

## **A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE EXPECTED AND ACTUAL SERVICE QUALITY PERCEIVED BY THE STUDENTS AT BOARDING HOUSES OF ST. FRANCIS XAVIER SISTERS IN PATHEIN DIOCESE, MYANMAR**

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**Abstract:** This study attempted to determine and compare the service quality of the St. Francis Xavier Sisters' boarding houses as perceived by the students before they joined the boarding houses and while they were staying there. The objectives of this study were (1) to determine the students' expected perception on service quality before they stay in Sisters' Boarding Houses of Pathein Dioceses, Myanmar. (2) to determine the students' actual perception on service quality while they stay in Sisters' Boarding Houses of Pathein Dioceses, Myanmar. (3) to compare the students' expected and actual perception towards service quality in Sisters' Boarding Houses in Pathein Diocese, Myanmar. This study was conducted in ten boarding houses of St. Francis Xavier Sisters in Pathein Diocese, Myanmar. There were 225 boarding students from grade 8 to 11 got involved in this study. The researcher adopted the questionnaire based on Bashir et al. (2012) which aimed to signify the Service quality of five dimensions; namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy at St. Francis Xavier Sisters' boarding houses. The study found that the total and individual service quality of St. Francis Xavier Sisters' boarding houses before they stayed and as they stayed there were high. And there was a significant difference between the expected and actual perception towards service management in Sisters' Boarding Schools of Pathein Diocese, Myanmar. The researcher discussed on the findings and recommended to initiate a culture of continuous improvement for the boarding houses which must be allied to regular monitoring and evaluation.

**Keywords:** Boarding House, Service Quality, St. Francis Xavier Sisters, Pathein Diocese.

### **Introduction**

A boarding house is a place where individuals can access accommodation, food, cleaning and other services for a fee for one or more days and nights (Hodges, Sheffield, & Ralph, 2013). Further, Hodges, Sheffield, and Ralph (2013) argued that the boarding environment was a community that was highly regulated and offered

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opportunities and activities for the development and learning of students within its residence.

The boarding school system had been used in many countries to give housing to students near their schools. In Australia, the dispersion of communities and populations across the country has been cited as necessitating the movement of families and students to boarding schools in search of quality education (Benveniste, Guenther, Dawson, & Rainbird, 2014; Hodges, Sheffield, & Ralph, 2013). In Thailand, apart from the normal boarding facilities for students, there were boarding houses that have been developed and are managed to house migrant children from Burma. These students had been classified as refugees in Thailand and arrive in the country due to conflicts in their country (Akiyama et al., 2013).

### **Research Objectives**

This research was conducted for the following objectives:

1. To determine the students' expected perception on service quality before they stay in Sisters' Boarding Houses of Pathein Dioceses, Myanmar.
2. To determine the students' actual perception on service quality while they stay in Sisters' Boarding Houses of Pathein Dioceses, Myanmar.
3. To compare the students' expected and actual perception towards service quality in Sisters' Boarding Houses in Pathein Diocese, Myanmar.

### **Literature Review**

Running and managing a boarding house for students requires considerations on the services being offered to the students. Therefore, it is vital to understand how they can or are meeting these expectations. This study seeks to establish the expected and actual service quality of the boarding houses managed by the sisters of St. Francis Xavier in Pathein Diocese.

#### *Service Quality Model*

The developers of this SERVQUAL model acknowledged the absence of an appropriate and objective measure for assessing service quality hence resorting to the use of customer's perception of quality. Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry (1998), therefore, defined service quality as the customer's judgment of an organization's excellence utilizing the perception on quality as the service quality defining factor.

Service quality had been considered as a multi-dimensional aspect as opposed to a one-dimensional aspect that can attract several judgments (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). On the other hand, the service quality framework proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) had been instrumental in bringing forward the five dimensions upon which service quality could be understood and ascertained. The dimensions included responsiveness, reliability, empathy, assurance, and tangibles.

Reliability was one of the core dimensions utilized in measuring clients' perception towards the quality of a service. Reliability was, therefore, the ability of the provider of the service to execute a particular service dependably and accurately.

