



## Service Quality Measurement of Higher Education Institutions in TR21 Thrace Region: A Study on Tourism Students

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### Abstract

The service quality levels of the three higher education institutions in the TR21 Thrace region were found to be slightly above the middle level ( $\bar{x}$ 3.41). Carried out to identify the link between the sub-dimensions of the higher education service quality scale, the correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship. Initially, a Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed to establish construct validity of the higher education service quality scale, followed by a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). As a result of the analysis, it was found that the 6 dimension structure at the scale was verified. It was determined that the obtained compliance values were within the accepted values in the literature.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism is an industry with wide-reaching economic, psychological, and social impacts and progresses at an ever increasing pace. Naturally, high service quality gives businesses an edge over their competitors. Education is the essential prerequisite for better service quality in businesses in the tourism industry (Işık, Tırak & Çapan, 2017: 17). The fundamental conditions for training qualified personnel and meeting the needs of the industry are creating a satisfactory education system and offering high quality education (Boylu & Arslan, 2014: 79).

Education lies at the core of any investment in human resources. In this sense, it stands as the most basic condition for individuals to achieve higher living standards and for societies to advance and become modern civilizations. Education makes significant contributions to economic growth because it underlies the raising of qualified generations that the industry and service sectors need and it increases productivity. Education is thus defined as a set of planned activities that elicit development in human behavior for certain predetermined purposes (Baltacı, Üngüren, Avsallı & Demirel, 2012: 17).

Accordingly, service quality of educational institutions is of cardinal importance. Particularly in recent times, a large number of schools and universities in Turkey and across the world have zoomed in on the issue of quality and have made significant efforts to improve it. As in all other industries, measuring quality in educational institutions is excruciatingly difficult. However, it is necessary to measure the current quality in order to carry out quality improvement and development activities (Deveci & Aymankuy, 2017: 411).

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Tourism Education**

Education contributes substantially to economic growth because it underlies the raising of qualified generations that the industry and service sectors need and it increases productivity (Olçay, 2008: 384). Positioned in the service industry, tourism is open to competition where higher quality and better service play a key role. As competition grows bitter, there is an increasing need for a qualified workforce, which is only possible through effective and high quality tourism education and well-trained staff (Akgöz & Gürsoy, 2014: 22; Demir & Demir, 2012: 292; Emir, Pelit & Arslan 2010: 143).

Tourism education is regarded as the teaching of tourism activities and their contributions, instilling of a tourism resource-protective awareness in people, and activities done to train employees and managers who can work in the tourism industry (Ayaz, Yeşiltaş & Türkmen, 2012: 104; Kızıllırmak, 2000; Koçoğlu, 2018: 24; Türkeri, 2014: 3; Ulama, Batman & Ulama, 2015: 342; Ünlüönen, Temizkan & Gharamaleli, 2010: 146; Üzümcü, Alyakut & Günsel, 2015: 182).

Tourism education in Turkey is divided into two categories: formal and non-formal education. Institutions that provide formal tourism education include secondary and higher education units. Non-formal education institutions, on the other hand, comprise certain official and private organizations (Aksu & Bucak, 2012: 11; Ayaz et al., 2012: 104; Baltacı et al., 2012: 18; Davras & Davras, 2012: 280; Demirkol & Pelit, 2002: 4; Hacıoğlu, Kaşlı, Şahin & Tetik, 2008: 25; Pelit & Güçer, 2006: 143; Ünlüönen & Boylu, 2005: 15). Formal education mainly aims to train a

well-equipped, versatile, and productive workforce for every branch of tourism. In contrast, non-formal tourism education serves more to raise tourism awareness (İbicioğlu, Avcı & Boylu, 2003: 5).

### **Service, Quality, and Service Quality**

Service is a set of abstract activities that is sold to meet people's and societies' needs; service creates benefits and satisfaction and has an intangible, easily expendable, and non-standardized or difficult to be standardized nature (Alhadad & Çavdar, 2019: 195; Kaya, 2019: 269; Songur, 2015: 1014).

Service differs from products in four main aspects: Services are intangible, nonhomogeneous, nonstorable, and eligible for simultaneous consumption (Antony, Antony & Ghosh, 2004: 380; Mei, Dean & White, 1999: 137). Such characteristics inherent in the nature of service make quality assessment rather difficult. In other words, measuring quality in the service industry is a complex issue (Ayaz & Arakaya, 2019: 124; Bektaş & Akman, 2013: 119; Şerban & Stoian, 2019: 427).

