SERVICE QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA: PERCEPTION OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Service quality can be defined as the overall impression of customers towards weakness or excellence of service provided by an organization. It is a vital element that identifies the users' satisfaction when using services whether it is as what they expected. The objective of this study is to identify the relationship between service quality and students' satisfaction in a public university in the East Coast of Malaysia. Research framework used in this study is based on the HEDPERF model which includes academic aspect, non-academic aspect, and students' satisfaction. A total of 265 respondents were sampled for responding with the return rate of 95.84%. Pearson correlation and multiple regression were used to analyze the relationship between academic aspect and non academic aspect towards students' satisfaction. The results discovered that academic aspect and non academic aspects have significant relationship with students' satisfaction. All the hypothesis tested also accepted. Academic aspect was found to be the strongest predictor of students' satisfaction. The result of this study influences the future research in improving service quality especially in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Service quality, Higher education, Satisfaction, HEDPERF

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Universities and colleges are facing new challenges with the growth and development of higher education in Malaysia. They need to improve their service quality and programs offered to satisfy students' needs in order to attract students worldwide. As many institutions used service quality to deliver information, provide facilities as well as academic, it seems very important in assisting the students to look for information about their education (Ibrahim, Rahman, & Yasin, 2012). Increasing students' satisfaction is required since university students have different involvement as university service customers (Asif, Merceron, Ali, & Haider, 2017).

Higher education institution has been concerned about the customer-focused method for several years (Mustaffa, Hamid, & Rahman, 2016). Since education considered as service, the service providers must be aware and capable to fast respond to the students concerns (Prikshat & Kumar, 2017). According to Webster (2012), quality of education can be evaluated when the institution fulfils the students' desires and needs (Webster, 2012). In Malaysia, the recent trends in higher education field are determined by the

quality and internationalization while focusing on teaching and learning. Subsequently, this resulting in the present of numerous public and private universities and colleges to turn Malaysia into a teaching hub. With the growing number of higher education institution especially in Malaysia, both private and public universities nowadays are competing to get students and striving for market position. The struggle and competition among them are unavoidable. To provide top quality to their customers, universities should recognise the significance of students' satisfaction (Akareem & Hossain, 2016). Thus, the factors that contribute to the students' satisfaction towards the university services should be taken into consideration.

Two key methods to measure service quality has been discovered by the services marketing literature namely Service Quality (SERVQUAL) and Service Performance (SERVPERF) (Adil, 2013). SERVQUAL is one of the well-known strategies as it defines the service quality by differentiating customer's expectancy and performance perceptions in the gaps model (Kashif, Ramayah & Sarifuddin, 2016). However, SERVPERF model was introduced due to perceived limitations in SERVQUAL model in measuring service quality (Adil, 2013). Yet, these two models were compared with HEDPERF to examine their relationship. HEDPERF is a new approach formed by Abdullah (2006) in measuring service quality in the higher education setting. A comparative study has been conducted by Abdullah (2006) and Falah Al-zoubi, AlShoura, and Oudh (2017) revealed that the HEDPERF model more suitable than the other two models as it more consistent, better principle and explained variance well (Abdullah, 2006). Hence, the main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the service quality dimensions by using HEDPERF model (Abdullah, 2006) with students' satisfaction.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Academic Aspects

Academic aspects can be described as the core structure of the academic process. Cho et al (2016) stated that university is a medium of sharing, information and creation applying. The academic aspects of a university course integrate types of test and quiz that will be applied, the books that are mandatory and others (Chanaka, et al., 2016). The expectancy of students toward the lecturers when transferring the service by their own capability or information also perceived as a viewpoint of academic aspects. (Mindano, 2016).