Responsiveness had also been brought forward as another important dimension in measuring service quality. This dimension focused on the attentiveness and promptness to deal with different clients' concerns, requests, questions, complaints,

and problems. Responsiveness had therefore been perceived as a dimension that can measure the provider's ability to help clients as well as delivering prompt services to the same.

Empathy dimension had also been suggested as an important aspect in assessing service quality. This dimension had been used to show that the clients were unique and special. In the boarding school setting, therefore, empathy would be assessed based on the special attention provided by the boarding house staff and whether specific requirements of students were well understood by the boarding staff (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Bashir, Sarki, & Samidi, 2012).

Assurance focusses on staffs' knowledge, courtesy, and ability to attain trust and confidence of the clients. In this case, assurance could be assessed through the exercise of courtesy by the boarding staff and the whether boarding staff possessed adequate knowledge for handling students' problems.

Lastly, tangibles dimension was also brought forward by Parasuraman et al. (1988) to assess the quality of services offered by service providers. According to the authors, tangibles referred to the physical representation of services used by clients to perform a quality evaluation.

#### *Theoretical Underpinnings of Housing Satisfaction*

In view of the premise that the improvement of services in boarding houses will seek to increase the satisfaction of the boarders in an effort to meet their expectations, a review of theory seeking to provide an understanding of the forces behind residential satisfaction is salient. Francescato et al. (1989) developed a robust view of residential satisfaction by conceptualizing satisfaction as a multi-faceted construct and attitude which has affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimension. The cognitive approach relates to the boarders' evaluation of both general and specific elements of residential quality. In addition, the concept of residential satisfaction expressed by boarders or residents greatly relied on the comparisons made between their expected standards and the situations they actually experience (Canter & Rees, 1982). The behavioral approach explored housing satisfaction as the attitude of the residents, that is, their behavioral intentions (Speare, 1974).

#### *Previous Studies on The Predictors of Student Housing Satisfaction*

Studies have suggested that there were several factors that influence satisfaction levels among students in boarding facilities (Khozaei, Ayub, Hassan, & Khozaei, 2010; Akinluyi, 2015). These factors contribute significantly to the students' expectations especially when influenced by satisfaction levels. A study carried out by Khozaei, Ayub, Hassan, & Khozaei (2010) sought to find out some of the factors that predicted the satisfaction of students living in boarding houses. The study was carried out at an institution of higher learning in Malaysia where students were boarding both within and out of the institution.

The study conducted by Akinluyi (2015) also brought forward important insights about several social and physical qualities boarding students' value, which further affects their satisfaction and expectations. The study, therefore, evaluated the social and physical qualities to ascertain their influence on satisfaction levels among the students.

*Boarding Setting as an Enhancer of Personal Growth – Social and Emotional Support*  
Boarding schools have been associated with various myths in a manner that portrays the institution negatively. Firstly, boarding schools have been perceived as places where troublesome students who are being ‘disposed away’ are sent by their parents. Secondly, boarding students are associated with troubled home lives. Thirdly, boarding settings are perceived as breeding areas for students’ alcohol and drug consumption. Lastly, bullying activities undertaken by some students negatively affects their subjects’ self-esteem hence their personal development (Association of Boarding Schools, 2016).

In response, therefore, to the latter myths, studies have found out that boarding schools are instrumental in playing a direct role in imparting ethics and personal values among students as well as enhancing a range of desirable traits in a motivating and supportive environment. A study conducted by The Association of Boarding Schools in an effort to unravel the truth about boarding schools while utilizing more than 2700 students in secondary schools and alumni from boarding schools found out that more time was spent on homework as compared to day students. The results also revealed that 95 percent in boarding as opposed to 86 percent in day schools were satisfied with their academic experience.

A study was carried out by Pfeiffer, Pinquart, and Krick (2016) to ascertain the link between boarding school and the social development of students. The experience of living in a boarding school environment was found to lead to better autonomy of the students compared to those living at home with their parents or guardians.

#### *Boarding Academic Support*

Placing children in a boarding school away from home is one of the strategies that is proposed to provide an excellent environment that can foster academic achievement. According to Curto and Fryer (2014), students from poor families or background were not able to access amenities and facilities that can increase their chances of getting quality education. The authors argued that placing students in a boarding environment that provides time and a good environment for learning can increase their academic performance.

