

Quality Education Management in Malaysia: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study examines Malaysian undergraduate students' perception on the effectiveness of their learning based on their evaluation of key factor areas concerning quality education management. Some 857 full time students enrolled in different faculty programs were randomly selected. Eight factors were examined to measure the students' perception, i.e., University Leadership, Strategic Planning, Students, Stakeholders and Market Focus, Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management, Faculty and Staff Focus, Process Management, Organizational Performance Results, and Innovation. The students were asked to evaluate based on a five-point scale ratings, items concerning the eight factors in a questionnaire. Findings showed that the majority of respondents agreed moderately that the management exhibited acceptable quality in all the eight constructs. T-tests and ANOVA indicated significant difference in students' perception of all eight factors between the faculties and the Branch Campuses.

Keywords: *Quality education management, customer-driver quality, institutional governance.*

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of education management is quality. It influences decision making in optimizing quality driven perspectives where services become important management dimensions for education providers. Two different definitions of quality are given (Murgatroyd and Morgan (1994), one relating to quality assurance which refers to the determination standards, and the other, consumer-driven quality which refers to a notion of quality in which those who received the products or services make explicit their expectation. Haque (2004), however, asserts that customer evaluations of quality should be integral in the overall quality management in all organizations.

In managing quality education, several principles and practice of institutional governance must be considered critically. Corporate governance issues become increasingly important. Good governance and management practices and their effectiveness in higher education involving the role of governing bodies in strategy formulation, institutional structures, leadership, management, decision making, participation and, communication are, fundamental recipes for quality governance.

With ever increasing demands on university budgets, expensive technology, and high maintenance cost, it becomes more challenging for educators and education managers to deploy methods that are simple yet effective. Education operations and delivery depend on the critical execution of the different management principles and infrastructure. They support the improvement in quality of several major educational areas such as improved teaching practices, enhanced teaching and learning, and improvement in student learning environment for effective learning, increased capacity for university management for effective education management, and improved management of accountability of lectures and students.

Thus, developing some standard ways of measuring quality in students learning has now become a norm in many universities, and other institutions. This is done as a way of ascertaining funding bodies that value has been added and that there has been some development or progress by universities in providing quality education to their students.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RELATED ISSUES

Several issues raised in evaluating the quality education management include the following:

1. What do students perceive of the quality in the university service delivery?
2. What are some of the most significant factors affecting high quality learning in the university education management?
3. What do students perceive as major pitfalls in the general education management service delivery of the university?
4. Does the university consider performance criteria interrelatedness in striving for better performance in education management service delivery?
5. Do students perceive their expectations in education management met?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study is:

1. To identify the students' overall perception of the quality of the university education management in service delivery.
2. To identify students' perceptions of high quality learning in service delivery of the eight major factors of the university education management evaluation.
3. To examine major pitfalls in the students' overall perceptions on the delivery of service in education management.
4. To examine the correlations among factors in the education management service delivery.
5. To find out whether students perceive their learning expectations have been met.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is recognized that good teaching is a function of an institution-wide infrastructure (Biggs & Tang, 2007). As such many universities are increasingly providing more fund for staff development programs, while increasing recognition in research and improving teaching. Universities are seen to be keen of the international competitiveness and thus forced into transforming themselves to be compatible with the changes to enable them to contribute effectively in providing quality education.

Compelled by the current economic climate, when university education is commercialized, and programs are increasingly corporatized and turned into marketable commodities, transformation requires increased measures on quality, improved educational technology, and state of the art support system. To be competitive is to exhibit excellent leadership in all areas of education, adopting sound strategic planning and possess high commitment in substantial areas of education management. Universities must provide efficient approaches for students' development which in effect contribute to the development of the nation. To do this a university must improve its performance through efficient learning, in improved education and training, in learning opportunities, in encouraging maximum development of human potential, in sharing its vision and mission, in nurturing a positive work culture shift, and in positive thinking.

Integration of systems and processes is therefore key towards maintaining and developing the overall management of services and to improving the effectiveness of a university mission and its goals. Management principles which incorporate important organizational functions and put into action plan are predicated on the initiatives which are based on leadership vision and mission. In Malaysia, the initiative for quality through the implementation of International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9000 quality system in the public higher education system was first undertaken following the directive from the Development and Administration Circular by the Malaysian Public Services Department in 1996. The Circular stipulates that all government agencies including the public higher education and institutions should implement Management System (MS) ISO 900 quality system to ensure the delivery of quality services to customers.