Quality is a factor that enables the efficient use of resources, adds user friendliness to products and services, centers on production and service provision based on customer demands and needs, and helps businesses properly fulfill their responsibilities (Avcı & Sayilir, 2006: 123).

Finally, service quality, in its broadest sense, is the provision of superior or excellent service to meet customer expectations (Okumuş & Duygun, 2008: 19). Lewis and Booms (1983) state service quality as a measure of how good the level of service (Danjuma, Bawuro, Vassumu & Habıbu, 2018: 127).

Since service is an abstract concept, service quality has an abstract nature as well (Olçay & Ay, 2019: 455), which entails the use of the term "perceived service quality" rather than "service quality" (Akbaba & Kılınc, 2001: 163; Avcı & Sayılır, 2006: 123; Devebakan, Koçdor, Musal & Güner, 2003: 33;). Perception of service quality is the result of the comparison between consumer expectations and service performance (Eroğlu, 2000: 205; Khan, 2010: 165). In this respect, service quality can be defined as the result of the comparison between expected and perceived service performance (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985: 42).

### **Service Quality in Higher Education**

Quality is a key factor of success in providing service and ensuring satisfaction (Khattab, 2018: 25; Nagaraju & Subbarayudu, 2017: 226; Olowokudejo & Oladimeji, 2019: 78). Interest shown in quality in institutions of higher education that are in the service industry grows at an exponential pace. The most influential factor prompting service providing institutions to seek better quality is the increasing number of universities to choose from and the growing competition among universities (Akbaba, Gürü, Yaran & Çimen, 2006: 9).

Students are now the drivers for institutions' efforts to enhance service quality. Students' expectations are crucial for the improvement of service quality of tourism education in higher education institutions (Şahin, 2011: 50; Songur, 2015: 1015). First and foremost, students' wants and needs should be identified to meet and even surpass their expectations (Arslantürk, 2010: 64; Aydın, Görmüş & Altıntop, 2014: 38).

Student satisfaction is largely considered the level of fulfillment of expectations in educational institutions. Aside from these institutions, businesses in the industry also emphasize student satisfaction because they believe that only institutions offering high quality service can train well-equipped and competent employees. For this reason,

institutions that enjoy a competitive edge are those that pay attention to students' expectations, offer high quality education, and know it is incumbent upon them to always take their services to the next level (Eren, Özgül & Kaygısız, 2013: 17).

As with all other service providers, it is considerably onerous to assess service quality of educational institutions (Duzevic, Bakovic & Delic, 2019: 16; Omidian & Nia, 2018: 58; Shah, 2013: 74). Identifying students' level of satisfaction and objectively pointing out service quality has always been a truly complex process because of the relations between students and administrative/academic staff in higher educational institutions. Personal characteristics of students and administrative/academic staff and cultural differences affect their relations and hence students' level of satisfaction (Şahin, 2011: 51).

Arguably the most influential factor in education quality is the academic staff. Academics' professional competence, interest in developments in their fields of expertise, personal approaches, vocational experience, and positive traits significantly determine their service quality. Others who also contribute greatly to the improvement of quality in educational institutions are administrative staff. Administrators can enhance the quality of education by providing the necessary tools and equipment for educational purposes, ensuring interpersonal coordination, and overseeing training processes (Taşkın & Büyük, 2002: 8). It is possible to assert that academic, administrative, and other support staff can seriously improve quality by making concerted efforts and adopting a holistic approach that targets stakeholders (Türel & Aytar, 2014: 5).

Another element of education is surely the organizational image (Damaris, Surip & Setyadi, 2019: 121). Higher educational institutions constantly compete on an international scale to attract the best students and academics. Since education is a global industry, the 'market of education' is gradually developing standards similar to those used in traditional product marketing. This means a more customer-oriented approach is brewing in education, and the organizational image has consistently gained more importance (Cerit, 2006: 347).

Tools and equipment also have a critical role in the improvement of education quality. The tools and equipment employed in education should be contemporary, and every student should equally benefit from them. In addition, physical properties such as cleanliness, heat and sound insulation, and layout of educational buildings also affect service quality (Taşkın & Büyük, 2002: 8).

