

# Do Private Fitness Centers Meet Users' Expectations?

Özel fitness salonları,kullanıcıların beklentilerini karşılıyor mu?

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of individuals who go to private fitness centers about service expectations and the service quality they receive in these facilities. For this purpose, a service quality scale was applied to 374 individuals who go to regular fitness centers. When the scale scores were analyzed, it was understood that the total service quality scale scores of the participants were high and the facilities met their expectations. In addition, significant differences were found between the expectation scores and perceived scores in the personnel, program, locker rooms and facility sub-dimensions ( $p < 0.05$ ). The analysis showed that the only significant difference was in the Program expected, where women had higher expectations than men ( $p:0.002$ ). In addition, significant relationship as found between age and monthly income that there is a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.578$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), meaning as age increases, monthly income tends to increase as well. In light of these findings, it can be said that in order to increase the service quality perceived by users, it would be beneficial for them to give importance to personnel training, increase facility opportunities and give importance to program diversity

**Keywords** Fitness center, service quality, facility management, user satisfaction.

## ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı, özel spor salonlarına giden bireylerin hizmet beklentileri ve bu mekanlarda aldıkları hizmet kalitesine ilişkin algılarını incelemektir. Bu amaçla düzenli spor salonlarına giden 374 bireye hizmet kalitesi ölçeği uygulanmıştır. Ölçek puanları incelendiğinde katılımcıların toplam hizmet kalitesi ölçeği puanlarının yüksek olduğu ve mekanların beklentilerini karşıladığı anlaşılmıştır. Ayrıca personel, program, soyunma odaları ve tesis alt boyutlarında beklenti puanları ile algılanan puanlar arasında anlamlı fark bulunmuştur ( $p < 0.05$ ). Analiz sonucunda tek anlamlı farkın Program beklentisinde olduğu, kadınların erkeklerden daha yüksek beklentilere sahip olduğu görülmüştür ( $p:0.002$ ). Ayrıca yaş ile aylık gelir arasında anlamlı pozitif korelasyon olduğu ( $r=0.578$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), yani yaş arttıkça aylık gelirin de artma eğiliminde olduğu bulunmuştur. Bu bulgular ışığında, kullanıcıların algıladıkları hizmet kalitesinin artırılması için personel eğitimlerine önem verilmesi, tesis imkânlarının artırılması ve program çeşitliliğine önem verilmesinin yararlı olacağı söylenebilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler** Fitness salonu, hizmet kalitesi, tesis yönetimi, kullanıcı memnuniyeti.

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## Introduction

The proliferation of private sports facilities has become a significant facet of the modern fitness industry, catering to the diverse needs of individuals seeking specialized services. As competition intensifies, the emphasis on service quality within these establishments has garnered substantial attention from both practitioners and scholars. Understanding and enhancing service quality is pivotal, as it directly influences customer satisfaction, loyalty, and the overall success of sports facilities. Despite the burgeoning growth of private sports facilities, there exists a notable variance in the quality of services provided. This inconsistency poses challenges in meeting customer expectations and retaining clientele. Studies have indicated that factors such as facility cleanliness, staff professionalism, program diversity, and equipment quality significantly impact perceived service quality (Yiğit & Soyer, 2023). However, discrepancies in these areas often lead to diminished customer satisfaction and loyalty. For instance, research by Buğdaycı (2018) revealed that members of both private and public sports centers in Konya perceived service quality negatively, highlighting areas needing improvement. Such findings underscore the pressing need to systematically examine and address service quality dimensions within private sports facilities.

This study aims to conduct a comprehensive examination of the service quality provided in private sports facilities. By analyzing various dimensions of service quality—such as interaction quality, physical environment, program quality, and outcome quality—this research seeks to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The study will utilize established service quality assessment tools to evaluate customer perceptions and expectations, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of the current service landscape in private sports facilities. Evaluating service quality in private sports facilities is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, high service quality is directly linked to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty, which are essential for the sustainability and profitability of these establishments (Lee, 2017; Yılmazoğlu & Çakır, 2023; Öktem, 2022). Secondly, understanding service quality dimensions allows facility managers to implement targeted improvements, enhancing overall customer experience. For example, Yiğit and Yurtseven (2020) found a positive relationship between service quality and the intention to repurchase services in multi-purpose recreational sports facilities, emphasizing the importance of quality enhancement. Moreover, insights from this study can inform training programs for staff, ensuring that employees possess the necessary skills and knowledge to meet and exceed customer expectations. Additionally, the findings can guide policy formulation and standard-setting within the industry, promoting a culture of excellence and continuous improvement.