BACKGROUND

First established in 1956, under the name of RIDA (Rural Development Agency), it functioned as a training college aimed at elevating and improving the standard of living among the rural poor. In 1965, a study of RIDA's function led to the submission of 22 recommendations, which, among the most important, stipulates the establishment of MARA Institute of Technology (ITM). ITM was mandated with a much bigger role both as a vocational training college and a college of higher education. In August 1996, ITM was conferred a full university status and carries the name of University Teknologi MARA (UiTM).

Briefly, the set up of the university is aimed at providing maximum opportunity to the masses in pursuing higher education, in the various fields of Science, Business and the Arts. Programs and course offering stress on quality, innovativeness and relevance. To date, University Teknologi MARA offers courses by 24 faculties and course offering distributed among 12 branch campuses. Courses offered are run on a full-time and part time basis. Until the end of 2009 the university boasts of more than 100,000 students.

It is the university tradition that education be managed well so as to remain competitive, effective and relevant. Quality standard as prescribed by the Committee of Higher Education is observed and Program Accreditation by professional Bodies be maintained. Improvement of quality is achieved through ISO 9001:2000 by Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance (LRQA). ISO 9001:2000 Certification is executed on all faculties and Branch Campuses.

To ensure continuity in quality management delivery, UiTM emphasizes continuous improvement and Total Quality. At the local level the Malaysia Qualification Agency (MQA) monitors the performance of the university programs following that of the International Standard.

METHODOLOGY

In many universities student surveys have been used to provide a source of data for accountability. In other institution surveys are used to assist in quality enhancement activities (Sharpe, 2007). Many of these surveys emphasized students' perceptions of their learning environment on its subsequent impacts on their learning. Other key priorities of usage of the

data is to strengthen dialogues and partnership between students and the external stakeholders and to reduce difficulties of having different higher education systems with the varying degrees institutional autonomy in the university governance.

The Instrument

The use of students' evaluation as one of a range of performance indicators for institutions to assess the quality of their learning and teaching is recommended by many scholars (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006, Ball & Wilkinson, 1994, Anderson, 2006). Students' perception surveys are widespread in the western higher education systems. Many of these countries have their national or sector wide students' surveys administered annually. Similarly, such practice has been successfully emulated by the university. The conceptual framework for education management excellence is adapted from the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence (2008), which was created to foster the success of programs. Performance excellence is measured based on students perception of management service quality and their expectations on the university education management quality strategies. The criteria for performance excellence cover areas of Leadership, Strategic Planning, Student, Stakeholder and Market Focus, Measurement Analysis, and Knowledge Management, Faculty and Staff Focus, Process Management, Organizational Result, and Innovation.

Several items such as, senior leadership and governance and social responsibilities are measured under the leadership category. Students were asked how they view the deployment of their faculty of departmental vision and values. Students perception on how their faculty and branch campuses promote legal and ethical behavior, create sustainable environment for performance improvement, how strategic objectives and innovation are accomplished, how their senior leaders communicate, empower and motivate students, and how senior leaders create a focus action to accomplish faculty and branch campus objectives were evaluated. Within the scope of governance and social responsibilities, students' views cover aspects of the appropriacy of fiscal accountability, management actions, transparency in their faculty and branch campus operations, selection and disclosure policies, protection of students interests.

Under strategic planning, aspects of strategy development and deployment were evaluated. Students were asked how they see their

faculty's or branch campus's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Students' perception was also evaluated based on their perception of the faculty and branch campus's strategic objectives and important goals, and how they perceive their faculty and branch campus address to these challenges. Within strategy deployment, students were asked how they perceive their faculty and branch campus develop and deploy their action plans, establish modified action plans, and the anticipation of students and stakeholders market, the faculty and branch campuses key performance measures, and how they view their performance and the performance of their competitors and other comparable organizations.

Two major items were covered in student, stakeholder and market focus. Firstly, items cover views on the students, stakeholders and market knowledge. For this item, students were asked how their faculty or branch campus identify and address students and market segment and how they determine which students and market segment to pursue for current and future educational programs, offerings and services. Then students were asked how their faculty and branch campuses determine their key requirements and changing expectations, and whether the faculty and branch campuses process improvements, persistence in services, facilities, complaint data for planning improvement. Subsequently students' information and feedback were also focused. Within the student and stakeholder relationship and satisfaction items, students' perceptions cover several other issues which include how faculty and branch campus build relationship to attract and retain; how management enhance students' performance and whether management meet student's expectations. Students' perception also cover questions on key access mechanisms, which enable them to seek information, pursue common purposes and make complaints. Students' views on how faculty and branch campuses keep their approaches to build relationships and providing students and stakeholders access to current educational services needs and directions, their measure of satisfaction and dissatisfaction on programs, services, and offerings and promptness of actionable feedback.

