

Student's attitude toward university services quality assurance methodology case study: Ajman University of Science & Technology (AUST) UAE-Fujairah campus

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Keywords

Higher Education, Service Quality, Students' Attitudes, Quality Assurance Methodology

Abstract

Higher education institutions service quality assurance have given a lot of attention among those who are interested in such practice. AUST-Fujairah uses a questionnaire survey as a tool to get the students feedback. This study seeks for assessment of AUST-Fujairah Campus Students' attitude toward university service quality assurance programs. This assessment is based on whether the students have negative or positive attitudes towards their university service quality assurance methodology used, and to understand if the design and the use of quality measurement tool (questionnaire) is effective enough to get a feedback from the students. The assessment revealed that, the factors that may affect the students' attitude are:

Realizing of the service quality importance

Clarity of the purpose of the assessment

Time and location of service quality assessment

The quality assurance methodology used

Implications of the study to management of AUST-Fujairah Campus and overall conclusion are also presented

Introduction

Higher education in UAE has grown faster, according to a statistical report from the ministry of higher education and scientific research, the number of licensed active institutions are (79)(MOHESR 2016). As a part of the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research conduct program according to the Standards for Licensure and Accreditation 2011 to ensure that the newly established institutions and programs, as well as the existing ones, all meet the levels of quality, which stated that the institutions demonstrate its commitments to continuous improvement.

Higher education in UAE has exerted great efforts to develop and update the quantity and quality through the expanding the institutions of higher education both public and private with higher standards of quality (<http://www.caa.ae>)

Woodhouse (2012) argued, "As the academic world started to look to the business world for ideas about quality, it started to struggle with what is meant by quality in higher education." Over the world, the number of the External Quality Agencies (EQA) has increased, which are looking after the task of 'quality assurance'. As the organizations, generically referred to as 'quality agencies', were set up, either by governments, institutions or private entities, they needed an 'organizing principle'. The two most common, though known by a variety of names, are accreditation and audit. The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) was established in Hong Kong in 1991 by a dozen of QA agencies (Woodhouse & Kristoffersen, 2006), and Now, after over 20 years, it has about 230 member organizations, about 150 of them are quality agencies, in over 80 countries. It is a clear evident that over the last 14 years a large numbers of countries have established quality agencies.

Standard Six of (CAA Standard version 2011) is mainly focusing on the learning resources, which states that the institutions provide learning resources and services for students, and faculty

members, that adequately support teaching and learning. Those typically include the library, technology, and laboratory.

In accordance with the requirement of the standard for licensure and accreditation, (Standard 6) Ajman University of Science & Technology (AUST) - Fujairah Campus has established comprehensive Quality Assurance Programs under the supervision of the Quality Assurance & Institutional Effectiveness Unit (QAIEU).

To evaluate the services that were provided to the students and measure its effects on the students and to some extent that match the CAA Standards, AUST-Fujairah used questionnaire survey as a tool to get feedback from the students.

This study seeks to assess AUST-Fujairah Campus Students' attitude toward university service quality assurance programs. The assessment is based on whether students have negative or positive attitudes towards university service quality assurance, methodology used and to understand whether the design and use of quality measurement tool (questionnaire) is effective enough to get a feedback from the students. This process provides university with some suggestions to enhance the quality of services given to students (non-teaching-services), as well as to improve the physical facilities.

Literature review

In order to provide a theoretical framework for the present study, and related literature services quality assurance in higher education, the review of literature focused on four critical elements: Higher Education, Service Quality, Students Attitudes, and Quality Assurance Methodology

"In education, quality control (internally, at least) requires feedback from staff, students and ideally employers. It requires regular monitoring and review of modules, programs and courses" (Doherty, 1994, p. 11)

In today's highly competitive environment, gives high attention to measure the quality of services provided to the students in higher education institutions, is key for success. Kimani, Kagira, and Kendi (2011). "Quality involves doing many other things well, but unless an institution puts its customers first, the preconditions for developing quality will not exist" (Sallis, 2002, p. 2). Now day's quality assurance and Total Quality Management (TQM) are widely used (Vazzana, Backmann, & Elfrink, 1997), which required all universities teachers and employees to be involved in the quality improvement process (Hrnciar & Madzik 2013). Higher education institutions have unique characteristics that require an approach different from business and industry in the implementation of TQM (Soni, Chaubey, & Ryan, 2000). Studies had established that the higher the services quality the more satisfied customers (students) (Petruzzellis, D'Uggerto, and Romanazzi 2006). While in other hand Douglas and Barnes (2006) found that (based on the results of comprehensive students studying within the Faculty of Business and Law at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU)) many of physical aspects of the university services are not important about student's satisfaction.

