The Examination and Comparison of Recreational Sports Centers With Regard to Quality of Service

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ABSTRACT:

The goal of this study is to analyse private sports centers offering recreational activities in the cities of Izmir and Manisa (Turkey) according to the opinions of voluntary members and compare them based on several variables. The "Service Quality Assessment Scale" developed by Lam and adapted to Turkish with a validity and reliability procedure was used as a data collection tool in the current study. The study was carried out with 527 people including 177 women and 350 men. In the analyses, descriptive statistics were used in the distribution of the demographic data and service quality satisfaction scores of the participants, and the independent t-test and one-way variance analysis (ANOVA) were utilized to determine if the demographic data led to any significant statistical difference in the service quality satisfaction scores. Significance level was taken as p<0.05 and confidence interval was accepted as 95%. According to the findings of the study, the average difference values of the participants (service quality satisfaction scores) were determined to be in the negative direction in all the related dimensions (perceived service quality - expected service quality). It was found that the service quality satisfaction scores of the participants from Manisa in all the dimensions except for the personnel dimension were lower than the scores of the participants from Izmir. Compared with male participants, the personnel satisfaction scores of female participants were found to be lower. Those whose monthly income was 1000 TL or lower perceived sports center services of changing rooms and facilities to be insufficient compared with those whose monthly income was between 1001 and 2000 TL or between 2001 and 4000 TL.

KEY WORDS: Recreation, sports, service quality
INTRODUCTION

In our day, manufacture of high quality products and services is one of the most important problems of companies. The fact that the service industry has developed very rapidly in recent years, that competition has expanded to much wider markets, and that humans have become much more sensitive and conscious about quality, all cause service companies to attach more importance to quality [1].

Quality is considered to be a strategic tool for producing goods and services, which can satisfy customer needs, increase the activity efficiency of companies, and decreasing costs through an efficient cost control process. It is more difficult to explain the concept of quality in the service industry when compared with other industries. Quality in the service industry is considered to be an element directly proportional to suitability to the needs and expectations of customers, continuous success, perfect performance of services, and measurable and assessable customer satisfaction [2].

The desire of humans and systems to reach perfection has raised the reality of the concept of quality. It is derived from "Qualis" which means how something is formed in Latin and expressed with the word "Qualitas" [3]. In daily conversations, quality in general refers to superiority and fitness, that is, it implies that a given product or service has good characteristics. In this sense, quality involves personal values [4].

According to the common characteristics of the definitions of quality made by worldwide institutions and experts that explain the concept of quality in the best way, quality for a product is defined as going beyond customer satisfaction based on a prediction of customer demands and satisfying customers during the natural life of the product. The American Society for Quality Control defined quality as "all of the characteristics of a product or service which reveal its ability to meet a certain requirement" [5, 6]. In the contemporary science of management, quality is a series of efforts which do not only focus on a product but aim to render all the production process reliable, efficient and effective [7].

Service is an important value which ensures increase of success for companies. For customers, service is a benefit received and therefore the quality of a service helps maximize the profit of a company and minimize adversities [8]. A high level of service quality is essential for service companies to leave a positive impression in the minds of customers, increase their market share and survive under intense competition conditions. For this purpose, companies need to measure and assess service quality and service performance all the times [9].

The concept of service derives from the business literature. Although services were not accepted as a part of the field of marketing before 1975, this approach changed when an article titled "Breaking Free from Product" by a New York banker named Lynn Shostack was published in the "Journal of Marketing" in 1977. The start of the field of service marketing happened with this article [10].

A service is defined as an activity or benefit which is offered by a group to another and which is not resulted in the ownership of anything [11]. Lovelock and Jochen (2012) defined service as an action or performance offered by one party to another. According to these definitions, services are abstract and humans and/or machinery [12] produce them. Services are characterized in four ways including intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability [13].

The formation of service quality began as a result of the increasing importance of service from the 1960s with the development of economy. By adding service to product definition, these developments contributed to the expansion of the traditional definition of a product. In the 1960s and 70s, many manufacturing companies began to be interested in this aspect of quality as well. The period
between 1980 and 1985 was characterized by a high level of interest and excitement regarding service quality. The period between 1985 and 1995 on the other hand focused more on efforts towards experimental tests and support activities. After 1995, along with the affordability and applicability of service materials and with the formation of service management as a result of these applications, service quality became the most studied topic in this field. In and after the 2000s, companies [14] carried out many studies on service quality including on customer satisfaction and performance of better services.

