

An investigation of student perceptions of quality in a secondary school

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Abstract

This research examines current students' perceptions of the quality features required by them from a secondary school and considers how well they judge their school to be performing in relation to these. Strengths and weaknesses are identified to ensure the school improves the quality of the students' experience. With secondary schools' funding dependent on roll numbers it is essential that schools meet the needs of their students so they become, or remain, the school of choice. The importance of marketing a school centers on both the communication of the quality of the education, and the recruitment and retention of pupils.

A small-scale mixed method study was used to examine the features in relation to students' perceptions of performance in 2007 and 2010. Two focus groups were conducted with both years' current Year 13 student leaders to identify 15 quality features they felt were important in a secondary school. An anonymous questionnaire was produced with the 15 quality statements acknowledged by the focus group.

The questionnaire results were mapped onto an importance/performance matrix which served to highlight some areas where there was a discrepancy between the school's performance and the importance of specific quality features to the students. In 2007 these related to students having passionate teachers that care, a fair discipline system, up to date resources and equipment with technology used to enhance learning. In 2010 these features were excellent, caring and supportive teachers, a safe learning environment, a wide curriculum that offered academic opportunities and rewarded students' success in a school with a good community spirit.

This study has a number of implications for the school with regard to meeting the students' perceptions of their educational needs. High on the list is ensuring that the school is safe for all students and supporting teachers to build a relationship with every student to allow effective learning to take place.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

This research originated from a desire to find out the quality features students believe are important for them to receive a quality education at a secondary school. In this chapter I provide the rationale for researching student perceptions of quality and performance. I set out the background for this research which was aimed at identifying what is important to students and how their school is performing in relation to these quality features. My research aims and questions are given. I discuss the scope of the research problem with reference to the literature. The importance of this research is described along with links to other research and professional practice. The chapter concludes with a description of the dissertation organisation and an outline of the purpose of each chapter in the dissertation.

Rationale

I started this dissertation with my own frustration, as an Associate Principal of a secondary school, about the extent to which a community's perception of a school can negatively impact on that school's reputation and therefore enrolments. I felt that my school was a great school and was tired of hearing unsubstantiated comments from members of the community which gave a negative impression of the school. The intention of this study was to seek the views of current students about how well they believed their school was performing which would help to confirm or dispel the community's apparent perception. This then would highlight areas of performance on which the school might focus in the future.

Providing a quality education to students is one of the key goals for any school in New Zealand but defining quality poses yet another challenge.

Quality means different things to different people. Sallis (2002) defines quality as “what makes the difference between things being excellent or run-of-the-mill”, (p.1). From a technical point of view, quality is about being measured against criteria (Sallis, 2002). This study therefore, endeavoured to measure how well the school was performing against a set of quality statements developed by the current students.

Examining the quality features required by students of a secondary school will inform future practice and potentially lead to a better quality education for all students of the school. While this is a small-scale localised study it may provide some help and guidance to other secondary school practitioners in New Zealand.

Clearly this research study was conducted at my own secondary school so to protect its identity, the school will be known throughout this research as Oceania High School (OHS).

Background

My initial thinking had been to question the effectiveness of our approach to promoting our school in the wider community. Subsequently it occurred to me that I ought first to be finding out what our students actually thought was important to them in terms of gaining a quality education.

Previous research undertaken by the school in 1996 and 2009 had not sought the views of their students particularly in relation to whether it was meeting their needs. Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2006) view service quality as “how customers perceive services in terms of the quality of the service and how satisfied they are overall with their experiences” (p. 106). Therefore it is essential for schools to ask views of its students, as the customers, how satisfied they are with the service.

Some schools tend to use somewhat adhoc marketing plans with little or no evaluation of the effectiveness of specific marketing events. At the proposal stage, the project was intended to focus on ensuring a school was making the most of its marketing undertakings. Initially an action research methodology was proposed but it was considered more appropriate to move to a small mixed method study, drawing on the interpretive paradigm, because of the 'social research' nature of the project. As the project further developed, the focus shifted from the marketing context to an examination of students' perceptions of quality in a secondary school setting and the extent to which this particular school was meeting these features. While the marketing literature is appropriate this research moved to the service marketing literature, as educational institutions do not produce an end product but provide a service to clients.

The initial aim of the research project was to complete the study by the end of 2007. Unfortunately this was not possible due to a number of unforeseen circumstances.

The 2007 student cohort, through a focus group, agreed on the initial quality statements which were used in the questionnaires relating to school performance, but extensive analysis of the data was not completed at the time.

When the research recommenced in 2010 this earlier data remained a valid source of rich information particularly when compared with the more recent data. As in 2007 a focus group was conducted with current Year 13 student leaders to gather the 15 quality statements most important to them. The questionnaire was developed and given to one member of each form class within the school.

Extensive analysis of the data was then undertaken. Deciding on how to group the data was initially difficult until the four common themes were identified and applied.

Initially three research questions were to be answered but as the study developed and grew in size, the final question on evaluating strategies implemented to improve perceptions of the school, was considered unmanageable and will need to be addressed in further research.

Research Aim and Questions

The aim of the research project was to investigate perceptions of current students of Oceania High School (OHS) and identify the school's perceived strengths and weaknesses with the intention of improving the quality of the students' experience at this school.

The research study endeavoured to answer the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of current OHS students?
- What educational and marketing strategies are required in order to continue to improve the quality of students' educational experience and their perceptions of OHS?
- How effective were the processes implemented in improving students' perceptions of OHS?

Scope of the Study

Reflection on the literature review in Chapter Two and the research questions led to both a qualitative and quantitative methodology being chosen for this research, as described in Chapter Three. Qualitative methods can provide a much richer understanding of the social and behavioural dynamics associated with service quality. Quantitative research techniques are used to gather numerical data which allows data to readily presented and interpreted. The methodology context, timeframe, and size of this study all limited the scope of this research.

As this research is contributing to a master's level dissertation it is a small-scale study. Only a relatively small number of participants are used in the study, although care has been taken to ensure sufficient data has been collected. Data for this research was collected from one provincial co-educational, year 9 to 13 secondary school. As the research period was extended, data was collected from two different years using the same research methods. Quality statements were developed for use in the questionnaire, using a focus group of current Year 13 students. One student from each form class at all year levels completed the questionnaire. The findings from the research are presented in chapter four.

Dissertation Organisation

The dissertation is organised into six chapters.

Chapter One introduces and backgrounds the dissertation providing a rationale and details of the research aims and questions.

Chapter Two reviews the international and New Zealand literature relevant to marketing within a secondary school, and how this marketing is unique. This includes understanding the concept of quality particularly in relation to a service, meeting students' needs and finally how service marketing research is interpreted to give direction on making changes to meet the students' needs from a secondary school.

Chapter Three describes the processes and methods used to conduct the research. A brief review of the history of educational research places this research within both the qualitative and quantitative, interpretive tradition. This chapter identifies the data collection and data analysis processes used. The relevant ethical principles are also outlined.

Chapter Four provides an overview of the research findings. Data has been coded and described. This chapter illustrates the key themes, including analysed comments, to show where there is substantial agreement or disagreement about the quality features provided by the school. The main themes relate to the features provided by a secondary school 'outside the classroom', by the school, by the teacher and 'within the classroom'.

Chapter Five analyses the findings set out in the previous chapter, with reference back to the literature. Following on with the themes identified in the previous chapter, this chapter considers where findings from other research supports the findings of this research, and where this research highlights issues that are not identified elsewhere. The discussion enables the issues facing the school to be understood within the larger educational research context.

Chapter Six draws conclusions based on the research aim. The implications of this research are discussed and recommendations for further research and practice are made.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This research study investigates students' perceptions of quality in a secondary school linked to the school's educational and marketing strategies. This chapter will examine the relevant literature on service marketing and ensuring the school is providing a quality education. This review provided the basis for examining the problem and confirmed the data collection plan.

Competitive pressures resulting from education reforms have forced schools to use marketing strategies to maintain their funding sources. OHS needed to ensure that its service delivery was meeting the needs of their customers/clients (the students). As secondary schools funding is determined by roll size, OHS must ensure that they are the school of choice for their local students.

This chapter has been divided into six sections: section one explains how educational reforms have forced schools to undertake marketing, the second section investigates the key components of marketing, the third section examines the foundations of services marketing and its relationship to schools, section four explains quality in an educational institution, section five examines the service qualities gap model, and the final section defines why it is important to understand the customers' requirements and how to measure performance.

Why Market? Education Reform in New Zealand

The need to market a school centres around both the communication of the quality of the education offered and the attraction and retention of pupils. Davies and Ellison (1997) claim, "it is not simply about being a

good school it is also important that the school is perceived as being a good one” (p. 4).

Teaching and learning are the key tasks for New Zealand schools (Codd, 2002). Before 1989, educational professionals were given to sharing and co-operating with each other to provide an equality of educational opportunities for their students. In this system, image promotion of a school had little in common with ideas of competitive marketing as a management process. Business approaches to educational management were seen as inappropriate (Peters & Marshall, 1996).

The need to attract and retain pupils has been brought into sharp focus, with the introduction of market forces in the maintained school sector. Foskett (2002) reports that this movement has meant schools have shifted from an inward-focused protected and closed mode of operation, to one which is externally focused, accountable, increasingly competitive and open. This change has brought schools into the world of communication management, public relations and marketing to varying extents. Such areas have been terra incognita for most teachers and managers in education to date. Principals are required to administer their schools quite differently, with a much more significant focus on managerial skills than was previously expected but this is now shifting to a greater emphasis on the leading of learning. This worldwide trend is particularly evident in New Zealand. Although not always easy to do, it is none-the-less strongly advocated and supported by research.

In 1989 the publication of *Tomorrow's Schools: The Reform of Education Administration in New Zealand* announced the Labour Government's (1984-1990) policy guide to the radical reform legislated in the *Education Act* (1989). This reform gave rise to a very different paradigm of school management, and paralleled similar changes in Australia, Britain and some parts of the United States. Hutchinson (2002) explains the political forces that shaped Tomorrow's Schools reflected the ascendancy of New Right ideology within government, and this influence continued with the

change to a National-led government from 1990 to 1999. The resulting economic and social reforms generally involved the realignment of the state-based policies of corporatisation, deregulation and 'user-pays'. Lauder, Hughes, Watson, Waslander, Thrupp, Strathdee, Simiyu, Dupuis, McGlenn and Hamlin (1999) state that "the appeal to markets was and is extremely attractive to policy makers" (p. 20). The idea that marketing could improve educational performance without having to increase government expenditure showed, in theory, how something could be got for nothing. At the same time parents could become more involved with their children's education through greater choice of schools.

Hutchinson (2002) identifies the most significant change for education as the devolution of accountability and responsibility for schools to their local communities. This was made explicit in the main features of the reform which can be summarised as follows:

- abolition of the Department of Education and its replacement with a small, policy-focused Ministry
- stand-alone agencies dealing with qualifications and assessment, special education and accountability
- Boards of Trustees, consisting mainly of elected parents, to govern schools
- abolition of regional support and devolution of this function to schools with privatisation (p. 11).

Education reform was continued under the National government which initiated changes that saw the abolishment of neighbourhood enrolment zones on the pretext of providing parents with increased school choice. The removal of these zones meant that schools now had to compete for students who would have traditionally attended their school. School funding was increasingly based on per-student formulas, meaning every student was important.

These changes meant schools needed to use varying degrees of marketing to ensure their continued success. School principals needed to

manage their schools in a competitive environment, consult with the community about what constituted quality schooling, plan strategically for these aspirations to be met, and be accountable to the community if they were not. In this new environment schools and their principals assumed that importance of public perceptions meant competing for prospective parents. Research by Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1997) suggests that a competitive environment was established as education reforms allowed schools to market themselves. These reforms allowed parents to believe that they were able to select the school for their child.

New Zealand educational reforms have required that senior management and Boards of Trustees in secondary schools understand and use marketing more effectively within their school. Kotler and Fox (1995) regard the evolution of educational marketing as a strategic activity. Their research indicates that educational marketing needs planning to promote the school's image and articulate its major goals and trends to shape "its uniqueness in order to attract students to the school" (p.12). Davies and Ellison (1997) explain that while "the main reason that a school *should* be marketing is a desire to improve its own service and relationship with its clients, the main reason why it *has* to market itself is that economic realities make this a precondition of its future survival" (p. 7).

From the end of World War II until the 1980s the New Zealand government played a steadily increasing role in determining school admission schemes (zones). Until the late 1970s, zoning occurred in the context of rapid educational expansion based on demographic growth. From the late 1970s to the end of the 1980s, the school age population declined. During this period zoning was used to share the impact of nationally declining secondary school rolls, aiming to prevent undue disruption to student learning through the unnecessary downsizing of any school. The 1991 Education Amendment Act changed the previous zoning regulations so that enrolment schemes could only be put in place to avoid overcrowding. Further legislation changes occurred with the Education Amendment Act (2000), which was to bring in school

admissions based on residential zoning where all students living in-zone (home zone) have the absolute right to attend that school and there is balloting for out of zone places. This zoning change was to prevent overcrowding of schools and enable local students guaranteed enrolment.

In 2005 in New Zealand, the Minister of Education announced school closures due to falling enrolments in some areas. Vining's (2005) research suggested that these closures provides strong evidence that schools are in a competitive marketplace and educators are beginning to realise that they must work to strengthen their school's identity.

In 2010 the National government indicated that in 2011 all school funding would be determined according to a term-by-term funding formula, a change from the bi-annual funding formula. The intention of this change is clearly to reduce operational funding unless schools maintain student numbers. Again this means schools must ensure they are providing a quality education.

What is Marketing?

The greatest misconception with regard to marketing in both business and education is that marketing is only as selling and advertising (Kotler, Armstrong, Brown, Adam and Chandler, 1998; Evans, 1995; Foskett, 2003).

Kotler et al. (1998) define marketing as a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others. Davies and Ellison (1997) believe that marketing is about managing relationships through effective communication. In the education world, marketing is about managing the relationship between schools and their clients.

Kotler and Fox (1995) define marketing as:

the analysis, planning, implementation and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets to achieve institutional objectives. Marketing involves designing the institution's offerings to meet the target markets' needs and desires, and using effective pricing, communication, and distribution to inform, motivate, and service these markets. (p. 6)

Stott and Parr (1991) quote a widely accepted definition of marketing as "the creative process of satisfying customer needs profitably and effectively" (p. 3). Evans (1995) sees marketing as "the management process of identifying and satisfying the requirements of consumers and society in a sustainable way" (p. 4). Vining (2000) provides a very simple definition – "marketing is communicating with an audience so that they understand and appreciate what you do" (p. 13).

Foskett (2002) has written many articles with a marketing theme but he still finds it difficult to provide a definition of what marketing is. In his 2003 article, he identifies two specific perspectives – "marketing as an overall philosophy for an organisation, and marketing as a functional area of management" (p. 126). He explains that as a functional area, marketing involves the application of strategies to effect the sale of a product or service. As an overall (holistic) philosophy, marketing is central to the operation of an organisation which encompasses its mission, strategies and operations, and in which the whole ethos and purpose of the organisation is focused on the needs and wants of its clients, partners, stakeholders and customers.

Zeithaml et al. (2006) have developed a specific service marketing text because they view service marketing as significantly different from goods marketing. They believe that it requires strategies and tactics that are not reflected in traditional marketing texts and see their research as equally

applicable to organisations (such as educational institutions) whose core product is a service.

While these definitions vary slightly some common themes can be identified. Put simply marketing is about satisfying clients' needs and wants. This prompts the question of how schools identify these needs and wants? Foskett (1998a) states that some schools think "they know what their clients want" (p. 49) and therefore do not need to find out or verify this information.

Another theme common too much of the literature is the need to actively communicate with the clients. This leads on to Davies and Ellison's (1997) idea of managing relationships which suggest that if you know what your clients want, and are delivering that, then your feedback from the clients should indicate how happy they are.

The more complicated definition provided by Kotler and Fox (1995) identifies the detailed planning should be undertaken before any marketing takes place. This idea supports a strategic management approach where educational organisations channel their energies so that the core purpose of teaching and learning is enhanced.

Service Quality for Schools

A dilemma for school marketing is that much of marketing literature is business orientated and assumes that the organisation output is a product that is the same each time. This type of marketing is not appropriate for a school. It has been suggested by some parents that examination results are the product of schools which is partially correct but, unlike a traditional product that is exactly the same each time it is produced, not all students examination results will be the same.

There is general agreement that there are differences between goods and services marketing. Put in simple terms, services are “deeds, processes and performances” (Zeithaml et al., 2006, p. 29). Zeithaml et al. (2006) define the basic characteristics of a service as “intangible, heterogeneous, produced and consumed simultaneously and perishable” (p. 29). These characteristics mean:

“intangible in that they are performances or actions that cannot be seen, felt, tasted or touched, these performances are frequently produced by humans and therefore no two services will be precisely alike, most services are sold first and then produced and consumed simultaneously and services cannot be saved, stored, resold or returned. Because services are intangible, customers often rely on tangible cues, or physical evidence, to evaluate the service to assess their satisfaction with the service during and after consumption” (p. 317).

