

METHODOLOGY OF MEASURING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES⁴

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, education is most often analyzed in the context of its quality. The quality itself is determined by many factors, the proper identification of which may contribute to the desired level of educational services provided. It is undoubtedly considered one of the most important factors influencing the civilization level of societies, having a long-term impact on all aspects of their socio-economic life. Both the issues related to the quality of educational services and the methods of measuring have been the subject of considerations of scientific researchers interested in this problem for many years.

Own research results and literature studies in this area lead to the conclusion that one of the factors determining the quality of educational services, and at the same time one of the most important, is the proper recognition of the factors of the quality of educational services and the methodology of its measurement, which is the goal of this study (article).

Thus, it was decided that the weight of the discussion of this article will be focused mainly on the quality of educational services, their socio-economic role, as well as the proper identification of the factors that determine it. Moreover, attention was focused on the issues of the methodology of its measurement. In this respect, the use of the quality gap model based on the Servqual method was proposed as a helpful tool, which, in the opinion of the authors of this article, should be considered a useful tool for the proper recognition of the quality of educational services. It should be noted that the mere identification of gaps and awareness of their occurrence allows for both the formulation of a general assessment of quality and the indication of those areas where the difference (gap) between the expectation and the perception of quality requires improvement. The application of the model of examining the quality gaps in educational services may also be helpful in developing measures to improve the quality of educational services provided.

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INTRODUCTION

Educational services are one of the most common modern services, and care for their quality is an issue of fundamental social importance. According to the document *Fundamental Goals of Polish Education* (2020) prepared by the Office of the Ombudsman, "general education and training are the most important national investments, guaranteeing a safe and prosperous future of Poland in the family of world nations and European nations. In order for the social effort made for the development of education in Poland not to be wasted, it is necessary to clearly formulate the basic goals of national education, and then ensure that they are achieved as quickly and well as possible."

The services themselves, in addition to substantive subjects and specific rights, are included in the group of goods with the ability to meet needs (Rogoziński, 2000).

Moving on to the category of quality of service, it should be stated that, as the quality itself, the quality of service is a concept that is difficult to define unambiguously. Its essence is influenced by a number of factors, among which we should distinguish (Urban, 2007):

- the need to take into account different aspects of the service product;
- the role of customers in the process of assessing the quality of services and the way in which they receive the service.

Many researchers specializing in the field of service quality avoid attempts to define the concept of service quality in order to formulate multiple criteria for the description and division of service quality.

It should be noted that the educational service is a specific provision, and the issue of quality assurance in education is closely related to many elements, the measurement and proper identification which can be a starting point for actions aimed at improving the quality of educational services. Making such arrangements is essential for the correctness and effectiveness of any actions taken to improve the quality of educational services.

Thus, due to the undoubted importance of the quality of education, the main objective of the article is to put forward a specific methodology for measuring the quality of educational services. When creating the study, the authors used extensive literature related to the issue of the quality of educational services. Some considerations were devoted to the methodology of quality measurement, presenting the selected measurement methods by ideas. It should be emphasized that in the world of scientific literature the vast majority of studies in this area relate only to academic education.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ROLE OF EDUCATION SERVICES

The modern economy is identified with the knowledge-based economy (GOW), the development of which is determined by the social system of verification and transfer of knowledge. Its carriers include, among others, education, treated as a whole of didactic and educational processes (Drabik and Sobol, 2014). Education is critically important in terms of equalizing opportunities and social differences and should be treated as an investment affecting socio-economic development.

The basic goal of education is to equip educated people with knowledge and skills, as well as shaping their personality. Education can be provided in an institutionalized form or take non-institutional forms, including occasional forms. The main and desirable effect of education is to shape a person who is versatile in intellectual, socio-moral, cultural and professional terms, adapted to live in the surrounding reality.

