

Analysis of the Perceived Quality of Service at Kocaeli International Youth Center

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the quality of service as perceived by the young members, who get service from the Kocaeli International Youth Center, which operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. In order to fulfill this objective, the three-dimensional “Scale of the Perceived Service Quality at Youth Centers,” developed by Aycan *et al.*(2005) and intended for youth centers, has been applied to 247 youths, who are members of and get service from youth centers. Within the scope of the research, viewpoints of the youths, with regard to some of their demographic characteristics, concerning the elements of the service quality have been analyzed. Consisting of 103 males and 144 females, a total of 247 individuals have taken part in the research. Following the analyses done and in the context of the elements of the service quality at the youth centers as perceived by the youths, it is found that there are no gender-specific differences; according to age variable, there is a difference in all factors in favor of the age group 7-12; as for the variable of family income, there is a difference in output quality factor in favor of the youths with an income level lower than 1300 TLs; and as for the variable of school type, there are significant differences in favor of the primary school level.

Keywords: youth; youth center; perception, service quality, perceived service quality

1. Introduction

When the definitions of the young and youth are considered, it is seen that youth as an age category is explained rather in terms of biology and chronology. These definitions gloss over the meaning of youth, which are influenced and transformed by the historical and social events of a period. However, there are definitions of youth that emphasize the innovative and powerful aspects of it, as well as definitions that characterize youth with negative qualities such as problematic, discordant, and rebellious. Defined as a transition process to adulthood, youth is characterized as a condition that strives to reach adulthood and in that sense manifests a lack. The period of youth finds meaning with the existence of power relations in the society (Kurtaran *et al.*, 2003).

United Nations defines “youth” as those persons between the ages of 12 and 24. On the other hand, considering the circumstances of our country, in the National Policy of Youth and Sports the individuals between the ages of 14 and 29 are accepted as the target group of the youth policies. Thus, the period of youth begins as one enters adolescence and ends by stepping, relatively, into the period of adulthood after 18 (Yazıcı, 2001). In the regulations of the youth centers, where the youth activities are carried out by the state, membership age is designated as between 7 and 26.

Covering the age group of 14-24, youth can be said to be a transition period that prepares the individual to social maturity, in which the individual undergoes a development in physical, emotional, moral, cultural, and economic terms; in which the characteristics of adolescence and puberty, a transition from childhood to adulthood, coalesce; in which the feelings of courage and adventure predominate; in which the individuals quickly improve their personalities in terms of emotion, thought, behavior, and attitude (Aydm, 2012).

In our country, which is about to complete its process of demographic transition, our young population is a human resource. Both perusing this human resource most effectively and solving many economic, social, and cultural problems that the young face are possible by designing and implementing an effective and proper youth policy (TÜİK [Turkish Statistical Institute], Youth in Statistics, 2017). Total population of Turkey is 80.810.525 as of the end of 2017, 16,1 % of which is made up of the young. The rate of the young population was 15,1 % in 1935 and 20 % on average between

1980 and 2000, after which it has shown a falling tendency. Of this young population, 51,2 % are young males, whereas 48,8 % are young females. According to the population projections of TÜİK, it is estimated that the rate of the young population in the total population will drop to 15,1 % in 2023, and to 10,1 % in 2075. As the predictions about Turkey's young population point at a decrease, when compared to some other countries in the world, a population policy is to be developed. However, such a policy requires not only increasing the number of children but a population planning along with the human, natural, and economic resources of the country (TÜİK, 2017).

Considered an advantage in the 21st century by all countries of the world in terms of economic and social policies, the participation of the young population in education and employment determines the level of development and growth of the countries. Enjoying an advantage among European countries in terms of a young population, Turkey proposes solutions concerning the participation of the young population in social and economic life (Dama, 2017). For raising qualified youths, many social actors, including the media and non-governmental organizations, should take on responsibility, and the range of activities intended for the young should be broadened (Çoşkun, *et al.*, 2016).

The state shapes our social life through regulatory and supervisory decisions and rules, especially concerning security and takes on tasks for enabling all its citizens to acquire qualifications to become human beings. The state carries out these functions through its various agencies and makes various investments. Despite all their drawbacks and shortcomings, our educational institutions play an important role and try to satisfy the expectations of the young about the future (Tuncay, 2000).