This characteristics can be directly related to a school in that a student’s learning is intangible - they cannot take the lesson home and show their parents, each teacher’s delivery is slightly different despite teaching the same topic, students choose their school first and then the lessons are delivered, the lessons cannot be resold or returned if the students are not happy with them. Therefore teaching and learning meet all the criteria for being a service orientated market rather than a goods market.

Boaz’s (2008) defines services as “activities, benefits or satisfaction offered in the marketplace in the form of skills or facilities to meet a need or want” (p.135). In her research she identifies four distinguishing features of a service: intangibility, perishability, inseparability and lack of standardisation (p. 136). Sallis (2002) identifies six characteristics that distinguish a service from a physical product. These characteristics are essentially the same as those described by Boaz. Sallis supports the notion that it is more appropriate to view education as a service industry rather than a production process.

Quality Gurus

Sallis (2002) acknowledges five of the most influential writers on quality. W Edwards Deming, Joseph Juran, Philip B Crosby, Tom Peters and Karoru Ishikawa have had an enormous influence on the development of total quality management. They all concentrated on quality issues in industrial settings, although all claim their ideas are equally applicable to service industries. Peters is the only one to give consideration to quality issues in education. There is much overlap in their thinking and in the main their general conclusions complement each other.

Deming was concerned that the management of companies in the United States were operating on the wrong paradigm. There was a failure to plan for the future and to foresee problems before they arose. Deming saw the problem of quality lying primarily with management. To provide a guide how to manage for quality, Deming produced his famous 14 points. They were a mixture of important management principles and insights into employee psychology.

Dr Joseph Juran is the other main veteran pioneer of the quality revolution. He is probably most renowned for coining the phrase 'fitness for use or purpose'. The central tenant of this idea is that a product or service can meet its specification and yet not be fit for its purpose. He believed, like Deming, that most quality problems were traceable back to management decisions, that quality does not just happen, it has to be planned. He developed a three-part process based on staff at different levels making their own unique contributions to quality improvement. Senior management has the strategic view of the organisation, middle managers take an operational view of quality, while the workforce is responsible for quality control. This model has a ready application to education.

Philip Crosby is associated with two very appealing and powerful ideas. The first is that 'quality is free'. This very powerful idea is premised on the idea that savings from quality improvement programmes pay for

themselves. The second idea is the notion that errors, failures, waste and delay – all the ‘unquality things’ – can be totally eliminated if the organisation has the will. This is his controversial notion of ‘zero defects’. In services zero defects are desirable, but it is difficult to guarantee fault-free service with so many opportunities for human error. Crosby’s improvement programme is one of the most practical and detailed guides available.

Tom Peters along with co-author Nancy Austin identified leadership as being central to the quality improvement process. They considered that the term ‘management’ should be discarded in favour of ‘leadership’. For them the leader was to be a facilitator and the person with vision motivating the rest of the team. They championed hands-on leadership styles and characterised it with their famous ‘managing with walking about’. Such leadership styles enable leaders to keep in touch with customers and staff and they believe that it leads to innovative and creative ideas. Peters is well known for his views on customer orientation. In *Thriving on Chaos* he described 12 attributes, or traits, of the quality revolution that all organisations need to pursue.

Kaoru Ishikawa is most famous for his work on quality circles and was a pioneer of the Quality Circle movement in Japan. He is also well known for his statistical techniques. In Japan a quality circle is typically a voluntary group of usually five to a dozen staff all from the same workshop. Their aim is to contribute to the improvement and development of the enterprise and to build a happy workforce. Typically, members of quality circles master statistical quality control and related methods and utilise them to achieve significant results in quality improvement, cost reduction, productivity and safety. All members of the circle engage in self and team development. They receive no direct financial reward for any improvements made. Joseph Juran expressed doubts on the effectiveness of quality circles in the West, as he believes the industrial culture is different.

Quality in an Education Context

New Zealand schools are expected to deliver quality education as directed by the National Education Goals and National Administration Guidelines by government instruction, but what is the definition of quality in this context? Sallis (2002) acknowledges quality is difficult to define but states, “quality is what makes the difference between things being excellent or run-of-the-mill” (p. 1) and can lead to the difference between success and failure. Schermerhorn, Hunt and Osborn (1998) agree with Sallis - “customers’ needs are met and that all tasks are done right the first time” (p. 3). Quality implies different things to different people. Quality in a technical sense as defined by Sallis is “about being measured against criteria” (p. 13). Problems with quality are identified when there is a ‘gap’ between what is expected and what is delivered.

Sallis (2002) raises an interesting dilemma with regard to quality education. Does a school believe that quality is about improving students’ learning, empowering teachers, supporting teamwork and providing leadership or is it the need to meet the Ministry of Education’s guidelines when evaluated by the Education Review Office? Therefore some quality features are linked with professional responsibility, while others result from competition within the educational marketplace or the need to demonstrate accountability.

The four quality imperatives identified by Sallis (2002) are: the moral imperative where the students deserve the best possible quality of education, the professional imperative which implies a commitment to meeting the needs of the students, the competitive imperative where falling enrolments may lead to staff redundancies and finally the accountability imperative where schools must demonstrate they are delivering what is required of them. It is noted that the student is the key component of two of the imperatives mentioned above so it is essential that schools know what their students want and need.

Zeithaml et al. (2006) define student expectations as “the standards of performance against which service experiences are compared” (p. 106), and are often formulated in terms of what a student believes should or will happen. Student perceptions are subjective assessments of actual service experiences. Schermerhorn et al. (1998) explain the notion of perception as the process by which people select, organize, interpret, retrieve and respond to information from the world around them. This information is gathered from the five senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. Perception is not necessarily the same as reality, nor are the perceptions or responses of any two people necessarily the same when describing the same event. Perception is a way of forming impressions about oneself, other people, and daily life experiences. The quality or accuracy of a person’s perceptions, therefore, has a major impact on their responses to a given situation. Perceptions and responses can be long-standing. For example, an outstanding teacher will be remembered long after the student has left the school.

A school needs to ensure a framework is used to ensure student expectations are being met. Zeithaml et al. (2006) have developed a service-marketing model which is about promises – promises made and promises kept to customers. This model could be adapted to meet schools’ educational needs. A strategic framework known as the services triangle, (illustrated in Figure 2.1), visually reinforces the importance of people (students, teachers and management) to the ability of an organisation to keep the promises it has made and succeed in building positive customer relationships.

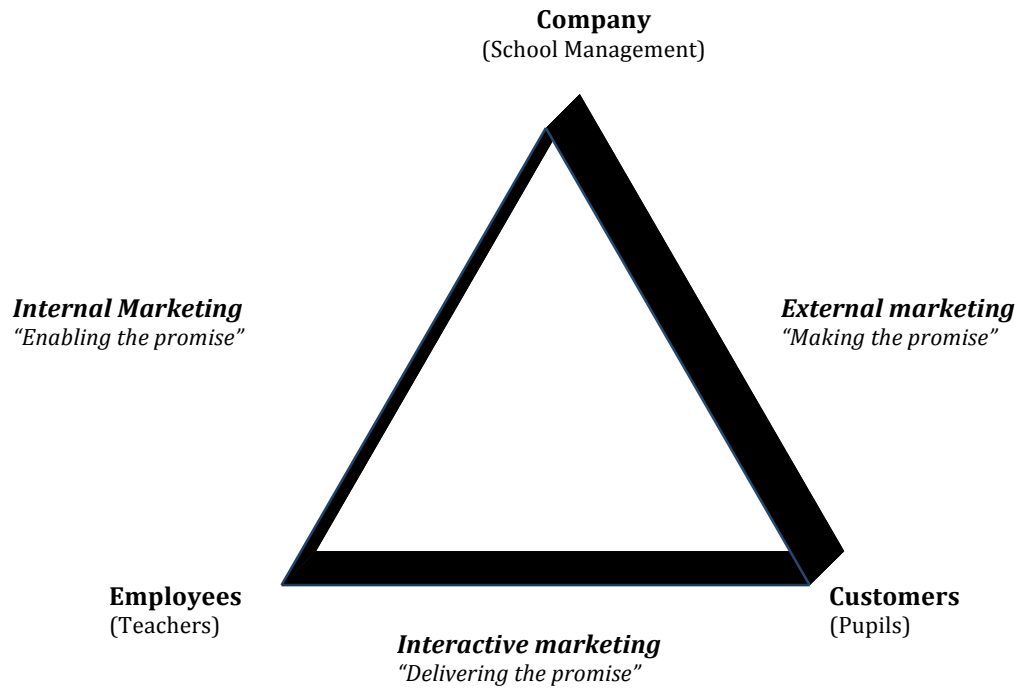
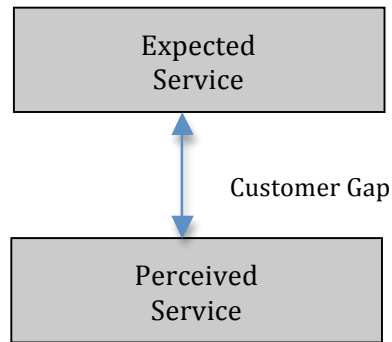


Figure 2.1 The Services Marketing Triangle
Adapted from Zeithaml et al., 2006, p. 356

Meeting Students' Needs

Effective marketing for schools is a complex undertaking that involves many different strategies, skills and tasks. Zeithaml et. al (2006) suggest one approach to evaluating a school's performance: viewing services in a structured, integrated way called the "gaps model of service quality" (p.33). This model positions the key concepts, strategies and decisions for a school and shows the gap between expectations and performance.

Zeithaml et al. (2006) define the customer gap as the difference between customer expectations and perceptions (as shown over the page). Customer expectations are standards that customers bring into the service experience, whereas customer perceptions are subjective assessments of actual service experiences.



The customers for a school are the students and parents and it is important to know if there is a customer gap, the extent of the gap and how the school is going to work to close this gap.

It must also be acknowledged that customers (students) hold different types of service expectations:

1. Desired service, which reflects what customers want
2. Adequate service or what customers are willing to accept, and
3. Predicated service or what customers believe they are likely to get (Zeithaml et al., 2006, p. 102).

Customer Perceptions of Service

Customers perceive service in terms of the quality of the service and how satisfied they are overall with their experiences. Two critical concepts underpin this perception: customer satisfaction and service quality. Zeithaml et al. (2006) believes these concepts are fundamentally different – satisfaction is generally viewed as a broader concept, whereas service quality focuses specifically on dimensions of service. Based on this view, perceived service quality is a component of customer satisfaction. Figure 2.2 graphically illustrates the relationships between the two concepts.

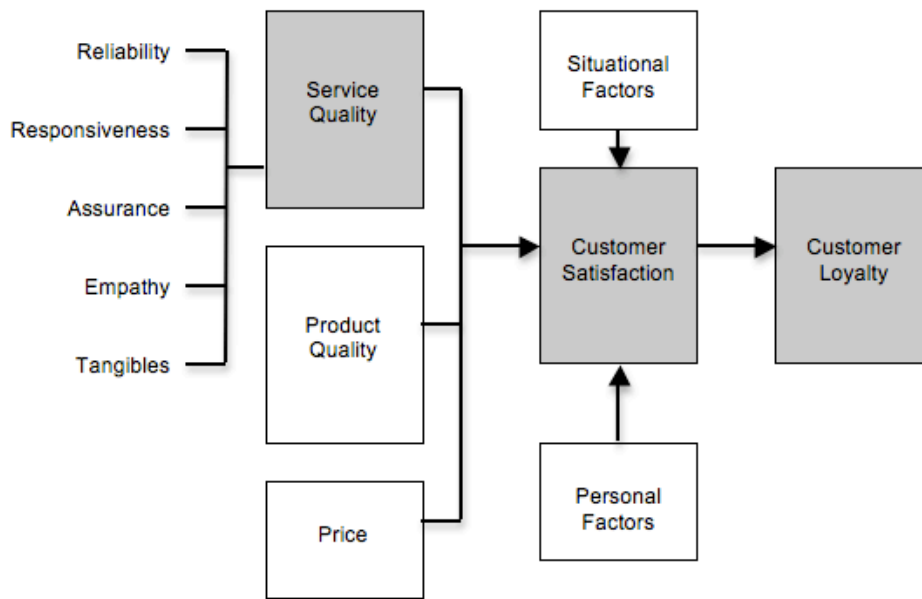


Figure 2.2 Customer Perceptions of Quality and Customer Satisfaction (Source: Zeithaml et al., 2006, p. 107)

As shown above, service quality is a focussed evaluation that reflects the customer’s perception of five service quality dimensions. Satisfaction on the other hand, is more inclusive: it is influenced by perceptions of service quality, product quality and price as well as situational factors and personal factors. Satisfaction is defined as the customer’s evaluation of a service in terms of whether that service has met the customer’s needs and expectations.

For example, service quality of a school is judged on attributes such as how responsive the teachers are to students’ needs, how skilled the teachers are, and whether the facility is well maintained. Customer satisfaction with the school is a broader concept that could be influenced by perceptions of service quality but could also include perceptions of product quality (such as quality of computers, library, canteen), price of costs involved with attending the school, personal factors such as the student’s emotional state, whether friends attend the school, and experiences travelling to and from the school.

Service Quality Dimensions

The pioneering research of Parsu Parasuraman, Valerie Zeithaml and Leonard Berry identified five specific dimensions of service quality, which apply across a variety of contexts and which can be related directly to schools.

- Reliability: ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
- Responsiveness: willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
- Assurance: employee's knowledge and courtesy and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.
- Empathy: caring, individualised attention given to customers.
- Tangibles: appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and written materials (Zeithaml et al. 2006, p. 117).

Zeithaml et al. (2006) used exploratory and quantitative research to identify that these dimensions represent how consumers organise information about service qualities in their mind and provide important information for a school to ensure they are meeting these specific dimensions.

Has the School Got It Right?

Finding out what the customers expect is essential to providing service quality. Marketing research is a key vehicle for understanding customer expectations and perceptions of services. In services, a school that does no marketing research at all is unlikely to understand its customers. A school that does marketing research, but ignores the topic of customer expectations, may also neglect what is needed to stay in tune with changing customer requirements. Not knowing what customers expect is one of the root causes of a failure to deliver to customer expectations. There are effective ways to close this gap between expected and perceived service: organisations listen to customers through research,

both formal and informal, the organisation then develops strategies to retain customers and strengthen relationships with them using a strategic marketing approach.

Zeithaml et al. (2006) have identified a set of criteria that need to be followed if the research is to be effective in a service organisation such as a school. Refer to Figure 2.3.

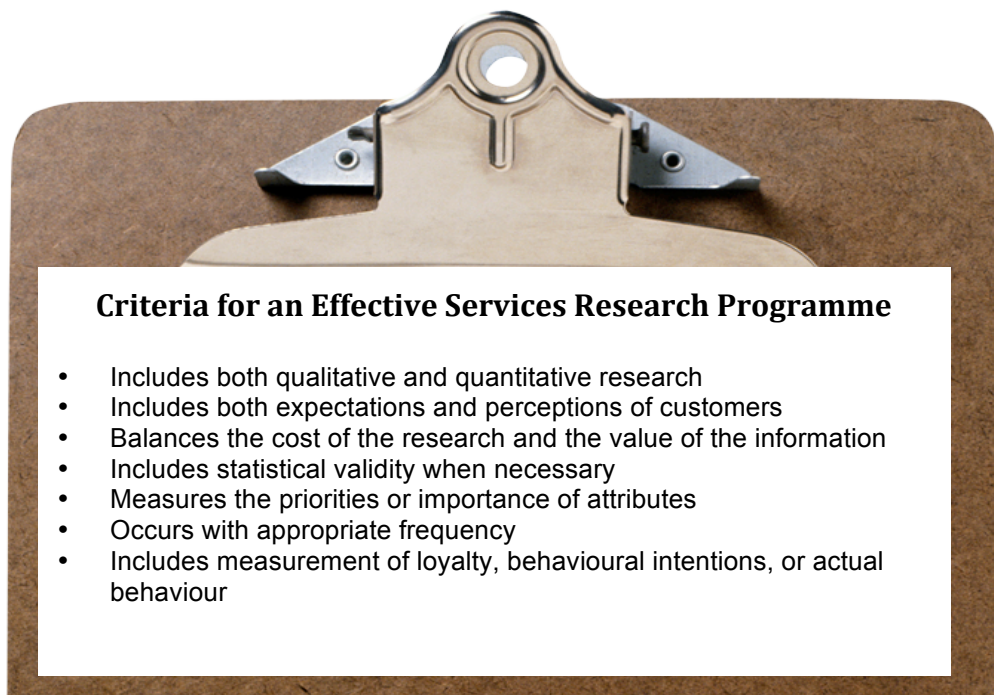


Figure 2.3 Criteria for an Effective Services Research Programme
(Source: Zeithaml et al., 2006, p. 143)

The literature is consistent in agreeing that market research needs to come early in the marketing process because it provides the information on which all subsequent decisions and activities are based. A school carries out market research in order to acquire up-to-date information that is vital at one level for survival and at another level for expansion and also to fulfil its accountability responsibilities more accurately and completely.