While an educational institution without academic staff, classrooms, libraries, and computers is unimaginable, it should also offer amenities for accommodation, safety, and food and offer sports, art, and cultural activities for social purposes. Students are customers of educational institutions, and their satisfaction truly matters to those institutions because students who are content remain loyal to their universities and tend to recommend them. This naturally contributes to the image of universities and helps them gain more reputation (Tayyar & Dilşeker, 2012: 185).

Just as students' satisfaction with their universities and faculties (schools) is of prime importance, their contentedness with their departments also matters in no small measure. Factors that determine students' level of satisfaction include courses, internship opportunities, profession-oriented conferences, and business-related events. Students' satisfaction with their departments (study areas) boosts their career success (Altaş, 2006: 439).

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study aims to establish how tourism students view the service quality of institutions of higher education where they study. The HEdPERF scale was preferred for service quality measurement. The HEdPERF scale was developed specifically for the comprehensive evaluation (Vrana, Dimitriadis & Karavasilis, 2015: 80) of the different aspects of the service provided by institutions (Jelena, 2010: 634) and especially for measuring the service quality at higher education level (Kawshalya, 2016: 5; Banahene, Kraa & Kasu, 2018: 97). Therefore, it is stated that HEdPERF scale is more effective than other scales in order to measure service quality in higher education (Firdaus, 2006: 31; İçli & Anıl, 2014: 31; Mekic & Mekic, 2016: 46). In 2009, Brochado stated that the HEdPERF scale is one of the best measurement scales to measure the service quality in higher education (Brochado, 2009: 174).

As a result of the literature review, it is seen that the number of studies using HEdPERF scale is increasing day by day (Ali, Shariff, Said & Mat, 2018; Ali et al., 2016; Ada, Baysal & Erkan, 2017; Banahene, Kraa & Kasu, 2018; Damaris, Surip & Setyadi, 2019; Deveci & Aymankuy, 2017; Firdaus, 2006; Firdaus, 2019; Khalid, Ali & Makhbul, 2019; Lazibat et al., 2014; Mang'unyi & Govender, 2014; Mekic & Mekic, 2016; Muhammad, Kakakhel, Baloch & Ali, 2018; Muhammad, Kakakhel & Shah, 2018; Mustaffa, Rahman, Wahid & Rosdi, 2019; Nagaraju & Subbarayudu, 2017; Omidion & Nia, 2018; Özçelik & Argon, 2019; Ravichandran, Kumar & Venkatesan, 2012; Silva, Moraes, Makiya & Cesar, 2017; Ushantha & Kumara, 2016; Vrana, Dimitriadis & Karavasilis, 2015; Yavuz & Gülmez, 2016; Yokuş, Ayçiçek & Yelken, 2017).

TR21 Thrace was selected as the study area. TR21 Thrace consists of the cities of Tekirdağ, Edirne, and Kırklareli. Tekirdağ is home to Tekirdağ Namık Kemal University, Edirne to Trakya University, and Kırklareli to Kırklareli University (TKA, 2010: 5-73; TKA, 2013: 19-89). This study is intended to identify how tourism students at these three aforementioned universities view the service quality of institutions of higher education. The hypotheses of the research are given below:

**H1** = There is a significant difference between the demographic characteristics of tourism students and service quality in higher education.

**H2** = There is a significant relationship between the subscales of the service quality scale in higher education.

The population of the research consists of 2078 associate degree and 667 undergraduate tourism students. These figures were determined based on the Handbook of Higher Education Programs and Quotas of the Student Selection and Placement System (ÖSYS) in addition to the student numbers provided by the departments of students affairs. The research population comprises 2745 tourism students in three universities. The first section of the research survey contains statements aiming to identify the demographic profile of the participants. The second part employs the HEdPERF scale which was developed by Firdaus (2006) and adapted to Turkish by Bektaş and Akman (2013). The HEdPERF scale consists of six dimensions and 28 statements.

The participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire in the first half of March 2018 with a view to testing its construct validity. 450 students took part in the process, and the data obtained were analyzed with the use of SPSS 21.0 and the statistical software LISREL 8.80. The research makes use of frequency analyses, correlation analysis,

independent samples t test, one-way analysis of variance, reliability analyses, simple linear regression analysis, factor analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis.

