



Determining World Class University from the Evaluation of Service Quality and Students Satisfaction Level: An Empirical Study in Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper aimed to investigate the characteristics of high service quality and its relationship in determining Universiti Teknologi MARA's (UiTM) Terengganu ability to provide high student's satisfaction level that may represents a world class university from the student's perspective. A total of 125 questionnaires were distributed to final year students from the UiTM Terengganu.. However, only 118 questionnaires were returned to the researchers. The results indicate that the student's are satisfied with the quality of the lecturers, physical facilities and the learning outcome. However there are elements in the service delivery that need to be improved as indicated by gap between what the student's expected and their actual experience. The result provides insights on how the Malaysian education systems of a similar structure could improve their service quality. This study is perhaps the first to address the quality of service and level of student's satisfaction at Malaysian university using service quality model.

Keywords: World Class University; Service Quality; Students' Satisfaction; Malaysia

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INTRODUCTION

There is lack of research done on the relationship between the achievement of a world class status university and the service delivery delivered by the academicians or lecturers of the particular university. However, it is known that, the lecturers or academicians played crucial roles in helping a university achieve a world class status. One of the important criteria of a world class university is its lecturers because they are the person who will deliver the knowledge, skills and experiences to the students (AbuBakar, 2006). However, the major issue to be

focused is not the lecturers, but the service delivered by them to the development of future leaders of Malaysia (MohdGhazali, 2006).

According to Fang (2005), a world class university can also be known as a first class university. A first class university should have first-class disciplines, first-class teaching contingent, first-class student sources, first-class talent training, first-class scientific research results, first-class administrative and operating mechanisms, powerful financial strengths and material as well as technological foundations. Of course, first-class universities should also make many outstanding contributions to the country and to social

development. There should be no great divergences of understanding on these standards. Nonetheless, much are still unknown about how to determine the critical success factors that could bring university to world-class standard. Issues such as service quality and students' satisfaction have raised the questions of whether university have been on the exact marks in terms of academic achievements, exceptionally after spending enormous investments on the university academic activities.

Besides, it is widely documented that quality service is a predictor of university performance (Fang, 2005; MohdGhazali, 2006; AbuBakar, 2006), however very little information has been available on the relationship between service quality and student's satisfaction. This, nevertheless, has not been discussed beforehand, and thus, it creates gaps in knowledge. Based on these grounds, the current study is conducted to address the following research objectives:

- To identify the gap between the services expected by the students of the Business Administration Faculty and the actual services experienced by them.
- To evaluate the level of satisfaction towards the physical facilities and services offered by the teaching staff at Faculty of Business Administration at UiTM Terengganu.
- To determine the relationship between the gaps of the items in the service quality dimensions and the student's average satisfaction level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

World-Class Status

It is very difficult to classify a university as a world class university. A research conducted by Niland (2000), summarized ten characteristics of a world-class university. He said that, it is very crucial for universities to have these ten characteristics if they want to be declared as a world class university. The ten characteristics of a world class university as outlined by Niland (2000) are:

1. Quality of faculty
2. Research reputation
3. Talented undergraduate
4. International presence
5. Proper usage of resources
6. Alliances and networks
7. Embrace many disciplines
8. Technologically smart
9. Practice the art of good management

10. Internationalism of all aspects of the university

On the other hand, AbuBakar (2006) believes that, a world class university should have twelve characteristics. These twelve characteristics covers a broad range from lecturers, students, administrative staffs and all aspects involved in the development of the university. The characteristics include among others; government accredited niches program, research and cross border research collaboration, the availability of staffs and students mobility program, the enrolments and the number of registered international students, the international awards from international institution, good governance and global recognition of graduates. In the same vein , AhmadBajunid (2006) adds, if a university wants to be a world class university, it should make sure that, it has a world class lecturers, world class students, world class administrative staffs, world class facilities and world class learning environment.

As the literatures and definitions discussed above postulate that a world-class university covers a broad range of service elements such as the quality of its lecturers, students, administrative staffs and all aspects in the development and service delivery of the university, the emphasis are on the human capital of the university (lecturers) and its products (students or graduates). To achieve the world class standard, university needs world class individuals. World class graduates can be produced when the lecturers successfully delivered the desired skills, experiences and knowledge. These graduates are measured by their performance at the workplace. When the employers are satisfied with the graduates' high abilities and skills in performing their tasks and responsibilities, then we can safely argue that, the lecturers too have achieved the world-class quality.

Service Delivery in a World Class University

A world class service is measured by a high level of customer satisfaction (Ambani, 2003). It is the services which always make the customer feel delighted and happy (WanJusoh, 2004). A world class service can also be known as a first class service (Fang, 2005). Therefore, a world class service is service that offers a very high quality products or service which simultaneously makes the customers happy and repurchase, reuse, or re-consume the same service in the future. Quality of service in education is crucial in order to develop a better human for the future. A high quality service in education contains an excellent teaching, learning and knowledge delivery from the lecturers to the students (AbuShah, 2006).