In order to implement these, the state utilizes Youth Centers, which operate under the aegis of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Youth Centers are institutions that do work for protecting the young from bad habits and enable them to put their leisure to good use through social, cultural, artistic, and sports activities in line with their wishes and abilities so that they can become active citizens. Youth centers aim at achieving the following objectives: to develop the useful, inquiring, creative, unitive skills of the young in line with the principles of Atatürk; to enable them to participate voluntarily in social life; to enable them to put their leisure to good use through social, cultural, artistic, and sports activities in line with their interests, wishes and abilities; to enable them to develop joint projects with the members of youth centers in other provinces and have exchange programs among the young through these projects; to procure exchange programs with international youth organizations; to help the young to develop their social identities and to achieve social harmony; to protect their physical and mental health by means of social, cultural, artistic, and sports activities and strengthen their feelings of national unity and solidarity; to provide for their cultural and psycho-social needs and contribute to their developing healthy and balanced personalities in their individual and social relations; to protect them from harmful habits; to increase their knowledge and skills in the direction of their interests and talents; to help the young with their problems, and offer guidance and counseling; to achieve coordination in youth organizations to be held provincially with other youth organizations (Youth Centers Regulation, 2003).

In the context of Bibliography of Youth Studies in Turkey, postgraduate work done at sociology departments is also included along with the articles and book written by sociologists in the field of youth sociology between 1923 and 2012. In this context, the number of the articles, books, theses and dissertations written and papers presented since 1923 in the field of youth sociology is about 800 (Yaman, 2013). The work done in youth sociology in Turkey is a manifestation of the social structure. Political and cultural climate of the society directly shapes the youth studies. Just as the society reproduces the youth for its own continuity, the scientific studies cannot be considered apart from the system (Bayhan, 2015).

This study analyzes the perception of the youths concerning the service quality they get from Youth Centers during their leisure. Service is a product that has no material characteristics and created for the consumer needs (Kuriloff *et al.*, 1993). Zeithaml defines the perceived service quality as “the customer's judgement about a service's overall excellence or superiority” (Robledo, 2001). On the other hand, according to Ghobadian perceived service quality is about the intuitions concerning the customers idea of the service quality and they determine, to a great extent, they determine the customers' levels of satisfaction (Ghobadian *et al.*, 1994). This study can be considered as an important work of appraisal in order to improve the notions of service quality on the part of the youth centers, carrying out their activities in the public sphere. Literature in this field contains limited number of studies. On the other hand, it is stressed that the quality of a service is made up of program quality, interaction quality, output quality, and physical environment quality (Ko, Pastore, 2005). Even if the measurement of the service quality is not efficient and precise, it is the first step towards developing an effective and proper strategy to improve the service quality (Gürbüz, 2003). This study was needed to be done because of the scantiness of research concerning the quality of services intended for the young, especially the quality of service in the public domain.

2. Method

2.1 Model of Research

This research was structured by a quantitative approach; and within the scope of this research, descriptive analysis, a type of quantitative research, was used.

2.2 Work Group

Work group consisted of 247 members, who participated in educational, cultural, artistic, and social activities of Kocaeli International Youth Center, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Participating in activities like YGS/LYS Exam Preparation, folk dances, drama, theatre, guitar, *bağlama* (which is a traditional Turkish, stringed instrument), marbling, calligraphy, wood carving, model ship building, break dance, values education, and the like at Kocaeli International Youth Center, these individuals were between the ages 07 and 29, and were chosen by random sampling, all of whom participated in the research voluntarily. The reason why only the members aged 07-29 were included in the research is that 07-29 is the age range for admission to membership of the Youth Centers, affiliated with the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

2.3 Data Collection Tool and Processing Method

To obtain information about the family, gender, educational background, and family income level of the participating members of the Youth Centers, Personal Information Form was used; and to determine the perceptions of service quality at the youth centers, the three-dimensional "Scale of the Perceived Service Quality at Youth Centers," including the components of Physical Environment Quality, Interaction Quality, and Output Quality, which was developed by Aycan (2005) and intended for youth centers, was used.

Scale of the Perceived Service Quality (HKAÖ) assesses the service quality at the youth centers. Having 3 sub-dimensions, HKAÖ consists of 23 items. These sub-dimensions are Physical Quality Service, 10 items; Interaction Quality, 8 items; and Output Quality, 5 items. These factors are named as Physical Environment Quality .81; Interaction Quality .89 and Output Quality .68 sub-dimensions. Alpha value of the total scale has been found as .89 (Aycan, 2005).