Students are the customers who come in contact with the universities at a fee for the purpose of acquiring knowledge and skills (Amal & Dennis, 2013). Lecturers are the main academic aspects when transferring the service knowledge to ensure service superiority that produces high education performance (Akareem & Hossain, 2016). Student's performance in education can be achieved with the quality academic aspect by giving a great service in learning information (Ibrahim, et al., 2012). Students' satisfaction is a vital indicator of the value of teaching performance and also be considered as the result of the education process (Rahman, Voon & Firdaus, 2016).

2.2 Non-Academic Aspects

An activity other than academic actions is referred to non-academic (Muhonen, Pakarine, Poikkeu, Lerkkanen & RaskuPuttone, 2017). The qualities of individual in the institution are the main aspects that need attention (Danilo S. & et al., 2017). The staff must be helpful, useful, well mannered, mindful, and skillful when dealing with students (Danilo, et al., 2017). Excellence service lead to student's satisfaction tends to have high students' performance in academic (Akareem & Hossain, 2016).

As mentioned by Sardar, Amjad and Ali, (2016) the most prevailing factor in students' performance are influenced by the interaction with staff. Customer-service representative influences how the customers' valuation of the service participation been established. Therefore, the service provider's part in creating a customer loyalty should not be disregarded (Rahman, et al., 2016). Mindano (2016) stated that students' satisfaction is recognized as the match between students' needs and the grounds condition like offices counter service that gives assistances to students in taking care of problems.

2.3 Students' satisfaction

Experience that a customer had with a service involvement about what was they expected is the characterized as customers' satisfaction (Leonor, et al., 2016). Hence, satisfaction linked to the capability of service provider to meet or exceed the customers' satisfaction (Asif, et al., 2017). Previous scholars have conducted many studies to identify the influence of service quality towards satisfaction (Kashif, et al., 2016).

Researchers revealed that service quality and customers' satisfaction have a strong relationship and well managed service encounter is important to rise customers' satisfacation (Ahmed, 2017).

Further, customers' satisfaction can be enlightened by perceived service quality as suggested by Sardar et al (2016) in their past studies regarding service quality in higher education. Not all universitys' services can achieve students' satisfaction. Unsatified service will receive many remark and complaint (Satpathy, et al., 2017). Unhappy can be regarded as a bad expressive state subsequent from the evaluation of individual experiences (Reeves, 2017).

Higher education that attains students' satisfaction can give advantages in many ways. Students who pleased with the services provider are less possible to quit (Kashif, et al., 2016). With satisfied service most students are possible to attain higher grades (Danilo, et al., 2017). Students' satisfaction reflects result related experiences with university services in evaluation to presumption expectations (Mindano, 2016).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Population and Sampling

The population for this study was the undergraduate students in a public university located in theEast Coast of Malaysia. The sampling technique applied in this study was stratified random samling. On the average, the total population of undergraduate students was 741 and the total of 254 students was selected as the sample size. In selecting the sample size, the researcher decided to use Table for Determining Sample Size (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). Thus, a total of 260 questionnaires were distributed.

3.2 Items and Measurement

The instrument for this study was a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was adapted from previous research. The questionnaires used a five-point likert scale which range from strongly disagree to strongly agree in order to measure each variable. The questionnaires were established using closed-ended question and consist of three sections; Section A, Section B and Section C. Section A consists of demographic background of respondents. Section B represents independent variables namely academic aspect and non-

academic aspect. The last section contains questions regarding dependent variable which is students' satisfaction.

4.0 FINDINGS

Out of 260 questionnaires distributed, 250 set of questionnaires were returned, equivalent to 96.15 percent response return rate. Majority of the respondents were female (79.5%) while others were male. More than half of the respondents (66.5%) were from the age group of 21-23 years old followed by 10-20 and 24 years old and above. Almost half (48%) of the respondents obtained 3-3.49 CGPA whereas the least obtained 2.5 or below CGPA. Respondents from Bachelors of Hotel and Tourism Management were representing 36.2% of the sample, followed by Bachelor of Foodservice Management 24.8%. The least were respondents from Operation Management course with 10.6%.

