

The Relationship Between Service Quality and Student Satisfaction: The Case of International Students in Public University

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Abstract: In light of the educational service quality within higher education worldwide become as a major issue to the students' productivity as the evaluation toward service quality of the service provider influence them in future working profile. Consequently, the universities and institution have to work hard in order to improve the outcome and feedback of the service provided regarding to the image and reputation of university itself. Hence, the purpose of this study is to examine empirically the relationship between service quality dimension and students satisfaction in a public university. The populations of this study were 250 of international students. The data is analyzed and interpreted through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 21.0. This study applied simple random sampling to determine sample size. The data were analyzed by using descriptive Analysis, Pearson Correlation Analysis and Multiple Regression Analysis.

Key words: International students • Service quality • Satisfaction • Public universities

INTRODUCTION

Student perceptions of service quality in higher education are not directly involved with the content and delivery of course units, but it involves with the tangible and intangible services [1-4]. Specifically, service quality is become a major attention [5-8] to student among higher education institutions as well as the satisfaction level with the service quality within education context.

Nowadays, measuring individually satisfactions with quality of services in any departments are playing a crucial role in any organization [9-11]. Most of the services department, businesses, organization and any institutions are trying to improve the service quality that delivered to the customers in order to fulfill the customer needs [12-14].

Generally, customers tend to compare the services from their experienced and their expectation [15-21]; if the experience does not match with the expectation thus it will cause a gap.

[14, 22-24] stressed that student satisfaction is a result of experience in education services as student received in campus life and evaluate in a short term of attitude. The educational industry is going through rapid

changes with high competition among local and foreign institutions within countries in order to attract the new students.

As higher educational institutions need to have strategies to influence and remaining their students. Significantly, service quality is one of an important perspective that effect students decision as well as institution's performance itself [25-29]. Since service sectors are under enhancing the demonstration of their services delivered which the best values of customer focused through the evaluation and improve performance constantly [30-34].

In service quality measurement, the most prevailing instrument has been accepted on service quality is the instrument of SERVQUAL model developed by [35-39]. According to [35] first listed ten determinants of service quality that can be generalized to any type of service. The ten dimensions include tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security and understanding. Ultimately, ten dimensions were grouped into five dimensions in the SERVQUAL model by [37] which consist of assurance, empathy, reliability, responsiveness and tangibility. Previous research also done by [40] and it also long proved by [35].

Constantly, the study by [41], the development of the SERVQUAL received the criticism that involve with the term of the questionnaire, the validity of the five service quality dimension and the predictive power of the instrument in consumer purchase afterward.

Previous authors have suggested that the dimension utilized by SERVQUAL lack generality [42, 43], that administering items of expectation are unnecessary [43, 44]. Whereas, [45] refused the SERVQUAL instrument and projected a new model which was "SERVPERF" to measured only the performance excluding expectations.

[46] studied on measuring the service quality of educational institutions that focus to enhance attentions due the strong competition among the educational institutions and the demand for excellence in education. This study stated that the issue of quality is related to the measurement of quality of services in which the practitioner and academicians were investigated the academicians over past 25 years due to its intangible and complex nature [46].

Moreover, Malaysia is one of the developing countries in South East Asia that challenge with the globalization and internationalization of education. Malaysian government has been confronted with this challenge by allowing the international students to study in public higher education institutions [47]. Besides, the important contribution of education services to the Malaysian national economy, the government is trying to make Malaysia as a hub of excellence in education within the international hub.

Accordingly, the aim of the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia has been successful in increasing access to higher education and it should emphasis quality and improvement of its standards of higher education.

However, it is remarkable to identify the applicability of SERVQUAL to education sector, which implied that there is appropriate to apply it in higher education. Numerous studies have modified this measurement in higher education likes university institutions, such as service quality in business schools [48].

