

## The Level of Service Quality in the Malaysian Public Service Sector

<sup>1</sup>Mohd Akmal Hakim Mohamad Zabri, <sup>1</sup>Abd Rahim Romle, <sup>2</sup>Safarina Mohd Rodzi,  
<sup>2</sup>Muhamad Shah Kamal Ideris and <sup>1</sup>Nor Azlindamazlini Mahamad

<sup>1</sup>School of Government, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>School of Tourism, Hospitality and Environmental Management,  
Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to identify the level of service quality in the Malaysian public service sector. Using a quantitative cross sectional survey approach, a total of 200 self-administered questionnaires were distributed to middle level administrators, regardless of service schemes, in Road Transport Department of Kedah State. Stratified proportionate random sampling technique applied in determining the sampling frame. The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 for Windows. Judging from the mean scores, the study suggested that the overall score of training among public servant were of *great importance*. Finally, implications and some suggestions for future research were also discussed.

**Key words:** Malaysian Public Service Sector • Public Servant • Service Quality

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### INTRODUCTION

In the public sector service quality is very important. 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. 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 [1-3].

Parasuraman [4] have observed that service quality is defined as the ability of the organizations to meet or exceed customer expectations. It is the difference between customer expectations of service and the service received (or perceived). In the public sector service quality is very important. This is because public sector workers are implementing policies that have been implemented so that the government can provide benefits to the public [5-7]. If civil servants do not 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 [8-11].

Based on Marshal and Murdoch [12] the theory and practice of service quality, it has gained the attention of academics which is seen as a way to differentiate between organizations competing clients, service quality known to contribute to market share and customer satisfaction [4, 13, 14]. Therefore, the pursuits of quality services in the public sector are driven by the need to survive and remain competitive [15-18].

Furthermore, Parasuraman [4] mentioned 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.

Hence, the purpose of this research is to investigate the level of service quality in Malaysian public service sector. Obviously, such knowledge is very useful for both academic and managerial purposes.

**Literature Review:** Researchers have come up with many definitions of service quality. Cronin and Taylor [19] state that many definitions of service quality revolve around the identification and satisfaction of customer needs and requirements.

Parasuraman [4] argue that service quality can be defined as the difference between predicted, or expected, service (customer expectations) and perceived serviced (customer perceptions). “Expectations” are the wants of the consumers that they feel a service provider should offer. Lim and Tang [20] cite that “Perceptions” refer to the consumers’ evaluation of the service provider.

According to Kumar [21], service quality is defined as the gap between customers’ expectation of service and their perception of the service experience. A service quality gap exists when there is a shortfall in which the service provider would like to close by Lewis [22].

In other words, service quality is customer’s evaluation on service or something that they are received which is integrated evaluation and continuous evaluation that customers give to product and services.

According to Parasuraman [23], service quality has been defined as a consumer attitude reflecting the perceived overall superiority and excellence in the process and outcome of a service provider.

Research divides service quality into two dimension: functional quality and technical quality [1, 22, 24, 25]. The distinction between these two aspects is extensively accepted although diverse terminology is occasionally used [4, 26, 27].

However, the first dimension is concerned with what the service delivers and on the other hand; the second dimension is concerned with how the service is delivered: the process that the customer went through to get to the outcome of the service. Moreover, service quality can be also defined as “a judgment about a service’s overall excellence or superiority” [10, 28-31].

According to Parvez [32] consider service quality is a significant differentiator and the most powerful competitive weapon which all the service organizations want to possess. Definitions of service quality hold the result of an evaluation process where customers compare their expectations about a service with their perception of the service to be received [4, 33, 34].

Subsequently, Li and Kaye [35] proposed that the service quality has a definition and wide, but the definition of a comprehensive concept and definition of the most famous of the concept proposed by researchers around the idea that this is the result of a comparison between that customers make their expectations about service and their perception of the performance of service.

Meanwhile, Kandampully [36] cite the service quality is generally viewed as a customer’s overall evaluation of the service provided to them. The customer’s overall

evaluation is based on their assessment of a number of service-related attributes such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy [4, 37, 38].

According to Prasanth, Pramod, Jagathy and Christian [39] stated that service quality is a concept that relevant in both manufacturing and services sector, the remarkable growth in the later sector makes the study of service quality within the sector more attractive.

A number of studies in service quality have enriched the services marketing domain over the last three decades or so [11, 40, 41]. Most of these studies have concentrated their findings on the dimensionalities of service quality across industries, cultures, and firms [42].

