

**CRITICAL SERVICE ENCOUNTERS IN UiTMCS:
AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION FROM STUDENTS'
PERSPECTIVE USING CRITICAL INCIDENT TECHNIQUE (CIT)**



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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study on the critical service encounters in UiTMCS was conducted to better understand the nature, causes and consequences of the University's students' favourable and unfavourable service encounters. The various underlying service evaluation criteria and service quality dimensions were identified with the applications of SERVQUAL Model. Critical Incident Technique (CIT) was used to investigate and understand the cause-course-outcome of each and every memorable service experience known as critical incident. There were 615 very satisfying and/or dissatisfying service encounters collected using personal interview, conveniently sampled to represent various major academic programmes in the University. The administered questionnaires contained few open-ended questions (capturing the critical incident) coupled with various close-ended questions (demographics). The findings showed that there were mainly dissatisfactory service encounters due to various underlying reasons like courtesy, workability of equipment/facility, availability, reliability, communication, responsiveness, impartiality, security, and food hygiene. The service satisfaction was mainly related to responsiveness, caring attitude, friendliness, understanding, and compassion. Students' loyalty is not really affected by their service satisfaction. The students' critical service encounters were very much concentrated at the basic product-levels and people-related. Generally, 'empathy' and 'assurance' service dimensions dominated the reported students' service encounters whereas 'tangibles' was the least emphasized. Extended product-levels like caring attitude of the University's staff had contributed much to their service satisfaction in campus.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of Study

Many contemporary organisations are embroiled in a highly dynamic and competitive environment, and they are endeavouring to enhance their survival and prosperity by installing quality improvement programmes. Such organisations are increasingly recognising the importance of the central thrust of the quality revolution. Universities in general and UiTMCS in particular have certainly become embroiled in these developments. The momentum in the institutions of higher learning will only escalate as future potential graduates demand more functional highly skill-based curricula, with lesser consequence for philosophical-conceptual dimensions (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994). They reiterate further that this shift, together with other changes in the composition of the student body, as well as heightened expectations from the community for value from ongoing investment in higher education is requiring these institutions to reexamine their functions and purpose. Nowadays, not only is the relevance of teaching and research under scrutiny, but also the management that is given by academic administrators is under investigation. Traditionally, academic administrators rose from faculty ranks without grooming which is normally undertaken in business and industry.

Malaysia appears to be following the UK system to some extent in its attempts to apply performance indicators to the tertiary education sector. The measures are primarily

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Today organizations – public or private, profit or non-profit oriented are taking tremendous strides forward in providing incredibly high standards of services to their customers. Organizations that have succeeded well beyond the year 2000 have embraced the concept of Service Management far more than mere lip service. Desatnick (1987) states that successful organizations are those that recognize today's customer revolution and are fully prepared to meet the challenges at the highest standards of service. The thriving and surviving enterprises of the future will be relentless in the quest to continually look at ways to improve their customer service levels. In Malaysia, the service industry is fast becoming an important industry to her economy while at the same time service quality is generally perceived to be less important. In general, customers come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, and they bring an equally wide variety of wants, needs, expectations, attitudes and emotions with them to the service provider. What is considered quality service or the things that satisfy customers today may be different. Customers perceive services in terms of the quality of the service and how satisfied they are overall with their experiences. These customer-oriented terms – quality and satisfaction – have been the focus of attention for executives and researchers alike over the last decade or more. Facing this situation, organizations are now realizing that the nature and level of the service they provide to today's quality conscious customers could be the source of competitive advantage. View from this perspective, quality