In higher education institutions attempted to deliver high quality service through the educational curriculums and administrative processes. Regarding to these services, institutions have to consider students as their primary clients and seek to maximize their satisfaction based on educational services provided. The SERVQUAL instrument is effective in service quality measurement in the higher education environment and useful to guide for

changing shortcomings to prevent weakness and improve it to be more strength as there were many extensive of evidences in higher education literature suggested [49, 50].

Moreover, most students will rate based on quality as a function of the satisfaction that students have experienced with the education service matters. Therefore, student's satisfaction in higher education is most focused on academic components where the department and service providers have to give the reliable information regarding academic matters and appropriate manner when they are dealt with the student's problem. In addition, the student's satisfaction perhaps depends upon an individual feels whether it meets his or her academic needs [14, 51] or fulfilling the student's educational expectations [52-54].

Finally, the measurement of service quality dimensions of student satisfaction are basically will judge and comparing between what they want and expect with what they perceived. Then they are trying to look upon on what they are really getting from the service staff. This means the expectation is evaluated by the first time of student experience.

Research Objectives: The objectives of this study are to determine the relationship between service quality dimensions and student satisfaction and identify service quality dimensions that predicts student satisfaction among international students in UUM.

Limitation of the Study: Respondents selected are focused on international students in a public higher learning institution. Currently there are 17 public universities/college universities in the country and the sample is selected only one of them. Therefore the sample cannot be generalized to all international students in the Malaysian universities or higher learning institutions. The limitations are due to time constraint, financial and manageability. The study only attempted to understand the relationship between service quality dimensions and student satisfaction among international students in the university.

Methodology: This study is designed to seek out the level of students' satisfaction under dependent variable among international students in the university. The questionnaire was using the SERVQUAL model developed by [36] that consisted five service dimensions; reliability, tangibility, assurance, responsiveness and empathy. Data is collected

through questionnaire survey as it is a pre-formulated recorded series to which the respondents giving their answers usually within rather closely defined alternatives [55].

The questions are consisted of 8 items scale. It used a 5 point of Likert scale to measure satisfaction from 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 degree and 5 strongly agree. The data is analyzes and interpreted through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 21.0 in order to produce descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis and Multiple Regression

The study is used simple random sampling in this study since the technique has an advance to ensure that the sampling process is an unbiased because every individual has a same chance in chosen as mentioned above. Moreover, a total of 400 questionnaires were direct distributed to international students in a university and 250 are useful for the further analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As the illustration of Table 1, the data of demographic factor includes the profile of participants which are gender, age and continent. The information is presented on above table demonstrates the frequency distributions and percentages. From 250 of respondents in this study as 56% recorded were 141 male respondents and another 43.6% were distributed 109 female respondents. Most of respondents were the age between of 21-25 years old as it distributes about 50.4%, While 36% were distributed to respondents who were less

than 20 years old, followed by between 26-30 years old were about 10.8%. And 2.8% of the minority illustrated for the respondents who were the age above 30 years old.

Besides, there were 69.6% of respondents who were from Asia continent, 29.6% recorded for Africa continent, followed by 0.4% of America and Australia continent as well. Astonishingly, this table demonstrates the existing number of international students who were studied in Universiti Utara Malaysia as there are experienced in services as the university provided.

Based on Table 2, the result from Pearson Correlations analysis through the hypotheses testing concluded that all three independent variables which were tangibility, assurance and empathy indicated as correlate with each other.

In this study, the multiple regression analysis is used as a statistical technique to analyze the linear relationship between a dependent variable and multiple independent variables (Hair *et al.*, 2006). This is a way to recognize whether there is significant relationship between independent variables and dependent variables or not. As the result of above table illustrated that correlation of the independent variables against the dependent variable is 0.60 with R square is 0.37. The F statistic is 47.38 and is significant at the .00 level.