Extensive research has been conducted on service quality in sports facilities, providing a foundation for this study. Yiğit and Soyer (2023) investigated the effect of perceived service quality on customer loyalty in sports-fitness facilities, highlighting the significance of interaction, output, and program quality. Similarly, Buğdaycı (2018) examined service quality perceptions in private and public sports centers, revealing negative perceptions and the need for enhancements. Lee (2017) explored the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty, emphasizing the roles of facilities and instructors. Furthermore, Yiğit and Yurtseven (2020) analyzed the link between service quality and repurchase intention, underscoring the importance of service quality in customer retention. These studies collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of service quality and its critical role in the success of sports facilities.

In conclusion, the examination of service quality in private sports facilities is imperative for enhancing customer satisfaction and ensuring the long-term success of

these establishments. By identifying and addressing areas of improvement, facility managers can implement strategies that align services with customer expectations, fostering loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing actionable insights and practical recommendations for stakeholders in the sports and fitness industry.

## Material and Method

### Participants

It was planned to include a total of 321 people over the age of 18 who go to private sports centers in the central district of Çanakkale province in the study. A total of 321 people out of 1926 people registered in a total of 16 private sports halls in the center of Çanakkale were invited as participants in the study. In order to prevent error in sample selection, the formula  $(N = Nt2pq/d2 (N-1) + t2pq)$  was used, which was taken into account in the known universe size (Sümbüloğlu, 1994). When the formula, which calculates the sample size with a margin of error of 0.05, was used, the number of samples to be taken from a population of 1926 with the stratification technique was determined as 321. However, those who wanted to participate voluntarily in the study were not turned away and a total of 374 people were included in the study. According to the results of the power analysis, with the sample size of 374 participants used in this study and the specified assumptions (effect size: 0.5, significance level: 0.05), the power was calculated as 1.0. This indicates that this study has a strong design and a very high likelihood of achieving statistically significant results.

### Data collection technique

The data of the study were collected by visiting private fitness and sports centers between December 2023 and March 2024, and after the necessary explanations were made about the importance and scope of the study, the "Service Quality Assessment Scale (QAS)" form, which includes 13 demographic and 34 7-point Likert-type questions, was filled face to face by the volunteer participants.

The data in the study were obtained using the demographic information form and service quality scale developed by the researcher, which included questions such as age, gender, monthly income, marital status, level of fitness center use.

### Service Quality Assessment Scale

In the study, information was collected by using the "Service Quality Assessment Scale", which was adapted by Lam (2000) and translated into Turkish by Gürbüz (2005) to analyze the service quality in sports and fitness centers. The original value of the scale includes 40 items in 5 sub-dimensions, including personnel, program, locker rooms, facilities and child care. However, the "child care" sub-dimension was not used in our study. The reason for this situation is that the fitness and sports centers where our research was conducted generally do not provide child care services. The sub-dimensions and item structure of the scale used in our study were evaluated twice as "expected service" and "perceived service". In the expected service section, participants were asked to indicate the importance level of the related item. In the perceived service section, they were asked to indicate to what extent the relevant option was met. A 7-point Likert scale was used while collecting the responses. While 1 point for the expected service means "less important" and 7 points means "very important", 1 point for the perceived service means "poor" and 7 points means "excellent". As a result, it is observed

that as the averages of the scores obtained from each item and sub-dimension increase with the general average, their desires and perceptions increase (Lam, 2000).

### Statistical Analysis

The data obtained as a result of the survey was analyzed with the SPSS program. First, the normality test was applied to the data. Kolmogorow-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests are applied to see whether the data is normally distributed. Since the number of samples in this study is more than 30, the "Kolmogorov-Smirnov test" result was taken into account. According to the result of the Kolmogorow-Smirnov test,  $p < 0.05$  is less than, therefore, the data does not show a normal distribution. For this reason, non-parametric tests were used when testing the hypotheses in the study. The Mann-Whitney U test was used for paired group comparisons, and the Kruskal-Wallis test was used for comparisons of 3 or more groups. Demographic data are shown as percentage (%) frequency (n), mean (x) and standard deviation (ss). For comparison results,  $p < 0.05$  was considered significant. The reliability rate (Cronbach Alpha value) of the Service Quality Assessment Scale (QAAS) used in the study was found to be 0.945.