Davies and Ellison (1997) define market research as the “systematic collection and analysis of information which relates to the school and the environment in which it is operating” (p. 41). It provides a means of qualifying and quantifying the nature of client wants and needs, and of monitoring the school’s effectiveness in satisfying those wants and needs. Information should be gathered from both internal and external sources. It should be balanced, unbiased and provide a critical commentary on the current situation.

The process of market research should enable the school to obtain specific information about the following four broad areas identified by Davies and Ellison (1997): the school’s environment, competitors, clients and the quality of the school’s service.

This marketing research can be gathered formally through a market research programme or by gathering information from inside and outside the organisation. Once obtained, this data can be used to confirm current understandings and intentions or as anticipatory evidence to allow new developments or changes to be made.

The type of information a school wants to find determines the research method it chooses to use to gather that information. Some of the most common methods used by schools are: personal interviews; telephone interviews; questionnaires; surveys; focus groups; observation; Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis; environmental scanning; informal talks (feedback, gossip); client complaints and documentary analysis. The selection of data collection method will be determined by what Juran (1988, as cited in Sallis, 2002) refers to its “fitness for purpose”.

Through their research, Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2003) found that the most common data collection methods used were interviews or self-report questionnaires rather than systematic observations to document and outline practical elements of school marketing. They identify this as a

major weakness because the documentation of the marketing process is based largely on subjective interpretations by school members and stakeholders. The result may give a biased, subjective perspective.

Analysing and interpreting marketing research findings

One of the biggest challenges facing a market researcher is converting a complex set of data to a form that can be read and understood quickly by the people who will decide future actions on the basis of this research. The goal at this stage of the marketing research process is to communicate information clearly to the right people in a timely fashion. These research findings must be used in a meaningful way to drive change or improvement in the way service is delivered. Zeithaml et al. (2006) advise that when users feel confident that they understand the data, they are more likely to apply it appropriately. Depicting marketing research findings graphically is a powerful way to communicate research information.

Importance/Performance Analysis (IPA)

One of the most useful forms of analysis in marketing research is the importance/performance analysis first developed by Martilla and James in the late 1970s. This chart combines data on customer perceptions and importance ratings (scores). The mean scores from all the students' responses are calculated for each of the quality features for both performance and importance ratings. These mean scores are then plotted onto the importance/performance matrix by locating points on a graph by means of coordinates. The mean of the two sets of mean scores determine the placement of the division quadrant axis lines.

An example is shown in Figure 2.4. Attribute importance is represented on the vertical axis from high (top) to low (bottom). Performance is shown on the horizontal axis from low (left) to high (right). The shading on the chart indicates the area of highest leverage for service quality improvements – where importance is high and performance is low. The

attributes that most need to be improved are in this quadrant. This type of research helps a school identify the attributes and areas to improve.

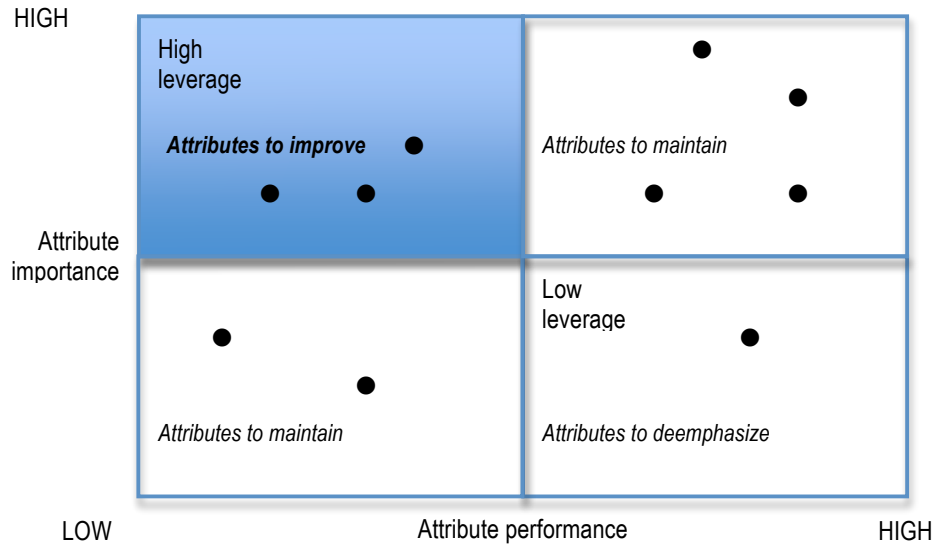


Figure 2.4 Importance/Performance Matrix
(Source: Zeithaml et al., 2006, p. 167)

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature relevant to the investigation of students' perceptions of quality within a secondary school. The recruitment, retention and enhancement of customer relationships is an important determinant of the customer's overall satisfaction with the service. The complex and changing nature of understanding students' perceptions and how they affect the marketing of the school is seen as producing interpretation and implementation tensions. Traditional marketing methods are not appropriate for schools and service marketing is seen as a critical area in the strategic marketing of schools. Schools must focus on the customer to ensure their requirements are being met and they are satisfied with the service being delivered by the school. The literature relevant to each of these areas has been explored in some depth. The review of literature contributes to the methodology for this research that is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological background to the research. The chapter will describe and reflect on the methodological approach used to explore the students' perceptions of quality at OHS. The next two sections explain the methods of data collection, 'focus group' and 'questionnaire', enabling rich and empirical data to be collected. The procedures related to data management and analysis methods are explored along with triangulation, reliability, and validity of the collected data. As the data was collected over a three-year period it can be considered a 'cross-sectional' study. Issues concerning the limitations of the research and research ethics are also discussed.

Methodological Overview

A sound measure of service quality is necessary for identifying the aspects of service needing performance improvement, assessing how much improvement is needed on each aspect, and evaluating the impact of improvement efforts.

Performance Approaches

The basis of perceptual outcome assessment has evolved from multi-attribute models through importance-performance (Martilla & James 1977; Kotler, 2000) to multiple discussions of service quality (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuramum, 1996; Cronin and Taylor, 1994). In all these conceptualisations, customers provide both perceptions of performance and importance.

Importance-performance analysis (IPA) conceptually underlies the multi-attribute models that date back to the late 1970s. Martilla and James (1977) were the first to apply the IPA technique to analyse performance.

They declared IPA to be a low-cost, easily understood technique for exploring different aspects of the marketing mix, and enabling managers to reallocate resources according to four areas that are discussed below. Originally devised with marketing uses in mind, the application of IPA now extends to a wide range of fields, including educational institutions.

The key objective of IPA is diagnostic in nature. It aims to facilitate identification of attributes for which, given their importance, the service underperforms or overperforms. To this end, the interpretation of the IPA is graphically presented on a grid divided into four quadrants. The Y-axis reports the customers' perceived importance of selected attributes, and the X-axis shows the services' performance in relation to these attributes. The four identifiable quadrants are: concentrate here, keep up the good work, low priority and possible overkill. Therefore, IPA provides a useful and easily understandable guide to identifying the most crucial service attributes in terms of their need for managerial action.

Service quality considers the success or progress of an organisation in delivering the service that was intended. The SERVQUAL approach uses scales designed to measure customer perceptions of service quality along five key dimensions: reliability, tangibles, assurance, empathy and responsiveness of the service provider. It evaluates both process and outcomes. SERVQUAL-styled systems use expectations as a comparison level for the perceived performance (Zeithaml et al., 1996), whereas SERVPREF-styled systems use a single measure for performance comparing evaluations over time (Cronin & Taylor, 1994). In both systems, importance weights are used to indicate priorities and to construct composite evaluation measures.

This research project is essentially 'social research' as it draws on the social sciences for conceptual and theoretical inspiration as defined by Bryman (2008). Educational research is fundamentally a problem solving activity and this research originated when reflecting on why some schools are perceived to be more popular than others. In education, research

attempts to address questions or solve problems through the collection and analysis of empirical primary data for the purpose of description, explanation and application (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

The research focus was on the perceptions of secondary school students in relation to the service provided by their school. The intention was to describe the quality issues required by students from their secondary school and to explore the extent to which these were being met by their secondary school. Cohen et al. (2007) describe espoused behaviour as the ability to “understand the subjective world of human experience and to get inside the person and to understand from within” (p. 22).

A service quality research study can be defined as the composite of separate research studies and types needed to address research objectives and execute an overall measurement strategy (Zeithaml et al. 2006). Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used for achieving the research objectives. A cross-sectional questionnaire was conducted in 2007 and 2010 for measuring the perception of secondary school students about the service quality of their own secondary school. The statistical analysis was conducted based on the quantitative data from the questionnaire. Quantitative research in marketing is designed to describe the nature, attitudes, or behaviours of customers empirically and to test specific hypotheses that a service marketer wants to examine. Quantitative research is essential to assessing and improving service delivery, and design for it provides managers with data from which they can make inferences about customer groups. These studies are key for quantifying the customers’ satisfaction, the importance of service attributes, the extent of service quality gaps, and perceptions of value.

The qualitative method was used to search related documentary data, from previous research and conduct two focus group interviews. Qualitative paradigms draw on people and their institutions with an emphasis on the theory and method of interpretation of human action (Bryman, 2008). Qualitative methods provide descriptive or textual

information to unpack causes and consequences of changes difficult to chart by numerical data. Qualitative research can offer explanation. Eight student leaders in 2007 and 12 student leaders in 2010 were interviewed in a focus group discussion to identify 15 service quality features most important to them. Coleman and Lumby (1999) assert that a researcher should make use of both qualitative and quantitative techniques that incorporate some elements from both of the two basic methods to ensure validity in the research findings. Results from quantitative studies can highlight specific deficiencies that can be more deeply probed through follow-up qualitative research.

The value of quantitative research methods is recognised in providing data for qualitative interpretation. “The use of quantitative data in qualitative research is not only useful and often unavoidable, it provides yet another perspective” (Anderson, 1990, p. 130). In describing and explaining the experiences of the students in terms of service quality, the data collection method selected needed to be the most useful for the purpose. Early in the research period it was recognised that any statistical analysis was unlikely to go beyond simple descriptions involving counts, frequencies and cross-tabulation. This was certainly the case in the context of this research. It is best described as ‘blended methodology’, since there are both qualitative and quantitative dimensions in the research process.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

A cross-sectional study of 52 students from Year 9 to Year 13 in 2007 and 54 students in 2010 was conducted for measuring and comparing the perception of secondary school service attributes of the two groups. As part of two focus groups the Year 13 Student Leaders had identified 15 quality features. These formed the basis of a self-administered anonymous questionnaire which was given to a randomly selected student from each form class in the school.

Initially the research project was to be completed within one year but due to unforeseen circumstances it was extended and now provides data from 2007 and 2010 allowing for it to be considered a cross-sectional study. The initial 2007 data provided a rich base to allow a comparison to be made with new data collected in 2010. The same processes were used as in the initial research to ensure the data was reliable and valid.

The next two sections will explore the two selected data collection methods used in this study. The focus group provided the initial quality statements that were included in the anonymous questionnaire given to the students.

The Focus Group

Hennink (2007) states that the essential purpose of focus group research is to identify a range of different views around a research topic and to gain an understanding of the issues from the perspective of the participants themselves. The initial purpose of the focus groups was to identify and rank the quality statements important to Year 13 students at OHS.

Focus group methodology was formally developed in the social sciences during the 1940s (David & Sutton, 2004, cited in Hennink, 2007) and its primary application was in the field of market research to determine preferences, behaviour and customers' views. From the early 1980s, there has been a resurgence in the use of focus groups as they provide information on a wide range of research issues in the social science area including educational institutions.

Hennink (2007) identifies a number of characteristics which distinguish this method, including the use of pre-selected individuals who have similar characteristics, with a group size of six to eight participants. A trained moderator guides discussion which is shared in a non-threatening environment.

The focus group participants were the respective year's elected student leaders. In 2007 the student leadership team consisted of eight Year 13 students, these students being led by the Head Boy and Girl. A change was made to the student leadership structure in 2010 with the group being enlarged to 12 students to provide more senior students with a leadership opportunity. The student leadership group was selected as it was felt that having been at the school for five years they understood which experiences were important to provide a quality education for all students.

The student leaders were invited to attend the focus group meeting where a colleague was asked to act as scribe for the meeting allowing me, as the researcher, to facilitate discussion. The focus group guidelines were explained and the data gathering began. It became very clear early on that identifying 10 service quality features for the school was going to be limiting. The group therefore decided to select 15 statements which allowed them the scope to include all of the statements they felt were important.

At the conclusion of the initial focus group it was agreed that the 15 quality statements would be collated and another focus group meeting held to check that all statements were clear and understandable and that they portrayed the agreed quality features. Exactly the same format was used when running the focus group in 2010 and the same scribe was used.

Krueger and Casey (2000) support the above approach and note that the goal for the focus group is to create a "comfortable, permissive environment" (p. 9). They also state that researchers should "always select participants who have something in common, and tell them what they have in common" (p. 9). In this research the students were all current student leaders of OHS. A scribe was used in the focus groups to moderate and encourage comments both positive and negative in nature

and provide a written record of the final quality statements. The presence of the scribe also ensured that I did not unduly lead the students' decisions due to my role as their Associate Principal.

The goal of the focus group was to collect qualitative data that was of interest to the researcher (Kruger & Casey, 2000). In this research, the data needed was a set of service quality features for OHS. Kruger and Casey (2000) identify the following uses of focus groups but state that this list is not intended to be mutually exclusive or all-inclusive: decision making, product or program development, customer satisfaction, planning and goal setting, needs assessment; quality movements; understanding employee concerns, policy making and testing and finally as a primary or secondary research tool.

The Questionnaire

A questionnaire was considered the most appropriate data collection instrument following the focus group for a number of reasons. It was an efficient way to gather data, given the number of subjects involved and the time available for data collection. The costs involved in producing the questionnaire were minimal and data entry and analysis expertise was available. Although the research was primarily qualitative to this point, a questionnaire allowed for simple quantitative analysis, with room for written comments and additional feedback if desired. As the questionnaire was anonymous, printing it on different coloured paper for the each year level allowed more in-depth analysis of ratings and identification of comments in relation to year level of the respective respondent.

Williams (2003) and Cohen et al. (2007) believe that there are three dimensions that need to be considered in order to produce a good questionnaire: context, content and appearance. These can be defined as follows:

- Context – how and from whom the data is to be collected determines the design of the questionnaire. The layout and the cultural knowledge of the respondents are also important.
- Content - the questionnaire contains instructions, filters, requires closed and open responses as well as a variety of questions.
- Appearance – the ‘look’ of the questionnaire is important for three objectives: to get the questionnaire completed, to get it accurately completed, and to allow an accurate analysis. Therefore, the questionnaire needs to be both attractive and simple to complete.

The questionnaire is a useful instrument for collecting data which is reasonably straightforward to analyse (Cohen et al., 2007). Questionnaires can be used to explain the relationship between people’s opinions and performance, and which can show where adjustments can be made to improve service.

A probability sampling strategy was used where every member of the school population for both research years had an equal chance of being included in the sample; inclusion or exclusion from the sample was purely a matter of chance. A stratified sampling method was used to divide the school population into homogenous groups, each group containing subjects with similar characteristics. Subjects were selected according to their year level grouping at the school (Cohen et al., 2007). As the school is academically streamed a questionnaire was given to one student in each form class at each year level. Deans were asked to ensure that in selecting this student they had a spread of males and females across the form class. The stratified random sample, therefore, represented a useful blend of randomisation and categorisation, thereby enabling both a quantitative and qualitative piece of research to be undertaken.

Rating scale means were calculated for each attribute of each group of students surveyed. Rating scales are widely used in research for they combine the opportunity for a flexible response with the ability to

determine frequencies, correlations and other forms of quantitative analysis. A Likert scale was used to provide a range of responses to a given statement. Rating scales are particularly useful for tapping attitudes, perceptions and opinions of respondents. The questionnaire was structured so that each quality attribute was scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (unimportant) to 5 (important) in the Importance part, and from 1 (poor performance) to 5 (good performance) in the Performance part. A five-point scale allowed a midpoint to be selected by the students. Both sections had a forced scale to ensure all students had to answer each question.

As OHS is a secondary school that has students from Year 9 through to Year 13, the questionnaire design had to ensure all the students selected could understand the language used. The questionnaire went through a pre-test where some ambiguity in the instructions was identified and eliminated.

Sequencing of questions was important. Early questions have the potential to influence the general tone of the questionnaire or the mind-set of the respondents. Word based questionnaires may be off-putting for many respondents, particularly children. Clarity of wording and simplicity of design are essential. Clear instructions should guide respondents.

It was important to include at the beginning of the questionnaire assurances of confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability. This was achieved for example, by indicating that, students need not give their names, that the data will be aggregated and that individuals will not be able to be identified through the use of categories or details of their location. This was especially important for this research due to the possible perceived authority and power attributed to my role as Associate Principal. The students needed to know they could be honest in both their responses and comments made in the questionnaire.

Importance/Performance Analysis (IPA)

In the service operations/marketing area perhaps the best-known importance-performance gap-based method is that proposed by Martilla and James (1977). They held that each attribute of a service could be judged by its 'customer importance' and 'company performance'. Joseph, Yakhou and Stone (2005) agree that academic researchers have long advocated the use of importance-performance analysis as a managerially effective method of translating customer perceptions of service quality into analysis of where to focus organisational attentions and resources.