Therefore, this means that 37% of the variance in student satisfaction is significantly explained and influenced by the independents variables. While, beta value is used to identify the most important variable among three independent variables in order to explain the variance in student satisfaction. As the above table

Table1 Demographic profile of respondents

Respondent's profiles		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	141	56.4
	Female	109	43.6
Age	<20 years	90	36.0
	21 - 25 years	126	50.4
	26 – 30 years	27	10.8
	>30 years	7	2.8
Continent	Asia	174	69.6
	Africa	74	29.6
	America	1	.4
	Australia	1	.4

Table 2: Hypotheses testing

Alternate Hypothesis	Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Result
HA 1: There is a relationship between assurance and students' satisfaction	0.23	0.000	Significance and supported
HA 2: There is a relationship between empathy and students' satisfaction.	0.36	0.000	Significance and supported
HA 3: There is a relationship between tangibility and students' satisfaction.	0.53	0.000	Significance and supported

Correlation is significant at 0.05 confidence level (2-tailed)

Table 3: Multiple regression analysis

	B	Beta	t	Sig
Assurance	.23	.35	5.39	.00
Tangibility	.24	.15	2.69	.01**
Empathy	.21	.24	3.92	.00

R=.60 R square=.37 Adjusted R=.36

F=47.38 F significant=.00

**p<0.05

*p<0.01

showed that assurance service scores the highest value at 0.35 which is statistically highly significant at the .000 level. While, the result indicates the tangibility service is significantly at .01 in explaining student satisfaction.

The analyses outcome indicated all services practice which utilize as independent variables: assurance, tangibility and empathy have significant relation to student satisfaction. Overall observation shown tangibility service appears the highest significant level of $r=.53$, $p<.05$, followed by empathy practices at the significant level of $r=.36$, $p<.05$ and assurance service is significant level of $r=.23$, $p<.05$.

This study is corresponding with the [56] have been stressing on earlier as seeing that tangibility has a stronger relationship than and empathy as it is a compliment to the services provided in higher education in such to enhance satisfaction. According to [57] also agree with the perception of that as the secondary aspects and facilities will have a direct and indirect effect on the evaluation of higher institution. The study of [58] stated that although the dimensions in service quality are important but assurance determinant in service is found to be one of the most important as well.

Similarly, [8, 59-61] described that although all dimensions is service quality are actually valuable in explaining student satisfaction, but it does not mean that all dimensions are significant. The statement is proven that assurance is one of the dimensions that are significantly related with satisfaction in higher institution what the students concern with the knowledge, courtesy and ability to inspire trust and confidence [62-65].

Furthermore, [66] in his study revealed that the most important contribute to satisfaction is actually due to the service encounter by stressing on communication as it also corresponds with [67], found that when the students expressed their satisfaction with their college experiences, it seems involve with people in order to contacting and communicating. By sharing this fundamental, it determines the empathy as an influential role toward satisfaction as it described as "being able to communicate care and understanding through the interpersonal skills of the staff and student-friendly policies and procedures".

[68] mentioned that the dimension of empathy is significant with satisfaction, with support from the finding of [69] as when student show a high satisfaction with their college experience, it is due to the formal and informal contact with their lecturer. It is reasonable why the contact with the lecturers and staffs seem to play an important role because the process of teaching, learning and inquiring are the central part to students' evaluation of service quality.

CONCLUSION

To determine and assess the students' satisfaction level with the service quality dimension provided by the university is not easy but it is possible to do as long as the management puts the effort to enhance the standard of service quality according to the students' need. In this study, the results indicated that the service quality dimensions have strong relationship with the international students' satisfaction. The results also revealed that the areas of university's service quality that reach the requirements or the needs of students' expectation or not in order to enhance the potential to build strong relationship with the student satisfaction.

Through the results have been discussed above, this study conducted for the better understanding in service quality focused on in the context of higher learning institution within international students' satisfaction in a public university. For future research can be conducted to determine the parameter of student's zone of tolerance. Because the university is a service provider can improve the service quality and manage the resource accordingly. If the university limited the resources allocation, it might affect the restricted in providing what students want. The further research also can investigate to the other stakeholders in order to see the level of differences and review it to overall quality and its application in the educational services [17, 70, 71].

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