Chaibuntan (2015) carried out a study to assess the perceptions of parents on the expected and actual aspects of service management in four boarding schools managed by the Catholic Church in Thailand. According to Chaibuntan (2015), academic support was measured based on nine variables and include the provision of activities and facilities that can foster intellectual development of students. The author argued that boarding schools should provide learning materials, equipment, activities, and an excellent atmosphere for students. A notable finding of the study was that personnel in the schools offered individualized support for educational achievement to students based on their performance.

Martin, Papworth, Ginns, and Liem (2014) carried out a study to determine the association between boarding schools and academic achievement of learners. The authors of this study argued that although for some students boarding schools may deny them positive rations from home, for others these schools offer a more stable atmosphere for learning. They also maintained that students in boarding schools have more time to study as well as interact with their teachers and peers. The study found

that students in boarding schools were significantly more motivated and engaged in studies compared to their counterparts in day schools.

#### *Safety and Health Support in Boarding Schools*

The provision of boarding facilities for students in high school and other levels of education needed to consider the needs of the students in terms of their health, hygiene, nutrition and safety (Curto & Fryer, 2014). According to Wang, Medina, Luo, Shi, and Yue (2016) students in boarding schools are placed in an environment that did not offer the safety and care of their families and homes. The authors argued that placing these students in ill-equipped boarding environments deprives them of good nutrition, health, hygiene, and safety, which may lead to negative outcomes in their academic as well as social lives. Wang et al. (2016), further, claimed that the boarding environment is associated with poor health and nutritional outcomes in students. In their study, the authors found that students in boarding schools had access to poor and limited health services and support compared to day school students. According to Pavletic, Dukes, Greene, Taylor, and Gilpin (2016), an individual student at home was able to get medical attention and care fast from their parents or guardians while those in boarding school might not be able to receive the same care from school.

#### *Boarding Management and Staff*

Providing boarding facilities for students away from their homes was a responsibility that needs careful planning and management (Curto & Fryer, 2014). According to Martin et al. (2014), living in a boarding environment might lead to students having both negative and positive experiences, which may be instrumental in shaping their future social, physical, and emotional lives. In the study conducted by Chaibuntan (2015), the expectation of parents was that the boarding facility was able to provide an environment that was caring and able to nurture the students in all aspects. However, the author found that the staff in the boarding schools were not active in providing affection and care for the students in compensation of the absence of the parents. According to Susilo (2012), the role of the parent as the person responsible for character formation in a child was taken by the teacher or caregiver in the boarding setting. The author proposes that a boarding teacher had more obligation in the development of character in boarding students as compared to a normal teacher.

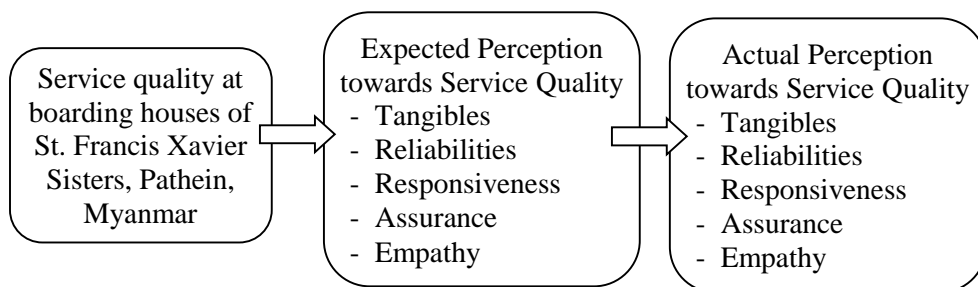
The results of the research carried out by Susilo (2012) maintain that apart from the requirements for running a boarding house for students, it was integral to integrate counselling services for students. This was necessary for the mental and psychological growth of the students in the boarding house. In agreement, Wang et al. (2016) found that poor management of the mental health of students in boarding led to poorer states of mental health for boarders compared to day scholars. However, Martin et al. (2014) found that boarders had a better psychological status compared to day scholars. Therefore, based on the findings of these studies, it was not conclusive on how the care and management of students' impact on their wellbeing. This might be a result of the different settings of the studies reviewed.

