

Examining the Impact of Training and Service Quality in the Malaysian Public Service Sector

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Abstract: The quality of the public service sector in Malaysia is always a sensitive issue. The dimension of service quality is still debated among the academic researchers. The purpose of this study adapted and integrated SERVQUAL to measuring the different dimensions used and applied in the process of evaluating the service quality in the Malaysian public service sector. The populations of this study were the employees in a Road Transport Department of Kedah State. The respondents were 200 employees and they were selected using purposive sampling. The data obtained was analyzed using Descriptive Analysis, Pearson Correlation Analysis and Multiple Regression Analysis by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 for Windows. The finding of this study revealed that public servants in Malaysian public service sector are found to be most interested in tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

Key words: Malaysian Public Service Sector • SERVQUAL • Service Quality

INTRODUCTION

In the public sector service quality is very important. According to Zabri, Romle, Nasri, Mohamed & Hassan [1]. Public services in Malaysia needs their civil servants to adapt themselves to face various challenges and at the same time can provide best services to the customers. This is due to changes in technology, skills, work ethics and integrity. In order to generate public employee has a high service quality, they have to undergo training provided by the organization [2, 3]. Service quality in the public sector is very important to the public. This is because public sector workers are implementing policies that have been implemented so that the government can provide benefits to the public. If civil servants do not have sufficient training to perform the service quality in everyday tasks, this will cause a problem to the achievement of government objectives in each of the policies implemented by the government [2-4].

Service quality has become an important option for Malaysian public service sectors. According to Landrum [5] the role of service quality has also become critical to the success of an organization. Wisniewski [6] cite that service quality is a concept that has passionate considerable interest and debate in the research literature

because of the difficulties in both defining it and measuring it with no overall consensus emerging on either.

There are a number of different "definitions" as to what is meant by service quality [7, 8]. One that is commonly used defines service quality as the extent to which a service meets customers' needs or expectations [9-12]. Service quality can thus be defined as the difference between customer expectations of service and perceived service. Expectations are greater than performance, then perceived quality is less than satisfactory and hence customer dissatisfaction occurs [9, 13-16].

Furthermore, Parasuraman [13] cite that delivering quality service is considered as an essential strategy for success and survival as it is considered as an antecedent to customer satisfaction if expectations are greater than performance, then perceived service quality is less than that of desired level, thereby leading to customer dissatisfaction.

Dimension of Service Quality: SERVQUAL: The dimensions of service quality (SERVQUAL) were originally started by Parasuraman, A., Valerie A. Zeithaml and Leonard L. Berry in 1985. They developed a model of

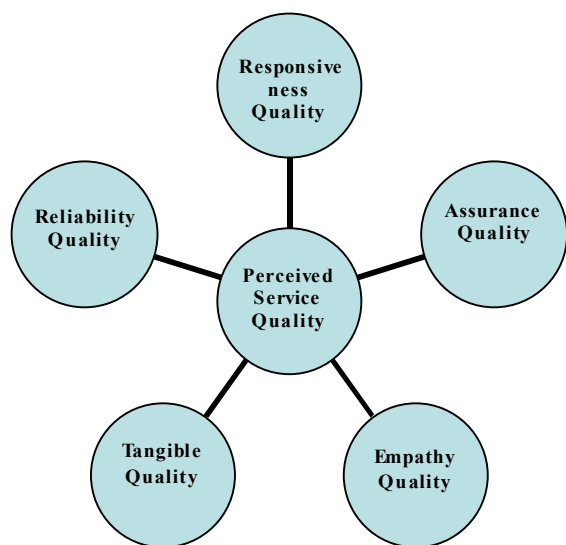


Fig. 1: Model of the Determinants of Perceived Quality

service quality after carrying out a study on four service settings: retail banking, credit card services, repair and maintenance of electrical appliances and long-distance telephone services. The SERVQUAL model represents service quality as the discrepancy between a customer's expectations of service offering and the customer's perceptions of the service received [13].

The SERVQUAL scale, consists of 22 items representing five dimensions, was originally applied in five service settings: retail banking, credit card services, repair and maintenance of electrical appliances, long-distance telephone services and title brokerage.

This measurement of service quality is based on both on how consumer evaluates the service delivery process and the outcome of the service. A good service quality is considered as one which meets or exceeds consumer's expectation of the service [13].

Moreover, Edvardsen, Tomasson and Ovretveit [17] stated that, in their experience, the starting point in developing quality in services is analysis and measurement. The SERVQUAL approach is the most common method for measuring service quality [18-21].