Z. Kwieciński (2003) proposes to explain the essence of education through the processes that generate it, as presented in Figure 1:

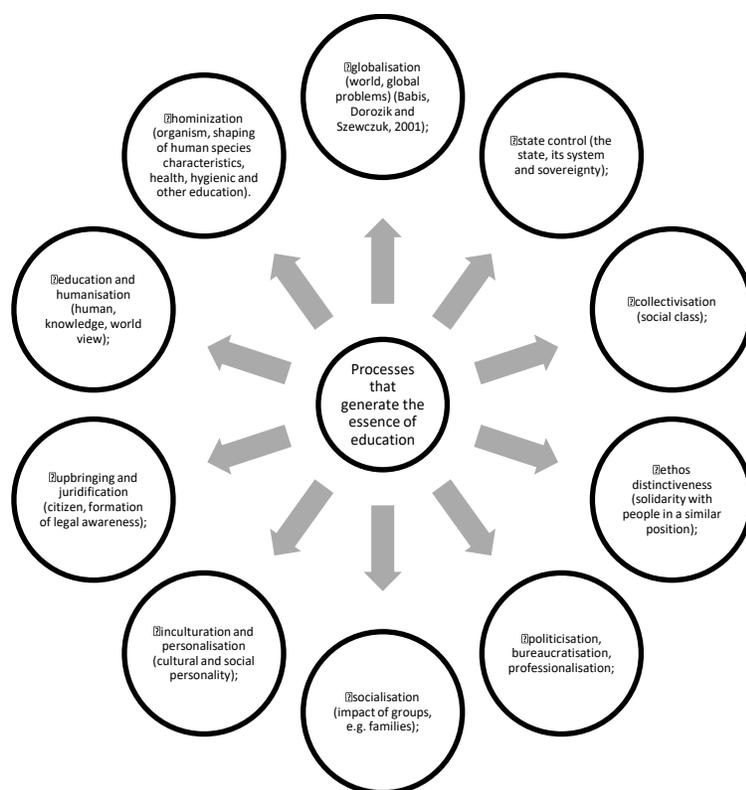


Figure 1. Processes that generate the essence of education

Source: own study based on Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XXI wieku, t.I, Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak, Warszawa 2003

The author also points out that education should primarily:

- provide the knowledge necessary for active and creative participation in the life of the modern world community;
- shape important values important for the successful functioning of a free, democratic society, such as tolerance, respect for rights, including minority rights, love of freedom, sense of solidarity;
- shape the idea and respect for the common good;
- develop a sense of social bonding and patriotism;
- teach in an appropriately balanced way the ability to combine active cooperation and harmonious cooperation at work, in the family and in local communities with the ability to choose and set their own goals and their achievement;
- teach accountability to yourself and to account for your actions to others.

A report was prepared by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, whose Polish title is *Edukacja. Jest w niej ukryty skarb* (Deloros, 1998) should also be considered an important document related to the issue of education. The report's recommendations on the development of education for the future are aimed at ensuring that it leads to the full development of the personality of all people.

Undoubtedly, it should be recognized that education is a broadly defined concept and, in the most general sense, it means upbringing as the education of a person from a child to the moment of reaching maturity, on the intellectual, psychological and moral level. Education in this field is mainly aimed at preparing for life in society, but also at developing one's own judgement. It also promotes the integration of individuals into the cultural, social and economic life of a given community and the preparation of human reserves for its enrichment.

In order to recognize the essence of educational service, the ways of defining it should be presented.

In the literature, the term "educational services" is usually given a broad and general meaning. An example is the definition of P. Kotler, according to which an educational service is any activity that one party can offer to another (Kotler, 2002). According to E. Skrzypek (2006), an educational service is a deliberate and organised sequence of relationships that occur between the teacher and the learner. M. Geryk (2007), on the other hand, defines an educational service as a service in which its seller sells his knowledge or skills, and the buyer acquires them.

An educational service can also be understood as a job, the result of which is the acquisition of knowledge, competences or skills by the recipient of this service (Kolman, 2003). This result is part of the general definition of the service because the acquisition of competences is the result of the will to meet the need, constituting a conscious deficit of competences that are considered necessary for functioning in society.

The educational service is also referred to as a process in which consumers participate in the creation and provision. *Popularna encyklopedia powszechna* (2001) defines it as a total of processes aimed at changing people, primarily children and young people, in accordance with the ideals and educational goals prevailing in a given society.

The efficiency and proper functioning of the service significantly affects the assessment of buyers. This process shall include decision-making procedures on:

- recruitment of educational institutions clients;
- schedules of classes;
- promoting:
- assessing and any means of verifying the level of knowledge and skills;
- activities as a result of which the consumer receives an educational service.