In order to achieve a world class status university, the services provided by the lecturers should also be first class services (Zakaria, 2006). As discussed above, one of the major determinants of a world class university is its graduates. A high quality graduates should also be a first class product of a university. It is crucial to have a good and high quality education delivery in every university in the world. A high quality education delivery is the main indicator to measure the performance of a student. If the teacher is able to deliver the right, high quality and first class knowledge to the students, then the outcomes would be high performance in the examination or excellence achievement of a student in his or her study (AbuShah, 2006).

Also, students or graduates are the most important customer and asset of a university because they are the principle customers of the academia (Kudchadker, 2003). Therefore, a university should make sure that, it has a high quality education system and should also provide a proper learning environment in order to enhance the learning process. Teachers or lecturers in a university should adopt the same attitude towards quality like what the industries has done. This was supported by AhmadBajunid (2006). He argued that a good teacher would be able to train and educate students to be better citizen if the teacher or educator delivers the knowledge in a very good and high quality manner. When discussing about the service delivery in a world class university, it is critical to ensure that the service delivery in a world class university should also be world class. Ambani (2003) stated that, world class service contains quality, good performance and excellent achievement. World class service is measured by a very high level of consumer satisfaction, optimum technological efficiency, and continuous improvement of facilities. Resilient attitude and inculcating genuine courtesy in spontaneous interaction with the consumers is also key ingredients in a world class service.

Measuring Service Quality

In general, quality is an objective measurement in manufacturing and a subjective one in the service sector (Pariseau & McDaniel, 1997). Ghobadian et al. (1994) classified the definitions of quality into five broad categories as transcendent; product led; process or supply led; customer led, and value led. Ghobadian et al. (1994) also provide a specific definition on quality on a service, which is a measure of the extent to which the service delivered meets the customer's expectations. The perception of quality is influenced not only by the service outcome but also by the service

process. The perceived quality lies along a continuum. Unacceptable quality lies at one end of this continuum while the ideal quality lies at the other end. The points in-between represent different gradations of quality. In addition, numerous researchers and scholars agreed that in today's world of fierce competition, focusing on quality service is a key for survival and success (Parasuraman et al 1985; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Zeithmal et al 1990). Service quality has proven to be apparently related to costs (Crosby, 1980), profitability (Rust & Zahorik, 1993), customer satisfaction (Bolton & Drew, 1991), customer retention (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990) and positive word of mouth. The later work on SERVQUAL by Parasuraman et al. (1988) sought to develop a general instrument for measuring service quality. They identified five dimensions of service quality (three original and two combined dimensions). The dimensions are defined as follows

- Tangibles: Physical facilities, teaching equipment, ambience and appearance of the teaching staff
- Reliability: Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
- Responsiveness: Willingness to help the students and provide prompt service in terms of solving the student's problem.
- Assurance: Knowledge and courtesy of the teaching staff and their ability to inspire trust and confidence
- Empathy: Caring individualised attention the teaching staff provides to the students

The study proposed that service quality can be measured by looking at the degree of discrepancy between customers' normative expectations for the service and their perceptions of the service performance. The SERVQUAL model is best known for its definitions of 5 gaps between customers' expectations and perceptions. It includes the gap between expected services and management perceptions of the expectations (gap 1), service quality specifications and management perceptions (gap 2), service quality specifications and service delivery (gap 3), service delivery and external communications to consumer (gap 4) and customer expected service and their perception of actual service (gap 5).

Out of the five gaps identified in the model, only Gap 5 or the satisfaction gap is the researcher's concentration since both parties; the teaching staff and the students must work hand in hand with each other in ensuring the quality of the service rendered. The management must truly understand the students'

expectations before devising any strategy or policy. The satisfaction gap, as defined by Parasuraman et al. (1988) is the discrepancy between customers' expected service and perceived service delivered. In this study the students are the customers to the teaching staff and management. They further add that customers' expectations are influenced by past experience, personal needs and word of mouth communications. Hence students will form certain level of expectations based on their past knowledge of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), their personal needs and promotional or publicity created by the management of UiTM.