Importance-performance analysis involves using a focus group to create a list of service features to include in a questionnaire. The questionnaire will then gather the customers' perceptions of the actual performance of each service feature. The final step involves plotting the study group's perception of service delivery on what is referred to as the perceptual map. The vertical axis will represent the 'level of importance' and the horizontal axis will represent the 'level of performance'. The placement of the axes creates the respective boundaries of the four quadrants of the map/grid. This placement will have an impact on the strategic interpretation of the customer perceptions of the service quality features plotted within each quadrant of the grid. Martilla and James (1977) originally suggested that the positioning of the grid lines was a matter of judgement, because the value of IPA is in determining relative, rather than absolute, levels of importance. Another method sees the cross-point being set at the mean importance-performance scores.

Since IPA was first developed 25 years ago, there has been debate about the positioning of the grid lines. Bacon (2003) identifies the one major shortcoming of the IPA model as an inherent discontinuity in the inferred priorities, where a slight change in an attribute's position might lead to a dramatic change in its inferred priority. Bacon suggests that the use of some other method of defining priorities in IP space, with a more continuous transition from high to low priorities, may be more valid.

Joseph, Yakhou and Stone (2005) explain Martilla and James' technique of importance-performance analysis as follows (refer to Figure 3.1):

- Quadrant A (concentrate here) is the top-left quadrant comprised of service features that customers consider to be of relatively high importance, but which they also feel that they are receiving relatively less than the desired service performance.
- Quadrant B (keep up the good work) is the the top-right quadrant comprised of service features that customers consider to be of relatively high importance and which they also feel that they are receiving relatively desirable service performance.
- Quadrant C (low priority) is the bottom-left quadrant comprised of service features that customers consider to be relatively less important and which they also feel that they are receiving either adequate service or relatively less than desired performance.
- Quadrant D (possible overkill) is the bottom-right quadrant comprised of service features that customers perceive either adequate or better than the desired performance on relatively less important matters.

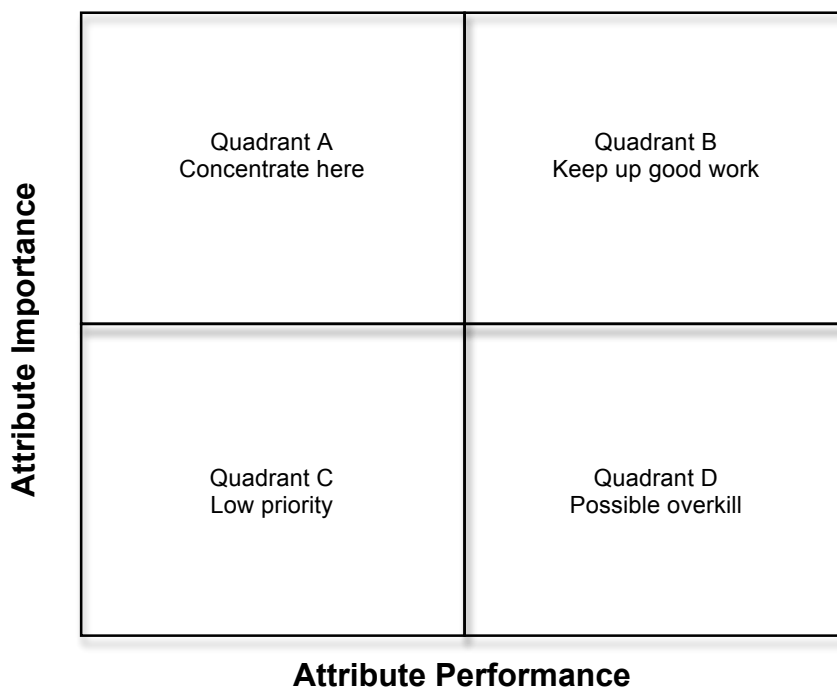


Figure 3.1 Importance/Performance Analysis
(Based on: Martilla and James, 1977)

As mentioned earlier, a focus group was conducted to gather the 15 quality attributes for each research period. These quality attributes were

placed into a questionnaire that was given to one student from each form class within the school population. The questionnaires and consent forms were returned to either the Dean or the main office where they were collated and separated. Questionnaires were given to the researcher.

At this point, the analysis of the data began using an Excel spreadsheet with formulae used to calculate the mean scores for both the importance and performance data for all students' responses. All questionnaires were numbered, 52 students in 2007 and 54 students in 2010, so that they could be identified at a later stage. Another spreadsheet used the mean scores for importance only and then ranked them from the highest mean score to the lowest. A similar spreadsheet was used for the performance data to provide a ranked list. To calculate the performance gap for the 15 quality attributes the performance and importance mean scores were entered. The gap was calculated by subtracting the importance mean score from performance mean score in a separate spreadsheet. Plotting the mean scores for each quality attribute on a graph created the importance/performance map. The horizontal axis indicates the importance of the attributes from low mean score to high mean scores and the vertical axis represents their perceived performance from low to high mean scores. The placement of the grid lines was determined by finding the mean of both the mean importance and performance scores.

The written comments from the questionnaires were coded according to the themes according to four categories of quality features - 'outside the classroom', by the school, by the teacher and 'within the classroom'. These were then split into positive and negative comments to assist with use in the data findings and discussion chapters. Individual questionnaires were identified by their year level and their unique number to enable deeper analysis.

Research Issues

When conducting research - researchers have some inherent challenges to face with regard to the issues of validity and ethical research.

Reliability

Reliability in research is concerned with the consistency of results. Bush (2002) defines reliability as “the probability that repeating a research procedure or method would produce identical or similar results. It provides a degree of confidence that replicating the process would ensure consistency” (p. 60). In this research study, while the quality attributes were different, the research procedures and methods used in the initial 2007 period were duplicated in 2010. Reliability, in the context of qualitative research is the idea that “different researchers, given exposure to the same situation, would reach the same conclusions” (Burns, 2000, pp 449-450). As applied to research, the researcher in qualitative research is more concerned with validity than reliability. The use of the written comments provided by the students could be interpreted by another researcher and the same conclusions would be drawn.

Validity

Validity is used to judge whether the research accurately describes the phenomenon which it is intended to describe. If an item is unreliable (cannot be repeated), then it must also lack validity. However a reliable item is not necessarily also valid. It can produce the same result on numerous occasions but not measure what it is supposed to measure. Validity, on the other hand, refers to whether or not the results are accurate and honest and is therefore more applicable to quantitative research methods. While the IPA method was chosen for this research study, research by Bacon (2003) suggests that while this type of research may be popular but has a low validity and must therefore be used prudently and the results interpreted with caution.

Cardno (2003) suggests that the researcher should pre-test questionnaires and survey tools as a means of ensuring validity and advocates providing opportunities for participants to check for accuracy throughout the process. A pre-test of both questionnaires was carried out to ensure they were valid and understandable. Researchers are primarily concerned with establishing internal validity, which refers to that the way the data is gathered, analysed and presented and the extent to which this meshes with their commitment to what is intended and what is important. The interviewer can have the interview data checked by the person interviewed to confirm its validity. This type of check was not possible as the questionnaires in this research were anonymous. Forward (1989) also suggests researchers might get their data checked by a co-practitioner which would verify their findings as well provide a link to a participative and collaborative approach of research. Another practitioner has checked this research study's data for accuracy.

Generalisability

Bush (2002) explains generalisability as the “degree to which findings can be generalised to other settings similar to the one in which the study occurred” (p. 67). The problem of generalisability can be minimised by replicating the study in another similar setting on a different occasion with the desire to show the results are similar in both situations. The fact that this research became a cross-sectional study over a three-year period has allowed the research findings to be generalised and compared just for the school. A common criticism of research is that it lacks rigour and is therefore not a useful tool for publication of the research. Cardno (2003) argues that whether or not the findings can be generalised is not the aim of research because research involves a “single situation or case that is internally rather than externally driven” (p. 54). As this research was conducted in my own school, which is unique, it is unlikely these research findings can be generalised to other secondary schools around New Zealand.

Triangulation

Some research suggests (Cardno, 2003; Davidson & Tolich, 1999; Gay & Airasian, 2000) suggests the use of triangulation as a tool for ensuring that the research is valid. Triangulation involves checking information from a range of angles and sources to look for recurring results and findings. It corroborates and confirms that the information is valid by finding the repeated regularities.

In this research triangulation was achieved in a number of ways.

- Methodological triangulation: multiple sources of data were used to collect evidence. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used.
- Time triangulation: analyses same, similar or different subjects at different points of time. In this research focus groups were used with student leaders and questionnaires were given to every year level in 2007 and 2010
- Data source triangulation: the use of multiple participants allows issues common across the questionnaires to be highlighted.

Ethical considerations

The ethics associated with any research project focus on the need to protect people involved in the research from any possible harm – physical, mental, emotional or financial. In gaining the support of colleagues, the researcher must pay close attention to such ethical considerations to ensure that those supporting the research are not compromised through disclosure, misquoting or bias on the part of the researcher. As this research study was conducted at my own school, with permission from my Principal and Board of Trustees, I had to ensure as part of the ethics approval process that the findings would not harm them so an assumed name was used throughout this research.

Regardless of which model of research is adopted, Cardno (2003) reinforces the view that “informed consent is fundamental in ethical

research” (p. 57). She emphasises the need for transparency to ensure that participants are fully informed as to both “the aims of the research and their role in it” (p. 57). Both the student leader and student consent forms contained statements concerning the protection of confidentiality and privacy of data. Confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that there were no identifiers on any forms or transcripts that might link the data to an individual. The informed consent agreements were collected and locked away by a Dean within the school. Only the student’s year level and a unique sample number identify individual students’ comments.

The participation of subjects must be voluntary and they must be able to remove themselves at any time they choose. There was no coercion of any of the participants either before, to force them to be involved, or during the study to get them to disclose information. All participants were given an information sheet (see Appendices D, E, H and I) which outlined the steps taken by the researcher to identify their rights as research participants.

The notion of power is significant in the focus group situation, for the focus group is not simply a data collection situation but a social group interview (Cohen et al. 2007). As a senior leader within the school and the moderator of the focus group I had to ensure that the student leaders felt comfortable to share their views honestly with regards to formulating the quality attributes for the school. To ensure that views gathered from the focus group were not influenced by my position within the school I engaged the services of a scribe (co-interviewer) to assist with the recording and to authenticate the attributes given by the students. Overall the research design was such that it minimised harm to participants while still achieving the research aims.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the methodology of this research as a small-scale, mixed method, cross-sectional study. The use of focus groups and questionnaires as data collection methods have been discussed. Importance-performance analysis was explained. Methods of triangulation to ensure the validity of the data have been given. The next chapter introduces the findings of this research from the students' perspectives of quality features within a secondary school.

Chapter 4: Data Findings

Introduction

The data collected from the focus groups, interviews and documents is presented in this chapter. Demographic data is presented first to provide information about the secondary school used, its size and pastoral format. The following themes emerged from the data collected in the questionnaires with regard to students' expectations and experience of a secondary school. Theme one focuses on the expectations/experiences of students outside the classroom. Theme two identifies features the students expected the school to provide with regards to their education. The third theme deals with their experiences and expectations in regard to the teachers within the school. Finally, theme four addresses student expectations within the classroom and the teaching and learning environment. The data relevant to each of the main themes is presented.

Background Demographic Data

The research school is a co-educational secondary school with a decile rating of five in 2010 and an average school roll of approximately 1300 students over the research period. For the purpose of this study and to protect the anonymity of the school, it will be known as Oceania High School (OHS).

Table 4.1 School Roll at Ministry of Education Statistics Dates

	2007	2010
Roll March 1 Return	1349	1407
Roll July 1 Return	1329	1344

The increase in the 2010 roll was largely due to an increase in Year 13 students. The pastoral structure for the school consists of horizontal form

classes with an appointed Dean at each year level. The appointed Dean follows the students throughout their time at OHS, which means the students are well known by the Dean when they reach Year 13.

Table 4.2 Form Class Numbers

	2007	2010
Year 9	12	12
Year 10	12	12
Year 11	12	11
Year 12	10	11
Year 13	6	8
Total	52	54

The slight changes in Year 11 and 12 form classes can be explained by the fact that the current Year 12 group was the largest intake at the school back in 2007 with 330 students. This cohort has continued to be the largest year level group in successive years.

The student leadership structure has changed during the period under study. In 2007 there were eight elected student leaders. This group comprised of a Head Girl and Boy, Deputy Head Girl and Boy with responsibility for Executive Council, Deputy Head Girl and Boy with responsibility for Cultural Council and Deputy Head Girl and Boy with responsibility for Sports Council. This leadership structure was introduced in 2003. In 2010 the student leadership structure was changed from eight to 12 students, to provide more students with an opportunity to hold a leadership role. Leadership roles are as follows: Head Girl and Boy, two Prefects with responsibility for Executive Council, three Prefects with responsibility for Cultural Council, three Prefects with responsibility for Sports Council and two Prefects with responsibility for Community Service.

Student Expectations of Secondary School

To identify the services expected by a secondary school student in 2007 that year's student leadership team, through the use of a focus group, identified the service quality features to be included in the questionnaire. As the initial project was not completed in 2007, the project changed to a cross-sectional study of both 2007 and 2010 students' perceptions.

A ranked list of quality statements (see Table 4.3) presents the findings from the 2007 focus group. A secondary focus group generally confirmed that the statements did reflect the features wanted although there were some minor differences in wording.

Table 4.3 Ranked Quality Statements for 2007 Questionnaire

1. The school has passionate teachers.
2. The school has teachers who care about their students.
3. The school provides a wide range of sporting opportunities.
4. The school provides a wide range of opportunities for students in the cultural arts.
5. The school offers up-to-date equipment and resources.
6. The school encourages students to be independent learners.
7. The school encourages students to achieve to the best of their academic ability.
8. The school holds high expectations of student behaviour.
9. The school has a fair discipline system.
10. The school provides an effective careers education programme.
11. The school physical environment is safe.
12. The school has effective communication systems to students and parents.
13. The school provides effective leadership through its Senior Management team.
14. The school provides leadership opportunities for students.
15. Technology is used to enhance teaching and learning.

Again in 2010 the current student leaders were used to identify their 15 service quality statements for the questionnaire. This initial focus group was a little more difficult to facilitate due to the increased number of student leaders. A lot more discussion took place to finalise the statements and ultimately the 2010 group came up with 21 of these. In a second focus group the students were asked to rank these statements in

order of importance to them and also eliminate some they felt were duplication. The feedback was then tabulated to identify the 15 agreed statements. This ranking identified 14 clear statements but the final statement was not clear. Another quick focus group meeting was held to clarify the last service quality statement.

Table 4.4 Ranked Service Quality Statements 2010 Questionnaire

1. The school provides students with plenty of academic opportunities.
2. The school provides students with a safe learning environment.
3. The school offers students a broad (wide) curriculum.
4. The school encourages the students to be the best they can be.
5. Students are well prepared for future study or work.
6. The students are provided with effective support systems (Form Teacher, Deans etc).
7. The school provides students with leadership opportunities.
8. The school rewards students' success.
9. The school provides students with a wide range of sporting opportunities.
10. The school provides students with a wide range of cultural opportunities.
11. The school has an effective and efficient Senior Leadership Team.
12. The school has excellent teachers.
13. The teachers are supportive and caring.
14. The school has a good community spirit.
15. The school respects different cultures.

When comparing the quality statements from the 2007 and 2010 cohorts some interesting similarities and conflicts are identified. When analysing the statements, six of the 15 (40%) were essentially the same. In both years, students identified the need for a wide range of sporting and cultural activities and their statements were almost identical in wording. The other four similar statements referred to teachers caring about their students, teachers encouraging students to achieve to the best of their ability, effective leadership of the Senior Management Team and finally, providing leadership opportunities for students.

Student Expectations/Experiences Outside the Classroom

While the majority of the students' ranked statements were related directly to teaching and learning within the classroom environment, three statements were identified which related to expectations outside the classroom but within the school structure. These experiences are generally offered as an optional extra curricular activity. In both years the focus group identified the same three experiences they expected to be offered by a secondary school outside the classroom. These features included a wide range of cultural, sporting and student leadership opportunities.

Importance Ranking from a Student's Perspective

The questionnaire asked students to rank how important these features were to them personally on a one to five-point scale (five being the most important). Table 4.5 shows how the students ranked the three outside classroom features for both years.

In both years the students ranked 'being offered a wide range of cultural opportunities' as the least important to them compared to the other service quality features. Student leadership opportunities ranked very low in both years, whereas sporting opportunities ranked in the middle in 2007 and in the bottom range for 2010.

Table 4.5 Importance Ranking - 1 (highest) to 15 (lowest)

	2007	2010
Cultural opportunities	15	15
Sporting opportunities	8	13
Student leadership opportunities	12	14

Performance Ranking from a Student's Perspective

Students were asked to rank the same three features with regard to how they perceived their secondary school performed these features, using a

five-point scale (five being the best performance). Table 4.6 shows the results for both years.