Scale of the Perceived Service Quality (HKAÖ) was applied to 259 participants, who attended to the activities of Kocaeli International Youth Center, affiliated with the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Since twelve participants made mistakes in filling the scales, these participants were left out this research. The turnaround rate of the scale is 95,36 % and the data provided by a total of 247 participants were analyzed within the context of this research.

2.4 Analysis of Data

By using the Scale of the Perceived Service Quality at Youth Centers, in analyzing the data obtained from the members of Youth Centers, descriptive statistics were used for the personal information. In order to test whether there were significant differences in terms of the sub-dimensions of the Scale of the Perceived Service Quality at Youth Centers according to age, gender, level of education, and the level of family income, non-parametric tests were applied since the data did not show normal distribution. In the analysis of the data, frequency analysis, Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal Wallis tests were used, and SPSS 22.0 program was used.

3. Results

Data gathered for determining the levels of the perceived service quality by the young were analyzed, and explanations and interpretations were made based upon the findings obtained.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics about the Research Group

Variables	Categories	n	%
Age	Age 7-12	56	22,7
	Age 13-18	117	47,4
	Age 19-24	60	24,3
	Age 25 and above	14	5,7
	Total	247	100,0
Gender	Male	103	41,7
	Female	144	58,3
	Total	247	100,0
Level of Family Income	1300 and less	10	4,0
	1301 - 2500	86	34,8
	2501 and above	151	61,1
	Total	247	100,0
School Type	Primary	40	16,2
	Middle School	14	5,7
	High School	116	47,0
	University	60	24,3
	Graduates	17	6,9
	Total	247	100,0

When the ages of the participants in the research are considered, it is seen that 22,7 % of the participants are within the age group 07-12; 47,4 % are within the age group 13-18; 24,3 % are within the age group 19-24; and 5,7 % are 25 and above.

The age group within which the participants center around is 13-18 with 47,4 %. When the gender of the participants is considered, it is seen that 58,3 % are female, and 41,7 % are male. When the income level of the participants' families considered, it is found that 4 % earn less than 1300 TLs; 34,8 % earn between 1301 and 2500 TLs, and 61,1 % earn more than 2500 TLs.

Of the youths participating in the research 16,2 % are students at Primary School; 5,7 % are at Middle School; 47 % are at High School; 24,3 % are at University; and 6,9 % are Graduates.

Table 2. General Average Values of the Perceived Service Quality at Kocaeli International Youth Center by the Youths Participating in the Research

	N	Minimum	Maximum Average	Standard Deviation
General Average	247	1,13	5,00	4,0751 65918

General Average the Perceived Service Quality at Kocaeli International Youth Center by the Youths Participating in the Research was found to be 4,07.

Table 3. Dimensions of Physical Environment, Interaction, and Output Quality According to Gender Variable, Results of Mann Whitney U Test

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	M Whitney		
				U	z	p
Physical Environment Quality	Male	103	124,71	7342,500	-0,133	0,894
	Female	144	123,49			
	Total	247				
Interaction Quality	Male	103	126,39	7170,000	-0,449	0,654
	Female	144	122,29			
	Total	247				
Output Quality	Male	103	124,83	7331,000	155	-0,877
	Female	144	123,41			
	Total	247				

When the Table 3 is examined, Mean Rank in the Physical Environment Quality sub-dimension, according to the gender of the youths participating, is 124,71 for males and 123,49 for females; Mean Rank in the Interaction Quality sub-dimension is 126,39 for males and 122,29 for females; and Mean Rank in Output Quality sub-dimension is 124,83 for males, and 123,41 for females.

Table 4. Dimensions of Physical Environment, Interaction, and Output Quality According to the Variable of Age Groups, Kruskal - Wallis Test Values

	Age	N	Mean Rank	X ²	sd	p
Physical Environment Quality	Age 7-12	56	166,49	26,161	3	0,000*
	Age 13 -18	117	111,63			
	Age 19-24	60	113,98			
	Age 25 and above	14	100,36			
	Total	247				
	Age	N	Mean Rank	X ²	sd	p
Interaction Quality	Age 7-12	56	144,71	10,036	3	0,018*
	Age 13-18	117	110,01			
	Age 19-24	60	129,60			
	Age 25 and above	14	134,04			
	Total	247				
	Age	N	Mean Rank	X ²	sd	p
Output Quality	Age 7-12	56	160,33	21,946	3	0,000*
	Age 13-18	117	110,96			
	Age 19-24	60	123,47			
	Age 25 and above	14	89,93			
	Total	247				

When the Table 4 is examined, it is seen that Mean Rank in the Physical Environment Quality sub-dimension, according to the Age Group of the youths participating in the research is found to be 166,49 for the “Age Group 7-12”; 111,63 for the Age Group 13-18; 113,98 for the Age Group 19-24; 100,36 for the Age Group 25 and above.