According to the authors G. Zieliński and K. Lewandowski, the essence of educational services is the transfer of competences, in which a commercial thread acts as an important element. This transfer involves a sponsor of the service (usually a state or other group of entities), a – qualified person providing the service (teacher, instructor, etc.) and a recipient – a learner (pupil, student or adult) (Zieliński and Lewandowski, 2012).

Educational services may, to a certain extent, expose the commercial nature of these activities. M. Geryk (2007), on the other hand, defines an educational service as a service in which its seller sells his knowledge or skills, and the buyer acquires them. Educational services play a special role nowadays, enabling people to adapt flexibly to new conditions of the labour market. J. Czapiński (1995), writing about the costs of the first years of transformation and chances for the future states that less educated people feel more severely both material and psychological costs of adapting to the new reality than the better educated ones. Taking into account that life expectancy also increases

with the level of education, especially among men, education can be seen as a real remedy for most of the negative effects of the rapid social change. The better educated an individual is, the faster and more effectively they adapt to the new rules of life.

Possession and ability to use knowledge translates into a high level of human capital, which results not only from the duration, but also from the quality of education of a given individual, and consequently of the entire society (Skórska, 2012). The education system shapes the general competences of future labour market participants, as well as allows to obtain specific professional qualifications sought-after by employers. Entering the labour market especially by young people depends on the size and structure of labour demand. It can be said that the development of labour demand depends on a number of factors, such as economic change, technological development and, increasingly, the pursuit of a knowledge-based economy.

FACTORS DETERMINING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

The *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation* (UNESCO) defines the quality of an educational service as the degree to which the requirements for the educational process and its outcomes, formulated by stakeholders, are met, taking into account internal and external conditions (UNESCO Road Map for Arts Education, Lisbon 2006).

At the same time, the key importance of the effectiveness of education, measured by the degree of adaptation of competences to social and economic life, and thus to the needs of the labour market, is emphasized.

In the scientific literature, the quality of an educational service is considered primarily as (Piotrowski, Kirejczyk, 2001; Topczynska, 2010; Purgailis, Zaksa, 2012; Mazurkiewicz, 2012; Mihaela, 2012):

- the quality of school, i.e. the educational institution, which is defined by: its organizational structure, the management style used, interpersonal relations between the participants of the education process, the methods and means of education used, educational interactions, forms and methods of cooperation with parents, the system of intra-school assessment. The quality of school may be perceived differently by different stakeholder groups, e.g. pupils, the managing body;
- the quality of education or didactic process, which includes: the objectives of education, the content of education, the principles of education, training methods, organizational forms, means of education, plans, programs and methods for the selection of teaching content, textbooks, auxiliary materials, procedures for the control and evaluation of educational results and the results achieved by students in external examinations, in particular the school-leaving exam and exams confirming professional qualifications in individual professions, as well as the number of winners of out-of-school competitions. Assuming that education should be understood both as the development of intellect and the building of students' attitudes regarding their comprehensive development and functioning in society, the quality of an educational service is essentially the quality of education, because the school has no other socially important goals than education understood in this way;
- the quality of teachers' preparation and professional experience;
- the quality of the result, i.e. preparation for the next educational stage or work in accordance with the current expectations and requirements of employers. The assessment of the result should be combined with the assessment of the effectiveness of an educational service, the

measure of which is the volume of knowledge transferred at a given time, with a certain effort and financial outlay.

Factors influencing the functioning of an organization can come from both its interior and exterior. Identification of these factors requires a diagnosis of the condition of the organization and its environment. When diagnosing the organization itself, its material and intangible resources should be considered in the context of their impact on the economic, organizational, technological, personal or image condition of the organization (Gieraszkowska and Romanowska, 1998). The factors of the organization to be diagnosed are most often referred to as micro-environments. The macro-environment includes such spheres as:

- political;
- legal;
- economic;
- cultural;
- social (including demographic);
- international, technological;
- ecological.

Separate spheres can negatively affect the organization or, on the contrary, stimulate its development. In terms of subjects, macro-environments are formed by:

- owners;
- clients;
- competitors;
- suppliers;
- allies;
- scientific and research institutions.