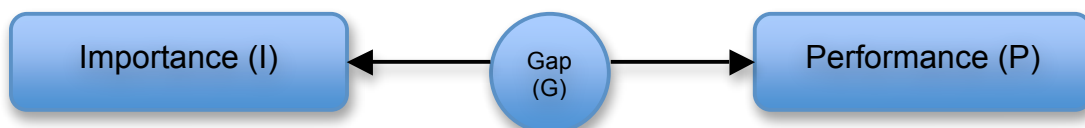
Table 4.6 Performance Ranking – 1 (highest) to 15 (lowest)

	2007	2010
Cultural opportunities	4	7
Sporting opportunities	5	1
Student Leadership opportunities	1	8

Table 4.6 highlights that based on the students' perceptions, their secondary school performed well in all features outside the classroom, especially in 2007 where all three features were ranked in the top half of all features identified. In 2010 the rankings are slightly lower. In both years one of these three extra-curricular features is ranked as the best performing feature by the secondary school used in the research project. These findings will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Performance Gap Identified by Students

A performance gap is the difference between the perceived importance ranking and the perceived performance ranking from the students point of view from within a secondary school.



In a performance analysis (adapted from Clark, 1999), you subtract the importance mean (I) from the performance mean (P) to measure the performance gap (G). This measurement ($I - P = G$), if the result is negative, identifies the span to be bridged in order to reach the importance objective. A positive result indicates that the organisation is over performing and may need to re-evaluate the time and energy spent on this particular activity. In this research study the mean scores have been rounded to one decimal place (any calculation of 0.5 or above has

been rounded upwards) for ease of interpretation. In some cases this has meant that the tabled calculations may appear to have been calculated incorrectly (because of this rounding process).

Table 4.7 2007 Performance Gap Identified by Students

2007	Importance Mean	Performance Mean	Performance Gap
Cultural Opportunities	3.7	4.2	0.4
Sporting Opportunities	4.3	4.1	-0.2
Student Leadership Opportunities	4.2	4.2	0.1

The performance gaps identified above are very small and could be interpreted as suggesting that the school is performing at an appropriate level to match the importance from the students' perceptions with the school's actual performance. From the research data above it could be deduced that the students believe that the school is over-performing in its delivery of cultural opportunities for its students and slightly under-performing with regard to sporting opportunities.

Some of the students provided written comments on their views. Twenty five out of 52 students (48%) felt the need to comment on sporting opportunities and only 12 on student leadership (23%), further reinforcing the deduction made that students felt the school under-performed in regard to sporting opportunities. Conversely, many of the comments regarding sporting opportunities suggested that students believed the school was meeting their expectations with regard to the delivery they provided. The significance of the student perceptions in this area will be discussed in the next chapter.

The written comments provided on cultural opportunities within the school did not give a clear indication of why the students felt the school spent too much time on these activities. While some of the comments were positive with regard to the service provided in this area one student commented:

I am not really interested in cultural art. (Y13-46)

Another stated:

It seems there is more focus on the sports side of things rather than the Arts. (Y13-50)

These comments are further dissected in the discussion of research findings in Chapter 5.

Table 4.8 2010 Performance Gap Identified by Students

2010	Importance Mean	Performance Mean	Performance Gap
Cultural Opportunities	3.7	3.9	0.2
Sporting Opportunities	4.1	4.3	0.2
Student Leadership Opportunities	4.1	3.9	-0.2

The performance gaps identified by students in 2010 are very small indicating that they are satisfied with the school's performance for these three features.

In the area of student leadership opportunities one particular comment suggests that the junior school feel that more leadership opportunities should be given to them as most of the school leadership is provided by senior students.

Most children never get the chance to be even the class captain. (Y10-16)

This is supported by the following comment provided by a Year 12 student:

More in the senior school need to bring more into the rest of the school. (Y12-33)

Student Expectations/Experiences of the School Features

In both 2007 and 2010, students identified a selection of features they expected the school to deliver. In 2007, student leaders identified five quality statements that they felt were important to them as students and should be delivered by a secondary school they attended. Only one feature was identified in both research periods, this being an effective

Senior Management Team for the school. While the wording of the statement was slightly different, the intention was essentially the same.

Importance Ranking from a Student's Perspective

The students' ranking of the importance of each of the features expected by them from the school as a whole, are shown in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9 Importance Ranking – 1 (highest) to 15 (lowest)

	2007	2010
Effective leadership through its Senior Management Team.	13	12
Offers up-to-date equipment and resources.	6=	
School has high expectations of student behaviour.	6=	
School has a fair discipline system.	5	
Effective communications systems with students and parents.	14	
School provides effective support systems for students.		6
School has a good community spirit.		10
School respects other cultures.		8

In both years the students ranked the leadership of the school by the Senior Management Team as one of the least important features for them personally. In 2007, behaviour and discipline were listed separately while in 2010 the only linked reference to discipline was the statement relating to the provision of effective support systems for students. In both years, students ranked these features around the same position of importance. In 2010 students identified a good community spirit for the school and respecting other cultures within the school whereas in 2007 neither of these features had been included in their top 15 quality features. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Performance Ranking from a Student's Perspective

Once again students were asked to rank the quality statements on how well they felt the school was performing in relation to these features, a ranking of one being poor and five being good performance. On the next page is how the students perceived the school performed over the two years:

Table 4.10 Performance Ranking – 1 (highest) to 15 (lowest)

	2007	2010
Effective leadership through its Senior Management Team.	6	5
Offers up-to-date equipment and resources.	15	
School has high expectations of student behaviour.	7	
School has a fair discipline system.	10	
Effective communications systems with students and parents.	12	
School provides effective support systems for students.		2
School has a good community spirit.		14
School respects other cultures.		4

The one feature common to both research periods, effective leadership by Senior Management Team, ranked nearly identically so while the students did not feel this feature was hugely important to them, they also identified the school performed well in this area. In 2007, the lowest ranked performance was perceived by the students to be the up-to-date equipment and resources. This feature was not listed in the top 15 statements for 2010. In 2010 the highest performing feature in this category was the support systems provided for students ranked at number two. Some representative comments given by students with regard to this feature:

It is good when bad students get sent out of class but they need to be harder on them. They come back to class and are naughty again. (Y9-5)

Good discipline processes for bad behaviour. (Y10-7)

It is important that there is someone who we can trust or talk to when we need help. I think most of our teachers are there for support. (Y11-20)

The school provides very effective support systems, with teachers/websites and revision work. (Y11-21)

I think the Deans and the teachers, Nurse are very good when it comes to personal issues because they listen to you. (Y11-22)

This system is great and is helpful for students and what they need to improve in. (Y12-30)

Good Senior Management Team and Deans. (Y12-33)

The significance of the issues highlighted in the above comments will be discussed more closely in Chapter 5.

Performance Gap Identified by Students

The discrepancies between importance and performance are shown in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11 2007 Performance Gap Identified by Students

2007	Importance Mean	Performance Mean	Performance Gap
Effective leadership through it Senior Management Team.	4.1	4.0	-0.1
Offers up-to-date equipment and resources.	4.3	3.1	-1.2
School has high expectations of student behaviour.	4.3	3.9	-0.5
School has a fair discipline system.	4.4	3.6	-0.5
Effective communications systems with students and parents.	4.1	3.6	-0.5

When comparing these figures the performance gaps are much larger than those relating to the previous theme and are all negative. This indicates that on the whole, students are unhappy with the performance by the school when compared to personal importance of each feature. The largest gap between importance and performance is in relation to the availability of up-to-date equipment and resources. Below is a selection of comments made by students with regard to their experiences of this feature.

Some of the equipment is from a while ago and is tagged. (Y10-17)

A lot of textbooks have got pages torn out and they have a lot of graffiti. (Y10-21)

Not enough Physical Education equipment. (Y11-24)

Building a new canteen. More shelter within the school for rainy days. (Y12-41)

Sports Department needs new uniforms for school teams. (Y12-42)

In particular slow and unreliable computers, these tend to breakdown regularly in the Media area. (Y12-43)

It would be awesome for new gym equipment. (Y13-47)

Specific mention of the poor state of textbooks and out-moded Science equipment was made repeatedly.

It is a running joke amongst friends whether or not the author of textbooks are dead yet. It is very important to have up-to-date equipment especially in Science, but for the most part I feel it is mostly an issue of having most of the equipment modern look for teenagers. (Y10-13)

Practical studies and assessment for Science topics are difficult due to lack of up-to-date equipment. (Y13-48)

Most of the textbooks/equipment are out of date, particularly in Science and Social Science Departments. (Y13-49)

Up-to-date equipment is beneficial to our learning but the school is only just starting to meet the mark. (Y13-50)

It seems to me that the school doesn't receive the funding needed to have the most up-to-date equipment and resources eg Physics experiment equipment. (Y13-51)

Table 4.12 2010 Performance Gap Identified by Students

2010	Importance Mean	Performance Mean	Performance Gap
School provides effective support systems for students.	4.5	4.2	-0.3
School has a good community spirit.	4.4	3.6	-0.8
School respects other cultures.	4.4	4.0	-0.4

Once again the data shows that all the gaps in 2010 are negative, with the largest gap being in relation to 'having a good community spirit'. The other two features, while negative, are closer in terms of importance to students and the performance by the school. Some comments were indicative of a strong sense of community in the school while others suggested issues of respect or community spirit:

Not really. I think a lot of students do not respect our community and that there is no spirit about our community. (Y11-20)

Yes it is important, because when you are feeling down and out, community spirit always helps. I don't think it's the actual school or teachers or parents but student different opinions. (Y11-21)

We help through a lot of things like carwashes, refereeing kiwi volleyball, netball and rugby. (Y11-23)

School spirit needs to be built, eg attitude towards each other and towards the school. More house events/social events to build school spirit. (Y12-26)

Some students need more community spirit. (Y12-33)

This has improved over the time I have been there, carwashes, Anzac Day. This is making community thing more highly of the school also. (Y13-38)

Strong sense of culture and family atmosphere. (Y13-44)

Student Expectations/Experiences of Its Teachers

In both 2007 and 2010 students identified two features they expected from their teachers at the secondary school. While the wording was slightly different, passionate teachers or excellent teachers was identified by students in both the 2007 and 2010 year groups.

Importance Ranking from a Student's Perspective

The students ranked the teachers' performance as follows:

Table 4.13 Importance Ranking – 1 (highest) to 15 lowest

	2007	2010
The school has passionate (excellent) teachers	10	1
The school has teachers that care about their students (supportive)	4	3

In 2007 the questionnaire used the term 'passionate' whereas in 2010 the students used the term 'excellent'. In 2007 this expectation was ranked in the lower third with regard to importance but in 2010 the students

perceived excellent teachers as the most important feature of all. The second feature identified by students with regard to their teachers was that they were caring and supportive and in both years this ranked in the top third of most important, with the ranking only one place apart.

Performance Ranking from a Student’s Perspective

In both years the students felt the secondary school was not performing to their expectations in either of the features identified.

Table 4.14 Performance Ranking – 1 (highest) to 15 (lowest)

	2007	2010
The school has passionate (excellent) teachers	13	13
The school has teachers that care about their students (supportive)	14	10

When comparing the comments written by students with regard to their teachers the following trends emerged. In 2007, 41% of the positive written comments made by students were about their teachers. In 44% of these comments students used the quantifier, ‘some’ or ‘most’, indicating that they believed that not all their teachers were good or excellent. In 2007, 19% of comments given were negative about the teachers and 40% of those used the word ‘some’ when referring to their teachers.

In 2010, students’ comments about teachers amounted to 53% of the total comments written with only 18% of the comments using either of the quantifiers ‘some’ or ‘most’. The same trend can be identified in the 2010 data with only 13% of negative comments relating to teachers although a 100% of these comments made reference to ‘some’ teachers.

Performance Gap Identified by Students

The performance gaps revealed when comparing importance rankings of students with their perceived performance rankings by the school are seen in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15 2007/2010 Performance Gap Identified by Students

2007	Importance Mean	Performance Mean	Performance Gap
The school has passionate (excellent) teachers	4.2	3.5	-0.7
The school has teachers that care about their students (supportive)	4.4	3.4	-1.0

2010	Importance Mean	Performance Mean	Performance Gap
The school has passionate (excellent) teachers	4.8	3.7	-1.1
The school has teachers that care about their students (supportive)	4.7	3.8	-0.9

While the students' perceptions of the most poorly perceived features are reversed, the data shows very similar results. In both research periods the gaps are negative and their ranges are similar. What is important is that in 2010 the performance gap of -1.1 was the joint highest whereas in 2007 neither of these statements was in the top ranking. Some positive comments about teachers at the school were provided by students in 2007. The significance of this finding will be further explored in the next chapter.

The teachers care about our students very well. (Y9-4)

Some teachers are caring and help students out. (Y10-16)

Some caring and understanding teachers. (Y11-32)

Some good teachers. (Y11-33)

98% of teachers are good. (Y11-33)

Teachers are caring people. (Y12-45)

Most teachers are caring and passionate about their teaching. (Y13-51)

In 2007, negative feedback about their teachers included comments about attitude and fairness of teachers towards pupils:

(We need) better teachers that listen to you. (Y9-1)

Some teachers need to try harder. (Y10-20)

Teachers need to be fair. (Y11-24)

Attitude of some teachers. (Y11-30)

Individual assessment of teachers by students. (Y12-43)

Students surveyed in 2010 provided the following positive comments when referring to their teachers, signalling that in general, teachers were likeable, inspiring and well-regarded.

Teachers care about students. (Y9-5)

... and care about students ... (Y10-9)

I like the teachers. (Y11-22)

Most teachers are really good at teaching. (Y11-25)

Generous teachers with their time. (Y12-26)

Teachers are happy to give up time for our learning. (Y12-28)

Most teachers are good teachers. (Y12-32)

Mostly good inspiring teachers. (Y12-33)

We have teachers that are caring (Y12-34)

Good PE teachers. (Y13-38)

Some excellent teachers that are willing to help and care about students. (Y13-40)

However, in 2010 negative comments in relation to teachers showed that not all were perceived to be performing to the pupils' expectations.

Disrespectful teachers on some occasions. (Y10-7)

Maybe more support from some teachers. (Y12-34)

Some teachers don't care about students learning. (Y13-43)

Both positive and negative comments about teachers are analysed further in Chapter 5.

Student Expectations/Experiences in the Classroom

In 2007 students identified five expectations for the classroom and in 2010 six features were identified with regard to student learning. Three of the features had essentially the same intent and can be compared over both years while the other features are incomparable.

Importance Ranking from a Student's Perspective

The students ranked the following classroom features for importance to them personally. Results are shown in Table 4.16.

Common to both years is the identification of the provision of careers education or preparing a study plan for future study or work as the second most important feature for a secondary school. Attending a school with a safe environment (learning) was also very important for students. In 2007 the three most important features to students were those provided within the classroom whereas in 2010 the students blended the classroom features with the services provided by the teachers.

Table 4.16 Importance Ranking – 1 (highest) to 15 (lowest)

	2007	2010
Encourages students to be independent learners.	11	
Encourages students to achieve to the best of their academic ability. <i>Best they can be.</i>	1	8
Provides an effective careers education programme. <i>Prepared for future study or work.</i>	2	2
Physical environment is safe. <i>Safe learning environment.</i>	3	4
Technology is used to enhance teaching and learning.	9	
Provides students with plenty of academic opportunities.		5
Offers students a broad (wide) curriculum.		7
Rewards students' success.		11

Performance Ranking from a Student's Perspective

Again students were asked to rank experiences within the classroom according to their personal opinion of the school's performance. Below are the rankings provided from the students' responses to the questionnaire.

Table 4.17 Performance Ranking – 1 (highest) to 15 (lowest)

	2007	2010
Encourages students to be independent learners.	9	
Encourages students to achieve the best of their academic ability. <i>Best they can be.</i>	3	3
Provides an effective careers education programme. <i>Prepared for future study or work.</i>	2	12
Physical environment is safe. <i>Safe learning environment.</i>	8	15
Technology is used to enhance teaching and learning.	11	
Provides students with plenty of academic opportunities.		9
Offers students a broad (wide) curriculum.		11
Rewards students' success.		6

In 2007 the students ranked the school performance in term of providing an effective careers programme at number two, acknowledging the good work done by the Careers Department within the school. Encouraging students to be the 'best they can be' was ranked at number three in both research periods. The two other common expectations were ranked very differently between the two research periods and this will need to be investigated later on. In 2007, students provided a range of comments, which supported their perception of how the school encouraged them:

School encourages students to do their best. (Y9-9)

Encourage students to do well academically. (Y11-27)

School helps failing students do better. (Y11-28)

The guidance given through out our years at school. (Y12-41)

Encourage students to be the best they can be. (Y12-43)

Comments from 2010 students reinforced those offered in 2007:

... encourages students to be the best they can be. (Y10-9)

Helping students that not good at learning. (Y10-10)

The school helps students that need help. (Y10-18)

School pushes students to do well. (Y11-21)

*I believe the school encourages high academic achievement.
(Y12-28)*

Encourage students to do well in all aspects. (Y13-38)

Performance Gap Identified by Students

A comparison of importance and performance by the school has identified the following performance gaps as shown in Table 4.18.