Abu Hasan, Ilias, Abd Rahman, and Abd Razak (2008) in their study has mentioned that the service quality has significant positive relationship with student's satisfaction. Thus, it confirms improving service quality it may potentially improve the students' satisfaction as well as that priority of the private higher institutions because they have to compete to earn interest from students to study there. Zafiroopoulos & Vrana (2008) in their paper about the service quality assessment in a Greek higher education institute concluded that there is an existing gap in how students and staff regard education quality; this gap consists mainly in differentiation regarding expected and perceived quality. Staff have greater expectation, while students have lower expectation and they perceive current educational status to be lower level

Previously students are less concerned regarding the service quality, but in today's highly educated and sophisticated environment they concern more about the services quality of higher education outputs (Verma, & Prasad 2012). In their study, regard service quality in higher education-

a case study of Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Alani et al (2015) found that" the results of the study showed that the quality of education services provided by UBD was only satisfactory among all students, rather than being exceptional"

Moreover, there are other factors, which imposed higher educational institutions to concern more on service quality assurance such as political, technological, economic, and social changes (Abu-Al-Sha'r & AL-Harahsheh 2013). Questionnaire is the main instrument used to get students feedback over the world. It used by millions of students near the end of every semester (Kember, Leung, & Kwan: 2002). However, Brennan, & Williams (2004), stated that Feedback from students has always played an important role in the maintenance of quality and standards in higher education. As quality assurance arrangements have themselves become more formalized, will be also too the arrangements for the collection, analysis and usage of student feedback.

In spite of the fact that the questionnaire is the main instrument used to get students feedback, many students and teachers believe that students feedback is useful and informative, but for a number of reasons do not take students feedback sufficiently seriously Richardson (2005). Research has shown that when students assess the quality of services provided by higher educational institutions they could not help but just compare the performance with expectation (Wright & O'Neill, 2002). There are many institutions tried to assess the student's expectations. Wilkins et al (2012) found that students are generally (very) satisfied about what they have been offered, and this satisfaction relates to aspects of teaching and learning and to elements of the context in which they study (institutional facilities, social life, etc.)

Based on literature, service quality has five dimensions, tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy which result from the SERVQUAL scale identified by Parasuraman et al. (1988), which compared service performance against expectation as result of study conducted earlier (1985) on four different types of service sector showed that the service quality had ten dimensions as reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, understanding/ knowing the customers, and tangibility.

In their study quality assessment in higher education using the SERVQUAL model, Donlagic & Fazlic (2015) identified that "The SERVQUAL model based on the adapted scales of the higher education sector can be used in assessing the quality in higher education institutions. Based on the research results a negative gap between students' expectations and perceptions of the service quality was identified."

Wang & Shieh (2006) employed SERQUAL Scale to study the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction: the example of CJCUC library, the results showed a significantly positive relationship between overall service quality and user satisfaction. In addition, all service dimensions have significant impact on the user satisfaction except "responsiveness"

Harvey (2003) argued that in order to complete the student's feedback it should follow specific cycle of feedback and action which it could be a generic cycle

The student's feedback cycle include:

Stakeholders determined questions

Questionnaire distribution

Analysis of results

Report noting areas for action

Consultation process

Action plan

Implementation and monitoring

Feedback to stakeholders

Source: Harvey, L. (2003) 'Students Feedback', Quality in Higher Education, 9 (1), pp. 3-20

Harvey & Williams (2010) outlined that "students feedback survey have played an increasingly prominent role in quality assurance since 1990s." and they suggested that it is still not clear that, even after 15 years, quality assurance systems have really enhanced higher education. E. Zaitseva et al. (2013) examined the usage of the concept mapping software to aid interpretation of the qualitative data from student satisfaction survey. The analysis revealed differences in student priorities and attitudes across the three years of an undergraduate degree, and concluded that this approach to analysis might benefit the work of quality assurance teams.

Attitudes are enduring systems of positive or negative evaluations (Anastasi1992), although there was an agreement on the definition of attitudes, the most focus on its positive and negative effects. Johns & Saks (2013) defined attitudes as "a fairly stable evaluative tendency to responded consistently to some, person, or category of people"

The student feedback questionnaire

Questionnaire widely used by many universities as a tool of quality assurance feedback in higher education. D. Kember et al. (2002b) concluded that there has to be a question over the continued usage of the student feedback questionnaires. Their regular use is expensive in terms of both funds and time.