**FINDINGS AND COMMENTS**

50.9% of the participating students are male, whereas the remaining 49.1% are female. Among the participants, 16.9% are 17-19 years old, 62.2% 20-22 years old, and 20.9% 23 years and older. 28.3% study at Tekirdağ Namık Kemal University, 38.2% at Trakya University, and 33.5% at Kırklareli University. The ratio of freshmen is 34.2%, sophomores 19.3%, juniors 13.6%, and seniors 32.9%. Whereas 53.8% of the participants receive daytime education, 46.2% are enrolled in evening classes.

16.2% of the participants' first choice after the university exam was their current university. It was the second choice for 7.1%, third choice for 11.6%, fourth choice for 10.7%, and fifth or a subsequent choice for 54.4%. 65.6% of the students chose their current university and department of their own volition. In contrast, 34.4% did not willingly prefer their current university and department in the first place. 46.9% indicate they looked into the university and department and gathered information before choosing it, but 53.1% state that they did not.

In the study, normality distribution was analyzed before analysis. Additionally, kurtosis and skewness coefficients were found to be between -1.5 and +1.5. It was concluded that the data showed normal distribution. T-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA)-tukey hsd were used for difference analysis. Table 1 shows the results of the analysis on the link between demographics and the scale of service quality. Accordingly, there is a statistically significant difference in terms of the variables of gender, age, university preference, and grade. There is nevertheless no statistically significant difference when it comes to the education program and current university. In light of these findings, the hypothesis H1 was partially accepted.

**Table 1:** Analyses of Difference between Demographics and the Scale of Service Quality in Higher Education

		Scale of Service Quality					
		n	$\bar{x}$	SS	t/F	p	Difference
<b>Gender</b>	Male	229	3.48	.617	2.311	.021	<b>Yes</b>
	Female	221	3.35	.576			
<b>Age</b>	17-19	76	3.16	.454	8.604	.000	<b>1-2 1-3</b>
	20-22	280	3.48	.609			
	23 and older	94	3.41	.627			
<b>Education Program</b>	Daytime Education	242	3.39	.632	-.872	.383	No
	Evening Education	208	3.44	.560			
<b>University Preference</b>	Yes	270	3.58	.608	7.858	.000	<b>Yes</b>
	No	180	3.16	.486			
<b>University</b>	Namık Kemal University	127	3.48	.578	1.989	.138	No
	Trakya University	172	3.54	.592			
	Kırklareli University	151	3.49	.586			
<b>Grade</b>	Freshman	154	3.16	.492	16.035	.000	<b>1-2 1-3 1-4</b>
	Sophomore	87	3.60	.585			
	Junior	61	3.60	.546			
	Senior	148	3.48	.646			

A correlation analysis was performed to test the relationship between the sub-dimensions of service quality in higher education and to put the H2 hypothesis to the proof. The correlation analysis led to  $\beta$  (beta) coefficients ranging

from 491 to 809. These coefficients are double-sided at a level of 0.01, and a positive and significant relationship was detected between the dimensions. The hypothesis H2 is deemed correct. The results are indicated in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Higher Education Service Quality Scale Correlation Analysis with Sub-Dimensions

		KİY	KAY	Kİ	ER	KSDP	KFİ	YHK
KİY	Pearson Correlation	1	,405 <sup>**</sup>	,220 <sup>**</sup>	,398 <sup>**</sup>	,241 <sup>**</sup>	,147 <sup>**</sup>	,772 <sup>**</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,000	,000	,000	,002	,000
	N	450	450	450	450	450	450	450
KAY	Pearson Correlation	,405 <sup>**</sup>	1	,225 <sup>**</sup>	,509 <sup>**</sup>	,269 <sup>**</sup>	,156 <sup>**</sup>	,696 <sup>**</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,000	,000	,000	,001	,000
	N	450	450	450	450	450	450	450
Kİ	Pearson Correlation	,220 <sup>**</sup>	,225 <sup>**</sup>	1	,352 <sup>**</sup>	,334 <sup>**</sup>	,313 <sup>**</sup>	,547 <sup>**</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000		,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	450	450	450	450	450	450	450
ER	Pearson Correlation	,398 <sup>**</sup>	,509 <sup>**</sup>	,352 <sup>**</sup>	1	,289 <sup>**</sup>	,198 <sup>**</sup>	,662 <sup>**</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000		,000	,000	,000
	N	450	450	450	450	450	450	450
KSDP	Pearson Correlation	,241 <sup>**</sup>	,269 <sup>**</sup>	,334 <sup>**</sup>	,289 <sup>**</sup>	1	,347 <sup>**</sup>	,597 <sup>**</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000		,000	,000
	N	450	450	450	450	450	450	450
KFİ	Pearson Correlation	,147 <sup>**</sup>	,156 <sup>**</sup>	,313 <sup>**</sup>	,198 <sup>**</sup>	,347 <sup>**</sup>	1	,477 <sup>**</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000		,000
	N	450	450	450	450	450	450	450
YHK	Pearson Correlation	,772 <sup>**</sup>	,696 <sup>**</sup>	,547 <sup>**</sup>	,662 <sup>**</sup>	,597 <sup>**</sup>	,477 <sup>**</sup>	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	N	450	450	450	450	450	450	450