### Ethical Approval

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and study was approved by the Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University Graduate Education Institute Scientific Research Ethics Committee with the decision numbered 14/69 dated 23.11.2023. In addition, the individuals who participated in the study signed a consent form stating that they participated in the study voluntarily.

## Findings

The descriptive characteristics of the individuals participating in the study regarding their use of fitness centers are shown in Table 1. When the table is examined, it can be seen that 57% of the participants go to these gyms to be healthy. 47.3% of the participants go to fitness centers most frequently 3-4 days a week. In addition, 58.6% of the participants have been members of fitness centers for less than 1 year.

**Table 1** : Distribution of participants' fitness center usage characteristics (n-%)

Purposes of Going to the	n	%
Being Healthy	213	57,0
Weight Control	45	12,0
Expanding My Social Circle	5	1,3
Good Physical Appearance	82	21,9
Free Time Evaluation	14	3,7
Other	15	4,0
Total	<b>374</b>	<b>100,0</b>
<b>How Long Have You Been a</b>		
Less Than 1 Year	219	58.6
1-2 Years	91	24.3
3 Years and Above	64	17.1
Total	<b>374</b>	<b>100,0</b>
<b>How Many Days a Week Do</b>		
1-2 Days	132	35,3
3.Nis	177	47,3
5 Days and Above	65	17.4
Total	<b>374</b>	<b>100,0</b>

The descriptive analysis of the participants' responses to the service quality scale and the results of the paired groups T-Test analysis are shown in Table 2. When the table is examined, it is seen that the participants' expectation score averages in the scale sub-dimensions are high, while the perceived scores are lower than expected. It was also determined that this difference differed statistically in Expectation of Staff, Program, Locker room and Facility sub-dimensions. ( $p < 0,05$ ). On the other hand, it is observed that the participants' total scale score averages are high and the facilities generally meet their expectations ( $397,82 \pm 41,09$ ).

**Table 2** Descriptive analysis results of scale sub-dimensions

Scale sub-dimensions	Score range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standart Deviation
Staff expected	9-63	32,00	63,00	58,52*	5,19
Staff perceived		11,00	63,00	49,04	10,50
Program expected	7-49	7,00	49,00	43,55*	6,09
Program perceived		8,00	49,00	36,47	8,72
Locker room expected	5-35	10,00	35,00	32,90*	3,19
Locker room perceived		6,00	35,00	27,14	6,33
Facility expected	13-91	34,00	91,00	80,34*	11,46
Facility perceived		18,00	91,00	70,09	14,13
Scale Total Score	68-476	267,00	476,00	397,82	41,09

\* Significant difference between groups  $p < 0,05$

**Table 3** Results of the scale sub-dimensions score analysis according to the gender

Scale sub-dimensions	Gender	n	X $\pm$ SD	U	P
Staff expected	Female	152	59,42 $\pm$ 3,99	14853	0,54
	Male	221	57,91 $\pm$ 5,81		
	Total	373	58,52 $\pm$ 5,19		
Staff perceived	Female	151	49,06 $\pm$ 10,33	16,756,500	0,996
	Male	222	49,02 $\pm$ 10,64		
	Total	373	49,04 $\pm$ 10,50		
Program expected	Female	152	44,70 $\pm$ 5,18	13676	<b>0,002</b>
	Male	222	42,76 $\pm$ 6,53		
	Total	374	43,55 $\pm$ 6,09		
Program perceived	Female	152	36,35 $\pm$ 9,03	16813	0,954
	Male	222	36,55 $\pm$ 8,53		
	Total	374	36,47 $\pm$ 8,72		
Locker room expected	Female	152	33,21 $\pm$ 2,82	15,609	0,184
	Male	222	32,68 $\pm$ 3,41		
	Total	374	32,90 $\pm$ 3,19		
Locker room perceived	Female	152	27,07 $\pm$ 6,37	16791	0,937
	Male	222	27,18 $\pm$ 6,33		
	Total	374	27,14 $\pm$ 6,33		
Facility expected	Female	152	81,39 $\pm$ 10,25	16052,5	0,42
	Male	222	79,63 $\pm$ 12,19		
	Total	374	80,34 $\pm$ 11,46		
Facility perceived	Female	152	70,00 $\pm$ 14,16	16818,5	0,958
	Male	222	70,16 $\pm$ 14,14		
	Total	374	70,09 $\pm$ 14,13		
Total scale score	Female	152	401,07 $\pm$ 38,6	15480	0,237
	Male	222	395,59 $\pm$ 42,5		
	Total	374	397,82 $\pm$ 41,09		

The results of the Mann Whitney U analysis comparing the scores of the participants from the scale sub-dimensions according to their gender are shown in Table 3. Analysis showed that, the only significant difference was in Program Expected, where females had higher expectations than males ( $p:0,002$ ). All other sub-dimensions and the total scale score showed no significant gender differences.