Based on the discussions above, it can be concluded that, in order to achieve a world class status university, a university should pay serious attention on the issues of education delivery from the producer (lecturers) to the customers (students). The more effective the lecturer delivers the knowledge to students, the better the students. Better and good students are crucial and very important to Malaysia in order survive in the globalise world. A good student is hoped to be a good leader who will lead Malaysia in the future. In addition, if the students produced are excellent students, then, they will help a university to achieve a world class status because. In addition to excellent lecturers, one of the major criteria of a world class university is its outstanding students. Therefore, it is important to say here that the service delivered by lectures is crucial in helping a university achieve a world class status.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, it is important to focus on several aspects concerning service quality that can be measured. The study is concerned with the perceptions (real experiences) of Bachelors Degree students on service quality at UiTM Terengganu and their expectations of service quality that should be provided by the Business Administration Faculty Programme at Universiti Teknologi MARA Dungun Campus. In line with the research objectives, perceptions and expectations of students towards the quality of physical facilities provided by the management of UiTM Terengganu are also determined. The theoretical framework of service quality conceptualised by Parasuraman et al. (1988) are used in this study. There are five dimensions of service quality, which include assurance, responsiveness, empathy, reliability and tangibles that can be applied in education. Likewise, the levels of students' satisfaction are also determined in this study.

Instruments

The theoretical framework of service quality conceptualised by Parasuraman et.al (1988) is used in this study. The five dimensions stated in the framework are tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. A sample of 125 students was chosen from a total population of 200 final year students from the faculty of Business Management. Questionnaires were distributed during their class breaks. However, only 118 questionnaires were properly filled and used, yielded a response rate of 94 percent. Thus, to avoid sample bias, a researcher is required to obtain at least 10 percent of response rate from the sample size (Roscoe, 1975). Moreover, according to Sekaran (2004), 30 percent of response rates are needed to make the findings eligible for generalization. In short, the response rate obtained for this study indicates a non-sample bias and makes the findings eligible for generalization (Rafidah et al., 2009).

Questionnaires were constructed with the objective of determining whether there are any gaps between the "expectations" and "perceptions" (actual experience) of the Bachelors Degree students. The gaps are expected to be in three scenarios. They can either be positive or negative or no gaps (perceptions equal expectations). Questions were further asked regarding their overall satisfaction towards the service quality at UiTM Terengganu, Dungun. The data were analysed using paired sample t-test and correlation analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

Respondents' Profile

Majority of respondents are female, aged 18-22 years old and from Faculty of Business Management.

Results

Two main analyses are used to examine the gaps analysis. The Paired Sample t-Test is chosen for the first analysis. The test helps to identify whether there is any difference in the data distribution of the expectations and perceptions of students for the Mean of each elements (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) in the service quality dimensions. In addition, the difference (gap) between the students' perception and expectation on the learning outcome were also analysed using the same analysis. A 5-point Likert scale is used in the questionnaires and from the score of the mean values, the overall gap (Perceptions minus Expectations) of each element were determined. Results of the Paired Sample t-test reveal that the perceptions of the students

are lower than their expectations for all elements of the service quality dimensions and also for the learning

outcome. Furthermore, the gaps were significant at the 95% confidence level. All results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Paired Samples t-Test for the Mean of Service Quality Dimensions and Learning Outcome

		Paired Differences			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)*
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Pair 1	P-E Mean Tangible	-0.4423	0.6184	0.05717	-7.737	116	0.000
Pair 2	P-E Mean Reliability	-0.3900	0.5121	0.04735	-8.238	116	0.000
Pair 3	P-E Mean Responsive	-0.4117	0.6652	0.06149	-6.695	116	0.000
Pair 4	P-E Mean Assurance	-0.3312	0.6087	0.05627	-5.885	116	0.000
Pair 5	P-E Mean Empathy	-0.4670	0.6424	0.05939	-7.862	116	0.000
Pair 6	P-E Mean Learning Outcome	-0.4530	0.5999	0.05546	-8.168	116	0.000

P=Perception, E= Expectation. * Significant at the 95 % confidence level.

Satisfaction Level

The satisfaction level of the students in the business programme is also analysed based on 7 items which are Quality of Physical Facilities, Lecturer’s Physical Appearance, Lecturer’s Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy shown by the lecturers and finally the Learning Outcome. Again, a 5 point Likert scale was used, where a score of 1 indicates that the students are extremely dissatisfied and a score of 5 indicates

extreme satisfaction. Based on the Median and Mode value, the researcher discovers that the majority of students had given a score between 3 and 4 indicating high satisfaction level. The general satisfaction level also indicates that on average the students are satisfied with the services that they received from the teaching staff of UiTM Terengganu at the business faculty. This is shown by the mean value of between 3.0345 and 3.8103 which are above the average score of 2.50. All results are shown in Table 2 and 3.