As service quality is a multifaceted concept, it is difficult to make a specific definition for it [15]. Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1985) described service quality as a comparison of expected service and perceived service performance [13]. Edwardsson (1998) defined service quality as the extent of being able to meet customer expectations and identifying their needs [16]. Teas (1993) on the other hand defined service quality as a comparison of performance and ideal standards [17].

Service quality is also defined as the amount at which a service meets or exceeds customer expectations [18]. Definitions of service quality differ also because service is a performance. Some researchers divides service quality into two.

Companies operating in the service industry has the advantage of a feedback mechanism regarding service quality which is offered by the direct relationship between their employees and their customers and which can function very fast. However, the fact that they cannot utilize these advantages properly and the additional difficulty of defining the quality characteristics of services and of differentiating suitable characteristics make it more difficult to clarify the concept of quality [19]. Characteristics of sports services show parallelism with the characteristics of other service fields. However, these characteristics bring many differences from many other fields of service in the presentation and shaping of sports services. Especially in those sports services, which are based on active participation, these differences make themselves evident [20].

With the increasing number of sports and fitness centers in many countries in recent years, it is observed that the centers now focus more on service quality. The expectations of those who attend to such centers regarding sports products and services also increase [21]. Effectiveness of sports organizations mostly depends on how managers work to acquire and maintain customers. In sports organizations, customer loyalty is the essential goal because customers both make an economic contribution to organizations and they also provide a great support for an organization to realize its goals [22]. In this context, success of sports organizations and fitness centers is directly proportional to their ability of identifying and meeting such expectations and also reaching the targeted service quality perception [23].

The development of technology has led to the emergence of a sedanter lifestyle on the one hand that facilitates people's lives. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), inactivity is the main cause of many health problems in contemporary life. Physical exercise is the most important tool recommended to overcome health problems. Especially after the 1960s, the increase in interest in leisure time sports services has led to the emergence of a new sector of sports consciousness. The public has been inadequate at certain points while trying to serve people in such a way that they are not profit-oriented. Therefore, private sports operators have undertaken an important responsibility to fill this gap. The quality of service of the individuals who continue to the sports centers surveyed in this research is relevant and can give an idea in terms of scheduling the activities to be presented in these increasing centers. In addition, the results to be obtained can be an idea for sports scientists and other researchers in the field. Moreover,
research can be regarded as important when considering the numerical limitations of the studies on the subject in the national literature.

**METHODS**

The general screening model was utilized in this study, which aims to examine and compare private sports facilities offering recreational activities in the cities of Izmir and Manisa in terms of their service quality. General screening models are applied on a population or a group, example or sample taken from the population to reach a general determination about that population [24].

**The Population and Sample of the Study**

The population of the study consists of private sports centers which offer recreational activities in the cities of Izmir and Manisa, have at least 350 members, and the price ranges of which are close to each other. The sample consisted of 6 sports centers and 527 participants who continued to those centers. The study was carried out including 177 females (33.58%) and 350 males (66.41%) who continued to the mentioned sports centers.

**Data Collection Tool**

For the study, the "Service Quality Assessment Scale", the validity and reliability works of the Turkish version of which was made by Gürbüz (2003), was utilized [25]. The original study, "Service Quality Assessment Scale" (SQAS), was developed by Lam (2000) in order to measure the service quality of health and sports centers [26]. The SQAS was designed to assess the service quality perceived in health and sports centers but subsequently it was extended so as to assess expected and perceived service quality. The Turkish version of the "Service Quality Assessment Scale" consists of a total of 5 dimensions and 40 items including personnel (9 items), schedule (7 items), changing rooms (5 items), facility (13 items) and childcare (6 items). Because the sports centers included in the study did not have childcare services, this dimension and the related items were not measured and thus the "Service Quality Assessment Scale" which consisted of 5 dimensions and 34 items was used. Removal of the childcare dimension from the study does not affect the validity or reliability of the scale [25].