**Table 4** Correlations between variables.

		Age	Monthly income	Scale total score
Age	r	1	,578**	,070
	p		,000	,179
	N	374	374	372
Monthly income	r	,578**	1	-,088
	p	,000		,092
	N	374	374	372
Scale total score	r	,070	-,088	1
	p	,179	,092	
	N	372	372	372

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis results examining the relationship between the scale total score, monthly income and age are shown in Table 4. According to analysis, the only significant relationship is between age and monthly income, while the other pairs show no significant correlations found. There is a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.578$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), meaning as age increases, monthly income tends to increase as well.

## Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the expectations and perceptions of participants across various sub-dimensions of the scale, as well as the influence of demographic factors such as gender, age, and monthly income. The results highlight significant discrepancies between expected and perceived scores, gender-based differences in expectations, and a notable correlation between age and monthly income. These findings are consistent with previous research and contribute to the growing body of literature on participant satisfaction and demographic influences in similar contexts.

The study revealed that participants' expectation scores were significantly higher than their perceived scores across all sub-dimensions, including staff, program, locker room, and facility. This finding aligns with the "expectation-disconfirmation theory," which posits that satisfaction is determined by the gap between expectations and actual experiences (Oliver, 1980). The high expectation scores suggest that participants enter the program with optimistic assumptions about the quality of services, which may be influenced by prior marketing or word-of-mouth recommendations. However, the lower perceived scores indicate that these expectations are not fully met, potentially leading to dissatisfaction. This discrepancy is consistent with findings from other studies in service quality research. For instance, a study by Peitzika et al.(2020) found that gaps between expectations and perceptions are common in service industries, particularly in areas such as healthcare, education, and fitness programs. The authors argue that managing expectations through clear communication and realistic promises is crucial for improving perceived quality.

The statistically significant differences between expected and perceived scores across all sub-dimensions ( $p < 0.05$ ) underscore the importance of addressing these gaps. For example, the "program" sub-dimension showed the largest discrepancy, with females reporting higher expectations than males ( $p = 0.002$ ). This gender-based difference may reflect varying priorities or preferences between male and female participants, as suggested by previous research. A study by Anderson et al. (2001) found that women often place greater emphasis on program structure and support in fitness and wellness programs, which may explain their higher expectations. Addressing these gender-specific needs could help bridge the gap between expectations and perceptions, ultimately improving participant satisfaction.

The analysis revealed that the only significant gender difference was in the "program expected" sub-dimension, where females had higher expectations than males. This finding is consistent with research by Calabrese et al. (2016), who found that women tend to have higher expectations for structured programs, particularly in contexts involving personal development or health. The authors suggest that these differences may be rooted in socialization processes, where women are often encouraged to seek out supportive and well-organized environments. In contrast, men may prioritize flexibility and autonomy, leading to lower expectations for program structure. The lack of significant gender differences in other sub-dimensions, such as staff, locker room, and facility, suggests that these aspects are perceived similarly by both genders. This finding aligns with a study by León-Quismondo et al. (2020), which found no significant gender differences in perceptions of physical facilities or staff behavior in a similar context. However, the authors caution that these results may vary depending on cultural or contextual factors, highlighting the need for further research in diverse settings.

The study found a significant positive correlation between age and monthly income ( $r = 0.578$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that older participants tend to have higher incomes. This finding is consistent with economic theories of human capital, which suggest that income tends to increase with age as individuals gain experience and skills (Beck et al., 2016). The strong correlation observed in this study underscores the importance of considering demographic factors when designing programs or services. For example, older participants with higher incomes may have different preferences or expectations compared to younger participants with lower incomes. A study by García-Fernández et al. (2018) found that income level significantly influences participation in wellness programs, with higher-income individuals more likely to prioritize convenience and premium services. The lack of significant correlations between other demographic pairs, such as gender and income or age and expectations, suggests that these factors may have limited influence on participant perceptions in this context. However, this finding contrasts with some previous research. For instance, a study by Sun and Pan. (2023) found that income level significantly influenced expectations for facility quality in a fitness center setting. The discrepancy may be due to differences in sample characteristics or measurement methods, highlighting the need for further investigation.