It should be emphasized that the conditions brought by the macro-environment are generally not influenced by the organization (Agunloye, 2012).

A widespread and recognized research method for studying the macro-environment of an organization is PEST analysis. This analysis is carried out in three stages:

- the distinction of important factors concerning particular spheres of the environment –, their determination must result from the actual impact on the organization;
- determining the impact of individual factors on the organization;
- identification of activities aimed at using knowledge about the identified impact of the examined factors.

PEST analysis can be adequately used to identify economic determinants of the quality of educational services. Due to the need for multifaceted determination of the level of significance of economic determinants for the formation of the quality in question, the authors of this study consider it necessary to identify also significant non-economic determinants. This will make it possible, on the one hand, to position economic determinants in a group of all determinants of significant importance, on the other hand, it will be helpful in trying to determine the impact of economic determinants on other key determinants of the quality of educational services. Such an approach will therefore make it possible to clarify both the direct and indirect impact of economic factors on the quality in question.

Factors determining the quality of educational services can be divided into out-of-school (external) and inside-the-school (internal) ones. A review of the literature on the subject, including both theoretical studies and content relating to educational practice, allowed the authors to compile these determinants of the quality of educational services. The determinants in question, in the proposed division into inside-the-school and out-of-school, were presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Determinants of the educational services quality divided into inside-the-school and out-of-school ones

Inside-the-school determinants of the educational services quality	Out-of-school determinants of the educational services quality
Economic determinants	
Qualifications and competences of a teacher	Financing of education
Qualifications and competences of a school principal	Market aspects
Number of students in a school in structural and financial aspects	Demographic situation
Equipping a school with teaching aids	
Non-economic determinants	
Teacher's professional attitude	State educational policy
Professional attitude of a school principal	Environmental conditions
Curricula	External evaluation of the quality of education
Internal evaluation of the quality of education	Standardisation of teaching

Source: own study based on a review of the literature cited in the article

Within both categories, the authors determined the economic determinants, recognizing (in accordance with their theoretical knowledge) the following factors as having such characteristics:

- financial (sources and principles of financing, cost structure);
- material (equipment, buildings, infrastructure);
- human resources (labour supply, qualifications, competences);
- market (supply, demand, structure, relations);
- technical and technological – in relation to the economic effects of the implementation of technology.

MEASUREMENT OF SERVICE QUALITY

In economic science, measurement is an important tool of cognitive processes, constituting in essence a specific type of observation enabling inference to be made on the nature of complexity and significance of the studied phenomena. Methodology of measurement, according to the authors R. Borowiecki and A. Jaki (2008), constitutes a research system presenting both the conduct related to the posing of problems and a description of ways of solving these problems.

The measurement is closely related to scientific definition and consists in determining the metric order between the various manifestations of individual properties and giving scientific events usefulness for the mathematical description. Measurement can be considered as:

- a process leading to the acquisition of data;
- procedure for determination of symbols describing the defined concepts;
- assigning specific numerical values to objects, events or features, enabling them to be given an orderly character.

Measurements can be made in analytical and synthetic terms. The result of the measurement at the analytical level is the vector of inherent property values, and the measurement in a synthetic approach is a numerical description of the distance between the numerical values assigned to the inherent properties of a specific object and the numerical values assigned to the requirements set for individual properties of the object, taking into account the relationship between these requirements (Szydłowski, 2000).

According to E. Kindlarski (1998), the measurement of quality conditions should allow for making decisions similar to the optimal ones. E. Skrzypek (2000) indicates that in order to have information about quality, it should be both measured and continuously checked. Lesiński (1996) reduces the essence of measuring the quality of services to comparing the values observed with the values required for given services. A quality measure is a numerical measure of one or more properties defining the quality of service. These measures may be determined in SI units or in relative numbers.

The acquisition of data to measure quality and the achievement of these objectives is closely linked with the basic sources of information used in this process. The information used for quality testing can come from various sources, e.g. primary sources collected through empirical and secondary research, such as publications, books and the industry press, publications of organisations and international publications, but also from internal sources, such as folders, leaflets and reports published by them.