Table 2: The Statistics Analysis of the Students Satisfaction Level for Physical Facilities, Physical Appearance, Reliability and Responsiveness of Lecturer

Elements of Satisfaction	Quality of Physical Facilities	Lecturer’s Physical Appearance	Reliability of Lecturer	Responsiveness of Lecturer
N Valid	116	116	116	116
Missing	2	2	2	2
Mean	3.0345	3.8966	3.9569	3.8103
Median	3.000	4.000	4.000	4.000
Mode	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00

Table 3: The Statistics Analysis of the Students Satisfaction Level for Assurance, Empathy and Learning Outcome

Elements of Satisfaction		Assurance Shown by Lecturer	Empathy Shown by Lecturer	Learning Outcome
N	Valid	116	116	116
	Missing	2	2	2
Mean		3.6983	3.6552	3.9310
Median		4.0000	4.0000	4.0000
Mode		4.00	4.00	4.00

Correlations Analysis

A correlation analysis is also performed between the general satisfactions and the mean gaps (perceptions minus expectations) for all service quality items used in the questionnaire. Results of the test indicate that there is a positive and linear relationship between the gaps and the Mean satisfaction level of the Bachelors Degree students in the Business Faculty at UiTM Terengganu. This is shown by the significant value of

less than 0.05. This indicates that as the gaps become more positive (Perception higher than Expectation), the satisfaction level would also increase. However, the Spearman Rho Correlation also indicates that the mean gaps (perception minus expectations) for all the service quality items listed in table 4 have a low correlation with the overall satisfaction level as shown by the correlation value between 0.185 and 0.225. These results can be observed in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlations Analysis between Mean Satisfaction Level and the Mean Gap of the Service Quality Items

Gap of Service Quality Items		Mean of Satisfaction Level
P minus E Punctuality	Correlation Coefficient	0.225(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.016
P minus E Speed of Answering Question	Correlation Coefficient	0.200(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.033
P minus E Commitment to Help Students	Correlation Coefficient	0.236(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.011
P minus E Courtesy and Kindness	Correlation Coefficient	0.191(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.041
P minus E Personalised Attention Given To Students	Correlation Coefficient	0.185(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.047

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). P= perceptions. E=Expectation

DISCUSSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATIONS

It is clear from the analysis that there is significant difference between the expectations and the perceptions of students towards the actual services delivered by the teaching staff and the management of the Business Faculty at UiTM Terengganu. The Paired Sample t-Test revealed that a substantial number of students experienced negative gaps; which indicates that the management and teaching staff are unable to

meet or exceed the students' expectations for all the components of the service quality dimensions. As such the management have much to do in improving their services to at least match the expectations of students that are unique, complex and unpredictable. No doubt, it is a daunting task but it has to be done to ensure a high satisfaction level. In this light, the authors would like to offer some recommendations that may assist the management in enhancing the services. First and foremost, a service quality audit should be conducted on an annual basis. The main purpose of conducting

this audit is to assess the quality of the students' experiences focusing on issues such as physical facilities, care and attention given by the staff, safety and security, after-hour on-line interaction, speed of delivery, courtesy and politeness of staff. The results from the auditing process can be communicated to the management of UiTM Terengganu in order to maintain and improve the service delivery.

The correlation analysis revealed that the gap in punctuality, speed in answering question, commitment to help students, courtesy and kindness and personalised attention has a significant influence in determining the average satisfaction level of the students. Even though the correlation value is low, these are the areas of the services that need to be improved in order to ensure a higher satisfaction level among the students. An effective approach to eliminate the gaps is to provide comprehensive training to the teaching staff. Training should focus on areas such as communication, interpersonal skills, ethics, and motivation. The training should be conducted on a regular basis and reviewed from time to time. In this training, important feedback from the teaching staff can be used to improve future training. Those attending the training should also be evaluated in a consistent manner using measurable specifications.

Finally, the Perceived Quality such as images, advertising, brand names and inferences about quality are critical (O'Neill & Black, 1996). Reputation and precise communication are very important. Potential students applying to the Business Faculty at UiTM Terengganu should have accurate information on the type, volume and quality of services available. Coupled with flexibility, this will hopefully ensure that the right services are delivered at the right time and place. Thus no false expectations are created in the minds of students. While the quest for quality is obviously a continuous and difficult process, it is vital that the effort to produce outstanding students at UiTM Terengganu is not hindered by failure to deliver the highest quality services.

CONCLUSION

This study has addressed the research objectives set forth in this study. To some extent, the findings represent a universal phenomenon as suggested by prior literature. Through the understanding of these relationships, it provides important insights to the university administrative in terms of indentifying strategies that would enhance the quality services within their organisations. For universities that are currently implementing such initiatives, this study sheds some light on the necessary measures to be

undertaken to ensure successful service quality implementation. Such corrective actions deemed important as they help to recuperate the university administrative. It is suggested for future studies to replicate the same methodology on different organizations in order to confirm the results of this study, particularly to explore on the dimensions of service quality and student's satisfaction in a more comprehensive manner. It is also interesting to investigate other important factors (internal quality audit, total quality performance etc.) and link it to university performance.

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