In the Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management Category, students' perception were based on two items namely:

1. The measurement, analysis and review of the organizational performance
2. Information and knowledge management.

Within the first item, apart from finding out how students perceive data quality in terms of accuracy, integrity, reliability, timeliness, and confidentiality, students' perception on how their faculty or branch campuses collect, align, integrate data and information for tracking daily operations and the overall university performance were also asked. Additionally, under these items, students' perceptions were also based on how they select effective use of key data to support operational and strategic decision making and the extent to which students perceive the university data measurement system stays current with the students needs and direction. Students' perception on the university performance reviews and whether these review findings are translated into continuous action for breakthrough improvement and opportunities were also evaluated. Within the information and knowledge management however, students' perception on whether needed data were made accessible to them, on data availability mechanism and on whether software and hardware systems are kept current with the students educational needs.

In the faculty and staff focus, items in the questionnaire cover work systems (administration), 'faculty and staff learning and motivation' and 'faculty and staff well-being and satisfaction'. Within these areas students' perception were focused on how they view their faculty or branch campus organize, manage work and jobs, (including skills) and how cooperation, initiative and empowerment among staff are organized. Additionally, students' perception were derived on issues such as how faculty and branch campuses capitalize diverse ideas, cultures, and thinking with which students interact, how faculty identify skills required and how staff are hired. Students' perceptions on other issues such as how faculty and branch campuses seek input from students to evaluate the effectiveness of education and training. Students' opinions on faculty and branch campus health, safety, security, and ergonomics, services, students well-being, and satisfaction were also sought.

For process management, two issues were covered. They include learning-centered processes and support processes and operational planning. Students' opinions on how they view faculty and branch campuses improve students' learning-centered processes to maximize students success, to improve educational needs, and how these improvements and lessons are learned and shared with other organizations to drive organizational learning and innovation, were sought. Within the support processes and operational planning, students were asked on how their faculty and branch

campus determine their key processes and whether performance measures were carried out to determine the appropriateness of these key processes.

More issues were covered in the organizational performance result category. For students' learning results, the students' perceptions were on how they perceive the current levels and trends in key measures or indicators of their learning and improvement in their learning, in their perceived value, in their persistence, and positive referral and other aspects of building their relationships and whether they perceived these results as appropriate. Students' opinions were sought on the levels, and trends in key measures or indicators of budgetary and financial performance and whether the cost of containment of these are appropriate. Also in this category, students' opinions on the current levels and key trends in key measures or indicators or work systems and performance and the students' well being, satisfaction and dissatisfaction were asked.

Finally in the Innovation category, students' perception on their faculty or branch campus productivity, cycle, time, and performance and other appropriate measures of effectiveness and efficiency were accounted for by their faculty or branch campuses. Students were also asked how they perceived their faculty innovations, either directed or self directed, were adapted and whether systems, and methodological processes have resulted in improvements of services, or have led to adaptations and improvements of their faculty and branch campuses effectiveness.

Sampling and Data Collection

Samples were taken from a randomized selection of male and female students representing the different faculties and branch campuses. A total of eight hundred and thirty-three (833) students were selected and they were each asked to complete a questionnaire. All 833 students completed the questionnaire.

FINDINGS

The reliability coefficients for the overall sectional constructs for the management quality system factors were analysed. It indicates a high reliability among factors evaluated (highest reliability factor .928 and lowest .888).

Leadership

The overall mean for the Leadership construct was 3.98, SD 0.54, which suggest that students highly agreed to the level of leadership. The findings also show that in comparison to the mean scores of other constructs in the management system quality factors. This construct shows the highest mean score. This suggests that the students were positively inclined in their level of satisfaction and were in the position of perceiving leadership in the university exhibited positive qualities. In this construct, the highest mean was 4.18 for the item “involving student in community activities” while the lowest mean was 3.75 for the item “providing avenues for lecturers evaluation by students”. The two items demonstrate that while to some degree, a level of openness is provided for students’ participation in decision making, there were obvious variations in response to students’ perception of the amount of provision given to them to evaluate lecturers’ performances.

Measurement Analysis and knowledge Management

The highest mean score was 4.04 for the item “ensuring up to date data to students. The lowest mean score was 3.78 for the item “easing delivery of information to students”. This shows that students perceive that the management has been prompt in displaying relevant current information but feel that the management needs to be more sensitive in how they could cut down complex processes in their delivery of those relevant information required by the students. The overall mean score for this construct was 3.90 (SD.60).