Many authors suggested other instruments to assess services quality in higher education. Firdaus (2004) proposed HEdPERF (Higher Education PERFormance), a new and more comprehensive performance-based measuring scale that attempts to capture the authentic determinants of service quality within the higher education sector. Senthilkumar & Arulraj (2011) developed a new model, namely service quality measurement in higher education in India (SQM-HEI) for the measurement of service quality in higher educational institutions, Senthilkumar & Arulraj (2011p 76) concluded that the mediated SQM-HEI model empirically proved that the placement is the mediated factor for the quality higher education

SERVQUAL scale is famous and important model of service quality have been used in a variety of published studies. Parasuraman et al. (1985) who concluded that consumer satisfaction leads to perceived service quality advanced the original model of service quality (SERVQUAL) and the difference between consumers' expectations and the actual performance of a specific organization drives the perception of service quality

On the hand, Cronin and Taylor (1992) identified alternative model based on the measurement of service performance called SERVPERF, which maintains only the perceptions of service quality. While Teas (1993) developed the evaluated performance (EP), scale that measures the gap between perceived performance and the ideal amount of a feature rather than the customer's expectations. Firdaus (2005) compared between HEdPERF versus SERVPERF empirically test a new industry-specific scale, HEdPERF (Higher Education PERFormance) to capture the authentic determinants of service quality within higher education sector. Firdaus (2005 p 305) found that "In terms of unidimensionality, reliability, and validity, HEdPERF explained variance within the higher education setting better in comparison to SERVPERF"

The student voice is increasingly used as a measure of educational quality. Shah Sid Nai (2013) said that" while the measurement and use of student experience data is well known in some countries; such developments are emerging in the UAE region and contributing to quality assurance."

Ajman University of Science & Technology (AUST) has two campuses; Ajman Campus located in The Emirate of Ajman & Fujairah Campus, which located in The Emirate of Al-Fujairah. (AUST)-Fujairah Campus the university in which the study was conducted, was opened in 2000 and started using the student feedback questionnaire since 2002, which established specialized unit to take the responsibilities of quality assurance titled as Quality Assurance and Institutional Research Unit (QAIRU). The primary goal of the Quality Assurance and Institutional Research Unit (QAIRU) is the assessment of the student learning and teaching processes as well the administrative and

support operations. This is carried out through systematically collecting and analyzing data, reporting findings, and following up on the implementation of the recommended procedures. (QAIRU 2016)

It was university policy that a minimum of once per semester questionnaires distributed to students, after data collection, data analyzed, and the following steps are:

preparation of reports,

communication of results and findings,

and follow-up of the implementation of recommended actions.

Table 1 shows assessment tools used by (QAIRU).

Table 1: Assessment Tools Used By (QAIRU).

Department	Survey Form	Higher Administration	Internal Audit
Department of Admission & Registration	Annual	Twice per semester	Once per semester
Human Resources Department	Annual	Once per semester	Once per semester
University Relations	Annual	Once per semester	Once per semester
Financial Department	Annual	Once per semester	Once per semester
Student affairs	Annual	Once per semester	Once per semester
Center of Training and Continuous Education	Annual	Once per semester	Once per semester
The Information Technology (IT)	Annual	Once per semester	Once per semester
University Facilities & Services	Annual	Once per semester	Once per semester
Library	Annual	Once per semester	Once per semester

Source: AUST-Institutional Effectiveness Manual (2014)

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitude of the students in AUST-Fujairah Campus towards university services quality assurance methodology. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Survey students attitudes (Negatives or Positives) toward university services quality assurance methodology used
2. Identify the problems facing conducting student's feedback in the university.
3. Identify strategies and good practice for university services quality assurance

Statement of the problem

The mechanisms used by AUST-Fujairah campus to collect students feedback, for the purpose of assessing the university services quality, is the questionnaire mechanism which most commonly used by higher education institutions. (Brennan & William 2004b). From the observation while the collection of feedback from the students through questionnaire mechanism students they have negative attitudes toward filling out the questionnaire.

In terms of mechanistic or ritualistic response either because lack of knowledge about the importance of services quality assurance programs used by the university, or unclear purpose of the questionnaire, or the time at which data collected, or because of the imperfect design of questionnaire. It therefore becomes imperative to take a closer look at those attitudes, which have an effect on how students give feedback and will in turn affect the overall success of the university services quality assurance programs.

