2	Perceived service quality	8	0.939
3	Customer satisfaction	4	0.900

4. Results

A total 100 employees were invited to be the part of this study but **66** completed questionnaires were included in the analysis with a response rate of **66.0%**. **Table-2** portrayed the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Slightly greater than half 59.09% of the study participants were males. A little higher than half of the respondents (65.15%) were single, followed by (34.85%) were married. Slightly lower than half (45.45%) of the participants were achieved Bachelor's degree level of education. Most of the respondents were working in the middle level management (71.21%), and the rest were in the top management (28.79%).

Table-2: Demographic information of the respondents

Serial no.	Characteristics	Component	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	39	59.09
		Female	27	40.91
2	Educational background	Diploma	-	-
		Bachelor's Degree	30	45.45
		Master's Degree	20	30.30
		Professional Degree	16	24.24
		PhD. /DBA	-	-
3	Marital status	Single	43	65.15
		Married	23	34.85
		Divorced	-	-
		Widowed	-	-
4	Position in the organization	Top management	19	28.79
		Middle management	47	71.21
		Firstline management	-	-

Employees were asked to provide their opinion on selected thematic area using a tool developed based on ordinal Likert scale with the least 1 and the highest 5 score (Likert,1932) . The

weighted average for various training and development, perceived service quality and customer satisfaction item assessed as depicted in **Table-3**. The first three variables were about training and development. Received training for new skills (3.18), received training for updating skills (3.24) and received training to understand customer (2.92). The second eight items were about perceived service quality. Reduce service waiting time (3.30), willing to help customers (3.77), instill a sense of trust (3.29), answer all the service related queries (3.52), strive to prevent service failures (3.52), give individual attention (3.61), provide prompt services (3.35), and satisfactory services (3.36). The third group was about customer satisfaction. Process customer's needs (3.21); provide benefits (3.11), customer satisfied compared to price (3.12), customer satisfied compare to competitor (3.14).

Table-3: Frequency table of responses

Serial no.	Question	Score					Mean	S.D.
		1	2	3	4	5		
Q1	Receive training for developing new skills	5	10	26	18	7	3.18	1.07
Q2	Receive training for updating current skills	5	7	29	17	8	3.24	1.05
Q3	Receive training for understanding customer	5	18	27	9	7	2.92	1.07
Q4	Reduce service waiting time	7	3	25	25	6	3.30	1.07
Q5	Willing to help customers	2	5	10	38	11	3.77	0.92
Q6	Instill a sense of trust	2	10	26	23	5	3.29	0.92
Q7	Can answer all the service related queries	2	8	19	28	9	3.52	0.98
Q8	Strive to prevent service failures	2	4	28	22	10	3.52	0.93
Q9	Give individual attention	5	2	18	30	11	3.61	1.05
Q10	Provide prompt services	2	9	24	26	5	3.35	0.92
Q11	Satisfactory services	3	4	29	26	4	3.36	0.87
Q12	Process customer's needs.	2	13	27	17	7	3.21	0.98
Q13	Provide benefits	3	16	21	23	3	3.11	0.98
Q14	Customer satisfied compared to price	4	10	30	18	4	3.12	0.95
Q15	Customer satisfied compared to competitor	4	12	24	23	3	3.14	0.97

In this research we want to estimate the effect of training and development on perceived

service quality and the effect of perceived service quality on customer satisfaction. Pearson correlation was computed to check whether training and development have any relationship with perceived service quality and perceived service quality with customer satisfaction.

After analyzing the data, we found that the correlation coefficient for training and development and perceived service quality was **0.846** and correlation coefficient for perceived service quality and customer satisfaction was **0.895** respectively the observed relationship is highly positive, which mean when the score of training and development increases the score of perceived service quality increase and same with the score for perceived service quality and customer satisfaction. Below the Table-4 illustrates the results of correlation among the variables.

