

FOREIGN STUDENTS' SATISFACTION ON VISA PROCESSING: COMPARISON BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study was to measure the foreign student's satisfaction on visa processing services rendered by public universities compared to private universities. Ministry of Higher Education aspires to develop Malaysia as a hub for education thus welcoming foreign student is a priority. One important requirement for foreign student to stay legally in Malaysia as a student is to have student visa. The visa processing service for foreign students in public university differ from the private universities in terms of fees, time period and other requirement of services. The disparity in service levels between these two entities suggests that there could be a difference in orientation towards visa processing service. In consequence, this could also have an impact towards the satisfaction of the recipients of this service. The respondents to this research involved both students from private and public universities and it explored their level of satisfaction towards the services provided. This study hopes to give an insight on the differences that exists and identify the strengths and weaknesses that could be shared and be used as a reference towards the improvement of the overall service levels of Malaysian universities.

Keywords: *satisfaction, foreign student, private universities, public universities, comparison, strengths and weaknesses.*

INTRODUCTION

Performance in service management not just only inter-relationship between people, trust, the way in which service delivery and performance services of government, but also is a vital tools or mechanism to enhance skills and competencies at individual and group level so that the organization benefits. It is a continuous proactive process focusing on planning, acting, measuring and reviewing performance which is differ from traditional approaches to performance management are the annual appraisal and day-to-day assessment (Lockett, J., 1992).

As mentioned by Prime Minister in 18th February 2006, Dato' Seri Najib Tun Razak (at that time Deputy Prime Minister), at the conference on Globalizing Higher Education in Malaysia, the country will become educational hub in 2010. The target is to have 100,000 international students by this year. This is to support the fact that we are moving forward a globalizing environment. Besides having the increase in number of international students, this could lead to healthy competition between local universities and foreign universities. As such quality services are the very first step to build trust abroad with Malaysia and the Malaysian institutions of higher learning.

In ensuring that the students stay here legally, the government of Malaysia has assigned the Immigration Department and the Ministry of Higher Education to be in collaboration in the process of issuing visas to international students. Universities involved in taking in international students will also be involved in pre qualifying international students while the Immigration Department has the responsibility to finalize the visa application. The government not only promised the student visa but also visa for student's family.

Focus of this study is on comparison of visa processing between private universities and public universities. The objective of this research is to measure the level of students' satisfaction regarding the visa processing services provided in private and public universities. In addition, this research also focuses factors that highly contribute to dissatisfaction of the student in visa processing services. It is hope that better understanding of the visa processing services can help not just the university built the brand name, but also endorsed Malaysia as the best preferred place for education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Satisfaction is an overall customer attitude towards a service provider (Levesque & McDougall, 1996, p.14), or an emotional reaction to the difference between what customers anticipate and what they receive (Zineldin, 2000), regarding of the fulfillment of some need, goal, or desire (Oliver 1999). A similar definition is provided by Gerpot *et al* (2001) who proposed satisfaction is based on a customer's estimated experience of the extend to which a provider's services fulfill his or her expectations. Customer satisfaction brings many benefits. Satisfied customers are less price sensitive and are less influenced by competitors, and they stay loyal longer (Zineldin, 2000).

Service customers frequently view waiting as a waste of their time (Schwartz, 1975; Rafaeli, 1989; Hui and Tse, 1996; Sheu et al., 2003). Consequently, customers tend to dislike long waits. Given the accelerated pace of life in today's culture, many people enjoy less free time and seem less tolerant of service waits (Katz et al., 1991; Davis and Heineke, 1994; Kostecki, 1996; Diaz and Ruiz, 2002). When customers

think that they wait too long for service, they become less satisfied with overall service quality (Taylor, 1994; Hui and Tse, 1996, Lee and Lambert, 2005). Customers may also complain to others about poor service quality and refuse to patronize the service in the future (Davis and Vollmann, 1990; Davis, 1991; Dube et al., 1994; Sarel and Marmorstein, 1998). These types of negative perceptions of service may ultimately damage the reputation and the profitability of the business (Davis and Maggard, 1990).

Hensley and Sulek (2007) came with the idea that given all those potential consequences, managers must determine how satisfaction or dissatisfaction with waiting time will affect customers' perceptions of the service experience. Many services consist of multiple stages in which customers have to wait more than once during service delivery. Although the actual number of wait stages will vary with the service context, three basic types of waits occur in multi-stage services:

- (1) the service-entry waits, which precede service delivery;
- (2) the in-service waits, which occur during service delivery; and
- (3) the service-exit waits, which take place at the end of service delivery (Dube-Rioux et al., 1989).