An internal consistency analysis was carried out in order to test the reliability of the scale for this study and the Cronbach alpha value was found to be 0.91 for the whole scale and 0.88, 0.93, 0.85 and 0.88, respectively. The statements contained in the scale were measured by a 7-Point Likert rating. For the expected service quality, a range from 1 (of little importance) to 7 (very important) and, for the perceived service quality, a range from 1 (weak) to 7 (perfect) was adopted.

This study, which assesses the service quality of sports centers in the cities of Izmir and Manisa, consists of two main sections including the demographic information form through which the demographic data of the participants were obtained, on the one hand, and the "Service Quality Assessment Scale" consisting of 34 items and 4 dimensions, on the other hand.

**Collection of Data**

After the identification of the sports centers (6) which would be included in the study in the cities of Izmir and Manisa, information was provided to the members who went to those centers about the study and voluntary members were included in the study. A total of 750 scales were distributed to the involved sports centers and, along those scales, 527 which were fully completed and returned were taken for assessment.

**Definition of Variables**

Dependent variables were personnel service quality scores, schedule service quality scores, changing room service quality scores (average difference values) and facility service quality scores. Independent variables were gender, city, educational status, income level and marital status.
Analysis of Data

As a result of the statistics that were carried out, the descriptive statistics were used to determine the percentage and frequency distribution of gender, city, educational status, income level, marital status, and frequency of weekly attendance to sports centers. The independent t-test was used to compare different binary groups and parametric one-way variance analysis (ANOVA) or the nonparametric Kruskal Wallis test was applied for comparing more than two groups depending on the result of homogeneity and distribution tests. The "normal plots" test was used for normal distribution test and the "Levene test" and the "homogeneity of variances" tests were used for homogeneity test. In the comparisons for more than two groups, when a statistical difference occurred, then the HSD Post-hoc test was conducted to determine the source of the difference and, when a difference occurred as a result of the nonparametric Kruskal Wallis test, the Tamhane test was made. However, when the analyses were being carried out, the parametric one-way variance analysis and nonparametric Kruskal Wallis tests were administered to the groups, which were not distributed normally and homogeneously, and both of the tests produced the same results. Therefore, in the findings section, the analysis results are given by the one-way variance analysis (ANOVA).

In the stage of calculating the "Service Quality Assessment Scale" scores, the total scores of the "expected" and the "perceived" service for each sub dimension of the scale were calculated and then the difference between the "expected" and the "perceived" scores (perceived-expected) were calculated. In the case the calculated difference was "zero", then it was concluded that the expected and the perceived service quality were equal, and, in the case the difference is "positive", it was concluded that the service quality perceived by the participants was higher than the expected service quality, and, in the case the difference was "negative", it was concluded that the service quality expected by the participants was higher than the service quality they perceived.

STATISTICAL RESULTS

It was determined that a total of 527 people were included in the study including 52.2% (275) from Izmir and 47.8% (252) from Manisa. Table 1 and Table 2 give the demographic characteristics of the participants. In Table 1, it is seen that the rate of female participants was 21.63% (114) while the rate of male participants was 30.55% (161) among those who participated in the study from Izmir and that 115 of them were married while 160 of them were single. As for the gender distribution of those who participated in the study from Manisa, 11.95% (63 people) of them were females while 35.86% (189) of them were males and 96 of them were married while 155 of them were single.

Table 2 provide information about the income and educational levels of the participants. When the monthly income level distributions of the members of the sports centers were examined, it was seen that 34.5% (182) earned 1001 TL or less, 32.4% (171) earned between 1001 and 2000 TL, 22.6% (119) earned between 2001 and 4000 TL and 10.4% (55) earned 4001 TL or above. As for the educational level distributions of the participants, 5.1% (27) were primary education graduates, 29.8% (157) were high school graduates, 58.4% (308) had a bachelor’s degree, and 6.6% (35) had a master's degree.

Table 3 shows the data which are obtained by subtracting the expected service quality scores from the perceived service quality scores in the personnel, schedule, changing room and facility sub dimensions of the participants to obtain the means and standard deviations of the average difference values. As seen in the table, all the scores are negative. The scores from the lowest to the highest are the sub dimensions of facility (-1.15 ± 0.32), the sub dimension of changing rooms (-1.09 ± 0.31), the sub dimension of schedule (-0.93 ± 0.25) and the sub dimensions of personnel (-0.87 ± 0.25). The median score of
the average difference values was found to be (-1.01 ± 0.29).