Strategic Planning

The highest mean score was 3.79 for the item “doing strategic planning which is appropriate for students, while the lowest mean score was 3.53 for the item “informing students of decisions in strategic planning”. This finding suggests that while strategic planning sensitizes on students needs, the students were of the opinion that improvements must be made of decisions taken to address to some of those needs. The overall mean score for this construct was 3.64 (SD .74).

Student, Stakeholder and Market Focus

The highest mean score was 4.14 for the item “ensuring students safety in students learning atmosphere”, and the lowest mean score was 3.62 for the item “ensuring appropriate ratio between staff and students”. The findings in this section tend to demonstrate that the lower mean scores tend to cluster around items that involve staff, staff services, staff skills and initiatives, such as “Providing service facilities and policies which support students needs” (mean 3.77). “Identifying students satisfaction” (3.76). “Planning on work and determines staff skills appropriate with students needs” (3.77), and “Ensuring organizational work and responsibility is balanced between staff and students” (3.72). The cluster of the lower mean scores around these items suggest that from the students point of view, staff particularly those providing service delivery demonstrate some amount ineffectiveness mainly due to poor ratio between staff and student number, and poor distribution of job tasks, and insensitivity to students service satisfaction. Students, however, feel that the environment of study is conducive and safe.

Organizational Performance Result

For the organizational performance results, the findings show that the highest mean score was 3.86 for the item “informing students of current employability trend”. The lowest mean score for the construct was 3.47 for the item “informing students of their level of satisfaction”. The other item in the lower mean score was for “identifying students budgeting trend” (3.48). These findings indicate that while students perceive that the management do provide them with the current information on their future job prospects and perspective employers, they also feel that the management need to improve their service to ensure the students an improved level of satisfaction.

Process Management

The highest mean score was 3.99 for the item “identifying management processes which are student focused” while the lower mean score was 3.71 for the item “avoiding repeated errors”. The findings indicate that although the students perceived the process management of the university are relevant and student focused, the management however, need to reduce unnecessary repeat of service errors.

Faculty and Staff Focus

The overall mean score for this construct was 3.90 (SD .69). The highest mean was 4.06 for the item “offering appropriate relevant services and programs”. The lowest mean score for this construct was 3.74 for the “item “identifying the students’ level of dissatisfaction”. This suggest that students were anticipating more pro-active actions taken in delivering the different types of services rendered and that the management must do more improve their service quality to the students.

Innovations

The highest mean score was 4.04 for the item “encouraging students’ initiative and innovation in learning improvement, while the lowest score was 3.88 for the item “identifying the level of management achievement in student services before and after using innovation”. The finding indicates that while students are encouraged to participate in providing ideas, often they are not informed of the effect of using those innovative ideas.

Table 1: Faculty and Branch Overall Mean Scores

Group Statistics					
	PTJ	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Leadership	Faculty	428	3.8991	.52983	.02561
	Branch	429	4.0543	.54748	.02643
Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management	Faculty	428	3.8301	.57974	.02802
	Branch	429	3.9697	.60774	.02934
Strategic Planning	Faculty	428	3.5355	.70232	.03395
	Branch	429	3.7492	.76728	.03704
Student, Stakeholder and Market Focus	Faculty	428	3.7448	.63754	.03082
	Branch	429	3.8959	.63038	.03043
Organizational Performance Results	Faculty	428	3.6074	.70862	.03425
	Branch	429	3.7470	.70899	.03423

cont.

Process Management	Faculty	428	3.7695	.64196	.03103
	Branch	429	3.9274	.64804	.03129
Faculty and Staff Focus	Faculty	428	3.8151	.69222	.03346
	Branch	429	3.9842	.67004	.03235
Innovations	Faculty	428	3.8947	.61383	.02967
	Branch	429	4.0076	.63190	.03051

As shown in Table 1, the overall mean scores for each also slightly differ between the Branch Campus and Faculty. For leadership the faculty's mean score was 3.89, while the Branch Campus mean score was 4.05. For measurement analysis and knowledge, the mean score for faculty was 3.83, while the Branch mean score was 3.97. The findings also indicated that for strategic planning, the faculty mean score was 3.54, while the branch campus mean score was 3.75. For student, stakeholder and market focus, the mean score was 3.74 and the branch campus's mean score was 3.896. The faculty mean score for organizational performance result was 3.61 and the branch campus's mean score was 3.75. Subsequently, the findings also showed that the faculty mean score for process management was 3.77 while the branch campus's mean score was 3.93. The faculty mean score for faculty and staff focus was 3.82, and the branch campus's mean score was 3.99. Finally the findings indicated that for innovations the faculty mean score was 3.89 and the branch campus's mean score was 4.01.