The findings of this study have several practical implications for program designers and service providers. First, the significant gaps between expected and perceived scores suggest a need for improved communication and expectation management. Providers should ensure that marketing materials accurately reflect the quality of services offered, avoiding exaggerated claims that may lead to unrealistic expectations. Additionally, regular feedback mechanisms, such as surveys or focus groups, can help identify areas where expectations are not being met and inform targeted improvements.

Second, the gender differences in program expectations highlight the importance of tailoring services to meet the needs of diverse participant groups. For example, offering structured programs with clear goals and support systems may be particularly appealing to female participants, while providing flexible options may better meet the preferences of male participants. A study by Richemond, & Needham. (2020) found that gender-specific programming significantly improved satisfaction and retention rates in a wellness program, supporting the value of this approach. Finally, the correlation between age and income suggests that providers should consider demographic factors when designing pricing structures or service offerings. For example, older participants with higher incomes may be willing to pay a premium for convenience or additional features, while younger participants may prioritize affordability (Punj, 2015). While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. First, the sample was

limited to a specific geographic and cultural context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should explore these relationships in diverse settings to determine whether the results hold across different populations. Second, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability or recall error. Objective measures, such as observational data or financial records, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of participant perceptions and behaviors. Additionally, the study did not explore potential mediating or moderating factors that may influence the relationships between expectations, perceptions, and demographic variables. For example, personality traits or prior experiences may play a role in shaping expectations and perceptions. Future research could incorporate these factors to provide a more nuanced understanding of the underlying mechanisms.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of managing expectations and addressing gender-specific needs in program design. The significant gaps between expected and perceived scores underscore the need for improved communication and targeted improvements, while the gender differences in program expectations suggest the value of tailored approaches. The correlation between age and income further emphasizes the role of demographic factors in shaping participant preferences and behaviors. By addressing these factors, providers can enhance participant satisfaction and improve the overall quality of their services.

## Kısaltmalar / Abbreviations

SD	Standard deviation
X	Mean
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
p value	Probability value
t test	Independent Samples t Test F value F statistic
N	Kişi Sayısı
Min	Minimum
Maks	Maksimum

## Beyanlar / Declarations

### Etik Onay ve Katılım Onayı / Ethics approval and consent to participate

Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma ve yazım sürecinde "Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi" kapsamında bilimsel, etik ve alıntı kurallarına uyulmuş olup; toplanan veriler üzerinde herhangi bir tahrifat yapılmamış ve bu çalışma herhangi başka bir akademik yayın ortamına değerlendirme için gönderilmemiştir. Makale ile ilgili doğabilecek her türlü ihlallerde sorumluluk yazara aittir.

During the preparation and writing of this study, the principles of scientific integrity, ethics, and citation, as stipulated in the "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive," were fully observed; no falsification was made on the collected data, and this study has not been submitted to any other academic publication platform for evaluation. The author bears full responsibility for any potential violations regarding the article.

### Veri Ve Materyal Erişilebilirliği / Availability of data and material

Bu çalışmanın bulgularını destekleyen veriler, makul talepler üzerine sorumlu yazardan temin edilebilir. Veri seti yalnızca akademik amaçlar için erişilebilir olacak ve verilerin herhangi bir kullanımı, orijinal çalışmayı referans gösterecek ve katılımcıların gizliliğini koruyacaktır.

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The dataset will be accessible only for academic purposes, and any use of the data will recognize the original study and maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

### Çıkar Çatışması / Competing interests

Yazarlar, bu makalede sunulan çalışmayı etkileyebilecek herhangi bir çıkar çatışması veya kişisel ilişkiye sahip olmadıklarını beyan etmektedirler.

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.



### Yazar Katkıları / Authors' Contribution Statement

Çalışmanın tasarımı ve planlanması: F.O., Ö.B.; Veri toplama, analiz veya yorumlama: F.O., Ö.B.; Makalenin yazımı: F.O., Ö.B.; Veri düzenleme, yöntem belirleme, yazım – özgün taslak, yazım – gözden geçirme ve düzenleme: F.O., Ö.B.; Tüm yazarlar makalenin önemli noktalarını eleştirel bir şekilde gözden geçirmiştir. Tüm yazarlar makalenin son halini onaylamıştır.

Study design and planning: F.O., Ö.B.; Data collection, analysis or interpretation: F.O., Ö.B.; Writing of the article: F.O., Ö.B.; Data curation, methodology, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing: F.O., Ö.B.; All authors critically revised the important points of the article. All authors approved the final version of the article.

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