Results from Hensley and Sulek's research on customer satisfaction with waiting in multi-stage services (2007) showed that the only waiting satisfaction that consistently affected customer perceptions of service quality involved the service-entry waiting. This findings, was used in this paper to measure time service by service provider in delivering their service and affect on the service satisfaction.

Under the literature review of Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSS), it seeks to ascertain the overall level of customer satisfaction with their service experience. Typically, this approach utilizes a survey instrument in which a sample of customers is asked to evaluate different aspects of a recent experience with the service organization. The CSS focuses on developing an aggregate measure of an organization performance using key service quality indicators (Dutka, 1994; Hayes, 1992; Kessler, 1996). Within a service organization, the CSS typically engages the customer from a marketing perspective. CSS approach provide valuable, customer based, ratings about an organization's service quality and performance and their results tend to complement one another. Focus of this research is to obtained information through the CSS approach and provides a more comprehensive assessment of what customers are thinking relative to their service experience (counter service, staff service, payment service, service information, value added service and service time).

According to Katcher (2003), there are three major reasons why CSS fail. Firstly, customer surveys are viewed as merely a performance appraisal tool. In response to poor customer ratings, managers typically use Band-Aids rather than perform major surgery. Management should focus on more fundamental issues such as whether the organization's products, services and culture need to change in order to improve customer satisfaction. Secondly, the wrong people involved in survey will

lead to the failure in CSS. Customer satisfaction is critically important to all organization, yet the job of gathering and interpreting customer satisfaction data is often relegated to lower levels of organization. These people are not in a position to evaluate the result from a strategic perspective, nor are able to implement the major organization-wide changes that may be needed. Thirdly, management engages in analysis paralysis. Far too often, CSS data is over-analyzed, scrutinized, and beaten to death. Management responds with denial and finger-pointing instead of constructive actions or strategic decisions.

One of the distinctive characteristics of many service sector organizations is the presence of customers during the service creation and delivery process. It is the presence of the customer that creates a special concern for managing the total service experience. Moreover, as Hart and Hogg (1998) have observed, services may have several dimensions that are used by clients to ascertain value. A customer's perception of the services rendered depends not only on the explicit service performed, but also on the: supporting facilities; facilitating goods; and any implicit services delivered. All of that are integral parts of the total service package (Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons, 1998). In this paper all 3 services package stated was covered under service satisfaction level on counter service, staff service, payment service, service information, value added service and service time.

Service delivery occurs through human interaction, the jobs of services employees, require high levels of empathy and emotional involvement, and these unique job features can be complex and demanding (Dormann & Zapf, 2004). Service quality is a competitive advantage for businesses that compete in service sector industries. Therefore, it shows that how important the high quality in service delivery (Bartlett & Han, 2007). According to De Jonge and Dormann (2003), the increasing number of service sector may affect the work performance of employees and organizations. A previous study that has been conducted by Netemeyer, Maxham and Pullig (2006) mentioned that customer service employees those have faced with the stress at work will affecting their performance and customers' evaluation and this will in turn seriously impacts the service employee performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Questionnaires were distributed to two public universities and two private universities. 120 questionnaires were distributed with 110 returned questionnaires. The questionnaires consist of several sections, students' demographic background. factors contributing to their level of satisfaction suggestions in improving the university's visa processing service. Collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 17.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 showed that the demographic profile of the respondents. 50.9 % percent of respondents are females and 49.1% percent are males. For the respondent's marital status, 71.8% percent of respondents are single, 28.2% are married. As for age of respondents, majority of respondents are between 26 years old to 30 years old with the total of 40 respondents which is 36.4% percent. Regarding the race of the respondents, 69.1% percent of respondents are Malay. While for the highest completed educational level of respondents majority of respondents have Bachelors Degree with the total of 54.5% percent.

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Questions	Percentage (%)
Gender:	
Female	50.9
Male	49.1
Marital Status:	
Single	71.8
Married	28.2
Age:	
20 years old and below	7.3
21 years old – 25 years old	29.1
26 years old - 30 years old	36.4
31 years old – 35 years old	17.3
36 years old – 40 years old	5.5
41 years old and above	4.5
Religion:	
Muslim	69.1
Christian	24.5
Hindu	6.4
Highest Educational Level:	
Diploma	13.6
Bachelor Degree	54.5
Masters Degree	31.8

(*n=110*)

Table 2 reports the mean value on the level of service satisfaction. The respondents found that the service counter clean, tidy and attractive in the public universities. On the other hand clients are dissatisfied with private universities counter's cleanliness, tidiness and attractiveness. The next area looked into is on the waiting time where clients found that private universities has minimal waiting time compared to public universities. In terms of staff service, clients are satisfied with staff knowledge and understanding on specific needs of visa needs and they trusted the staff

in public universities, Where else, client are dissatisfied with all staff service in private universities. As for the staff helpfulness and friendliness, findings showed that the clients are unsatisfied.