### *Historical Background of the Sisters of St. Francis Xavier Congregation*

Sisters of St. Francis Xavier Congregation is one of the Catholic religious Sisters' congregations and the first locally founded congregation in Myanmar in 1897. It was founded to educate the indigenous women by running boarding schools in Myanmar. All the administrative tasks function in Pathein, the origin and center of congregation and spread throughout the country in thirteen dioceses out of sixteen dioceses mainly in Myanmar.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The expected and actual service quality of the St. Francis Xavier Sisters' boarding houses were measured in five dimensions of SERVQUAL model.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of This Study**

### **Population**

The target of this study was all the students currently staying in the ten boarding houses of St. Francis Xavier, Pathein Diocese, Myanmar. According to current information, there were 225 female students varied from grade 8 to college studying in different government high schools.

### **Research Instrument**

This research was designed as quantitative and comparative study by using the Bashir, Sarki, & Samidi, (2012) Students' Perception on the Service Quality of Malaysian Universities' Hostel Accommodation – Adopted as a major instrument for data collection.

In this study, the researcher adopted a questionnaire consists of 25 items under five dimensions of service quality based on the study of Bashir, Sarki, & Samidi (2012).

The reliability was analyzed by means Cronbach's alpha coefficient as the previous study of Bashir et al. (2012) and the total result is 0.92, which was regarded as excellent.

The researcher used this questionnaire for her study in St. Francis Xavier Sisters' boarding houses in Pathein Diocese, Myanmar. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of this study for expected service quality was 0.93 and actual service quality was 0.9, which were regarded as excellent reliability for service quality.

## Finding

### *Finding for Research Objective One*

Research Objective one was to determine the students' expected perception on service quality before they stay in Sisters' Boarding Schools of Patheingyi Dioceses, Myanmar.

The total mean score of students' expected perception on service quality for 'Tangible' dimension is 4.10. According to the scale of interpretation, it means that students' expected perception on were regarded high. Among the five question items of students' expected perception on service quality of the "Tangible" item of boarding houses of St. Francis Xavier Sisters, "Study room, light, tables and chairs are supportive for learning" with the highest mean score of 4.37; and "Students described Stationaries and learning facilities are available as needed" with the lowest mean score of 3.73.

The total mean score of students' expected perception on service quality for 'Reliable' dimension is 4.20. According to the scale of interpretation, it means that students' expected perception on were regarded high. Among the five question items of students' expected perception on service quality of the "Reliable" item, "Boarding house environment is safe and secure for the students" with the highest mean score of 4.44; and "The boarding staff maintains accurate record of individual student in order to provide their best services" with the lowest mean score of 3.33.

The total mean score of students' expected perception on service quality for 'Responsiveness' dimension is 3.9. According to the scale of interpretation, it means that students' expected perception on were regarded high. Among the five question items of students' expected perception on service quality of the "Responsiveness" item, "Reminders and corrections against the rules are practical, timely, just and reasonable" with the highest mean score of 4.01; and "The Boarding in charge tells the exact timing of their services to be performed" with the lowest mean score of 3.73.

The total mean score of students' expected perception on service quality for 'Assurance' dimension is 3.9. According to the scale of interpretation, it means that students' expected perception on were regarded high. Among the five question items of students' expected perception on service quality of the "Assurance" item, "Boarding staff are role model for the students" with the highest mean score of 4.01; and "Boarding staff deals every student with respect" with the lowest mean score of 3.73.

The total mean score of students' expected perception on service quality for 'Assurance' dimension is 4.0. The scale of interpretation stated that students' expected perception on were regarded high. Among the five question items of students' expected perception on service quality of the "Empathy" item, "The boarding staff assigns relevant and appropriate tasks to the students." with the highest mean score of 4.25; and "The Boarding staff is willing to listen to the feedback from the students" with the lowest mean score of 3.79.

The data from the questionnaire shows that the total overall mean score of the students' perception on expected service quality was 4.1, in the scale of 3.51 – 4.50. The Reliability dimension of service expected service quality received the highest score of 4.2. The Responsiveness dimension of expected service quality received the

lowest score of 3.9. This led to note that students' expected perception towards service quality of St. Francis Xavier Sisters' boarding houses was regarded high according to the interpretation of scale.

#### *Findings for Research Objective Two*

Research objective two is to determine the students' actual perception on service management while they stay in Sisters' Boarding Schools of Patheingyi Dioceses, Myanmar.