Since in most research cases, when measuring and evaluating the quality of services, the use of many tools used to measure the quality of products becomes impossible, the selection of appropriate sources of information and a model for assessing the level of quality of services should always be made earlier, in terms of the purpose of the conducted research. It should be noted that the universality and topicality of the issue of quality measurement require constant verification.

In order to achieve optimal precision in the study, according to N. Denzin (1970), it is justified to use methodological triangulation, giving the possibility of using quantitative methods (observation, questionnaire interview, survey, test, sociometry, quantitative analysis of documents) and qualitative methods (participant observation, personal interview, qualitative content analysis, biographical method, case study) in one study (Nadolna, 2017).

Assuming that quality is defined as the fulfilment of the customer's expectations, according to this definition, the service (intangible product) provider should primarily ensure that the manufactured product satisfies the customer (Pacana and Stadnicka, 2010). The results of the research prove that the degree of meeting the customer's expectations examined *post factum*, i.e. after delivery of the product, does not guarantee success. It is only ensured by shaping the optimal quality by early recognition of customers' expectations (Gazda, 2007). This makes it possible to determine the product pattern to be pursued. This is particularly important in the case of the quality of services, which are characterized by a much higher number of non-measurable features, compared to tangible products, and the assessment of their quality depends to a significant extent on the customer's opinion. There is a common belief that it is difficult to measure the quality of a service, but people usually know when they are getting a bad service.

It should be emphasized that any action aimed at improving the quality of service is associated with the elimination of losses, which is all that does not create added value for the customer (Sage and Rouse, 2009). Therefore, each activity should be treated as a process that can be improved.

As noted, various methods are used to measure quality. For example, S. Borkowski (2004) in his study entitled *Mierzenie poziomu jakości*, presents the ABCD method. This method consists of the following four steps:

1. Ordering the causes.
2. Preparation and completion of a table of individual rank selections.
3. Preparation and completion of the summary table of assessments.
4. Ranking of causes.

The presented method can be interchangeably used with the Pareto-Lorenz analysis and used, after identifying the causes causing a given problem, to create a ranking of their importance.

A. Smoluk (2000) in the study *Pomiar jakości i grupowy wybór* presented a mathematical explanation of the possibility of measuring quality understood as a relation of preferences. According to this author, the family of all preferences in the set M ordered by the relationship is a matrix, which means that the multiplicity product of two preferences is their lower bound. The upper bound, however, is the extension of the union of these preferences to the minimum preference containing this sum. What's more, quality is a property that depends on individual preferences, but quality is also a measure of compliance with the pattern. The author believes that quality changes when the pattern changes. In his view, therefore, there is no objective quality. Quality is a relative concept and depends primarily on experience and needs. Quality is a preference, and a quality feature is a linear preference, called tolerance (preorder). It is reciprocal and transitional in character (...).

The author, T. Wawak, presents a numerical measure of quality as a quotient of the actual state and expectations. If the result of such a ratio is less than 1, this state is referred to as "sub-quality"; if the result is exactly equal to 1, then there is "full quality", i.e. complete fulfilment of expectations by the product; if the result is greater than 1, then it should be referred to as "excess quality", i.e. the actual state of the product, which exceeds all expectations of the customer (Tkaczyk, 2000).

P.B. Crosby (1995) proposes to measure quality at the cost of non-compliance. This author draws attention to the financial aspect of the lack of quality and suggests expressing quality in monetary units. The maximum quality according to this measure is the lack of any costs of non-compliance to the requirements.

J. Dahlgard, K. Kristensen, G. Kanji (2000) believe that there are two aspects to practical quality measurements. The first aspect concerns whether the features are explicit or hidden, since explicit features are directly measurable, while hidden features are not directly measurable. The second aspect concerns user issues, in particular whether they have a uniform approach to quality or its assessment, or whether they have different perceptions of quality. The combination of these two aspects of measurement allows to create a typology of the concept of quality, which can be the basis for measuring quality in practice. In this approach, quality can be measured in two ways. The first is direct measurement of consumer preferences by means of statistical scaling methods and designing experiments, while the second way is indirect measurements of preferences based on observations of market reactions.

Referring to the issue of researching the quality of services, it should be noted that it is more complicated than researching the quality of products, which results from the nature of the service, i.e. primarily from its following features: intangibility, impermanence, heterogeneity and individuality. The assessment of the level of quality of service provided by service providers depends on both objective factors and subjective ones, a reference point, as well as the level of requirements on the part of the evaluator.