4.1 Correlation Analysis

To assess the degree of the relationship between independent variables (academic aspects and non-academic aspects) and the dependent variable (students" satisfaction), Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used.

Table 1 Correlation Analysis (n=254)

Variables	Pearson Correlation
Academic Aspect	.663**
Non-Academic Aspect	.602**
Students' Satisfaction	-

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 1 shows the relationship for this study. The results show the relationship between academic aspect and non-academic aspect with students's satisfaction was moderate significant and positively linked.

Table 2 Table of Model Summary and ANOVA

Model Summary		ANOVA	
R	R2	F	Sig
.756[a]	.572	111.432	.000[b]

R-square is the proportion of variance in the dependent variable (students' satisfaction) which can be predicted from the independent variables (academic aspects and non-academic aspects). This value indicates that 57.2% of the variance in students' satisfaction can be predicted from the variables of academic aspects and non-academic aspects. The remaining 42.8% of the model will be explained by other factors.

Table 3 Table of Coefficients

Model	Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
	Beta	T	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)		.196	.845		
Academic Aspects	.604	14.028	.000	.922	1.084
Non-academic Aspects	.246	3.893	.000	.427	2.341

Further analysis through regression, produces standardizes measures (Beta Weights) of the strength of each dimension's association with students' satisfaction. β is the values of the regression equation for predicting the dependent variable from the independent variable. The result of the three independent variables are academic aspect (β 0.604, p<0.000) and non-academic Aspects (β 0.246, p<0.000). This result indicates that academic aspects have a higher Beta value that provides a strong evidence of being the factor that influences students' satisfaction.

5.0 Discussion

The study was conducted to examine the relationship between independent variables which are academic aspects and non academic aspects towards dependent variable (students' satisfaction). Pearson Correlation result indicated that there is relationship between academic aspect and non academic aspect towards students' satisfaction. Findings also revealed that there is a strong and moderate relationship between academic aspects with the value of 0.663. The finding has been supported by Faizan et al. (2016) as he stated that the students' complete satisfaction in Malaysian public universities influenced by the academic aspects. Further, as supported by Mwiya et al. (2017) service quality in academic affected students' satisfaction. In addition, non academic aspects also discovered to have a positive relationship with the students' satisfaction with the value of 0.602. The finding was reliable with the findings by Subrahmanyam and Shekhar (2016) who stated that non academic aspects is an important factor contributed to the students' satisfacation as well. Students would satisfy more if the university provides more services and facilities. The researchers further said that low students' satisfaction resulted from the limited and non improvement facilities at the university. Hence, all the proposed hypothesis was supported. The academic aspects have an extra influence on how students perceived service quality compared to non academic aspects.

6.0 Conclusion

The study was conducted to identify the relationship between academic aspects and non-academic aspects towards students' satisfaction. As for overall conclusion for this study, there are positive relationships between academic aspects and non-academic aspects towards the student' satisfaction. Findings also supported all hypotheses made in this study. Therefore, the results of the study highlighted the most important factor that focuses on the university's main function which is the academic aspects and how it affects towards students' satisfaction because students are extra focus on the service that are given by the university.

7.0 Recommendation

Application of the following approach is recommended in order to improve the standards and service quality in higher education that can lead to the enhancement of students' satisfaction continuously. Higher education needs to expand the services for instance having more facilities available for students' necessity. Besides, the management staff should be the leading of excellence in providing service quality. They should be upgrading the information and knowledge to make decision of service quality resources. Every and each complaint made by students to improve service performance must be acted quickly. Since academic aspect was the main contributor to students' satisfaction, improving teaching staff services should be emphasis since teaching staff play an important role in fulfilling students' need as well increasing their satisfaction.

Several recommendations for future research also identified. Since only one university involved in this study, future research can be conducted in other higher education institutions either public or private universities. This study focuses on undergraduate students. Future research may choose other sample populations such as diploma or postgraduate students. Future researcher can also use both samples and compare them to find whether it would give some different results for future reference.

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