# SERVQUAL: SERVICE QUALITY ASSESSMENT FROM THE STUDENTS EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS IN COMPARISON WITH THE STUDENTS ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AT THE HULU SELANGOR DISTRICT SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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*Abstract:* SERVQUAL stands for Service Quality which can be quantified from the difference or the gap between perceptions and expectations of customers. Expectations are the reference point customers have coming into service experience; perceptions reflect the service as actually received by the customers. The purpose of this study was to gather information about the expectations and perceptions of students who are considered as customers, regarding their schools service quality. The higher mean of SERVQUAL indicates the higher quality of the organization being assessed. Service quality offered by the school has been compared to the academic performance based on the PMR results of the year 2003 to see if there is a significance correlation between the two. The statements in the SERVQUAL instrument were reviewed and adapted from business to educational terms and formulated into a 22 statement of Part A of the questionnaire. In Part B, the relative importance of each dimension was identified and demographic section was in Part C. Three hundred and thirty six respondents from twelve schools in the Hulu Selangor district have been selected to answer the questions. The 22-statement SERVQUAL instrument, measuring the five service dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, was administered to those students during a two-week data collection period. In the data analysis, the Expectation-Service Gap Grid was used to identify service shortfalls under these five dimensions and statistical technique of correlation has been used to identify the relationship between service quality and academic performance. This paper ends with conclusion and recommendation.

Keywords: Service quality, Expectation, Perception, Service Dimensions, Academic Performance

## INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the prominent service components in Malaysia. Its main purpose is to enable the Malaysian society to have a command of knowledge, skills and values necessary in a world that is highly competitive and globalize. The mission is to develop a world class quality education system which will realize the full potential of the individual and fulfill the aspiration of the Malaysian nation [3]. The development of education is a major undertaking which needs the full commitment of the service provider to deliver high service quality. When discussing the concept of service quality, three underlying principles need to be kept in mind. Service quality is more difficult for a consumer to evaluate than the quality of goods. Service quality is based on consumers' perception of the outcome of the service and their evaluation of the process by which the service was performed. Service quality perceptions result from a comparison of what the consumer expected prior to the service and the perceived level of service received [4]. In measuring service quality, SERVQUAL is a widely-tested instrument being used [1] [2]. There are five gaps in the Gap Model namely discrepancy between the perceived service and management's perception of customer expectation, the translation of the management's perceptions into service quality specifications, the translation of these specifications into service quality, and the external communications of these service quality to customers, and finally, the customers' expectation and their perception of the actual service delivered by the organization [5]. Thus, the purpose of this paper was to gather information about the expectations and perceptions of students in order to evaluate their schools service quality, identify the schools service shortfalls and consequently provide some recommendation to overcome the service shortfalls. This study also was trying to compare between service quality and academic performance if there is a significant relationship.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