Table 4.18 2007 Performance Gap Identified by Students

2007	Importance Mean	Performance Mean	Performance Gap
Encourages students to be independent learners.	4.2	3.8	-0.4
Encourages students to achieve the best of their academic ability. <i>Best they can be.</i>	4.7	4.2	-0.5
Provides an effective careers education programme. <i>Prepared for future study or work.</i>	4.5	4.2	-0.3
Physical environment is safe. <i>Safe learning environment.</i>	4.5	3.8	-0.7
Technology is used to enhance teaching and learning.	4.2	3.6	-0.6

These results show that the majority of gaps identified are reasonably small. The largest gap is in relation to the need to provide students with a safe physical environment. The negative performance gaps across each of the five areas demonstrate students' perception of the lack of optimum performance by the school.

In 2010 the data has revealed the following performance gaps with regard to students' expectations within the classroom.

Table 4.19 2010 Performance Gap Identified by Students

2007	Importance Mean	Performance Mean	Performance Gap
Provides students with plenty of academic opportunities.	4.5	3.8	-0.7
Encourages students to achieve the best of their academic ability. <i>Best they can be.</i>	4.4	4.1	-0.3
Provides an effective careers education programme. <i>Prepared for future study or work.</i>	4.7	3.7	-1.0
Physical environment is safe. <i>Safe learning environment.</i>	4.6	3.6	-1.1
Offers students a broad (wide) curriculum.	4.5	3.8	-0.7
Rewards students' success.	4.4	3.9	-0.5

As in 2007, the performance gaps are all negative. There are reasonably sizeable gaps with regard to 'preparing students for future study or work' and 'providing a safe learning environment'. When examining the students' written comments the feedback relates mostly to disciplinary matters and the control of disruptive students in the school.

Be harder on people that bully. (Y9-1)

Being harder on students stopping other students learning. (Y9-5)

... having learning interrupted by naughty students. (Y10-9)

The punishments don't change a student's bad behaviour. (Y10-18)

Try to reduce intimidating behaviour by students. (Y11-20)

Disruptive students should be moved out of class. (Y11-25)

Bullying is an issue. (Y12-31)

Importance/Performance Matrix/Map

This map combines the mean scores from the students' perceptions and importance ratings of their experiences and expectations of OHS. This information is sometimes referred to as a perceptual map. As perception differs from person to person, so do the results of the perceptual map. This map allows the performance and importance means to be compared and contrasted in relation to each other. The importance is represented on the vertical axis from high (top) to low (bottom) and the performance is shown on the horizontal axis from low (left) to high (right). The map is then split into four quadrants based on calculating the mean of all the importance means for the horizontal line placement and the mean of the performance means for the vertical line placement. This information should help the school identify the areas of performance they should try and improve (top left), areas in which they should keep up the positive performance (top right), low priority areas (bottom left) and those where they may be applying excess effort (bottom right).

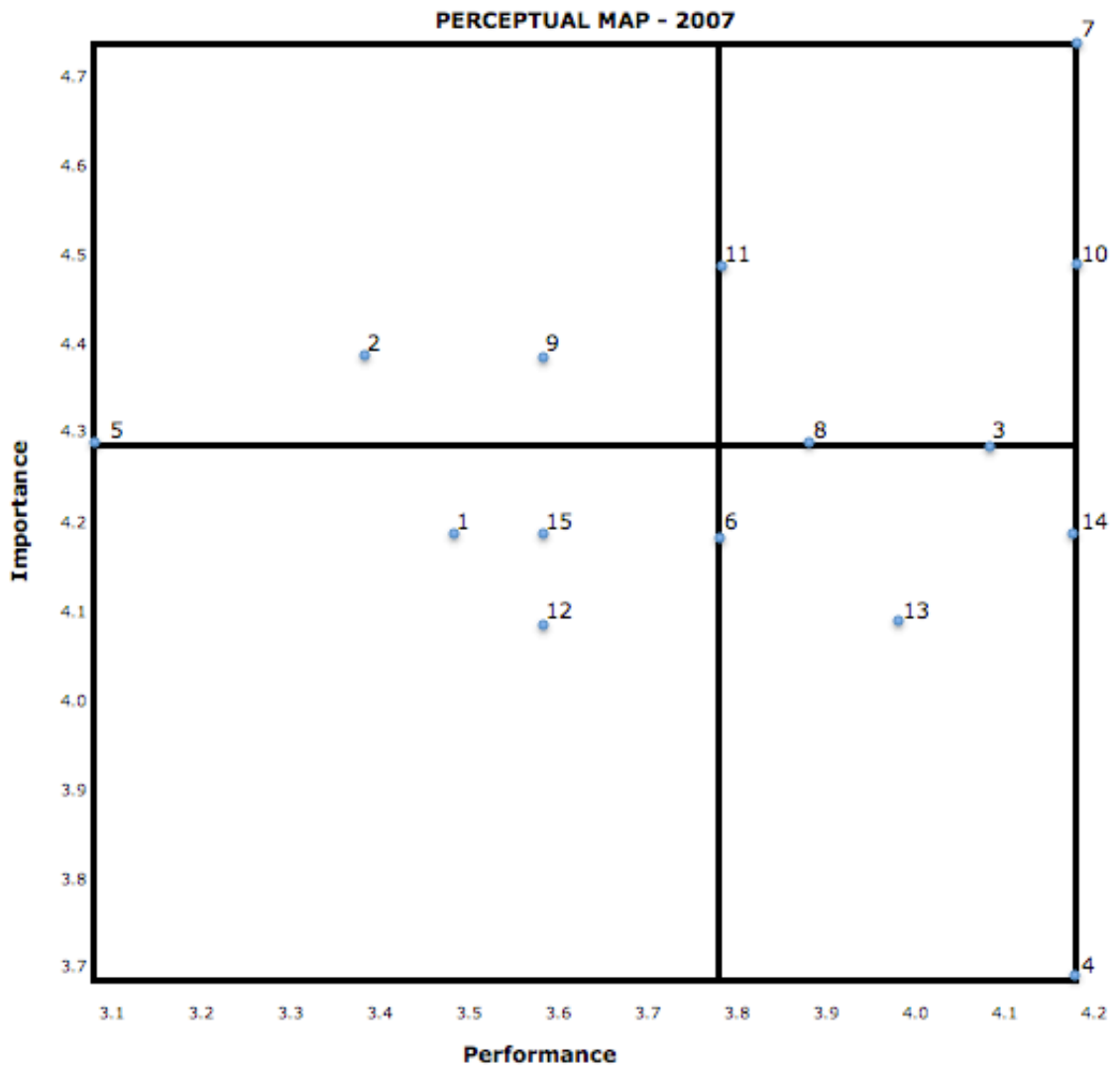


Figure 4.1: 2007 Importance/Performance Map

To help interpret the information in Figure 4.1, a table has been created using the same four quadrants using a letter code to match the themes used throughout this chapter and the expectation rather than the number of the mapped statement.

Themes used within research study

- O – outside the classroom
- S – school features
- T – teachers
- C – inside the classroom

Attributes that are on the vertical or horizontal axes on the grid are shown in italics.

Table 4.20 2007 Importance/Performance Table

2007

<p>Concentrate Here 2. Teachers who care - T 9. Fair discipline system - S 5. <i>Up to date equip and resources - S</i></p>	<p>Keep it Up 7. Encourage students best academically - C 11. <i>Safe physical environment - C</i> 10. Effective careers programme - C 8. <i>High expectation of student behaviour - S</i> 3. <i>Wide range of sporting opportunities - O</i></p>
<p>Maintain – low priority 1. Passionate teachers - T 15. Technology to enhance learning - C 12. Effective communication with parents - S</p>	<p>Deemphasize 6. <i>Independent learners - C</i> 14. Opportunities for student leadership - O 13. Effective SMT - S 4. Wide range of cultural opportunities - O</p>

The data above identifies three features the school needs to concentrate on from the students' perspective. Five of the 15 features are being performed well by the school which should continue to perform at the existing level with regard to these features. Seven features have been identified that are either low priority or over-emphasized by the school in 2007. These features and their impact on OHS will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

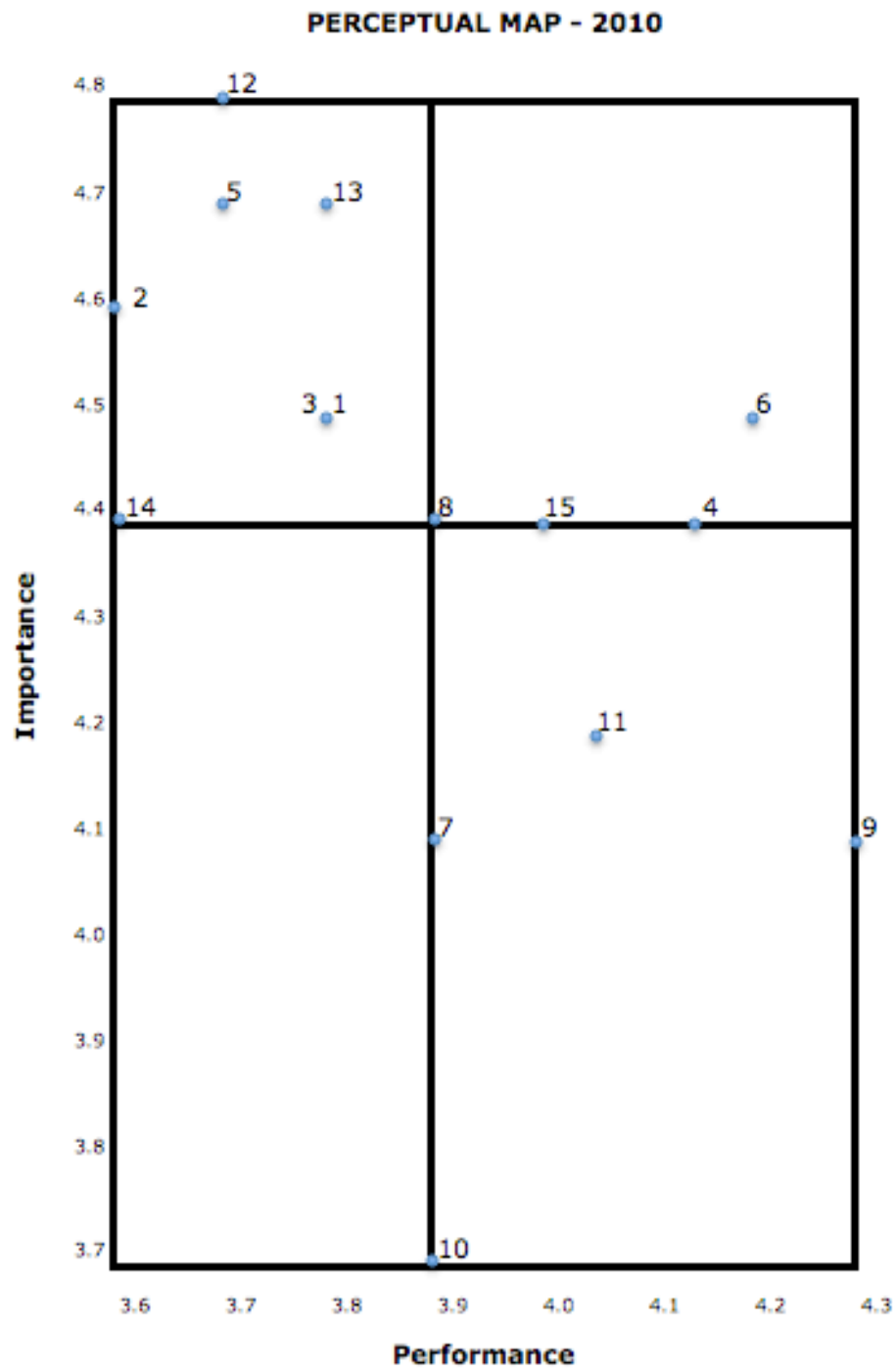


Figure 4.2: 2010 Importance/Performance Map

Table 4.21 2010 Importance/Performance Table

2010

<p>Concentrate Here</p> <p>12. Excellent teachers - T 5. Preparation for future study/work - C 13. Supportive caring teachers - T 2. Safe learning environment - C 1. Academic opportunities - C 3. Wide curriculum - C 14. <i>Good community spirit - S</i></p>	<p>Keep it Up</p> <p>6. Effective support systems – S 8. <i>Reward students' success - C</i> 15. <i>Respects different cultures - S</i> 4. <i>Encourages students – C</i></p>
<p>Maintain – low priority</p> <p>7. <i>Student leadership opportunities - O</i> 10. <i>Wide range of cultural opportunities - O</i></p>	<p>Deemphasize</p> <p>11. Effective SMT - S 9. Wide range of sporting opportunities - O</p>

The 2010 data has highlighted seven features on which, from the students' perspective, the school needs to concentrate its efforts. Four features have been acknowledged where the school has met the students' perceived needs. This is in significant contrast to the 2007 questionnaire results where the majority of the features were in the 'keep it up' area. In 2010 the majority of the features are in the 'concentrate here' quadrant. These findings will be analysed further in Chapter 5.

Contextual Changes Within the School

The initial research project was to be completed in 2007 but with its extension into 2010, the school has undergone a number of changes that may have had an impact on the more recent research findings. The school had addressed a number of issues that were identified in the 2007 research before the 2010 data gathering began. As the research data was not complete it had not been shared with the school so this earlier research had not assisted the school in identifying the areas that needed improvement.

Since the initial research undertaken in 2007, the school has addressed the need for more up-to-date resources both inside and outside the classroom. The school has allowed departments to purchase new

textbooks and Science equipment, out of date computers have been replaced with new machines and the school purchased 60 laptops for student use. The school has also been involved in a number of major building refurbishments which commenced in 2008 with a new canteen being built. In 2009 the Art, Music, Commerce and Media areas were rebuilt and the major project for 2010 was the remodelling of the Library as a Resource and Research Centre. The next major project is the refurbishment of the school gymnasium, which will take place in 2011.

Conclusion

This chapter on data findings and results has been produced using a thematic grouping for the four areas of students' expectations: outside the classroom, school responsibilities, the teachers, and inside the classroom. These results highlighted a number of areas where the students' expectations and experiences of the performance features (within a secondary school) did not meet their importance rankings. The next chapter will discuss the significance of the key findings in relation to the relevant literature from Chapter 2 and to consider issues identified by the students.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Research Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the research findings based around the four themes identified in the previous chapter. Literature addressing quality from a customer's perspective will be explored. This section will draw together findings and discuss their significance in relation to the literature. Conclusions are drawn from these findings.

Student Expectations of a Secondary School

Based on his research, Sallis (2002) identified the following list of qualities required by students within education:

- outstanding teachers
- excellent examination results
- the support of parents, business and the local community
- plentiful resources
- the application of the latest technology
- strong and purposeful leadership
- the care and concern for pupils and students
- a well-balanced and challenging curriculum. (p.2)

The research undertaken in both 2007 and 2010 shows that the important quality features identified by OHS's student leaders were consistent with Sallis' list. The majority of Sallis' qualities were included in the OHS research in either 2007 or 2010. The only outlier is the 'support of parents, business and the local community', students did identify 'good community spirit' in 2010.

Service quality in secondary schools is nothing more and nothing less than exceeding students' expectations, thus leading to student satisfaction and a positive learning experience.

Student Expectations/Experiences Outside the Classroom

Three of the quality statements identified by the student leaders in both 2007 and 2010 involved activities outside the classroom and curriculum based teaching and learning. These were the opportunities offered in student leadership, sporting and cultural activities. In 2010 the students ranked all three experiences outside the classroom as the least important for them (13 to 15). So while important enough for the students to include in their top 15 features they were not as important as other features which related directly to their learning.

In both of the research years when the data collected from students was placed into a perceptual map these extra-curricular service features were not identified as priority factors. In fact in 2007 the data suggested the school should deemphasize the time it spent on cultural opportunities and student leadership while sporting opportunities ranked in the 'keep it up' section. At first glance, the research may suggest that the school should concentrate its efforts on other features but the 2008 Education Review Office (ERO) report noted the performing arts area as a strength of the school.

In 2010 all three outside the classroom features were placed in the 'maintain low priority' or 'deemphasize' quadrants. At first glance this could indicate that the students are happy with the performance by the school in these areas. Further research would be necessary to clarify why the current research found the school over-performed in relation to these areas. As secondary school students have a choice about participating in extra-curricular activities, those students who choose not to take part in these activities would possibly rank these features as less important to them.

It would be a rarity to find a New Zealand secondary school that does not offer some extra-curricular activities for their students. ERO in the publication "Going to a Secondary School" (2006) acknowledges that

often the most lasting memories we have of secondary school are the activities the teachers organise outside the classroom. This is supported by Knowles and Mulcahy (2008) who assert that “secondary school isn’t just about sitting in a classroom and students’ most important learning may take place outside the confines of the classroom.” (p.253). ERO also acknowledge that these activities are not compulsory and students can choose whether to participate or not.

A 1996 research study of OHS commissioned by the school and conducted by an independent firm identified extra-curricular activities as an area of weakness, specifically the lack of organised sport. This research would indicate that the school has addressed this issue and moved it to a perceived strength.