The total mean score of students' actual perception on service quality for 'Tangibles' dimension is 4.4. According to the scale of interpretation, it means that students' actual perception on were regarded very high. Among the five question items of students' expected perception on service quality of the "Tangibles" item, "Study room, light, tables and chairs are supportive for learning." with the highest mean score of 4.73; and "Stationaries and learning facilities are available as needed" with the lowest mean score of 4.10.

The total mean score of students' actual perception on service quality for 'Reliability' dimension is 4.5. According to the scale of interpretation, it means that students' actual perception on were regarded high. Among the five question items of students' expected perception on service quality of the "Reliable" item, "The necessary information, instructions and practices are providing for staying in the boarding house community" with the highest mean score of 4.64; and "The Boarding staff is approachable, willing and well prepared to help the students" with the lowest mean score of 4.31.

The total mean score of students' actual perception on service quality for 'Responsiveness' dimension is 4.2. According to the scale of interpretation, it means that students' actual perception on were regarded high. Among the five question items of students' expected perception on service quality of the "Responsiveness" item, "The Boarding staff is timely, punctual and prompts to response effectively the students" with the highest mean score of 4.37; and "Reminders and punishment against the rules are practical, timely, just and reasonable" with the lowest mean score of 4.17.

The total mean score of students' actual perception on service quality for 'Assurance' dimension is 4.3. According to the scale of interpretation, it means that students' actual perception on were regarded high. Among the five question items of students' expected perception on service quality of the "Assurance" item, "Boarding staff has sufficient knowledge, skill and ability to help the students" and "Boarding Staff keeps her promises for the readjustments and requests" with the highest mean score of 4.48; and "Boarding staff is reliable and trustworthy to open personal difficulties" with the lowest mean score of 4.17.

The total mean score of students' actual perception on service quality for 'Empathy' dimension is 4.3. According to the scale of interpretation, it means that students' actual perception on were regarded high. Among the five question items of students' expected perception on service quality of the "Empathy" item of boarding houses of St. Francis Xavier Sisters, "The boarding staff assigns relevant and appropriate tasks to the students" with the highest mean score of 4.60; and "The



Boarding staff is willing to listen to the feedback from the students” with the lowest mean score of 4.06.

The data from the questionnaire shows that the total mean score of the students’ actual service quality was 4.5. The Reliability dimension of service quality received the highest score of 4.5, which showed a high service quality. The Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy dimensions of service expected service quality received the same lowest score of 4.3, which showed a high service quality. This lead to note that students’ actual perception towards service quality of St. Francis Xavier Sisters’ boarding houses was regarded high according to the interpretation in the scale of 3.51 – 4.50.

#### *Findings for Research Objective Three*

Research objective three is to compare the students’ expected and actual perception towards service quality in Sisters’ Boarding Houses in Pathein Diocese, Myanmar.

To compare the students’ expected and actual perception towards service quality in Sisters’ Boarding Houses in Pathein Diocese, Myanmar, the researcher used paired sample t-test to measure the significance between the perceived service quality and actual service quality at significant level 0.05 based on questionnaire part II of service quality in the five dimensions of service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

The research findings were displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1: Comparison between the Perceived Service Quality and Actual Service Quality of The St. Francis Xavier Sisters’ Boarding Houses (N=225)**

Service Quality	Mean	S.D.	t	Significance
Perceived Tangible	4.1	0.82	5.089	0.000
Actual Tangible	4.4	0.62		
Perceived Reliability	4.2	0.82	4.722	0.000
Actual Reliability	4.5	0.59		
Perceived Responsiveness	3.9	0.90	6.310	0.000
Actual Responsiveness	4.3	0.71		
Perceived Assurance	4.1	0.88	3.639	0.000
Actual Assurance	4.3	0.72		
Perceived Empathy	4.1	0.92	4.226	0.000
Actual Empathy	4.3	0.70		
Perceived Total	4.1	0.71	5.755	0.000
Actual Total	4.4	0.55		

There was a significant difference at the level of 0.05 between the perceived service quality and actual service quality of St. Francis Xavier Sisters’ boarding houses. According to table 1, research findings showed that the significance of each service quality dimension for expected and actual service quality such as Tangible, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy at 0.000 are less than 0.05. Moreover, the significance of total expected and actual service is also 0.000.