*The Conceptual Framework*

There are five major components in the conceptual framework (Figure 1) which includes SERVQUAL dimensions, student expectations, student perceptions, service quality and academic performance. Students were required to evaluate five dimensions of service quality includes, tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Tangibles include the schools' physical facilities such as classrooms, science laboratories and libraries. Reliability is the ability of schools to perform the service promised dependably and accurately such as the punctuality of teachers to enter the classroom and the time taken to solve the discipline problem of the students. Responsiveness is the willingness of the school's staff to help students and to provide them with prompt service such as to help poor students find ways how to solve their financial problems. Assurance refers to the knowledge and courtesy of schools' staffs and their ability to inspire trust and confidence in the students towards schools. Empathy is the caring individualized attention the school provides for each student [6].
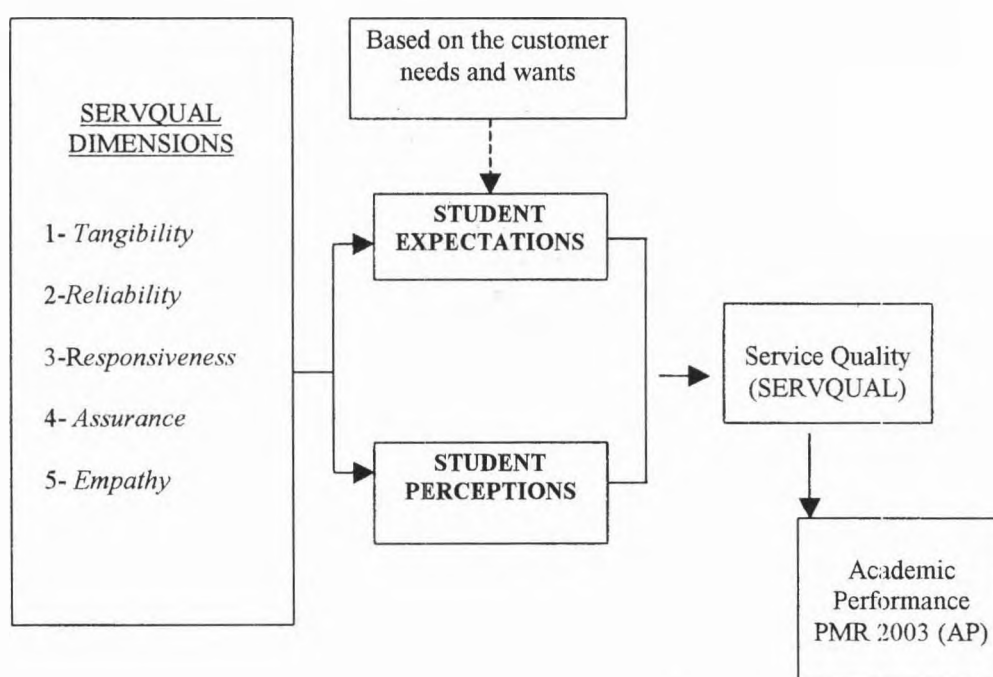


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

In evaluating the service quality of schools, the premise that service quality is the difference between customers' expectations and their perceptions will be used. Students' expectations are the level of service they would expect from the schools and students perceptions is students' evaluation of service really performed by the schools [8].

After evaluating all the quality aspects, the quality position of the schools needs to be compared with the academic performance of the students as to see if there is a significant correlation between the two. The year 2003 PMR results were identified as a benchmark of the academic performance of the students [3].

One class from each school was selected to answer the questionnaire. It was administered during the school hours after getting the permission from the principle and the particular teacher that supposed to teach the class during that time. After giving some explanation, students answered the questions and from the researcher observation respondents took about 45 minutes to complete the whole set of the questionnaire. A total of 336 questionnaires managed to be collected back. All questionnaires were analyzed by using Microsoft Excel 2000 and the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) v.11 software.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Respondent Demographic Profile*

The findings indicate that 41.1% are male respondents and 58.6% are female respondents. In term of racial background, 61.9% are Malays, 26.5% are Chinese, 10.7% are Indian and 0.9% are from other races. As for parent educational background, the majority are having lower than SPM level of education followed by SPM, bachelor degree and diploma. There are 84 parents work at the government sector, 70 parents work at the private sector, 89 parents are self-employed or run their own business and 93 parents are from other sector. Majority of the parents received less than RM1000 income per month and majority of the students started studying in their school since they were in form one.

*Relative importance of service dimensions*

To determine the relative importance of the service dimensions, respondents were requested to divide 100 points among the five service dimensions [7]. The results are presented in Table 1. The tangibles dimension with a mean score of 27.98 was ranked the most important dimension followed by the assurance dimension at 18.97. The least important dimension was responsiveness at a mean score of 16.80. The tangibles dimension, which has a mean score 27.98, has the highest standard deviation of 11.88. It indicates that the evaluations by students for this dimension varied considerably.