Mean Rank in Interaction Quality sub-dimension is found to be 144,71 for the Age Group 7-13; 110,01 for the Age Group 13-18; 129,60 for the Age Group 19-24; and 134,04 for the Age Group 25 and above. On the other hand, it is seen that the Mean Rank in Output Quality sub-dimension is 160,33 for the Age Group 7-12; 110,96 for the Age Group 13-18; 123,47 for the Age Group 19-24; and 89,93 for the Age Group 25 and above.

Table 5. Physical Environment, Interaction, and Output Quality According to the Variable of the Level of Family Income, Kruskal - Wallis Test Results

	Level of Family Income	N	Mean Rank	X ²	sd	p
Physical Environment Quality	1300 and less	10	135,50	0,308	2	0,857
	1301 - 2500	86	122,34			
	2501 and more	151	124,19			
	Total	247				
		Level of Family Income	N			
Interaction Quality	1300 and less	10	123,30	0,436	2	0,804
	1301 - 2500	86	128,05			
	2501 and more	151	121,74			
	Total	247				
		Level of Family Income	N			
Output Quality	1300 and less	10	165,40	6,613	2	0,037*
	1301 - 2500	86	132,90			
	2501 and more	151	116,19			
	Total	247				

P<.05*

When the Table 5 is examined, Mean Rank in Physical Environment Quality according to the Level of Family Income is found to be 155,50 for the group “1300 and less”; 122,34 for the group “1301-2500”; 124,19 for the group “2500 and more”. Mean Rank in Interaction Quality sub-dimension is found to be 123,30 for the group “1300 and less”; 128,05 for “1301-2500”; 121,74 for the group “2500 and more”. Mean Rank in Output Quality is seen to be 165,40 for the group “1300 and less”; 132,90 for the age group “1301-2500”; and 116,19 for the age group “2501 and more”.

Table 6. Physical Environment, Interaction, and Output Quality Dimensions According to the Variable of the School Type, Kruskal - Wallis Test Results

	School Type	N	Mean Rank	X ²	sd	p
Physical Environment Quality	Primary School	40	164,38	23,011	4	0,000*
	Middle School	14	166,71			
	High School	116	111,09			
	University	60	114,02			
	Graduates	17	117,15			
	Total	247				
	School Type	N	Mean Rank	X ²	sd	p
Interaction Quality	Primary School	40	154,75	16,851	4	0,002*
	Middle School	14	117,89			
	High School	116	107,05			
	University	60	130,89			
	Graduates	17	148,00			
	Total	247				
	School Type	N	Mean Rank	X ²	sd	p
Output Quality	Primary School	40	165,05	18,434	4	0,001*
	Middle School	14	129,96			
	High School	116	114,16			
	University	60	122,14			
	Graduates	17	96,24			
	Total	247				

P<.05*

As it can be seen in Table 6, Mean Rank in Physical Environment Quality sub-dimension According to the School Type is found to be 164,38 for the “Primary School” group; 166,71 for the “Middle School” group; 111,09 for the “High School” group; 114,02 for the “University” group; and 117,15 for the “Graduates” group. Mean Rank in Interaction Quality sub-dimension is seen to be 154,75 for the “Primary School” group; 117,89 for the “Middle School” group; 107,05 for the “High School” group; 130,89 for the “University” group; and 148,00 for the “Graduates” group. And the Mean Rank in Output Quality sub-dimension is 165,05 for the “Primary School” group; 129,96 for the “Middle School” group; 114,16 for the “High School” group; and 122, 14 for the “University” group; and 96,24 for the “Graduates” group.

4. Discussion

This study aims at measuring the service quality as perceived by the youths, who get service from Kocaeli International Youth Center, operating under the aegis of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Thus, the perceptions of the members, who take part in the activities at the Youth Center, concerning the physical environment quality, interaction quality, and output quality are compared with reference to their age, gender, level of education, and level of family income.