The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) identifies five Key Competencies that students need to develop for living and lifelong learning. While the majority of this learning will take place inside the classroom, two of these competencies can be encouraged and developed through extra-curricular activity participation. These competencies are ‘relating to others’ and ‘participating and contributing’ and both are naturally developed through involvement in sporting or cultural activities where students have to work in groups to achieve an agreed outcome.

Student Expectations/Experiences of the School Features

In 2007 the perceptual map identified two areas (within the features provided by the school) that the school needed to concentrate on as priority opportunities for improvement, these being ‘a fair discipline system’ and ‘up-to-date equipment and resources’.

As mentioned in Chapter 4 the school has made a number of contextual changes, which may explain why ‘up-to-date equipment and resources’ was not identified as a quality feature in the 2010 research period. One

student did comment in 2010 that the gym needs improvement and this is an area that the school should address through its building programme.

Research conducted by the school in 1996 supports the need for a fair discipline system as this was identified as a weakness that the school needs to address. Comments made by students in 2007 highlight the need for a consistent system that encourages higher standards of discipline. OHS had identified through this older study the need to modify its discipline system and had begun training the Senior Management Team and Deans in the use of restorative practices in 2007. Blood and Thorsborne (2006) acknowledge the implementation of a restorative philosophy demands a major shift in thinking and realignment of beliefs about discipline, its purpose and practice. Moving from a punitive model to a system underpinned by relational values requires a change in the hearts and minds of practitioners, students, their parents and the wider community.

John Langley (2009) writes that few would disagree with the proposition that positive relationships between schools and communities are desirable. As there is no formal legislation to force a school to involve its community it is up to the school itself to develop these relationships.

In 2010 only one school feature was acknowledged as an area of improvement for the school and this was the need for the school to have 'a good community spirit'. In 2010 student leaders agreed on the need for a secondary school to have a good community spirit.

Students identified this feature as an area in need of improvement. Analysis would therefore show a lack of 'community spirit' identified and requiring attention. The Vision of the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) is that the country needs students who are connected members of communities and actively involved in contributing to the well being of the country. Before the school embarks on improving this feature it would be advisable to clarify what students understand by the term

'community spirit'. OHS recognises that students spend a significant proportion of their time at college, so their sense of belonging and inclusion at the school is paramount to their achievement. OHS needs to clarify whether all students feel a lack of community spirit or whether the school needs to spend more time verbalising relationships that demonstrate the school has a good community spirit.

In both research periods an effective Senior Management Team ranked in the 'deemphasize' zone by the students. Whitaker (2003) states that "highly effective principals understand their importance as role models" (p. 38). The 2008 ERO report found that "as a team, the principal and senior leaders are taking a key role in promoting professional development and establishing expectations for students about learning and behaviour" (p.2).

Student Expectations/Experiences of Its Teachers

In 2007 having teachers who care fell into the 'concentrate here' quadrant while having passionate teachers scored in the 'maintain' quadrant. In 2010 both of the teaching quality features fell into the 'concentrate here' quadrant, which could indicate that students were less happy with their teachers performance in this later research period. Fried (2001), through his observation in classrooms, found it was the teachers' passion that leaped out, rather than their knowledge of subject matter, variety of teaching techniques used, organisational skills, or being friendly, funny or fair. Both 2007 and 2010 students identified the need to have teachers who care about their students and are supportive of them. Osterman (2000) states one of the best predictors of students' effort and engagement in school is the relationships they have with their teachers (as cited in Stipek, 2006, p. 46). Stipek's research supports a broad body of literature which asserts that students function more effectively when they feel respected and valued and do not reach their potential when they feel disrespected or marginalized. This is consistent with the findings,

with students rating these experiences highly in the importance data. In terms of performance, responses suggest that some students at OHS have good relationships with teachers, and others have very poor ones, (as demonstrated by the comments cited in Chapter 4).

Student views in Carline's (2008) research report state that one major cause of breakdown in relationships between students and teachers is when "teachers fail to provide them with positive constructive feedback on the quality of their work" (p. 30). Significantly, students in 2007 (Y13-43) and 2010 (Y13-43), reinforce Carline's research with their comments regarding assessment and attitude of teachers in regards to students' academic learning.

OHS has undertaken a number of initiatives which have relationships as their key foundation. One of these is the use of restorative practices whose fundamental principle is "repairing the harm and putting things right with the intention of rebuilding the relationship" (Thorsborne & Vinegrad, 2009, p.10). OHS has also been involved with the Te Kotahitanga professional development initiative which emphasises strong, positive and supportive learning relationships between students and their teachers as a proven approach to enhancing Maori students' learning and engagement at school. Te Kotahitanga is a research project developed by the School of Education, University of Waikato with the aim of raising Maori achievement in schools. Both of these key initiatives address the need for priority consideration of student/teacher relationships as identified by both research groups at OHS and are areas that the school needs to continue to develop.

Carline (2008) has surveyed secondary school students and argues that giving them a voice and listening to them can help improve school life, from the quality of teaching and learning through to the organisation of the school itself. Carline's research supports this study which found that students want teachers who are firm but fair, who talk with them rather than at them, engender mutual respect and treat them as individuals.

In 2007 students wanted passionate teachers and in 2010 they wanted excellent teachers. In each case the words passionate and excellent are open to interpretation and students' own experiences will be used to clarify the grading scale divisions used by each individual. Students, it seems, want their teachers to really enjoy their subject area, be enthusiastic when teaching and have a genuine desire for their students to learn. Research undertaken by De Knop, Theeboom, Huts, Van Hoecke and De Martelaer (2004) found their interviewed students' ideal teacher should: "participate, be friendly, enthusiastic, humorous, motivated and show respect for all students" (p.28). Knowles and Mulcahy (2008) agree that a "good teacher must be: consistent, fair, capable and knowledgeable about their subject" (p. 30) which affirms the research findings referred to above.

A common theme of students' responses was that they had some 'good' teachers and others who were not. One major difference for secondary school students is that the way in which the school timetable is constructed means that students may see up to five teachers per day. It is highly unlikely that the relationship between the students and all five of these teachers is going to be to the students' liking. As Knowles and Mulcahy (2008) explain, this can mean one teacher sees up to 150 students per day which is very different from a primary teacher, who interacts with an average of 30 students daily. It is therefore more difficult for a secondary school teacher to build a rapport with each individual student they teach. Students must also learn to cope with different styles of teaching, standards and expectations. There is therefore more potential for the secondary school student to have a teacher they do not like or respect.

Professor John Hattie, in the House of Representatives report "Inquiry into making the schooling system work for every child" (2008) states that teachers account for about 30 percent of the variance in achievement. The only greater influence on students' learning is the students

themselves and their homes, which account for about 60 percent, neither of which a school can affect to an equal degree for all students. This demonstrates that the teacher's role in a student's learning can bring about the quickest improvement in the achievement for all students. Findings from both the 2007 and the 2010 research suggest that teachers' enthusiasm about their teaching role is eminently important to the students. Students have identified relationships with teachers as very important and an area which they need to be performed well as seen in the data presented in Chapter 4.

Student Expectations/Experiences in the Classroom

When using the findings from the perceptual map the expectations in relation to features inside the classroom is the area that demonstrates the greatest disparity between the two research periods. In the 2007 research period none of the 'inside the classroom' features fell into the 'concentrate here' quadrant, (which could indicate that students were happy with the quality of service provided, by the school). In the 2010 research period, all the expectations inside the classroom were in the 'concentrate here' and 'keep it up' quadrants. In 2007, students identified academic opportunities, safe learning environment and careers or future focus as areas of strength. These features were all found to be areas needing attention by the 2010 student group. This shift over time shows that student perceptions of quality service provision inside the classroom at OHS, have in fact changed for the worse.

These findings are of concern to OHS as at first glance they might indicate that the school is not performing as well as it was in 2007. The research undertaken does not provide answers about why the students ranked so many of the 2010 classroom quality features as needing improvement, and why most of the students' comments referred to the need for a safe learning environment. The issues raised here require further investigation.

In 2010, five of the classroom features were identified as being areas needing improvement. Chapter 4 cites a number of written comments from students relating to how the school was not meeting their needs for a safe learning environment. These comments included requests to, “Be harder on people that bully” (2010 Y9-1), and address what happens when “...learning is interrupted by naughty students” (2010 Y10-9). The school has been using restorative practices since 2007 but as mentioned earlier the embedding of a new discipline philosophy is a slow process. As Blood and Thorsborne (2006) suggest it is unrealistic to expect that people will change their behaviour overnight. Such change, both by teachers and students take time and is not an easy task. Anecdotal evidence from staff using the restorative justice practices within the school has shown that it is very effective when dealing with bullies. According to Kay Sutherland, Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour “not only does the relationship between the wrongdoer and the harmed get restored but can significantly impact on the community of care involved with both parties”.

Pupils from Carline’s (2008) study wanted to be involved in developing an anti-bullying policy, or failing that, at least its review and evaluation. OHS might similarly allow their students to take an active role in the implementation of restorative practices within the school. Carline also suggests that policy should focus on both the victim and bully, which is at the heart of the restorative practice model. Wachtel (1999) supports this as he has observed behaviour changes achieved by restorative practices in Pennsylvania. Wachtel’s research has seen students change their behaviours, co-operate, take positive leadership roles and confront each other about inappropriate behaviour.

The 2009 external research project undertaken by the school by an external researcher supports the need to ensure the school environment is safe for all, as a bad experience can mean the student involved does not achieve academically and that when speaking about the school in the

community the feedback shared is not always good (p. 15). In Chapter 4, examination of student feedback in this area showed that 'dissatisfaction' was generally around disciplinary matters inside the classroom and the control of disruptive students. Students from Carline's research report that the factor most detrimental to teaching and learning is bad behaviour. Students expect that the classroom teacher will prevent such unacceptable conduct and maintain order in the classroom.

Carline's research supports the comments made by students from OHS, who want their classroom teachers to deal with bad classroom behaviour and refuse to tolerate unchanged behaviour by these students. In fact, some of the comments made indicate that they do not mind what happens to the poorly behaved student as long as the behaviour is changed or the student removed from the classroom environment to allow their learning to continue. Carline's research also shows that from a student's perspective, a successful teacher is one who retains control of the classroom. Skilful management of behaviour creates a positive learning environment and therefore these two expectations are linked to how students rate the performance of their teacher.

Performance gaps were identified by both the 2007 and 2010 students, in the classroom area, for providing both academic opportunities and rewarding student success. In 2008 OHS introduced a major initiative 'No Choice but Success', with awards, presentation ceremonies and academic-focused assemblies in the hope of addressing these two features from 2007. The performance gap with regard to academic opportunities has decreased in the 2010 research indicating the success of this initiative.

The expectation that the school provides a broad (wide) curriculum was a new feature for 2010. In terms of the relevant performance gap, both Years 9 and 11 had a -0.7 gap, Years 10 and 12 had a performance gap of -0.4 and Year 13 students a gap of -1.6. A closer investigation of the questionnaires revealed that few comments had been made in relation to

this feature. At Year 13 some of the students identified they had had subject clashes which may explain why the performance gap was larger for the Year 13 group. No clear picture has emerged from the research that the school needs to improve in this area.

The final feature requiring extra effort by the school is preparing students for future study/work. In 2007 this quality feature directly mentioned providing an 'effective careers education programme' whereas in 2010 it was worded as 'well prepared for future study or work'. The wording in 2010 was more ambiguous and may have been misinterpreted by the junior students who have not decided on their career path yet.

The school has purchased a web-based careers programme that tracks the students' career aspirations and goals. This programme is delivered in the junior school through their core subjects and at senior level it is delivered during Year 11 study period. Year 12 and 13 students are encouraged to use their own time to work on updating their career goals.

The majority of the comments made by students in relation to this feature were positive and many praised the efforts of the career department and the careers computer program. Of the positive comments, 88 percent were made by senior students, which would support initial impressions that this feature is not perceived as important for the junior students as they know they have a minimum of three years secondary education.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a discussion of the findings from this research and the implications of these findings in light of the previous literature on meeting students' needs in regard to a quality education. From the students' perspective the school is performing well in all the 'outside the classroom' features and students are happy with these services. The school is also providing a good service in the delivery of the 'outside the

classroom'- based features and the only feature identified by students as requiring further development was a 'good community spirit'. This feature placed on the borderline of two quadrants indicating it is not necessarily a major area of concern for the school. Teachers are the key factor in influencing students' experiences and expectations at secondary school and have a lasting effect on the students' learning experience. A good teacher can make an imprint on a student that lasts a lifetime. Good teachers are remembered and respected by their students, their colleagues and by the parents of their students. Students' experience inside the classroom is the other major area in need of improvement with four of the six quality expectations in 2010 in need of improvement compared with 2007 where all features were perceived to be delivered to an acceptable standard.

The next chapter will draw some conclusions and present some recommendations on the basis of this research study on student perceptions of a secondary school.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

This research has examined the students' perceptions of quality within a secondary school. Reflection on my own experience when dealing with the community's perceptions prompted this research. Every school needs to ensure it is meeting the needs of its students. This chapter attempts to draw conclusions based on the findings of this research. The implications of the findings are discussed with reference to a possible model to help understand the issues involved in providing a quality education for students. The implications of the issues raised are reflected in the recommendations for practice and further research.

Research Questions

The aim of the research project was to investigate current students' perceptions of OHS and identify the schools strengths and weaknesses with the intention of improving the quality of the students' experiences at this school.

The research study endeavoured to answer the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of current OHS students?
- What educational and marketing strategies are required in order to continue to improve the quality of students' educational experience and their perceptions of OHS?
- How effective were the processes implemented to improve perceptions of OHS?

Findings Summary

Below are the summarised findings for each of the researched themes and their implications for OHS. Knowing what the customer expects is the first and possibly, most critical, step in delivering quality service. Being wrong about what customers want can mean losing a customer to another provider (Zeithaml et al., 2006). Perceptions are always considered relative to expectations and expectations are dynamic. Evaluations may also shift over time – from person to person and from culture to culture. What is considered quality service today may be different tomorrow? While these findings were found using IPA, Bacon (2003) recommends that users of such a framework should interpret these results with caution. The IPA method is very effective in providing a starting point for gathering perceptions of services delivered but can sometimes unearth unsubstantiated areas of concern.

Student Expectations/Experiences Outside the Classroom

From the data collected on the students' experiences of extra-curricular activities at OHS it is clear to see that in both 2007 and 2010 the school was meeting students' needs and in some cases exceeding expectations. "Secondary school isn't just about sitting in a classroom and students' most important learning may take place outside the confines of a classroom" (Knowles & Mulcahy, 2008, p. 253). While the school does not need to focus extra energy on these features it does need to ensure that it maintains an equivalent level of service provided in the past.

Student Expectations/Experiences of the School Features

It could be argued that the majority of performances by OHS in this area fall in the respondents' 'zone of tolerance'. This suggests that even though the students do not perceive the school to provide all school features at a 'quality' level, they are nonetheless satisfied with the school's performance for these features. In 2007 two features were identified for the school to 'concentrate' on: a fair discipline system and

up-to-date equipment and resources. In 2010 the feature identified as requiring attention was the school having 'a good community spirit'.

The school had already identified some of the performance gaps revealed in the 2007 research, prior to the findings being shared with the school. Measures taken to address these areas of concern included the modernisation of resources and buildings and the implementation of the restorative practices programme to provide a fair discipline system for the students. Sallis, (2002) defines these issues as 'common cause failures resulting from a resource problem' (p. 37). The important point to note is that it is only management who can right common cause failure due to the resourcing implications for the school budget.

In 2010 the largest performance gap for this theme was in relation to the need for good community spirit. Unlike the features above, this is described as a 'special cause failure'. A special cause failure is one that may have arisen due to communication failure or simply misunderstandings. Possibly, the students in the research study did not understand the feature or the school did not communicate this feature well to students.

The research found that 'the school has an effective Senior Management Team' (SMT) was the only quality feature within this theme to rank in the 'deemphasize' zone. While the students may feel this is an area that the school can ease up on, this would be inadvisable from a school efficiency point of view. Sallis (2002) refers to Juran's strategic quality management approach, which sees the role of senior management as the provision of a strategic view through the setting its vision, priorities and policies.

'Support services provided by the school' and 'respecting other cultures' are both in the acceptable zone from the students' point of view but as the school undertakes a planned approach to raising their performance in other areas it must ensure it does not let these services drop in their delivery.

Student Expectations/Experiences of Its Teachers

The study found this was the only area where one feature fell in the 'concentrate here' quadrant in both 2007 and 2010. From a student's perspective, teachers who care is one of the most important features to their learning and they want to be treated fairly by all teachers. The school must ensure that the teachers understand how important their role is and how their relationships with students impact on their experience at school. As the quality of teachers drop, so does the student's opinion of the school (Whitaker, 2003).