Table 1: Relative Importance of Service Dimensions

| SERVQUAL Dimensions | N | Std. Deviation | Mean | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tangibles | 336 | 11.88 | 27.98 | 1 |
| Reliability | 336 | 8.61 | 18.90 | 3 |
| Responsiveness | 336 | 6.49 | 16.80 | 5 |
| Assurance | 336 | 7.93 | 18.97 | 2 |
| Empathy | 336 | 7.58 | 17.22 | 4 |

*SERVQUAL scores*

As shown in Table 2, the overall SERVQUAL scores for the Hulu Selangor district secondary schools was -1.36. The negative value indicates that the performance of the school was not meeting the expectations of students. It shows that tangibles dimension has the greatest service gap of -1.70 followed by empathy dimension. The smallest gap was the reliability dimension. In order to make it more accurate, the weighted SERVQUAL scores are computed and shown in Table 3.

Table 2: SERVQUAL Scores

| SERVQUAL Dimensions | Expectation (E) | Perception (P) | SERVQUAL score (SQ = P - E) | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tangibles | 6.10 | 4.39 | -1.70 | 1 |
| Reliability | 6.32 | 5.08 | -1.23 | 5 |
| Responsiveness | 6.23 | 4.95 | -1.28 | 3 |
| Assurance | 6.06 | 4.80 | -1.25 | 4 |
| Empathy | 5.89 | 4.59 | -1.29 | 2 |
| Overall mean | 6.12 | 4.76 | -1.36 | |

Table 3: Weighted SERVQUAL Scores

| SERVQUAL Dimension | SERVQUAL score (SQ = P - E) | Weighted (%) | Weighted SERVQUAL score | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tangibles | -1.71 | 27.98 | -2.17 | 1 |
| Reliability | -1.23 | 18.90 | -1.06 | 3 |
| Responsiveness | -1.28 | 16.80 | -0.98 | 5 |
| Assurance | -1.26 | 18.97 | -1.08 | 2 |
| Empathy | -1.29 | 17.22 | -1.01 | 4 |
| Overall mean | -1.36 | 100.00 | -1.26 | |

The overall weighted SERVQUAL scores is -1.26. This score was calculated by multiplying the SERVQUAL scores of the service dimensions by the weights assigned which is taken from the mean score in Table 1 and dividing the sum by 22 (i.e., 22 items in the Part A of the questionnaire) [7]. The weighted SERVQUAL scores are less negative than the unweighted SERVQUAL scores.