When Table 4 was examined, a statistically significant difference (p<0.05) was found in terms of "schedule", "changing rooms", and "facility" scores in the comparison that was carried out according to the cities in which participants were located while no statistically significant difference was found among the cities in terms of the "personnel" scores.

In the comparison of female participants by their cities (Table 5), a statistically significant difference (p<0.05) was found in terms of the "changing rooms" score while no statistically significant difference was found regarding the "personnel", "schedule" and "facility" scores.

As for Table 6, when the data were examined in terms of income level, a statistically significant difference (p<0.05) was found in terms of the "personnel", "schedule" and "facility" scores.
The results of the Post-Hoc TUKEY test which was made to determine the source of the difference that occurred in terms of the "changing rooms" and "facility" scores in Table 7 show that the difference is created by the group which had a monthly income of 1000 TL and less. According to the table, the participants who earned 1000 TL compared with those who earned 1001-2000 TL considered the service quality of these dimensions to be insufficient.

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When Table 8 was examined, no statistically significant difference was found in terms of the "personnel", "schedule", "changing rooms", "facility" and "total" scores in the educational level comparison.

**DISCUSSION**

It is seen upon an examination of the sports center members taking place in the study in terms of gender that 33.6% (177) were females and 66.4% (350) were males. These findings reveal that women do not go to such centers as much as men. Mullin et al. (2000) emphasized that gender is an important factor in participation in sports activities [27]. It might become included based on this fact that women prefer different activities (like tennis, swimming, yoga, walking, etc.) instead of attending to sports centers.

While a great majority (58.44%) of those who join sports centers are bachelors, the rate of primary education graduates is very low (5.12%). Among the participants, the number of high school graduates was 157 (29.79%) and the number of those who had a master's degree was 35 (6.64%). The high educational level is not surprising when the cities where the study was carried out are taken into consideration because Izmir and Manisa are cities where educational opportunities and levels are high. It can also be supposed when considering the situation from another perspective that those with a higher educational level have a higher rate of participation in sports activities when compared with those with a lower educational level. When it is considered that joining sports centers is...
often based on a purpose of being healthy, losing weight and getting stronger, it might be concluded that those with a high educational level act by this awareness and join sports centers at higher rates.

Significant parts of the participants (34.53%) were going to the sports centers although they got a minimum salary or a salary between 1001 and 2000 TL (32.44%). When considered along with the high number of bachelor participants, it is likely that this group mostly consists of university students. According to an assessment of this group based on university students and single participants, when assessed regarding those study participants who go to such centers to make exercises on certain days and hours of a week against a monthly membership fee which approximately correspond to 1/10 of their monthly income, it can be said that they engage in a very optimal and beneficial activity. Among the study participants, 212 (40.23%) were married and 315 (59.77%) were single when they were included in the study. The proportional majority of the single participants was an expected situation. The fact that married people have more responsibilities and probably children might have prevented them from having the same amount of free time as singles for joining sports centers.

The average difference values of the participants (service quality scores) were in the negative direction. The biggest difference between the perceived and expected service quality average scores was in the dimension of facility (-1.15 ± 0.32) and differences were observed in a negative direction in the dimensions of changing rooms (-1.09 ± 0.31), schedule (-0.93 ± 0.25) and personnel (-0.87 ± 0.25), respectively. Findings show that the expectations of the study participants from sports centers were above their perceptions. The fact that the service quality scores were negative, that is, the fact that the perceived service quality was lower than the expected service quality does not necessarily mean that the service quality of sports centers are actually low or poor because expectations about service fields are always high [28]. Chelladurai and Chang (2000) indicated that everyone might have a different understanding of quality [29].