Correlation

The finding indicates that when these constructs were measured for level of association, they show varying degrees of closeness. The findings demonstrate that there was strong correlation between leadership construct and measurement, analysis and knowledge management construct (.803), followed by process management construct (.721). High correlation was also shown for measurement analysis and knowledge management construct and student, stakeholder and market focus construct, (.823). The findings indicate that there was high correlation between strategic planning construct and student, stakeholder and market focus construct (.768). The organizational performance results construct indicated a high correlation with student, stakeholder and market focus, (.808). A high correlation between the process management construct and the faculty and staff focus

construct (.837). The findings also showed that there was a high correlation between faculty and staff focus construct and innovations (.814).

Table 2: T-test between faculty/branch and leadership

	Item	Leaderships' Factor			
		N	Mean	t value	Sig.
	Faculty	428	3.90	t = -4.22	.000
	Branch	429	4.05		
t-test between faculty/branch and measurement, analysis and knowledge management					
	Item	Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Managements' Factor			
		N	Mean	t value	Sig.
	Faculty	428	3.83	t = -3.44	.001
	Branch	429	3.97		
t-test between faculty/branch and strategic planning					
	Item	Strategic Plannings' Factor			
		N	Mean	t value	Sig.
	Faculty	428	3.54	t = -4.25	.000
	Branch	429	3.75		
t-test between faculty/branch and student, stakeholder and market focus					
	Item	Student, Stakeholder and Market Focus' Factor			
		N	Mean	t value	Sig.
	Faculty	428	3.74	t = -3.49	.001
	Branch	429	3.90		

cont.

t-test between faculty/branch and organizational performance results					
Item	Organizational Performance Results' Factor				
	N	Mean	t value	Sig.	
Faculty	428	3.61	t = -2.88	.004	
Branch	429	3.75			
t-test between faculty/branch and process management					
Item	Process Managements' Factor				
	N	Mean	t value	Sig.	
Faculty	428	3.77	t = -3.58	.000	
Branch	429	3.93			
t-test between faculty/branch and faculty and staff focus					
Item	Faculty and Staff Focus' Factor				
	N	Mean	t value	Sig.	
Faculty	428	3.82	t = -3.63	.000	
Branch	429	3.98			
t-test between faculty/branch and Innovations					
Item	Innovations' Factor				
	N	Mean	t value	Sig.	
Faculty	428	3.89	t = -2.65	.008	
Branch	429	4.01			

T-TEST AND ANOVA

The t-test as shown in Table 2 indicated that a significant difference in the perception on Leadership's factor, Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management's factor, Strategic Planning factor, Student, Stakeholder and Market focus' factor, Organizational Performance Results' factor, Process management's factor, Faculty and Staff Focus' factor, and Innovations' factor between students in the faculties and those in the Branch Campuses ($t = 4.22$ $p < .05$), ($t = 3.44$ $p < .05$), ($t = 4.25$ $p < .05$), ($t = 3.49$ $p < .05$), ($t = 2.88$ $p < .05$), ($t = 3.58$ $p < .05$), ($t = 3.63$ $p < .05$), ($t = 2.65$ $p < .05$) respectively. The mean score showed that students in the Branch Campuses expressed more agreement for the quality of all eight factors.

DISCUSSION

The result from this study clearly suggests that the students from the branch Campuses were more satisfied with the overall service and education management quality. Although it was shown that students show lower satisfaction on the organizational performance result, they, however, agreed that leadership quality at their Branch Campus level was satisfactory. The data has also shown that the university must undertake the task of improving the level of quality of some appropriate services to the students.

Significant differences in the perception of Leadership, Measurement Analysis and Knowledge, Strategic Planning, Student Stakeholder and Market Focus, Organizational Performance Result, Process Management, Faculty and Staff Focus, and, Innovations factors were attributed to the location of the students. The students in the Branch Campuses appeared to be more positive in their perceptions of all the factors. The academic environment in the Branch Campuses were said to be more appealing.

CONCLUSION

The objective of the study was to obtain feedback from the students concerning the quality of education management in University Teknologi MARA. Although students highlighted several issues and challenges, the results indicate that they have high perceptions of the quality of education

management provided by the university. The responses also highlighted several factors which must be looked into by the university management in order to increase the level of students' satisfaction on the services, management processes and student learning results. Some in-depth study could be carried out to investigate these factors.

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