An Examination of Service Quality in Malaysian Public University

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Abstract: In the effort to be a hub for higher education in the Southeast Asia region, the higher learning institutions had given focus towards their delivery of service since they want to maximize the customers' satisfaction. This study attempts to examine the relationship between service quality dimensions (reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness) and students' satisfaction. Furthermore, this study is also examine critical factors in service quality dimensions reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness) that contributes most to the satisfaction of the students A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed for this purpose to the students from every level of their studies study in the Northern University of Malaysia. Systematic random sampling procedure was used in selecting the sample for this study and data obtained was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21.0. The study will provide results from empirical test of these relationships. The empirical results of this study can provide support for the Parasuraman's SERVQUAL which related to the factors contributing to students' satisfaction. Lastly, conclusion and some recommendations for future research have been provided for the benefits of the higher learning institution.

Key words: Students' satisfaction · Service quality · Malaysia Public University

INTRODUCTION

The education system in Malaysia has been developed and goes through several transformations since British colonization. During the colonization, the education was done informally with the purpose of acquiring basic living skills. After Malaysia gets it own independence in 1957, a formulation of structured education policy was made in which it resulted in the implementation of National Education System which is right after the Parliament passed the Education Act 1966 [1, 2]. With the implementation of National Education System in Malaysia, the government of Malaysia was able to reach its objectives which are to foster unity and nation-building through a common syllabus and curriculum. Besides that, a new policy of education was released in 1989 which plays a role as a part of Malaysia's Vision 2020 and it is known as National Philosophy of Education. The Malaysia's Vision of 2020 will lead the country to be a fully developed country by year 2020. Thus, with the efforts of becoming a fully developed nation, Malaysia through MOE has developed a new National Education Blueprint (NEB) in order to better prepare the young generation for the needs of 21st century [1, 2].

According to [3], more than 95% of primary and secondary education and 60% of the tertiary education is funded by the government. Also, the government had restructured the higher education system so that Malaysia's education system is capable to respond to the need for nation-building in line with the nine challenges in Vision 2020. Thus, the government had encouraged the Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in Malaysia to make change and achieve excellence so that they are capable to compete at the global education market because nowadays there is a rapid growth of the higher learning institutions in Malaysia. As mentioned by [4], the objective of these plans is to ensure that Malaysian universities achieve world-class status and operate as a hub for higher education in the Southeast Asia region.

In becoming a hub for higher education in the Southeast Asia region, the higher learning institution must give focus on the customer satisfaction as it is the most important facet for the service organizations and it

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also relates to the service quality. Therefore, in developing the higher learning education in Malaysia, as mentioned by [5], in today's competitive business environment, such development is highly related to the intensity of the rivalries. As we can see now, the organization that provide education service clearly emphasize on the service quality since their focus is to attract new customers and enhance the relationship with the customers [6].

Frequently, the higher education sector focusing on the service quality to ensure the customers of the higher education institution both public and private are happy with the service provided to them. According to decades [7], the most important research topic for past few decades is on service quality. The researchers wanted to explore more how the service quality can affect customers' satisfaction. In fact, the customers concerned more on the quality of the output that they receive and not only how long a service delivery will take. The higher learning institutions must ensure the sustainability of the services provided to the customers as it is the most important tools to attract more customers to use the same services in the future, which claimed by [8] the satisfied student would attract more students through word-of-mouth communications. Besides that, the authors added that there is a positive relationship between perceptions of service quality with students' satisfaction. As mentioned by [9] In the context of ensuring sustainability of higher learning, institutions require them to continuously strive towards meeting and exceeding students' expectations.

On top of that, the students of higher learning institutions tend to judge and develop their own expectation on a particular service that they should get and the one that they already get. Thus, [10] indicated that their behaviors and attitudes of customer contact employees primarily determine the customers' perceptions of the service quality provided [11-13]. Thus, it shows that in order to determine the level of satisfaction among the students of the higher learning institutions, the human element and non-human elements must be given attention [14-16]. The non-human elements includes appropriate infrastructure of admin and academic buildings, residential halls, catering facilities, sports facilities and recreations centre [1, 17-19].