Summing up this stage of considerations, it can be concluded that there are many quantitative and qualitative methods, documented theoretically and verified in practice, that allow for effective measurement of quality. The results of the conducted assessments are used both in the planning of quality improvement, as well as in checking and analysing the results after the implementation of pro-quality changes. At the same time, it should be pointed out that there is a difficulty in selecting the appropriate measurement method, appropriate for the category of the examined problem, as well as the purpose of the conducted research.

METHODOLOGY OF MEASURING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES - PROPOSAL

The model of service quality that is most widely presented and commented on in the literature on the subject is the model by A. Parasuraman, V.A. Zeithaml, L.L. Berry. This model, which according to the authors of this article is the most complicated of the developed quality models, is based on the *Servqual* method.

Using this multi-stage method, it is possible to recognize the expectations and perception of the quality of the services studied (Sztejnberg and Stypułkowska, 2005). Information about the degree of customer expectations' satisfaction is obtained by asking customers questions about the requirements for the service, and then asking the same questions after its performance. Comparing the answers to the same questions allows you to know which areas should be improved, and which the customer is already satisfied with. The scheme of the *Servqual* method presented in the literature, depending on the needs, can be adapted to the nature and specificity of both a specific organization and specific services (Wolniak and Kostorz, 2004).

A typical *Servqual* questionnaire consists of 22 pairs of statements grouped into 5 dimensions:

- *tangibles* (M) – understood as the external and internal appearance of rooms and a service facility, equipment, infrastructure, promotional materials and the behaviour and presence of personnel shaping the image in the eyes of a customer;
- *reliability* (N), also defined as – infallibility or conscientiousness, i.e. the ability of a service provider to perform the promised service in the right way and at the promised level – accurately, soundly, without fail, reliably and on time (Kangis and Voukelatos, 1997);
- *responsiveness* (R), – understood as the speed of action and response to customer expectations, timely delivery of services, readiness to provide rapid assistance to the customer during the entire service process, but also readiness to respond immediately to customer dissatisfaction signals (it is often also referred to as the responsibility or sensitivity of the service provider to the needs of customers);
- *assurance* (K) –, defined as the professionalism (skills and expertise of the personnel) and appropriate behaviour of the personnel, i.e.: courtesy, credibility, safety and trust compelled by the personnel;
- *empathy* (E) –, i.e. an individualized approach to each customer, the ability to understand the needs and expectations of customers and to empathize and identify with them (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1991)

The creators of the *Servqual* method proposed a seven-point Likert scale for the assessment of statements (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991), in which 1 means that the respondent strongly disagrees with the content of the statement, and 7 means that he strongly agrees with it (Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml, 1993).

The quality of service model based on the *Servqual* method is essentially a concept of studying five quality gaps (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1983).

Its essence is the assumption that the assessment of the quality of services made by the recipient is shaped by the perception of discrepancies between expectations and observations made by him both during the service performance and after its delivery.

It should be mentioned that quality improvement should be a continuous, endless process. It can be implemented in a variety of ways. The authors acknowledge that improving the quality of educational services requires taking into account the discrepancies between the actual state of an educational service quality and the expectations of school stakeholders. The occurrence of these gaps is a specific defect in the quality of the educational services provided. As a tool helpful in identifying

the defects in question, the authors propose the use of a model based on the *Servqual* method, adapted by authors to measure and monitor the quality of educational services. The advantage of the *Servqual* method is that it allows not only to identify quality gaps, but it also explains the relationships between them. However, the mere identification of gaps and the awareness of their occurrence allows for the development of actions improving the quality of services provided. The model of quality gaps in educational services is presented in the figure below.