## Discussion

### *1. The Students' Expected Perception on Service Management Before They Stay in Sisters' Boarding Schools of Pathein Dioceses, Myanmar*

The analysis of students' expected quality before they stay in Sisters' boarding houses had been studied in five dimensions such as tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy were in the high level. It is consistence with the findings of Bashir et al. (2012) studied of students' perception on the service quality of Malaysian universities' hostel accommodation. The researcher observed that mean and standard deviation scores for each characteristic under each dimension was almost identical, which indicates the results as observed in overall dimensions of expected services to be good at Malaysian university's hostel; if not excellent.

In terms of students' expected service quality, the Reliability dimension was rated as high with the highest total mean score with 4.2 among the other dimensions. The study found for item no.1 of reliability dimension "Boarding environment is safe and secure for the students." with the highest mean score of 4.2. In view of expected service, Palvletic et. al. (2016) reported that the parents expected the provision of boarding facilities was accompanied by the provision of professional health and safety services or support. According to Pfeiffer et. al (2016), boarding houses are expected to provide the necessary accompaniment to the students in order to develop their social wellbeing. This result of this study can also visualize that there were underpinning factors for choosing the boarding houses. Association of Boarding Schools, 2016) found that the students perceived their boarding schools as possessing a supportive environment where students enjoyed more time with teachers and other members of the boarding house community outside the class. The research of Curto & Fryer (2014) suggested that boarding facilities for students also needed to consider the needs of the students in terms of their health, hygiene, nutrition and safety. This also link to this study that the students expected the boarding houses offered health and safety for them.

In general, this study showed the high level of service quality as the students expected at St. Francis Xavier Sisters' boarding houses.

### *2. The Students' Actual Perception on Service Management as They Stay in Sisters' Boarding Schools of Pathein Diocese, Myanmar*

The analysis of students' actual quality while they were staying in Sisters' boarding houses had been studied in five dimensions such as tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy were in the high level. It is consistence with the findings of Bashir et al. (2012) studied of students' perception on the service quality of Malaysian universities' hostel accommodation. The researcher observed that mean and standard deviation scores for each characteristic under each dimension was almost identical, which indicates the results as observed in overall dimensions of expected services to be good at Malaysian university's hostel.

The findings of this study are in contradiction with previous study of Wang et al. (2016) claimed that health and nutritional outcomes of student's schools were significantly poor. This study also does not support previous research of Yue et al. (2014), which found that the safety of students in the boarding schools was not adequate. The same result was seen in the studies of Gilpin (2016) and Palvletic et al.

(2016) where the need of health and nutrition is required to pay more attention in the boarding schools. They remarked that the boarding experience of the students were different from the home environment where they were supported in terms of health care and medical assistance. In contrary, there is considerable disagreement that this research found the Reliability dimension was regarded as high. Sisters' boarding houses seem to pay necessary attention to the health needs of the students as their homes although this study did not focus on specific items about healthcare, academic, social, emotional and behavioral orientation.

In general, this study showed the high level of service quality as the students received at St. Francis Xavier Sisters' boarding houses. Accordingly, it is already understood that not only St. Francis Xavier Sisters' boarding houses but also all the religious boarding houses offer health care, academic, social, emotional and behavioral orientation service to the students. The nature of boarding houses of religious sisters in Myanmar offers not only academic achievement but also overall betterment of the whole person as the main reason of their establishment in the service of the education.

### *3. The Comparison Between Students' Perceived Service Quality and Actual Service Quality Had Been Analyzed in This Study*

The finding of this study found that there was a significant difference at the level of 0.05 between students' perceived service quality and actual service quality under the dimensions of tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The result indicated that the actual service quality is higher than expected service quality. This result was supported by the previous study conducted by Pfeiffer et. al (2016) which found that the experience of living in a boarding school environment led to better autonomy of the students compare to those living at home with their parents. This means that boarding houses have a good service quality to provide the students as they perceived before they actually stayed there. Based on the findings of this research, the students found that the services offered at the Sisters boarding houses are helpful and supportive for their studies as well as their social, emotional and behavioral development.

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