**\*\*.** Correlation is bilateral at 0.01 level.

The reliability value in the research was calculated with the use of Cronbach's Alpha. The Cronbach's Alpha for the service quality scale in higher education was measured to be .908. It was established that the scale in use was highly reliable (İslamoğlu & Alnaçık, 2014:293). One statement in the scale of service quality in higher education had a factor load of below .50, which is why it was removed from the analysis. The dimensions KİY ( $\alpha=.923$ ), KAY ( $\alpha=.843$ ), Kİ ( $\alpha=.841$ ), ER ( $\alpha=.867$ ), KFİ ( $\alpha=.775$ ), and KSDP ( $\alpha=.624$ ) are considered sufficiently reliable. Furthermore, the total correlation value of over .30 (Field, 2005) indicates that the correlation between each and every statement is solid enough.

A descriptive factor analysis was carried out on the scale of service quality in higher education in order to ensure construct validity. The scale was found to have a six-dimension structure. The descriptive factor analysis suggested that the KMO equaled .886, Bartlett 6835.210,  $df=35$ , and  $p<.000$ . The total variance explained value of the higher education service quality scale was calculated to be 67.108%. The results are indicated in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Higher Education Service Quality Scale Exploratory Factor Analysis

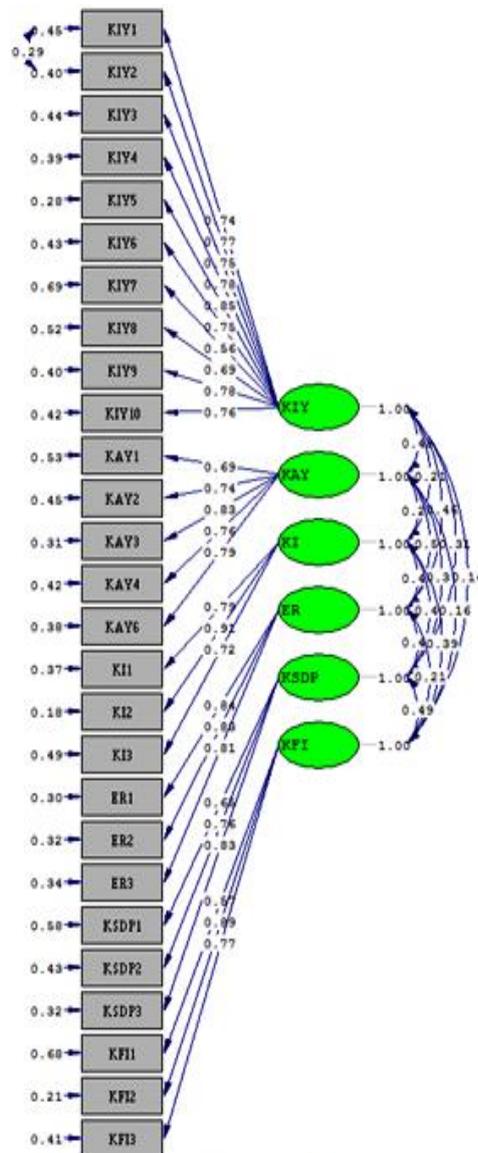
Statement of Quality of Service Scale in Higher Education	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Common Variance
KİY Statement 2	.838						1,001
KİY Statement 5	.832						1,110
KİY Statement 1	.826						1,190
KİY Statement 3	.803						1,114
KİY Statement 4	.796						.990
KİY Statement 9	.741						1,027
KİY Statement 10	.719						1,018
KİY Statement 6	.669						1,065
KİY Statement 8	.632						.946
KİY Statement 7	.528						.905
KAY Statement 3		.802					.811
KAY Statement 4		.784					.855
KAY Statement 6		.773					.793
KAY Statement 2		.769					.988
KAY Statement 1		.713					.975
Kİ Statement 1			.884				1,638
Kİ Statement 2			.862				1,461
Kİ Statement 3			.724				1,191
ER Statement 2				.832			1,015
ER Statement 1				.806			1,003
ER Statement 3				.772			.942
KFİ Statement 2					.863		1,618
KFİ Statement 3					.806		1,755
KFİ Statement 1					.733		1,718
KSDP Statement 1						.742	1,415
KSDP Statement 3						.713	1,024
KSDP Statement 2						.628	1,718
Cronbach Alpha (Factor)	.923	.843	.841	.867	.775	.624	
Cronbach Alpha (Scale)	.908						
Eigenvalues	8,431	3,171	2,568	1,620	1,219	1,110	
Explained Variance %	31,225	11,743	9,512	6,000	4,516	4,112	
Total Explained Variance (Factor) %	22,020	13,699	8,583	8,413	8,020	6,373	
Total Explained Variance (Scale)%	67,108						
<b>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy</b>							.886
<b>Bartlett's Test of Sphericity</b>				Approx. Chi-Square			6835,210
				df			351
				Sig.			.000