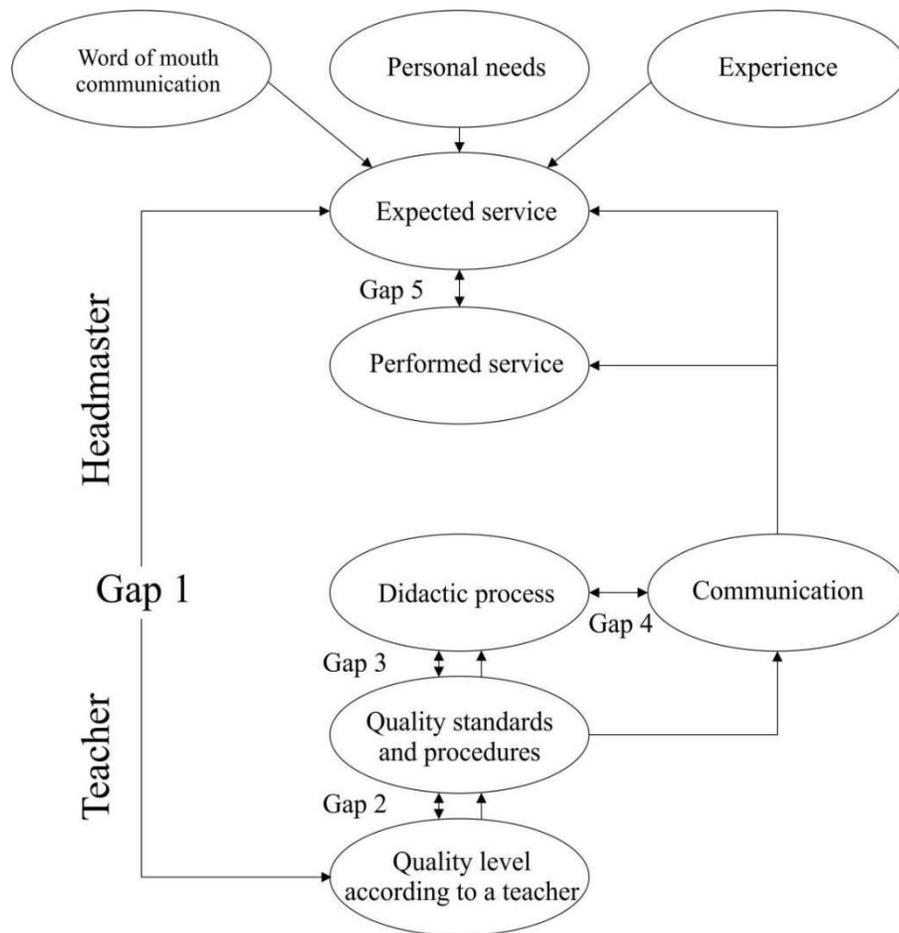


Figure 2. The model of quality gaps in secondary school educational services
Source: own study

The knowledge obtained by the authors as a result of the considerations made for the purposes of this article allows to specify the recommended research scopes within the identified quality gaps in educational services.

With regard to the first gap, i.e. describing the differences in views and knowledge of the school staff and its clients in terms of understanding the quality of educational service, the findings made by the authors show that many schools have no orientation of what is expected from them by the recipients. It should be assumed that if the school management does not have such knowledge, it will not provide services that meet the expectations of the recipients. Schools should therefore conduct systematic research relating to the identification of educational preferences of potential customers, verifying them in terms of their feasibility. It should be taken into account that the expectations of the recipient in terms of educational offer and related services change along with the development of his relationship with the school. In addition, it should be taken into account that there may be a

misrecognition and misunderstanding by schools of the quality requirements of the recipient due to their lack of sufficient skills in formulating their expectations.

The second gap is the difference between the service provider's perception of the educational service customers' expectations and its features, especially when the school management is unable to translate the knowledge about customers' expectations into the language of procedures and quality standards. This gap is mainly due to:

- unverified belief that the school is able to meet the expectations of its recipients;
- insufficient involvement on the part of the school's management in activities aimed at recognizing the expectations of recipients;
- routine and belief that certain standards or at least part of the applicable quality standards of the educational service offered are not, by definition, feasible;
- a broad, i.e. difficult to take into account, range of customer needs and expectations.

The third gap results from failure to meet the adopted quality standards of the educational service, or setting these standards at a level that does not ensure adequate quality. This gap should be associated primarily with the work of a teacher with a group of students (class), in a situation where a large number of tasks to be performed hinders the provision of high-level services. The identified causes of the third gap are:

- ambiguity and/or conflict of organizational roles at school;
- insufficient involvement of the school staff;
- improper teacher preparation, resulting in the inability to perform specific tasks and ensure the appropriate level of the educational service;
- low level of responsibility of the service provider for the work performed;
- inadequate system of control of the school staff and ignorance, downplaying and even denying the occurrence of a conflict understood as a difference between the expectations of the school and the service recipient's expectations (lack of clarity in the perception of goals and expectations);
- mismatching of equipment, tools and technology to perform tasks at school;
- improper organization or lack of teamwork.