[20-22] pointed out that usually the students will measure the quality of the organization by looking at the tangibility (teachers), reliability and responsiveness (methods of teaching) and management of the institution and these factors have direct influence on the level of students' satisfaction. Other than that, for the measurement of the service quality, it can be measured using SERVQUAL dimension that consists of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles and it can be a basis for tool to test the service quality of an organization. [22-24] claimed that the introduction of SERVQUAL model is a lasting and reliable scale of service quality.

According to [25, 26], they assumed that the outcome of the service is related to reliability while the process of the service delivery is related to the assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness. In addition, the satisfaction of the customers on the services rendered by them not only depends on the reliability of the service providers but also coming from other factors that can contribute towards the good experience of the service delivery process.

Therefore, it is very important for the higher learning institutions to keep on monitoring their service delivery process so that it can meet with the students' expectation and thus satisfy the students [23, 27, 28]. It is interesting in identifying the applicability of the SERVQUAL in the higher learning institutions as it can be a basis to measure the performance of the Malaysia higher education itself. Also, by applying the SERVQUAL model in the education sector in Malaysia, it can create trust and confidence among the students who became the customers of the university and it can convince them that they are receiving quality services in exchange for what they give by means of their tuition fees. This study is important because it measure the level of service quality and level of satisfaction among the students. As pointed out by [29], presumably, if quality programs were initiated based on marketing research- that is, the changes were market driven and customer oriented- the quality improvements should lead to customer satisfaction. Thus, the results from this study is valuable and can be used to give information on the elements and dimensions that have been given priority by students in assessing the quality of services and satisfaction. In addition to this, this study provides the conclusions and recommendations and it is hoped that it's going to provide useful information for the public university in Malaysia.

Objectives: The specific objectives of the study were to:-
- To examine the relationship between service quality and student's satisfaction in a university.
- To investigate the dimensions of service quality (Reliability, Assurance, Tangibility, Empathy, Responsiveness) that predicts students' satisfaction in university.

Limitation of the Study: This study focus on examining the relationship between service quality with the students satisfaction of a public university in Malaysia. There are several limitations that has been identified in this study. First is, in this study the questionnaire for measuring the service quality (SERVQUAL) includes only perception scale. The students' perception will be limited since they can only rate it according to the scale. The limitation is due to the absence of expectation section which can be a guideline for the university to improve their service quality in future.

Second is this study attempt to understand the relationship between service quality and students' satisfaction by examining their level of satisfaction randomly from the students. The result of the study can be enhanced if the sample being use comes from the students from first year of the study and also last year of their study. This is because if in this study, the researcher just measure the students' satisfaction among all students regardless their year of studies, the result obtained is not accurate since the new students only experience very minimal services from the university. By doing this, the researcher can fully understand on the level of satisfaction of the students experience in the university.

Methodology: This study was designed to examine the students' satisfaction with the service quality of the university. The data were collected using a cross-sectional personal-administered questionnaire, developed specifically for the students from every level of their study. Likert scale is used to determine how strongly agree and strongly disagree with the statement. In this study, the Likert scale of 5-point scale is used from Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), Strongly agree (5). The internal consistency score (Cronbach's alpha coefficient) for this scale is 0.978. Systematic random sampling procedure was used in selecting the sample. This procedure will provide better in terms of equality and precision in selecting the respondents as the values within the strata are homogenous.

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to the university students from different level of study in Northern University of Malaysia and 343 questionnaires were returned. On top of that, the application used of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21.0 was used to generate descriptive statistics for this study. The analyses were conducted by using descriptive statistics, Pearson Correlation Analysis and Multiple Regression Analysis.