The confirmatory factor analysis performed on the scale corroborated its six-dimension structure. The ensemble and absolute concordance values of the scale are  $X^2= 1028.51$ ,  $df=308$ ,  $X^2/df=3.33$ ,  $RMSEA=0.072$ ,  $GFI=0.85$ ,  $CFI=0.96$ ,  $NFI= 0.94$ ,  $NNFI=0.96$ ,  $IFI= 0.96$ ,  $AGFI= 0.82$ ,  $RFI= 0.94$ , and  $RMR= 0.063= 0,063$ . The values obtained are within the accepted limits of the literature (Bayram, 2013: 75; Çapık, 2014: 199; Çokluk et al.,2012: 271-272; 41; İlhan & Çetin, 2014: 31; Kanten, 2012: 198; Meydan & Şeşen, 2015: 33; Varol, 2014: 227; Yılmaz & Varol, 2015).

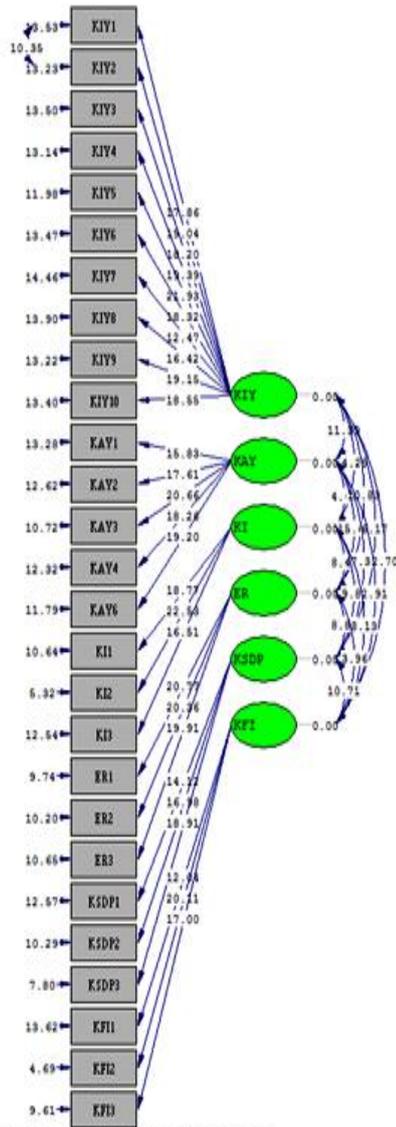
The research model comprises 27 observed variables and six implicit variables. As all the variables supported the model, none was taken out. The observed variables of KIY1 and KIY2 are connected to one another through a two-

way path. Absolute fit indices increased in the model, which ensures its suitability. Figure 1 shows the results diagram for the higher education service quality model (standard solution and t-score).