Table-4: Correlation among variables

Serial	Variables	Correlation (r)	r ²
1	Training and development	1	
2	Perceived service quality	0.846	0.716
3	Customer satisfaction	0.895	0.801

This research also employed hypothesis testing to understand the relationship among the variables. H1 suggested that a high level of employee training would be related to a high level of perceived service quality. The results of the *t-test (two tail)* model supported it statistically because as shown in the Table-5 t critical, 1.978 or -1.978 is lower than t stat, -2.135 and p value is 0.034 which is also lower than alpha value of 0.05. So, our alternative hypothesis falls in the area of acceptance. Thus, we conclude that Employee training was significantly related to perceived service quality.

Table-5: t-test results of two variables

	Employee training (Independent)	Perceived service quality (dependent)
Mean	3.116162	3.464015
Variance	1.017068	0.734502
Observations	66	66
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	127	
t Stat	-2.13528	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.017329	
t Critical one-tail	1.65694	

P(T<=t) two-tail	0.034658	
t Critical two-tail	1.97882	

H2 suggested that a high level of perceived service quality would be related to a high level of customer satisfaction. The results of the *t-test (two tail)* model supported it statistically because as shown in the Table-6 t critical, 1.978 is significantly lower than t stat, 2.096 and p value is 0.038 which is also lower than alpha value of 0.05. So, our alternative hypothesis falls in the area of acceptance. Thus, we conclude that perceived service quality was significantly related to customer satisfaction.

Table-6: t-test results of two variables

	Perceived service quality (Independent)	Customer satisfaction (dependent)
Mean	3.464015	3.143939
Variance	0.734502	0.803963
Observations	66	66
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	130	
t Stat	2.096433	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.018991	
t Critical one-tail	1.656659	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.037982	
t Critical two-tail	1.97838	

5. Discussion

With the growing popularity of the service industry, managing service quality that leads to customer satisfaction is a complex and persistent challenge. More in depth understanding is needed in this area for successful achievement of the goal of the organization. In light of the endeavors, this research contends that to be a successful organization there needs to be considered training of employees, perceived service quality and customers.

The main findings of this research, is that employee training is a critical element to enhance perceived service quality which in turn leads to customer satisfaction. It is a hard task to manage perceived service quality directly, consistently, and reliably as services have the characteristics of intangibility, perishability, and simultaneous production, delivery, and consumption (Hays

and Hill, 2001). Training enables employees to better understand their responsibilities, monitor their work performance and adapt work routines in response to a variety of circumstances (Dong and Park, 2007). Although management cannot control perceived service quality directly, employee training enables them to render consistent and reliable service quality to customer. Satisfied customer will be more attracted to the service of the organization and will use the service again and again, which will in turn increase the organizational effectiveness.

This research finds that there is a significantly positive correlation between employee training and perceived service quality ($r = 0.846$). Ni and Wang (2015) confer organization should have concern about the potential development and self-realization of the employees. Similarly, Quartey (2012) found a moderately strong relationship between employee training and organizational performance. This is in line with Ahmad and Din (2009) suggestion on the intention of providing training was to enhance the performance of employees through learning process.

This research also illustrates that perceived service quality is also highly correlated with the satisfaction of the customer ($r = 0.895$). Perceived service quality may not affect financial performance directly. Instead, it affects customer satisfaction directly and then influences financial performance indirectly (Yoo and Park, 2007). It is consistent with an understanding that improved service quality will reduce the number of customer complaints and service failures, resulting in customer satisfaction. Management should be aware that customer satisfaction directly enhances financial performance, and perceived service quality directly affects customer satisfaction (Yoo and Park, 2007).

6. Conclusion

Employee training, perceived service quality and customer satisfaction are some of the important variables for the design of the service, which are studied in this research paper. Through this research we found empirical evidence in supporting the rich interrelationships among three variables. It also offers valuable organizational understandings for better execution of service quality. Service is immaterial, fragile and concurrent production, distribution and consumption in nature. Therefore, organization cannot directly control the quality of service. Employee training and a shared understanding, however, permit organization to regulate service quality and accomplish a chosen level of result for the organization. Greater service quality leads to customer satisfaction, thus increasing organizational performance. Service organizations need to pay attention to employees and customers concurrently in the planning and evaluation for improved service quality. More consideration to relationships among employees, customers, perceived service quality may enable service firms to have outstanding performance.

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