Research hypothesis

Students they have negative attitudes toward university service quality assurance methodology because the lack knowledge of service quality assurance importance
 Students they do not have ideas about the usage of the feedback (clarity of purpose).
 Students they have negative attitudes toward university service quality assurance methodology because the time & location of service quality assessment is inadequate
 Students have negative attitudes toward questionnaire design
 Students have negative attitudes toward Quality Assurance methodology because of motivation to complete the questionnaire

Research design and methodology

The present study was a survey of Student's attitude towards university services quality assurance Case Study: AUST-Fujairah Campus: Data was collected from a stratified random sample of 562 students selected from each of the 8 AUST-Fujairah Campus Colleges, College of Information, Mass Communication & Humanities, College of Business Administration, College of Education & Basic Science, College of Law, College of pharmacy & Health Science, College of Dentistry, College of Information Technology, and College of Engineering. Questionnaires were distributed to regular students during the fall semester 2015-2016. The completed questionnaires collected and then sent it back to the researcher.

Table 2: Representative Sample of Respondents who participated in the Study

Colleges	No of students registered in fall semester 2015-2016	Students (Stratified) random sampling	% Students (Stratified) random sampling
College of Information, Mass Communication & Humanities	392	120	31 %
College of Business Administration	94	35	37 %
College of Education & Basic Science	232	76	33 %
College of Law	364	116	32 %
College of pharmacy & Health Science	162	60	37 %
College of Dentistry	322	106	33 %
College of Information Technology	56	21	38 %
College of Engineering	83	28	34 %
Total	1705	562	33 %

Source: Field Data (2015)

From the table above, the College of Information Technology had Students (Stratified) random sampling (38%) while College of Information, Mass Communication & Humanities and College of Law had the least (31.0%) and (32%) respectively

Survey questionnaires reflecting all research areas have been used as an instrument for collecting data using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, to strongly disagree to determine the response of the participant.

The first part of the questionnaire covers information, includes questions about student gender, college, and semester. While the second part includes 29 questions regarding the opinion of the participant on the University Service Quality Assurance Questionnaire. The first category is designed to measure students' knowledge of service quality assurance importance. The second category of this part concerns about clarity of purpose of the quality assurance programs; the third

category relates to the focus on time & location of service quality assessment process; the fourth category investigates the questionnaire design; the fifth category examines the problems with quality assurance methodology

Data analysis

The statistical program SPSS, was used to analyze the data collected. A descriptive statistical analysis with reliability test using Cronbach Alpha, moreover testing the hypothesis F-test was performed.

For examining Student's Attitude towards University Services Quality Assurance Methodology in Ajman University of Science & Technology (AUST) UAE-Fujairah Campus, hypotheses were evaluated. Seven Hundred questionnaires were distributed and 562 have been returned with 80% response rate.

Study reliability

As a measure of internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha is used as a statistical tool to assess how reliably survey or test items that are designed to measure the same construct actually do so. It is widely employed, because it uses a great deal of information about the items in questions and their correlations (Alan, 1995). The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of this instrument was acceptable at 0.721 based on the standardized item at 0.70 and the number of items at 22 indicates that the measuring instruments are capable of consistently measuring the same construct (Table 5).

As a measure of internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha assesses how reliably survey or test items that are designed to measure the same construct actually do so. Higher values of Cronbach's alpha suggest higher internal consistency. A historical benchmark value of 0.7 is commonly used to suggest that at least some of the items measure the same construct. However, benchmarks usually depend on the standards in your subject area and the number of items .

If the Cronbach's alpha is high, then evidence explains that the items measure the same construct, customer satisfaction. On the other hand, if the value of alpha is low, then the items have little in common and are not good measures of the single construct.

Table 3: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items	No. of items
.721	.694	22

Data presentation, analysis and discussion

Table 4 shows that 127 of the participants (22.6%) are male, while 435 are female (77.4%). The majority of the participants were female this is because of the majority of AUST-Fujairah Campus students were female (60%) (AUST-Fact Book 2015), the previous information also was illustrated in the Figure 2.