According to Parasuraman [13] the SERVQUAL model was made of ten dimensions of service quality which is tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, communication, credibility, security, competence, courtesy, understanding the customer and access. These dimensions were conceptualized into five dimensions because some dimensions were overlapping. These dimensions which is reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. These dimensions mainly

focus on the human aspects of service delivery responsiveness, reliability, assurance and empathy and the tangibles of service.

The five dimensions represent the different between consumer expectations and perceptions of a firm performance along each quality dimension. Perceived quality is a function of the magnitude and direction of the five perceptual dimensions as shown in Figure 1.

The basic assumption of the measurement was that customers can evaluate a firm's service quality by comparing their perceptions with their expectations.

SERVQUAL has its detractors and is considered overly complex, subjective and statistically unreliable. Customers generally have a tendency to compare the service they 'experienced' with the service they "expect". If the experience does not match the expectation, there arises a gap.

Moreover, Nyeck, Morales, Ladhari and Pons [22] stated the SERVQUAL measuring tool "remains the most complete attempt to conceptualize and measure service quality". The main benefit to the SERVQUAL measuring tool is the ability of researchers to examine numerous service industries such as healthcare, banking, financial services and education [23-25].

According to Parasuraman *et al* [26] reliability quality is an ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately, assurance quality is a competence of the system and its credibility in providing courteous and secure services. It also refer to staff or employees ability to inspire trust and confident among customers, tangible quality is an appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials which is staff appearance, empathy quality is approachability, ease of access and effort taken to understand customer needs and responsiveness quality is a willingness to help customers and provide prompt service in order to respond customer needs.

SERVQUAL model is widely used by researcher in order to measure the service quality. According to research done by Butt and Run [27], SERVQUAL model is a measurement to measure the Malaysian private health service quality. The similar research in banks is done by Kumar, Kee and Charles [28], where the study is to look on service quality between conventional and Islamic banks in Malaysia. In this study, the same model had been used as measurement.

A research done by Hussein and Amal [29], found that Cronbach alpha for five service quality dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, safety and empathy) were high and the SERVQUAL instrument

proved to be reliable, valid and appropriate in doing a research on service quality in Saudi public and private hospitals.

Furthermore, mostly research to study relationship between service quality and customers satisfaction are using SERVQUAL instrument. This is supported by research had been done by Angelos & Nancy [30]; Pankaj *et al.*, [31]; Paramaporn *et al.*, [32] and George *et al.*, [33] that shows that there are relationship between reliability quality, assurance quality, tangible quality, empathy quality and responsiveness quality towards customers satisfaction in clinics, sport event, internet service provider and hospital.

Gounaris [34] cite that SERVQUAL is used to measure assessing perceived service quality in business-to-business (b2b) context from four different service industries. In a related study based from SERVQUAL instrument is done by Curry and Sinclair [35] in assessing the quality of physiotherapy services.

Based on a study that carried out by Ladhari [36], it is recommended that the SERVQUAL model is a good scale to use when measuring service quality in various specific industries but that it is appropriate to choose the most important dimensions of this model that fit to that particular service being measured in order to assure reliable and valid results. In this regard, according to Shahin [37] using this model it will be exanimate the expectation and perceptions of the service which is best way to measure service quality in Malaysian public service sector.

Objectives: The specific aims of this study are as follows:

- To investigate the relationship between training and service quality in Malaysian public service sector.
- To rank the most dominant factors in Attributes of Service Quality in Malaysian public service sector in terms of the relationship between training and service quality.

Justification of the Study: This study tries to relate the importance of service quality among public servants in terms of their experience, specifically related to their expectations and perceptions of the public sector. The findings of this study help to contribute towards the understanding of improvement in service quality efforts in Malaysian public service sector. This study also provides theoretical contribution to the service quality development and attempts to draw ideas from different perspectives in the study of service quality.

Methodology: This research was designed to study exploring the dimensions of the relationship between training and service quality in Malaysian public service sector. The population of this study consists of employees in a Road Transport Department of Kedah State. Data were collected using a cross-sectional self-administered questionnaire, developed specifically for the individual level unit of analysis.

Thus, they could response to the survey based on their perception and experience more effectively. In determining the sample size, Krejcie and Morgan (1970) in Sekaran [38, 39] were taken as a basis. A total of 200 respondents were selected using purposive sampling.

The instrument used for this study was using a 5-Point multi-item Likert scale format was employed, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (Somewhat disagree), 3 (Neither agree nor disagree), 4 (Somewhat agree) and 5 (strongly agree).

Proportionate stratified random sampling procedure was used in selecting the sample. This procedure ensured each subpopulation that existed in the total population is well represented.