When the average service quality scores of the participants by cities were assessed, it was shown that the lowest average scores for Manisa was (-1.271 ± 0.554) for the dimension of facility and, for Izmir, (-0.927 ± 0.504) for the dimension of changing rooms and (-1.057 ± 0.405) for the dimension of facility. When female participants were assessed by cities, it was found that there are statistically significant differences in the dimension of changing rooms (p<0.01) and in the total score of service quality (p<0.05). For Manisa, the average score for changing rooms was (-1.306 ± 0.575) and the total service quality average score was (-1.100 ± 0.273) and, for Izmir, the average score for changing rooms was (-1.027 ± 0.44) and the total service quality average score was (-1.014 ± 0.269). When male participants were assessed by cities, a statistically significant difference was found in the schedule, changing rooms, facility and service quality total scores (p<0.05, p<0.01. p<0.01. p<0.01., respectively) excepting the dimension of personnel. As for the average scores for male participants in Manisa, the schedule dimension was (-0.979 ± 0.511), the dimension of changing rooms was (-1.263 ± 0.548), the facility dimension was (-1.252 ± 0.504) and the total was (-1.081 ± 0.300), and, for Izmir, the schedule dimension was (-0.863 ± 0.411), the dimension of changing rooms was (-0.857 ± 0.532), the facility dimension was (-0.998 ± 0.370) and of the total was (-0.895 ± 0.263). As for married and single participants, the results obtained by cities revealed that the average scores of those who participated in the study from Manisa compared with the average scores of those who participated in the study from Izmir were higher in all the dimensions except for the personnel dimension and in the total service quality score. According to the result stated in the above paragraph, compared with the participants from Izmir, the average
service quality scores of the participants from Manisa were higher in all the dimensions except for the personnel dimension and also in average total service quality scores. So the service that the participants from Manisa get from these centers is lower than those of the participants from Izmir.

A statistically significant difference was found in the "changing rooms", "facility" and "total" average scores of the participants according to their income status (p<0.01, p<0.01, and p<0.01, respectively). Those whose monthly income was 1000 TL or lower perceived sports center services for changing rooms and facilities to be insufficient compared with those whose monthly income was between 1001 and 2000 TL or between 2001 and 4000 TL. It is seen according to the findings of this research that as the income level decreases, the expectation for service quality increases. Those with a lower income level pay sports centers the same price with those with a higher income. So, from the viewpoint of income levels, it can be supposed that these people pay more and therefore they expect a higher quality service. Yüzgenç (2010) suggested that the income levels of members influence the general scores of service quality and that this influence was only present in the sub dimension of workers [30]. Ardıç et al. (2004) argued that income level does not influence the perception regarding service quality [31], but that its level decreases as income level increases while Ceyhun (2006) reported that the satisfaction in the sub dimension of schedule decreases as income level increases but the satisfaction regarding physical characteristics of facilities increases [32].

No statistically significant difference was found in any dimension in terms of educational variables (primary education, high school, undergraduate and master's). However, when average scores (Table 8) were examined, it was found that the service quality scores of bachelors and master's degree owners were lower than those of primary education and high school graduates in all the dimensions except for the schedule dimension. Kurtoğlu (2006) argued that bachelors and master's degree owners cannot benefit from sports facilities and found a statistical difference between educational levels in the dimensions of trainer and worker [33]. Boz (2007) reported that the level of service quality increases as educational level decreases in the dimension of worker [34].

CONCLUSION

The service quality scores (perceived-expected) of the sports center members were found to be negative in all the dimensions. The participants differed by cities in the dimensions of changing rooms and facility. Compared with the participants from Izmir, those from Manisa consider the service quality of sports centers to be lower in these dimensions. It was determined that the service quality scores of the participants from Manisa were lower compared with those from Izmir. As for males, the service quality scores of the participants from Manisa were lower than those of the participants from Izmir. As for married and single participants, a difference was found regarding changing rooms and total scores. Compared with married participants, single participants consider the service quality of sports centers to be lower. No statistical difference was found in the level of primary education, high school, undergraduate and master's degrees but it was found that the service quality scores of undergraduate or master's degree owners were lower than those of primary education and high school graduates in all the dimensions except for the schedule dimension. Those whose monthly income was 1000 TL or lower perceived sports center services for changing rooms and facilities to be insufficient compared with those whose monthly income is between 1001 and 2000 TL or between 2001 and 4000 TL.

RECOMMENDATION
In the light of all these findings, the dimensions, which the study participants were the least satisfied regarding sports centers, were "changing rooms" and "facility". It is suggested that sports centers can increase the extent at which they are preferred by attaching more importance to these dimensions, that more such studies on companies which offer recreational sports services should be performed with a wider population, that a more extensive study should be made for assessing the quality of managers and workers as well as the service quality perceptions of customers within the context of a general assessment of the service quality of recreational sports centers, and that sports centers should carry out various studies especially for ensuring women's participation.

REFERENCES