Table 4: Participants Gender

Gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	127	22.6	22.6	22.6
	Female	435	77.4	77.4	100.0
	Total	562	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data (2015)

Figure 2: Participants Gender

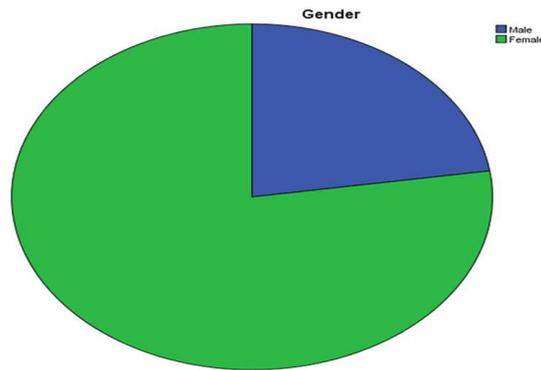


Table 5 shows respondents' distribution over the AUST-Fujairah campus eight colleges

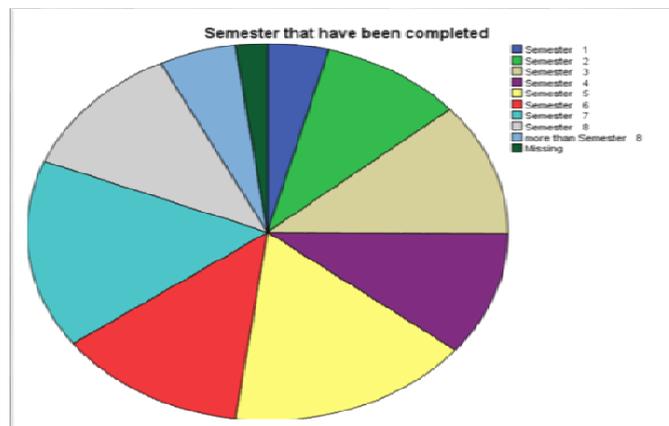
Table 5: Students Colleges

Colleges		Frequency	Percent
Valid	College of Information, Mass Communication & Humanities	120	21.4
	College of Business Administration	35	6.2
	College of Education & Basic Science	76	13.5
	College of Law	116	20.6
	College of pharmacy & Health Science	60	10.7
	College of Dentistry	106	18.9
	College of Information Technology	21	3.7
	College of Engineering	28	5.0
	Total	562	100.0

Source: Field Data (2015)

From the table above, the College of Information, Mass Communication & Humanities had the highest Students response (21%) while College of Information and College of Engineering had the least (3.7%) and (5%) respectively; the previous information also was illustrated in the Figure 3.

Figure 3: Students Colleges



The semester that have been completed by respondent presented in table 6

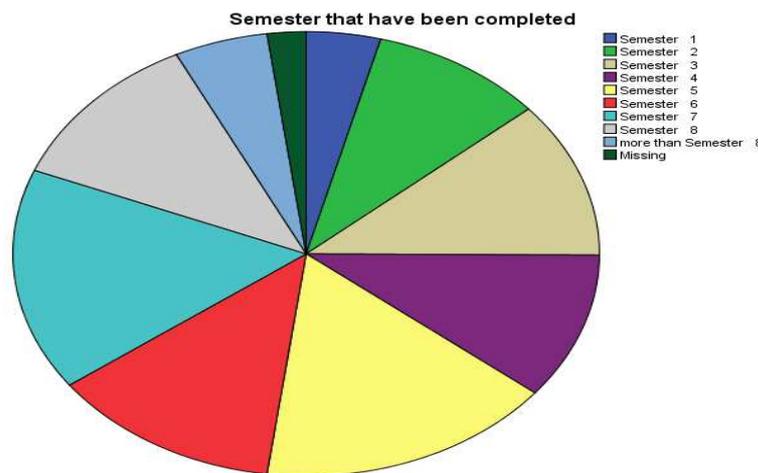
Table 6: Semester that have been completed

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Semester 1	23	4.1
	Semester 2	54	9.6
	Semester 3	64	11.4
	Semester 4	60	10.7
	Semester 5	92	16.4
	Semester 6	72	12.8
	Semester 7	91	16.2
	Semester 8	65	11.6
	more than Semester 8	29	5.2
Total		550	97.9
Missing	System	12	2.1
Total		562	100.0

Source: Field Data (2015)

As in Table 6, most of respondent completed semester 7 (16.2%), which indicate that the students are familiar with the quality assurance process, the previous information also was illustrated in the Figure 4

Figure 4



The information for the number of respondents who participated in the quality assurance programs during their study in the university exhibited in the following table and figure.