*Expectation-Service Gap Chart*

The Expectation-Service Gap Chart in Figure 2 was used to identify service shortfalls [7]. The SERVQUAL scores denoting service gaps for 22 items were plotted against their expectation scores.
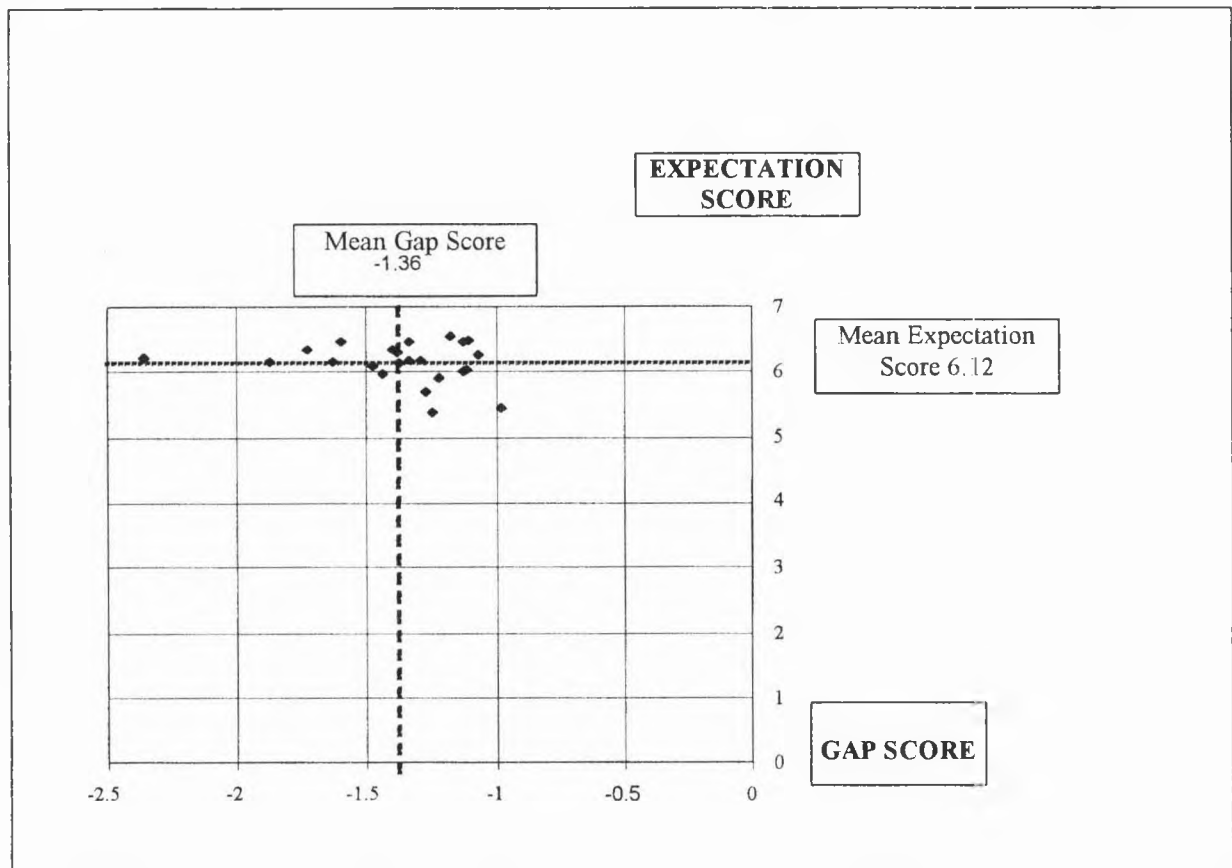


Figure 2: Expectation-Service Gap Chart

The chart presents the total view of the school service quality. The Expectation-Service Gap Chart was transformed into a grid as shown in Figure 3 so that it will be easier to identify the item that contributed to the service shortfall.
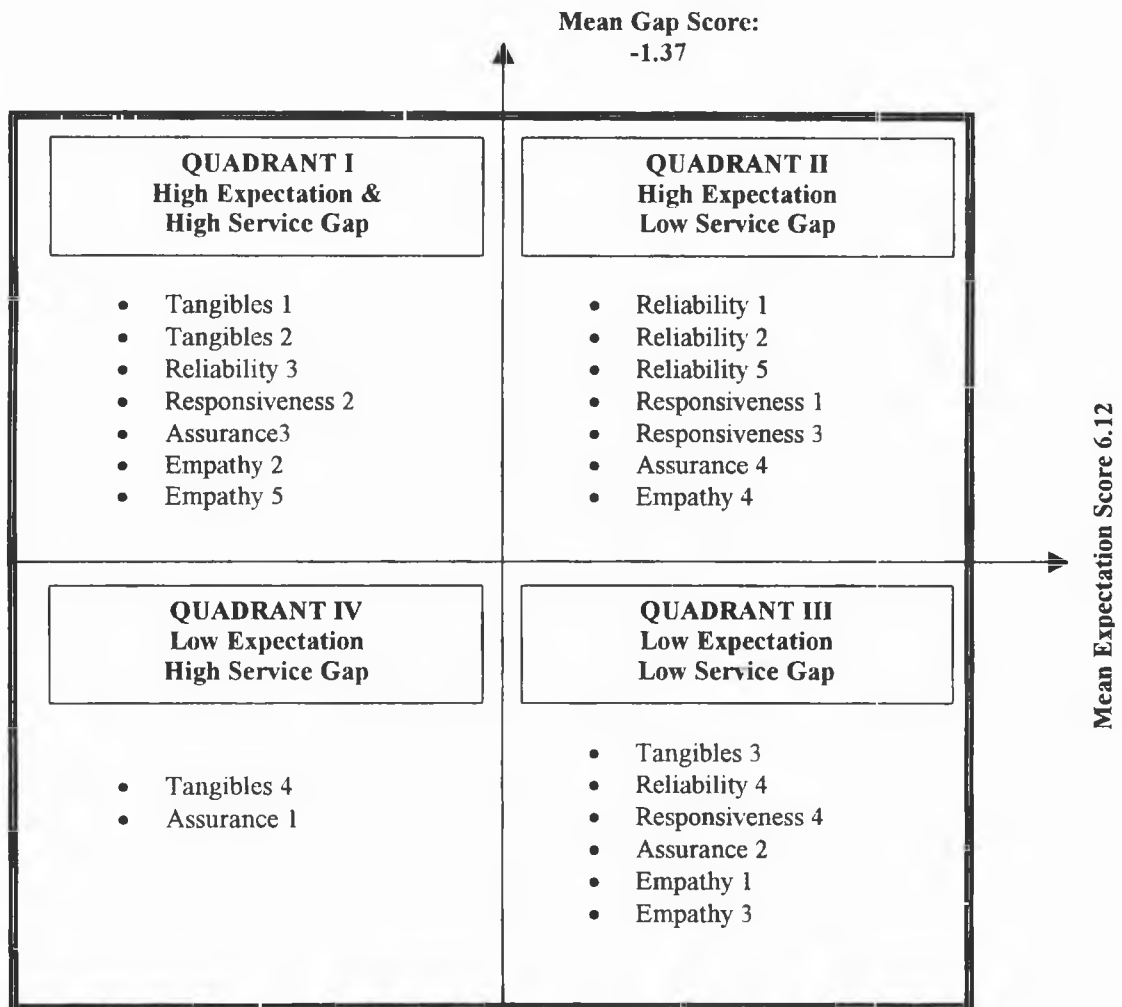