In the authors' opinion, the most common reasons for this gap are the lack of competence or resistance to standards, in both cases resulting in their non-compliance. At the same time, it should be pointed out that ensuring that the school meets the standards for the provision of educational services does not always guarantee the provision of these services at a high quality level. This is often due to the objectively limited capacity of the facility, especially in relation to the material resources at its disposal.

In the authors' opinion, it is a mistake to rely only on the applicable quality standards because in certain situations their strict application may reduce the motivation and commitment of teachers in relation to the work performed, especially in the field of creating and introducing the desired innovations. In addition, the standards impose specific requirements on individual parameters of the educational service, which do not always correspond to the preferences of various stakeholders.

The fourth gap is related to the forms of communication with recipients, used by educational institutions. It is often the consequence of occurrence of the third gap. In various types of messages and announcements, the school promises to offer a certain level of quality of services provided. These messages affect the expectations of service recipients, therefore in the event of non-compliance with the promises made, the recipient has the right to feel dissatisfied. On the other hand, the school, without informing about the quality level of its offer, loses the chance to shape the customer's expectations. According to the authors, the communication properly conducted by the school affects not only expectations, but also the perception of the service by the recipient. The reason for the occurrence of the fourth gap is primarily the tendency to make unrealistic, impossible to fulfil promises.

The fifth gap, which is essentially a component of the remaining gaps, is a clearly perceived discrepancy between the service received and expected. The existence of this gap in an intensified form, in practice, results in the withdrawal of customers from the use of the services of a given school. It should be noted that the basic action to counteract the occurrence of discrepancies between the received service and the expected service is an analysis of the key quality parameters of the educational services provided, carried out by the school management, ongoing, and not only periodic, resulting – in the immediate taking of appropriate corrective actions in the case of identification of undesirable deviations.

CONCLUSION

Quality improvement should be a continuous, endless process. It can be implemented in a variety of ways. In this study, the authors set themselves the main goal of proposing a methodology for measuring the quality of educational services on the basis of literature analyses. According to the authors, the literature research, experiments in the field of pedagogical work in the education sector and own observations carried out for the purposes of this article made it possible to achieve a goal specified in that way.

Undoubtedly, improving the quality of educational services requires taking into account the discrepancies between the actual state of an educational service quality and the expectations of school stakeholders. The occurrence of gaps is a specific defect in the quality of the educational services provided. As a tool helpful in identifying the defects in question, the authors propose the use of a model based on the *Servqual* method, adapted by authors to measure and monitor the quality of educational services.

In practical terms, the authors also propose that the identified most important factors shaping the quality of an educational service should be assessed by school stakeholders, respondents in two stages. The first step would be to collect information from the respondents on the expectations referring to a service in a given school, and the second step would refer to obtaining information on the perception of this service quality. In both phases, the respondents would express their assessment through scores. Based on the averaged values of all dimensions, the overall result of *Servqual* would be determined. This would allow both the formulation of an overall quality assessment and the identification of those areas where the gap between expectations and perceptions of quality needs to be improved.

Summing up the considerations, the use of the proposed model of examining the quality gaps of educational services, supported by a good understanding of the specificity and conditions of functioning of an educational institution, can be an effective way of acquiring knowledge enabling pro-quality orientation of teachers' work in a way that increases the satisfaction of school stakeholders.

The general conclusion from the conducted analyses is to confirm the importance of properly recognizing the determinants of the educational services quality, using the proposed model as the basis for developing a proposal for shaping the desired level of quality of these services.

It should be noted, however, that actions aimed at developing optimal solutions in terms of improving the quality of educational services, require conducting a number of analyses and research among all stakeholders of the school (employees, students and candidates, parents, employers, superiors, graduates), what will be the subject of further scientific inquiries, as intended by the authors, as a justified continuation of the considerations of this article.

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