Table 7: Did you participate in the University Service Quality Assurance

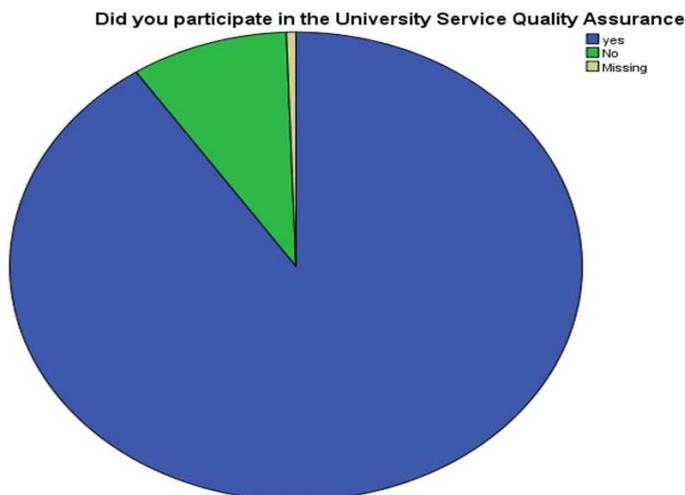
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	509	90.6	91.1	91.1
	No	50	8.9	8.9	100.0
	Total	559	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	3	.5		
Total		562	100.0		

Source: Field Data (2015)

From the table above it can be observed that 509 (90, 6 %) of the respondent participated in the university quality assurance programs, while those who are not participated only 50 (8, 9 %)

students, and only 3 (, 5%) missing information, the previous information also was illustrated in the Figure 5

Figure 5



Testing of hypotheses

Five hypotheses were formulated for testing using the five-point scale from Strongly Agree (1), to strongly disagree (5). (See the Appendix)

Table 8 shows hypothesis test results of this study

Table 8: Hypothesis Test

Test	Hypothesis	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Cronbach's Alpha
H1	Students they have negative attitudes towards university service quality assurance methodology because the lack knowledge of service quality assurance importance	31.06	14.56	54.4	0.620
H2	Students they do not have ideas about the use of the feedback (clarity of purpose)	38.02	14.46	47.54	0.594
H3	Students they have negative attitudes towards university service quality assurance methodology because the time & location of service quality assessment is inadequate	23.03	12.4	64.57	0.682
H4	Students have negative attitudes towards questionnaire design	23.2	13.725	63.1	0.627
H5	Students have negative attitudes towards Quality Assurance methodology because of motivation to complete the questionnaire	57.82	15.56	26.6	0.950
	Over All	34.626	14.141	51.242	

Source: Field Data 2015

In deciding whether students they had negative or positive attitudes toward AUST-Fujairah Campus Services Quality Assurance Methodology, it is obvious from data on table 8 above that 54, 4 % of respondents were had positive attitudes about the importance of service quality assurance while 31, 06 % had negative attitudes. The majority of students 47.54 had positive attitudes toward the use of feedback, while 38, 02 %had negative attitudes. Regarding the time and location of the quality assurance assessment currently used students were had positive attitudes 64, 57%, however

23, 03% had negative attitudes. Students were have positive attitudes toward the questionnaire design 63, 1%, but the 23, 2% of the students had negative attitudes. Despite the above positive attitudes for the four first hypothesis the last hypotheses which indicates that students have negative attitudes toward their motivation to complete the questionnaire 57, 82%, while 26.6% had positive attitudes. This either because of doubt the effect of quality assurance action and usefulness of quality assurance activities or because of the lack of knowledge and skills about quality assurance methodology

Conclusion and recommendations

Based on the findings above, it is concluded this study focused on the issue of service quality and students' attitudes. One objectives of this study is to investigate the students attitudes toward AUST-Fujairah Campus services quality assurance methodology, the study revealed that 51.24% of respondents had over all positive attitudes toward service quality programs. The finding demonstrated negative attitudes towards the methodology used in assessing the service quality assurance due to the doubt of the effect of quality assurance action and usefulness of quality assurance activities or because of the lack of knowledge and skills about quality assurance methodology. Thus, the followings are recommended for enhanced service quality assurance in AUST-Fujairah Campus:

1. Introduce the SERVQUAL model that grouped the measurement of different services provided to students in one model (Parasuraman et al., 1990) which include assurance, empathy, reliability, responsiveness and tangibility
2. Awareness campaign to students who are yet unaware of services assurance methodology used by AUST-Fujairah Campus since there cannot be enough of such a campaign.

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