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents

Respondent's Profile		Frequency	Percent (100%)
Gender	Male	152	44.3
	Female	191	55.7
Age	Under 20 year	157	45.8
	21-25 year	168	49.0
	26-30 year	10	2.9
	More than 31 year	8	2.3
Study Level	First year	188	54.8
	Second year	58	16.9
	Third year	45	13.1
	Fourth year	52	15.2
Scholarship/Financial Sponsorship	JPA	25	7.3
	PTPTN fund	138	40.2
	State agency	4	1.2
	Parents/own private source	14	4.1
	Others	162	47.2

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the frequency genders of the respondents were 44.3% (male) and 55.7% (female). It was recorded 45.8% of the respondents under the age of 20 years, 49.0% were 21 to 25 years, 2.9% were 26 to 30 years and 2.3% were more than 31 years. On top of that, about 54.8% of the students were in first year, 16.9% were in second year, 13.1% were in third year and 15.2% were in fourth year of their studies.

It has been identified that there is 7.3% of the respondents obtained scholarship from JPA, 40.2% obtained financial sponsorship from PTPTN fund, 1.2% from the state agency, 4.1% get financial sponsorship from parents or own private source and 47.2% obtained financial sponsorship from others. A profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

By analyzing the hypothesis testing using Pearson Correlations, it can be concluded that all five independent variables (reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness) are correlated to each other.

The multiple regression analysis was used as equation that represents the best prediction of students' satisfaction from all the dimensions of service quality. Table 2 shows the result of multiple regression analysis of the independents variables against dependent variable.

Based on Table 3, it can be seen that correlation of the independent variables against the dependent variable is 0.85 with R square is 0.72. The F statistic is 172.95 and is significant at the. 00 level. Therefore, it can be understand that 72% of the variance in students' satisfaction was explained and influenced by the independent variables. By referring to the Beta value, it

Table 2: Hypothesis Testing

Alternate Hypothesis	Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Result
HA 1: There is a relationship between reliability and student's satisfaction	0.80	0.00	Significance and supported
HA 2: There is a relationship between assurance and student's satisfaction	0.81	0.00	Significance and supported
HA 3: There is a relationship between tangibility and student's satisfaction	0.83	0.00	Significance and supported
HA 4: There is a relationship between empathy and student's satisfaction.	0.79	0.00	Significance and supported
HA 5: There is a relationship between responsiveness and student's satisfaction.	0.82	0.00	Significance and supported

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

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis

	B	Beta	t	sig.
Reliability	.18	.18	2.00	.05**
Assurance	.10	.14	1.08	.28
Tangibility	.26	.42	5.57	.00*
Empathy	-.01	-.10	-.10	.92
Responsiveness	.17	.15	1.09	.28
R=.85	R^2=.72		Adjusted R=.72	
F=172.95	F significant=.00			

$**P < 0.05$

$*P < 0.01$

would be helpful to identify the more important variables among five independent variables in order to explain the variance in students' satisfaction. From the data obtained in Table 3, it can be identified that tangibility scored the highest value of 0.42, which is significant at the. 01 level. Thus, from the result, it can be understood that reliability, assurance, empathy and responsiveness are not significantly correlate in explaining students' satisfaction.

The analysis of the data that has been made shows that all dimensions of service quality which employ as independent variable: reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness have significant relation to students' satisfaction. On top of that, from observation, it was shown that tangibility appeared to be the highest at significant level of r=0.83, p<.00, followed by responsiveness at significant level of r=0.82, p<.00, assurance at significant level of r=0.81, p<.00, reliability at significant level of r=0.80, p<.00 and empathy at significant level of r=0.79, p<.00.

As stated by [30-33] some studies suggested that service quality functions as an antecedent to customer satisfaction. Thus, it is important for the university to concentrate on providing the good service quality to the students since they became the customers of the university and if the students are happy with the services provided to them they will give good returns to the university.

The relationship between service quality and students' satisfaction has been supported by [34] which claimed that there is positive relationship between the service quality and student's satisfaction. Thus, it can be considered that, the service quality is one of the key

elements for a higher education institute to achieve success in the competitive market [35]. On top of that, [36] stated by focusing on student satisfaction not only enables universities to re-engineer their organizations to adapt to student needs, but also allows them to develop a system for continuously monitoring how effectively they meet or exceed student needs. In the study conducted by [37], the result shows that there is a positive relationship between reliability and student's satisfaction of the university.