A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed to the public servant in Road Transport Department of Kedah State. Subsequently 200 replies were obtained. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 for Windows was used to generate descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and multiple regressions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research obtained 100% response rate. The frequency of respondents was 108 females (54.0%) and 92 males (46.0%). While 29.0% respondents age are 31 – 35 years old, above 51 years old are 21.5%, 13.0% respondents age between 26 – 30 years old, 12.5% was 36 – 40 years old, 9.5% age between 46 – 50 years old, 7.5% are 41 – 45 years old and 7.0% respondents age are 21 – 25 years old. The marital status of the respondents is 86.5% are married, 13.0% was single and 0.5% respondent was divorced.

The education background of the respondents is 55.5% has A Level, SPM and STPM. Then, 30.5% has diploma, 11.0% has degree, Master Degree's was 2.5% and 0.5% PhD. The job position 90.0% respondents was support team and 10.0% respondents are professional. Then, 97.0% was permanent staff and 3.0% was contract staff. Meanwhile, at the job scope 38.0% respondents are administrative, 32.5% respondents are enforcement, 14.0% accounting and finance, 14.0% was others and 1.5% respondents are information technology. A profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents

Respondent's profiles		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	92	46
	Female	108	54
Age	21 - 25 years	14	7
	26 - 30 years	26	13
	31 – 35 years	58	29
	36 – 40 years	25	12.5
	41 – 45 years	15	7.5
	46- 50 years	19	9.5
	>51 years	43	21.5
Marital Status	Married	173	86.5
	Single	26	13
	Divorced	1	0.5
Education level	A Level, SPM, STPM	111	55.5
	Diploma	61	30.5
	Bachelor's degree	22	11
	Master's degree	5	2.5
	PhD	1	0.5
Job Position	Managerial/Professional	20	10
	Support	180	90
Job Status	Permanent	194	97
	Contract	6	3
Job Scope	Administrative	76	38
	Accounting & Finance	28	14
	Information Technology	3	1.5
	Enforcement	65	32.5
	Others	28	14

Table 2: Hypotheses Testing

Alternate Hypothesis	Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Result
HA 1: There is a relationship between employee training and tangibles	0.590	0.000	Significance and supported
HA 2: There is a relationship between employee training and reliability	0.630	0.000	Significance and supported
HA 3: There is a relationship between employee training and responsiveness	0.683	0.000	Significance and supported
HA 4: There is a relationship between employee training and assurance	0.697	0.000	Significance and supported
HA 5: There is a relationship between employee training and empathy	0.645	0.000	Significance and supported

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

Table 3: Regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	9.056	1.149		7.878	.000
	Tangibles	.036	.151	.022	.241	.810
	Reliability	-.115	.093	-.143	-1.242	.216
	Responsiveness	.561	.164	.331	3.427	.001
	Assurance	.285	.092	.370	3.109	.002
	Empathy	.327	.155	.198	2.108	.036

a. Dependent Variable: Training

Results from Pearson Correlations analysis through the hypotheses testing concluded that all five independent variables were attributes (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) indicate that there will be relationship between those variables with training. In other hands, public servants in Malaysian public service sector need to emphasize the factors of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy in order to achieve the higher level of quality in their services seen as Table 2.

Results from regression analysis help us to see which among five independent variables is the most important in explaining the variance in employee training. Again, the results will explained the expectations of employees towards on the Malaysia public service sector as general; what are they expect. It shown that among five independent variables, the predominantly factor is responsiveness, empathy and assurance. The ranking of four is tangibles and lastly reliability as Table 3.

Analyzing the Pearson Correlations analysis through the hypotheses testing, it is concluded that all the five independent variables (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) are correlated among each other.

The results from the regression analysis, display the most important variable that explain the variance of perceptions among Malaysian public servants. The results of coefficients suggest the attributes of responsiveness, empathy and assurance. The ranking of four is tangibles and lastly reliability, exerted the strongest influence on overall service quality.

CONCLUSION

Service quality in organization is important for success of an organization that [14, 40-43]. Therefore, the dimensions of service quality should reflect the employees' expectations and perceptions in total [44, 45]. Public servant as an employees' should be the determinant of the dimension of service quality rather than the others. Service quality dimensions cover broad spectrum of area and items [46-48]. Public servant perceptions and expectations on the service quality are complex, different and subjective [49-51]. Therefore, it is suggested that the researchers test the validity and reliability of the chosen dimensions before drawing any conclusion from the research.

The results obtained show that the public servant in Malaysian public sector has shown rather high understanding of the relationship between training and service quality [50-53]. Several factors such as assimilation, consistent and comprehensive on the public servants could be the reasons why public servants are more conscious of their obligations and encourage them to the service quality at the Malaysian public service sector.

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