Various conclusions have been reached at the end of the research. As can be seen in Table 2, on the part of the young, who have participated in the research, the general average of the Perceived Service Quality in Kocaeli International Youth Center has been found, in all sub-dimensions, as 4,07. This rate shows that the perceived service quality by the young is high. In the study carried out by Barata (2015) and entitled “recognition level of the youth centers, affiliated with Youth Services and Sports Provincial Directorates, by the youths aged 15-29”, it is concluded that the young participating in the activities at the youth centers attach particular importance to cultural and social activities. Furthermore, it is also emphasized that the recognition level about the youth centers is high among the young. These results show parallelism with our study. The study conducted by Özkan (2016) and entitled “Analysis of the level of satisfaction of the individuals participating in the activities at youth centers” concludes that 50 % of the participants are content with the youth centers.

The Gender variable given in Table 3, no statistically significant difference is found in the results of Mann Whitney U test, which overlaps with the study done by Yüzgenç *et al.* in 2014, entitled “Service Quality in Sports Services Provided by Local Administrations (Example of Youth Centers and Family Life Youth Centers)”. The said research too, found no difference in terms of gender.

The Table 4 presents a significant difference, according to the variable of the Age Range, in the age group 7-12 in comparison to other age groups. It can be said that in comparison to other age groups, the youths within the age group 7-12 have higher perceptions of the physical quality, interaction quality, and output quality of the Youth Center. On the other hand, in general context, the perception level is higher according to age groups as well. The study conducted by Ekici and Çolakoğlu (2005) and entitled “A comparison of the level of utilization by different age groups of the General Directorate of Youth and Sports camps” reached the conclusion that there were positive changes in the youths that

participated in the camp activities. A similar case is true for the perception of service quality. Therefore, both studies show similarities. In their study from 2012, Lapa ann Baştaç (2012) did not find a statistically significant difference between the ages of the participants and their scores of levels of satisfaction from service quality. According to the findings of the research done by Üzüm *et al.* (2016), there was no statistically significant difference between the ages of the participants and their scores of levels of satisfaction from service quality. Similarly, the study by Yıldız and Tüfekçi (2010) found no significant difference between the ages of the participants and their scores of levels of satisfaction from service quality. As it can be seen, the studies in the field have reached different conclusions about the relationship between age factor and the levels of perceived quality of service.

When the results of the analysis according to the variable of the Level of Family Income, given in Table 5, are examined, a significant difference is seen in the sub-dimension of “Output Quality,” which is in favor of the members belonging to the group of “1300 TL and less” family income. This can be interpreted as the youths with limited economic means have their expectations from the Youth Center met in terms of “Output Quality” sub-dimension. These results differ from those of the research conducted by Yüzgenç *et al.* (2014), entitled “Service Quality in Sports Services Provided by Local Administrations (Example of Youth Centers and Family Life Youth Centers)”, which concludes that the members with higher incomes have a higher perception of service quality than the members with lower incomes.

When the results of the analysis according to the variable of the School Type, given in Table 6, are examined, statistically significant differences are seen. In the “Physical Quality” sub-dimension, a difference is observed in favor of the members, whose level of education is primary school. In other words, the youths at the level of primary school have a higher perception of service quality in the sub-dimension of “Physical Quality” than others. In the “Interaction Quality” sub-dimension as well, there is a meaningful difference in favor of the members at the level of Primary school. Similarly, in the “Output Quality” sub-section, there is again a meaningful difference in favor of the members at the level of the Primary school. This can be said to be related to the choices given in the sub-dimension. For example, studies conducted show that cleanliness is very important within the context of “physical quality.” Hence, Liu *et al.* (2009) in their study reached the conclusion that cleanliness is important in the customers’ classification of the overall service quality at different levels and forming their value perceptions. The difference in favor of the younger age group can be considered very natural. Howat and Murray (2002) state that the highest service performance is “the staff’s being friendly.” Ko and Pastore (2005) state that the staff’s attitudes, behavior, and experiences are important in determining the customers’ evaluation of service quality. Findings of the research conducted by Kyle *et al.* (2010) at two skiing centers in northern Greece to find out about the effect of the service quality on loyalty and satisfaction of the participants indicate that psychological commitment, satisfaction and loyalty, which have linear relationship with service quality, are strong in the participants.

In conclusion, it can be said that the perception towards Youth Centers, where youth activities are held, are at a positive level. This shows that Youth Centers are becoming important in Turkey day by day. It also means that the activities of the Youth Centers are effective. It is also certainly important that the levels of the perceived service quality by all age groups should be equalized. Making assessments about the quality and quantity of the Youth Centers is also an important topic awaiting the attention of researchers. When the results obtained are considered, it is seen that the youths’ level of the perceived service quality concerning the Youth Centers is positive; however, these levels are not the same for different age groups, levels of income, and levels of education.

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