**Figure 1:** Results of the Model of Service Quality Measurement in Higher Education (Standard Solution and t-scores)



Chi-Square=1028.51, df=308, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.072



The regression coefficients and t-scores pertaining to the higher education service quality model (standard solution) show that they are significant at  $p < 0.01$ , and the model is confirmed. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis of the service quality scale in higher education was indicated in Table 4.

A simple linear regression analysis was undertaken to determine the impacts of the sub-dimensions of higher education service quality on the scale of higher education service quality. The results of the analysis are as follows:

The rate at which the administrative dimension of the institution describes the change in the scale of higher education service quality equals 596%. There is a strong positive relationship between the dimensions of KİY and YHK at a significance level of .05 ( $\beta = .772$ ;  $t = 14.081$ ;  $p = .000 < .05$ ).

**Table 4:** Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Service Quality Scale in Higher Education

Statement of Quality of Service Scale in Higher Education	Standard Solution	t-value	R <sup>2</sup>	CR	AVE
KİY Statement 1	0,74	17,86	0,64	0,86	0,69
KİY Statement 2	0,77	19,04	0,68		
KİY Statement 3	0,75	18,20	0,59		
KİY Statement 4	0,78	19,39	0,61		
KİY Statement 5	0,85	21,93	0,71		
KİY Statement 6	0,75	18,32	0,54		
KİY Statement 7	0,56	12,47	0,30		
KİY Statement 8	0,69	16,42	0,45		
KİY Statement 9	0,78	19,15	0,57		
KİY Statement 10	0,76	18,55	0,56		
KAY Statement 1	0,69	15,83	0,47	0,89	0,66
KAY Statement 2	0,74	17,61	0,55		
KAY Statement 3	0,83	20,66	0,69		
KAY Statement 4	0,76	18,23	0,58		
KAY Statement 6	0,79	19,20	0,62		
Kİ Statement 1	0,79	18,77	0,63	0,90	0,65
Kİ Statement 2	0,91	22,53	0,82		
Kİ Statement 3	0,72	16,51	0,51		
ER Statement 1	0,84	20,77	0,70	0,89	0,65
ER Statement 2	0,83	20,36	0,69		
ER Statement 3	0,81	19,91	0,66		
KSDP Statement 1	0,65	14,12	0,42	0,90	0,67
KSDP Statement 2	0,76	16,98	0,57		
KSDP Statement 3	0,83	18,91	0,68		
KFİ Statement 1	0,57	12,04	0,32	0,91	0,66
KFİ Statement 2	0,89	20,11	0,78		
KFİ Statement 3	0,77	17,00	0,59		

The rate at which the administrative dimension of the institution describes the change in the scale of higher education service quality equals .485%. There is a strong positive relationship between the dimensions of KAY and YHK at a significance level of .05 ( $\beta=.696$ ;  $t= 14.827$ ;  $p= .000<.05$ ).

The rate at which the dimension of organizational image describes the change in the scale of higher education service quality is .300%. There is a weak positive relationship between the dimensions of Kİ and YHK at a significance level of .05 ( $\beta=.547$ ;  $t= 13.846$ ;  $p= .000<.05$ ).

The rate at which the dimension of accessibility describes the change in the scale of higher education service quality is .439%. There is a strong positive relationship between the dimensions of ER and YHK at a significance level of .05 ( $\beta=.662$ ;  $t= 18.719$ ;  $p= .000<.05$ ).

The rate at which the dimension of degree programs offered by the institution describes the change in the scale of higher education service quality is .356%. There is a strong positive relationship between the dimensions of KSDP and YHK at a significance level of .05 ( $\beta=.597$ ;  $t= 15.743$ ;  $p= .000<.05$ ).

The rate at which the dimension of physical amenities describes the change in the scale of higher education service quality is .227%. There is a positive relationship between the dimensions of KSDP and YHK at a significance level of .05 ( $\beta=.477$ ;  $t= 11.480$ ;  $p= .000<.05$ ).

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

The study draws on the HEdPERF scale of service quality in higher education which is applied by way of 28 statements, six dimensions, and a five-point Likert scale that were adapted to Turkish by Bektaş and Akman (2013). The scale was left intact and implemented in its original form. The research was conducted on tourism students mainly because they are expected to engage actively in the service industry in the future. In addition, it is assumed they have a grasp of service quality as part of their education.