Other than that, with the assurance it reflects the workers' knowledge and experience and their ability to build self confidence as well as confidence in the customers themselves. Thus, a study conducted by [38], the result shows the result there is a positive relationship between assurance and student's satisfaction in the university. This is in line with the study conducted by [39]. The other result of tangibility presented by [40] showed that the non-human elements have positive significant with the student's satisfaction and the result obtained showed that. Furthermore, based on the study being conducted, the empathy also had a positive significant relationship with student's satisfaction [41]. [42] also claimed the same statement which is empathy has a significant relationship towards the student's satisfaction in a university. Also, based on study conducted by [43] it was claimed that there is a positive relationship between responsiveness and student's satisfaction.

As stated in Table 3, which shows the result of multiple regression analysis, only tangibility was found statistically correlated to students' satisfaction. In the analysis, tangibility was explained by 72% of the students' satisfaction. This finding was in line with [44] which found a stronger and positive relationship between tangibles and student satisfaction in their study on service quality and students' satisfaction at higher learning institutions. This finding indicates that the physical facilities on the campus (for example, computer labs, library, classrooms etc.) has a major impact on student satisfaction. However, the finding on significance of tangibility with students' satisfaction is contradict with

research conducted by [45] which found the relationship between tangibles and customer satisfaction was not significant enough. The researchers claimed that the infrastructures facilities are needed to enable an organization deliver good quality service and the infrastructures itself are not important enough to ensure good service being provided to the customers. Also, the study conducted by [46] found that there is a weak relationship between tangibility and students' satisfaction. The inconsistency in the finding the inconsistent in the findings might be due to the different expectation of quality service to be experienced by the students.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As mentioned by [47], with the increasing significance of the service sector in the global economy beside the ever mounting competition between companies to attract new customers, educational institutions and universities are placing greater emphasis on meeting the expectation and needs of their customers "students". Therefore, the university should comply with all the necessities, standards and requirements of quality education needed by its students. Especially by focusing on the tangibility which means the university need to provide good physical facilities that can make students who used those facilities becomes satisfy, reliability and responsiveness which means the university should gives more focus on the nobleness of the staffs in delivering the services to the students i.e. having a good communication with the students and the staffs is responsive to solve any problems faced by the students.

Although students' satisfaction is not necessarily correlated with achievement [48], satisfaction seemed to be a very important component for the successful completion of the course [49]. It is believed that if students are happy with the university, it can lead to the completion of their study. The students will feel motivated to complete their study on time since they are satisfied with the services provided to them. As mentioned by [50] the result of the student's satisfaction is also having positive and significant relationship with students' motivation and willingness to put more work efforts. Based on the findings, service quality does give impact towards students' satisfaction of the university. There are many factors that contribute towards the students' satisfaction and this study trying to identify the effects of service quality on students' satisfaction among the public university in Northern University of Malaysia.

In this study, the investigation of the service quality were made based on the SERVQUAL model proposed by [51] that consists of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles and it can be a basis for tool to test the service quality of an organization. As stated by [52], the consumers are not only concerned with how a service is being delivered but most importantly with the quality of output they receive.

The result from this study shows that all the independent variables have significant correlation to students' satisfaction. Besides that, the result of multiple regression analysis shows that tangibility is the only predictor to students' satisfaction. Other than that, the university needs to give focus on its customers like giving more attention when dealing with them. By doing this, the services delivered to the students can meet with their expectation. In sum, the higher education leaders must be attuned to these changing demands to maintain student loyalty and ensure that their institutions are meeting or exceeding student expectations [53].

The study of investigating students' satisfaction was carried out in Northern University of Malaysia. Since this study only measure the satisfaction of the students from one public university only, the result from this study cannot be generalized for the overall public universities in Malaysia. In order to understand better about the most determinant factors that can lead to the students' satisfaction in Malaysia, the future research can measure the satisfaction level among the students in all public universities throughout Malaysia.

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