Figure 3: Expectation-Service Gap Grid

The grid is divided into four quadrants using the mean expectation score (6.12) and mean gap score (-1.37). Each quadrant is defined by the level of expectation and service gap. It can be seen that there are two tangibles items, one reliability item, one responsiveness item, one assurance item and two empathy items in Quadrant I. This quadrant indicates that the students' expectations were not synchronized by the school service performance leading to the high service gaps. Items in quadrant IV also need to be corrected as this quadrant is also having a high service gap. Quadrant II and III can be given less priority in taking the corrective action as both quadrants have low service gaps.

*Correlation between SERVQUAL and academic performance*

In Table 4, the value of correlation coefficient is -0.109. It shows that there is a weak-negative relationship between the school service quality and the academic performance of the students. The significance level is 0.046 which is slightly lower than 0.05, then the correlation is significant at 0.05 level of significance. It implies that service quality alone is not a factor to excel in the academic performance.

Table 4: Correlation

| | | ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE | OVERALL SERVQUAL MEAN |
|---|---|---|---|
| ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE | Pearson Corr. | 1 | -0.109* |
| | Sig. ( 2-tailed) | . | 0.046 |
| | N | 336 | 336 |
| OVERALL SERVQUAL MEAN | Pearson Corr. | -0.109* | 1 |
| | Sig. ( 2-tailed) | 0.046 | . |
| | N | 336 | 336 |

\*. Correlation is significant at 0.05 (level (2-tailed)

## RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

The results shows that the school service quality is not fully matched the customers' expectations. It still needs some corrective action and improvement in order to achieve the target mission of developing a world class quality education system. Students ranked tangibles dimension to be the most important aspect in school service yet tangibles dimension has the greatest service gap. Students expect the excellence school should be equipped with the modern technological tools, excellence school should look vibrant and attractive, and students also mentioned that schools physical facilities should match with the service delivered to them. Therefore, it is recommended that the priority should be given to look into the physical facilities in schools and perhaps old equipments should be replaced with a more advanced one in the future in order to fulfill customers' satisfaction, thus, to upgrade the school service quality.

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