Clients are more satisfied on payment mode service provided by public universities compared to private universities. Clients only satisfied with cash payment service offered by private universities. The rest of payment mode services, they claim unsatisfied.

Table 2: Factors Contributing to Level of Satisfaction

Items	Mean	
	Public Universities	Private Universities
Counter		
Counter is clean and tidy	4.62	3.58
Counter is attractive	4.20	3.62
Facilities and equipment fully provided	3.96	3.53
Minimal waiting time in line	3.55	4.07
Staff		
Staff willing to help and friendly	3.80	3.60
Staff are knowledgeable	4.15	3.85
Staff understand specific needs of visa processing	4.36	2.56
Staff can be trusted	4.29	2.50
Payment		
By cash	3.93	4.29
By cheque	4.13	2.87
By credit card	4.18	3.38
Amount charges	4.25	3.78
Payment are error-free	4.33	3.76
Service Information		
Accurate and reliable pamphlet	3.85	4.00
Accurate and reliable website	2.76	2.98
Accurate and reliable counter explanation	3.49	3.93
Accurate and reliable briefing during orientation	2.75	3.33
Easy to understand pamphlet	3.80	3.71
Easy to understand website	2.87	3.05
Easy to understand counter explanation	3.84	3.60
Easy to understand briefing during orientation	2.18	3.29

Value Added Service		
Letter given mention that passport been taken to submit to immigration	2.91	3.31
Emergency number to call	1.98	2.91
Warranty by university regarding safety	2.58	3.44
Notification that visa are ready to be collected	2.67	3.95
Information on the future renewal of visa	3.98	3.45
Reminder on when should comeback for visa renewal	3.15	3.33
Time		
At least 1 month to complete visa processing	3.05	3.09
Service provided for visa renewal after its expiry date	3.93	3.40
Priority given on urgent basis	3.93	3.29

In terms of service information, clients are dissatisfied with information provided by both universities but, clients are still satisfied on the accuracy and reliability of the pamphlet regarding the visa processing service in private universities. Clients reported information delivered during orientation as highly dissatisfied in public universities while for the private universities they reported highly dissatisfied on the accuracy and reliability of service information in website. Both clients in public and private universities were dissatisfied with the value added services especially on the availability of emergency call numbers. Clients were also dissatisfied on the time lengthy in completing the service processes (provided, at least one month) in both, public and private universities. They were also dissatisfied on the services for renewal of expired visa.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The analysis showed that time is the most important factor contributing to customer satisfaction in visa processing. As foreigners, the passport is a very important document not only as self identification, but also a document for bank account, driving license, traveling and others. Most of the student claimed that the universities usually take 1 to 3 months to settle the visa. As this process involves the Immigration Department, the Universities and other parties involve should relook into the process and reengineer the time required for foreign students' visa.

Students also expect better service especially from public universities in terms of after working hour services. Usually the duration of study is around 2 to 4 years and it is so hard to bring along passport anywhere. And sometime they need immediate responds from university officer when police, immigration or any other authority unit need conformation about their status. The problem with public universities is there is no emergency call service after office hours.

Several students also have come out with suggestion to get recall from universities in terms of when they should submit passport for renewal and also when the passport is ready to collect. They will appreciate this if the universities can provide this service via e – mail or SMS.

Even this is simple research; it still can show that there are strength and weaknesses in certain area for both public universities and private universities in terms of services in handling visa processing. Statistics show that public universities students are more satisfied in counter services, staff service and payment method. For value added services, private universities show very high satisfaction by students. And for visa information service and time factor involve for both private and public universities show the equal satisfaction.

With this result both private and public universities can recognized factors that highly contribute dissatisfaction of student in terms of the most important thing to stay legally in Malaysia; visa. But both private and public universities show nearly equal satisfaction on each service provided except for one services; the emergency call when students have problem with authorities such as police or immigration officer. Public universities show very high dissatisfaction compare to private universities in that service which is very important service should be provided as a secure value to student to feel safe to study here.

To ensure the satisfaction of this service by our government is going to be improved or not, same measurement can be done in next several years. This type of method can be reused by any researcher to compare this kind of services recently and in the future.

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