The study was carried out in the TR21 Thrace and revealed that the tourism students at the three universities subject to examination point out that their universities' service quality remains slightly above average ( $\bar{x}$ 3.41). In the studies conducted by Yokuş, Ayçiçek & Yelken (2017) and Özçelik & Argon (2019), students evaluate service quality slightly above the middle level and the conclusion bears similarity. However, it is possible to say that this conclusion may vary according to the institutions. For example; in the study conducted by Omidian & Nia (2018), the researchers found that the students were not satisfied with the services of the university.

In this study, it was determined difference between male and female in the evaluation of service quality. This finding bears difference the conclusions of Deveci & Aymankuy's 2017 research, Yavuz & Gülmez's 2016 research, and Yokuş, Ayçiçek & Yelken's 2017 research.

One notable finding is the participants' dissatisfaction with the physical amenities of their current universities. This finding bears similarity to the conclusions of Deveci & Aymankuy's 2017 research and Özçelik & Argon's 2019 research. In line with this conclusion, it is possible to say that students are not satisfied with dormitory facilities, social facilities and academic facilities. Likewise, in a study conducted by Cevher to determine the elements of service quality in 2015, it is seen that students' attitudes towards physical amenities are negative. Again, In 2016, Cevher examined university complaints in terms of service quality, and it was observed that students complained about physical amenities.

The data demonstrate that the institutions provide academic and administrative satisfaction. Service quality seems rather poor ( $\bar{x}$ 2.49) when regard to the statement "The social facilities in and around my school are adequate and suitable for use by students". Additionally, the statement with the highest average ( $\bar{x}$ 3.96) is "Academics are competent enough to answer my course-related questions".

The three universities in the study were the fifth or subsequent choice of the great majority of the participants. Carried out to identify the link between the sub-dimensions of the higher education service quality scale, the correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship. This finding bears similarity to the conclusion of Mang'unyi & Govender's 2014 research.

In this study, it was found that there was no difference between the service quality of three universities in the Thrace Region. Similarly, in the study conducted by Ada, Baysal & Erkan (2017), there was no difference between the two universities compared. It was found difference in only physical amenities dimension by the researchers. The researchers believe that the main reason for this difference is that the campus is located in a more central location and the opportunities are higher in İstanbul compared to the universities in Nigde. In this study, the main reason for

the absence of differences; it is believed that the three universities in the Thrace Region are located in the same geography and have similar facilities.

In the study conducted by Ada, Baysal & Erkan (2017), it was stated that perception of service quality in higher education was higher in 3rd grade than in 4th grade. This conclusion bears similarity to this study. The perception of service quality in higher education increases up to the 3rd grade and decreases slightly in the 4th grade. It is thought that the main reason for this is that students focus more on graduation, post-graduation work and work-related exams.

Initially, a descriptive factor analysis was performed to establish construct validity of the higher education service quality scale, followed by a confirmatory factor analysis. These analyses substantiated the six-dimension structure of the scale. The concordance values obtained in the study are within the accepted limits of the literature.

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to identify the impacts of the sub-dimensions on the scale and to pinpoint which of the sub-dimensions is most influential. The results demonstrate that the administrative dimension (KİY) is the most influential one whose rate of describing the change in the scale equals 59.6%.

The research offers useful insights into how the three TR21 region universities offering tourism training can enhance their services. Preliminary efforts can be concentrated on the identification of students' wants and needs so as to tackle them later on. Physical amenities can be better if such a course of action is taken.

Besides, in-service training sessions in various units of the universities are highly recommended for the improvement of service quality throughout the year. Service quality should be assessed at the beginning of an academic period so comparisons can be drawn between the results of that term and the previous one. This way, it would be possible to pass judgement on whether the problems have been fixed.

An interregional comparison can be drawn if all the universities in Turkey are included in the research, or, simply, service quality of the universities founded in the same year can be compared or a comparison can be made between the old and newly established universities.

As indicated by Barani & Kumar (2013), it is seen that there are many studies on service quality but there are few studies on service quality in higher education. It is also possible to say that domestic literature is more limited especially when compared with foreign literature. In order to increase the preferability of higher education institutions and provide a quality education service, it is important to measure the quality of service available and to determine perspective of the students. In order to contribute in this respect, it is recommended that researchers place more emphasis on studies related to service quality in higher education.

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