As this feature was identified by students in both research periods it is clear that students believe that their teachers play a key role in determining their experiences at school. Sallis (2002) through his research of quality assurance in educational establishments identified four quality imperatives: "the moral, the professional, the competitive and the accountability imperative" (p.3). Schools must ensure that it is their moral duty to provide the very best possible educational opportunities. Educators have a professional duty to improve the quality of education and meet the challenge of competition from other schools by working to improve the quality of their service delivery to students. Schools must meet the political demands for education to be more accountable and publicly demonstrate the high standards. All four of the above imperatives have a direct link to the role of the teacher so it is essential that school ensure their teachers are meeting these imperatives.

Student Expectations/Experiences in the Classroom

In 2007 no classroom feature was identified in the perceptual map as needing attention. In the 2010 research findings, 'classroom experiences' is a major area of focus for the school with four of the six features falling into the 'concentrate here' quadrant of the perceptual map.

Despite using a careers computer program at the school it is clear from the students' feedback that better communication is needed in this area – a 'special cause' failure as identified by Sallis (2002). This was a feature that in the 2007 research rated as being one in which the school was performing well and the school needs to confirm that it is indeed poor communication rather than poor service.

The school must ensure it provides the students with a safe learning environment. Further research needs to be undertaken to identify whether the students are feeling unsafe in the classroom or outside in the grounds. Continued professional development for teachers on how to manage poor behaviour in the classroom needs to be undertaken. Students at OHS should be invited to assist in the development and implementation of a school-wide anti-bullying policy as indicated in Carline's (2008) study.

The comments made by students in this research indicate that they are frustrated by badly behaved students in the classroom who stop them taking full advantage of the teaching and learning. The school will need to work with teachers to ensure that badly behaved students in their rooms are dealt with quickly and effectively so that the majority of the class can continue to learn. Any intervention for badly behaved students needs to ensure that when they return to the classroom the poor behaviour is changed. Thorsborne and Vinegrad's (2009) research indicates that using a punitive system will not change behaviour and OHS needs to continue on their restorative practice pathway. Recidivist offenders need to be referred to the Board of Trustees or outside agencies to provide the support they need to modify their behaviour.

More research is needed in the area of academic opportunities and a wide curriculum to: identify exactly which areas the students feel the school is under-performing in and clarify whether these issues are related to the timetable problems as students progress to the senior school. As the school population decreases in Year 13, class sizes, need to be large

enough to make the classes economically feasible so that they can and will continue to be offered. OHS needs to ensure it is providing its students with the academic opportunities they want.

Recommendations

The findings of this research have highlighted some areas where practice might be improved. These improvements need to be linked to the school policies and strategy to ensure that all the service features are being met and a high quality service is being provided. The school must ensure it does not concentrate on improving the performance of the identified features and let other features that were being done well move into the 'concentrate here' zone. As a small-scale study the limitations of these findings are acknowledged and further research is needed. The following recommendations for practice and research are made as a result of this study.

School

- The school should develop a strategic plan that will address the issues raised by the students in this study. The areas that must be included in the plan are students' relationships with teachers and ensuring the classroom environment changes to allow all students to learn and enjoy their learning.

It is recommended that this plan use the following five tools to ensure it has critical success and will lead to predictable and desirable results.

⇒ A set of measureable outcomes – by documenting the measures before, during and after the plan, the school can gauge and advertise the success. As this research has already identified which areas need to improve, the school only needs to address how to measure any improvement.

⇒ A clear, well-defined plan – this research has identified where to concentrate, now the plan needs to set the boundaries, benefits,

costs, risks, time frame and resource requirements with the measurable desired outcomes identified.

- ⇒ Effective problem analysis – while this research has identified areas that need to be improved it has not highlighted exactly where the problem is in some cases. By breaking the problem into smaller, simpler pieces, patterns can be found. By formulating and testing theories, observing and collecting data the school will be able to identify specific needs and their root causes.
- ⇒ A reliable feedback system is required – good feedback systems teach as well as hold people accountable. A critical success factor is the ability to inspire confidence early so students and teachers trust the process.
- ⇒ A system for collecting and applying what is learnt – use of experts inside the school, a critical success factor is the speed with which the proven new skills are built and implemented.

Further Research

- A further research study might also be conducted with two other stakeholder groups: the teachers and support staff and the parents of students at the school. I do not recommend this study is undertaken immediately as it is essential to address the issues identified in this research study first.
- A similar study could be undertaken at the local Intermediate School to identify the service quality features required by their students allowing both schools to compare and contrast this data to identify strengths and weaknesses within each school. This would ensure that both schools are providing a quality service to their students and may encourage students to choose to attend their local school.

Research Limitations and Issues

There were a number of limitations that may have influenced the quality of the findings within this research. The primary limitation of this study is

the scope and size of the sample used, less than 5% of the school population was surveyed. Increasing the sample size may have changed the research findings. Nonetheless, the study does provide evidence for the development and use of an Importance/Performance map on those occasions calling for preliminary identification and assessment of student measures of service quality.

Although the initial research was to have been completed in one year the data was in fact collected over two periods. This meant the analysis of both sets of data was difficult in some instances due to the diverse quality statements in both periods. It is also important to note that the school had addressed many of the 2007 quality features identified at its own instigation and independently of these questionnaire results.

It could be argued that in the 2010 questionnaire design some of the quality features were too broad and had qualifying statements such as 'plenty of academic opportunities' which made ranking them more difficult for the students. Also two statements included two qualifiers, which may also have been problematic, for example 'an effective and efficient Senior Leadership Team'. Some students may have felt the team was effective but not efficient and vice versa.

A possible risk was that of bias, in that students selected for the questionnaire may not have been representative of the school population as a whole. Bias may also occur where few questionnaires are returned, where a question misunderstood or the researcher asked 'leading' questions.

In this research project only the students' perspectives were collected. The findings may have been enriched by collecting responses from the staff, as the providers of the services, and analysing the gaps identified by this data source.

The questionnaire was given to Year 9 students in both research periods and it is possible that their knowledge of the school and how it performs is not as defined as that of the students who have been at the school longer.

Gathering background information on the students would have allowed deeper analysis, for example, comparisons between genders, age and race.

My role in the school as Associate Principal may also have been a limitation in that students may have been concerned that their comments may have identified them personally.

Conclusion

My research aim was to examine the students' perceptions of OHS and identify areas where the school could improve to better meet their needs and expectations. If the students are satisfied with the service they receive from the school then the school may feel less frustrated by the unmerited community perceptions.

Schools do conduct research but in many cases the students within the school are not given an opportunity to share their experiences. Joseph et al. (2005) believe that much research on school quality is gathered from an 'inside-out' model which is too highly focused on an academic insider's perspective rather than meeting the students' collective needs. This research represented an opportunity for the students to give their views and for the school to appreciate that student voice is an important gauge of service quality delivery. Students' pride in their school is positively related to their satisfaction with a service quality.

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CONSENT FORM - ORGANISATION



TO: Students and Parents/Caregivers of Oceania High School students

FROM: Tina Yule

DATE: June 2007

RE: “An investigation of students’ perceptions of quality in a secondary school.”

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research for the Master of Educational Management. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered. I understand that neither my name nor the name of my organisation will be used in any public reports, and that I may withdraw the organisation or any information that has been provided for this project without penalty of any sort.

I agree for Oceania High School to take part in this project.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2007.748

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2007. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretariat (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 7254). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM



My name is Tina Yule. I am currently enrolled in the Masters of Educational Management degree in the School of Education at Unitec New Zealand and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a Thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The aim of my project is:

To investigate current perceptions of Oceania High School and to identify and implement a strategy or strategies that will result in improved perceptions of Oceania High School.

I request your participation in the following way:

- Participation in focus groups comprising of Year 13 student leaders
- Completion of an anonymous questionnaire on school image

Neither you nor your organisation will be identified in the Thesis. The results of the research activity will not be seen by any other person in your organisation without the prior agreement of everyone involved. You are free to ask me not to use any of the information you have given, and you can, if you wish, ask to see the Thesis before it is submitted for examination.

I hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find participation and discussion of interest. If you have any queries about the project, you may contact my supervisor at Unitec New Zealand.

My supervisor is Dr Jenny Collins, phone 815 4321 ext. 8369 or jcollins@unitec.ac.nz

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2007.748

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CONSENT FORM – CHILDREN/MINORS



TO: Students and Parents/Caregivers of Oceania High School students

FROM: Mrs Yule (Deputy Principal)

DATE: June 2007

RE: An investigation of students' perceptions of quality in a secondary school.

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research for the Masters of Educational Management. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered in relation to the involvement of a child/minor for whom I am the caregiver. I understand that neither the child's/minor's name nor the name of the organisation will be used in any public reports, and that I may withdraw the child/minor or any information that they or I have provided for this project without penalty of any sort.

I agree that the child/minor named below may take part in this project.

Name of child/minor: _____

Signed: _____ (caregiver)

Name: _____ (caregiver)

Date: _____

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2007.748

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from (date) to (date). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretariat (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 7254). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

“An investigation of student perceptions of quality in a secondary school.”

My name is Mrs Tina Yule and I am the Deputy Principal of Oceania High School.

An invitation

Your child has been invited to take part in the following research project.

Focus

The service quality of Oceania High School from a students’ perspective.

Reasons for the research

Ten years ago the school conducted a research paper on the image and services provided by the school. It was felt is now time to investigate current perceptions of **Error! Contact not defined.** and to identify and implement a strategy or strategies that will result in improved perceptions of Oceania High School. This research will also contribute to completing my Masters in Educational Management through UNITEC.

Nature of the research

The research will take the form of a focus group of 6-8 people (balanced in gender) conducting a discussion about school image. The group will not enter a critical discussion of the performance of the school but will aim to uncover important concerns that are relevant to school image. The meeting will take approximately one hour and all main points raised will be recorded on flip paper for later reference.

Participant’s Rights

You have the right to decline to take part. If you agree to participate, your parents/caregivers will be asked to sign a consent form. You can withdraw at any time until the completion of the focus group discussion. You will be given an opportunity to check the data collected from the focus group discussion and make corrections. Information that may identify you will be kept completely confidential. You are able to ask any questions about the study at any time during participation.

Upon completion of the project a one page summary of the findings will be made available to the participants. Information given in the course of the focus group will be confidential to the research and publications resulting from it.

UREC requirements mean that a copy of the focus group findings will be kept in a secure archive for five years before being destroyed.

Please contact me at the school if you need more information about the project.

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**Information for Parents and Participants -
Questionnaire**

"An investigation of student perceptions of quality in a secondary school."

My name is Mrs Tina Yule and I am the Deputy Principal of Oceania High School.

An invitation

Your child has been invited to take part in an anonymous questionnaire.

Focus

The service quality of Oceania High School from a students' perspective.

Reasons for the research

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The questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire is to gather information on the school image through a service quality survey. The service quality items were identified through a focus group of Year 13 students. The survey is intended to: provide information on the educational quality of the school; identify strengths and weaknesses of the school; find ways in which the school could improve and provide information to help better understand the students' needs. There are not right or wrong answers and students do not need to have any personal experience to "know" about an issue in order to have an opinion on it.

Participant's rights

Your child has the right to decline to take part. Those who fill in the questionnaire will be consenting to the information being analysed as part of this research. The researcher will take the following steps:

- Only the researcher will have access to the information in the questionnaire.
- The questionnaires will be stored in a secure place for five years then destroyed.
- Data gathered from this questionnaire will be anonymous.
- This information will be confidential to the research.

Please contact me at the school if you need more information about the project.

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Oceania High School Service Quality Survey for Students

We are conducting a survey to help improve the vital relationship between you and the School. Your responses will help our self-review and in planning for the future.

The questionnaire was developed with the assistance from a group of Year 13 students, and has the approval of the Principal and the Board of Trustees. We will inform you of the results of this survey in the middle of next year (2008).

The survey is intended to:

- provide information on the educational quality of the school
- identify strengths and weaknesses of the school
- find ways in which the school could improve
- provide information to help better understand your needs.

There are no right or wrong answers. The statements are in no particular order.

It is **not** necessary for you to have had any personal experience to ‘know’ about an issue in order to have an opinion on it. Regardless of your actual knowledge, we are interested in your *opinion* or *impression*. These can be based on your own experience, what you hear from other people, or information picked up from other sources. Comments to support each statement are welcome.

We assure you that your responses are absolutely confidential. No names are required.

Using the scales below, please **CIRCLE** the number that best expresses:

How important is the issue to you?	How is the School performing?
------------------------------------	-------------------------------

The school has passionate teachers.

Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5		Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5	
<i>Comments</i>											

The school has teachers who care about their students.

Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5		Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
------------------	---	---	---	----------------	--	-----------------------	---	---	-----------------------	---

The school provides a wide range of sporting opportunities.

Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5		Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
------------------	---	---	---	----------------	--	-----------------------	---	---	-----------------------	---

The school provides a wide range of opportunities for students in the cultural arts.

Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5		Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
------------------	---	---	---	----------------	--	-----------------------	---	---	-----------------------	---

The school offers up-to-date equipment and resources.

Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5		Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
------------------	---	---	---	----------------	--	-----------------------	---	---	-----------------------	---

The school encourages students to be independent learners.

Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5		Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
------------------	---	---	---	----------------	--	-----------------------	---	---	-----------------------	---

Please return the questionnaire and your Parental Consent form to the School Office.

PTO

How important is the issue to you?					How is the School performing?				
<i>The school encourages students to achieve to the best of their academic ability.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	4	Good Performance 5
<i>Comments</i>									
<i>The school holds high expectations of student behaviour.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	4	Good Performance 5
<i>The school has a fair discipline system.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	4	Good Performance 5
<i>The school provides an effective careers education programme.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	4	Good Performance 5
<i>The school physical environment is safe.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	4	Good Performance 5
<i>The school has effective communication systems to students and parents.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	4	Good Performance 5
<i>The school provides effective leadership through its Senior Management team.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	4	Good Performance 5
<i>The school provides leadership opportunities for students.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	4	Good Performance 5
<i>Technology is used to enhance teaching and learning.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	4	Good Performance 5
Please tell us about the things we do well.									
.....									
.....									
Please tell us about the things we can improve upon.									
.....									

Optional

CONSENT FORM – CHILDREN/MINORS



TO: Students and Parents/Caregivers of Oceania High School students

FROM: Mrs Yule (Associate Principal)

DATE May 2010

RE: An investigation of students' perceptions of quality in a secondary school.

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research for the Masters of Educational Management. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered in relation to the involvement of a child/minor for whom I am the caregiver. I understand that neither the child's/minor's name nor the name of the organisation will be used in any public reports, and that I may withdraw the child/minor or any information that they or I have provided for this project without penalty of any sort.

I agree that the child/minor named below may take part in this project.

Name of child/minor: _____

Signed: _____ (caregiver)

Name: _____ (caregiver)

Date: _____

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2007.748

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Please contact me at the school if you need more information about the project.

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- Only the researcher will have access to the information in the questionnaire.
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The questionnaire was developed with the assistance from a group of Year 13 students, and has the approval of the Principal and the Board of Trustees. We will inform you of the results of this survey later this year (2010).

The survey is intended to:

- provide information on the educational quality of the school
- identify strengths and weaknesses of the school
- find ways in which the school could improve
- provide information to help better understand your needs.

There are no right or wrong answers. The statements are in no particular order.

It is **not** necessary for you to have had any personal experience to ‘*know*’ about an issue in order to have an opinion on it. Regardless of your actual knowledge, we are interested in your *opinion* or *impression*. These can be based on your own experience, what you hear from other people, or information picked up from other sources.

Comments to support each statement are welcome but NOT compulsory.

We assure you that your responses are absolutely confidential. No names are required.

Using the scales below, please **CIRCLE** the number that best expresses:

How important is the issue to you?	How is the School performing?								
<i>The school provides students with of plenty of academic opportunities.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
Comments									
<i>The school provides students with a safe learning environment.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
Comments									
<i>The school offers students a broad (wide) curriculum.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
Comments									
<i>The school encourages students to be the best they can be.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
Comments									

Appendix J: 2010 Questionnaire

How important is the issue to you?					How is the School performing?					
<i>Students are well prepared for future study or work.</i>										
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5		Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
<i>Comments</i>										

<i>The students are provided with effective support systems (Form Teacher, Deans etc).</i>										
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5		Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
<i>Comments</i>										

<i>The school provides students with leadership opportunities.</i>										
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5		Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
<i>Comments</i>										

<i>The school rewards students' success.</i>										
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5		Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
<i>Comments</i>										

<i>The school provides students a wide range of sporting opportunities.</i>										
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5		Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
<i>Comments</i>										

<i>The school provides students with a wide range of cultural opportunities.</i>										
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5		Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
<i>Comments</i>										

<i>The school has an effective and efficient Senior Leadership Team.</i>										
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5		Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
<i>Comments</i>										

Appendix J: 2010 Questionnaire

How important is the issue to you?					How is the School performing?				
<i>The school has excellent teachers.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
Comments									

<i>The teachers are supportive and caring.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
Comments									

<i>The school has a good community spirit.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
Comments									

<i>The school respects different cultures.</i>									
Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Important 5	Poor Performance 1	2	3	Good Performance 4	5
Comments									

Optional

Please tell us about the things we do well.

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Please tell us about the things we can improve upon.

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PLEASE RETURN the QUESTIONNAIRE and CONSENT FORM to YOUR DEAN or MAIN OFFICE before FRIDAY 11 JUNE

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

Mrs Yule