According to Shahin and Dabestani [43], service quality is crucial to the success of any service organization. High quality of frontline employees is integral to the excellence of firms because the service provided by such employees reflects the image of the organization and affects customer perceptions of service quality state by Cheung and To [44].

The conceptual definition of service quality developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry [25] has been largely employed for comparing excellence in the service encounters by customers. Through the same study, they view service quality as an overall evaluation similar to attitude, and satisfaction as a specific service transaction.

Therefore, Bitner [46] defined service quality as the customers’ overall impression of the relative inferiority/superiority of a service provider and its services and is often considered similar to the customer’s overall attitude towards the company.

Through study by Zeithaml and Bitner [46], the authors defined service quality as a global judgment or attitude relating to the superiority of a service.

Fen and Lian [47] state that other researchers like Cronin and Taylor [19], defined service quality as the form of attitude representing a long-run overall evaluation.

Various studies [31, 48, 49] explained that the service quality as a form of attitude of customers on the service provider in a long run and also their overall evaluation. These two constructs (service quality and attitude) are viewed as similar.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry [23] state the attitude is defined as a learned predisposition to respond to an object in a consistently favourable or an unfavourable way. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry [42] developed a service quality measure, SERVQUAL which measure of the overall service quality dimensions.

As a conclusion, several scholars stated that improving service quality in the Malaysian public sector is more important for a better service quality in the public servant.

**Methodology:** This research was designed to study the level of service quality impact in Malaysian public service sector. Data were collected using a cross-sectional self-administered questionnaire, developed specifically for the individual level unit of analysis.

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. Subsequently, The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 for Windows was used to generate descriptive statistics.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This research obtained 100% response rate. The frequency of respondents was 54.0% (female) and 46.0% (male). 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 had indicated both the mean and standard deviations of training scale. The ranking of importance as suggested by Rosli [50] and Rosli and Ghazali [51] were used as a reference in determining the level understanding of the training in the public sector. The authors suggest the following four categories based on rank of importance: mean value of 2.59 and below is indicating as *less important*, mean value between 2.60 to 3.40 is indicated as *moderate importance*, mean value ranging from 3.41 to 4.20 is indicated as *high importance*, and mean value of 4.21 and above is indicating as *great importance*.

Hence, based on the findings, 14 items which obtained mean value is indicated as *high importance*. The items are *The knowledge gained from the training programmed was sufficient, I could apply all the knowledge gained onto my work tasks, The knowledge contributed to increase service quality, The training programmed had given me the skills that needed, The skills gained from the training programmed were sufficient, I could apply the skills gained onto my works task, The skills gained helped me in increasing my work competency, The skills gained helped me in solving work problems, The skills contributed to Excellency in service quality, The training programmed helped me in increasing my work commitment, The training programmed helped me to be*

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Service Quality

	Mean	SD
The training programmed had given me the knowledge that I needed	4.23	.657
The training programmed had increased my knowledge that related to my works	4.28	.635
The knowledge gained from the training programmed was sufficient	3.63	.963
I could apply all the knowledge gained onto my work tasks	4.10	.699
The knowledge helped me in increasing my competency	4.21	.623
The knowledge contributed to increase service quality	4.20	.652
The training programmed had given me the skills that needed	4.16	.690
The skills gained from the training programmed were sufficient	3.73	1.006
I could apply the skills gained onto my works task	4.01	.767
The skills gained helped me in increasing my work competency	4.17	.688
The skills gained helped me in solving work problems	4.07	.711
The skills contributed to Excellency in service quality	4.12	.738
The training programmed helped me in increasing my work commitment	4.11	.656
The training programmed helped me to be more proactive	4.13	.667
The training programmed helped me to stimulate ideas and creativity	4.10	.706
The training programmed helped me to increase my self-esteem	4.17	.632
The training programmed helped me to strengthen the team work	4.20	.695

more proactive, The training programmed helped me to stimulate ideas and creativity, The training programmed helped me to increase my self-esteem and The training programmed helped me to strengthen the team work.

Three items which scored mean value between 4.21 and above is ranked as *great importance*. The items were *The training programmed had given me the knowledge that I needed*, *The training programmed had increased my knowledge that related to my works* and *The knowledge helped me in increasing my competency*.

Observing from the mean score, the level of perception of service quality in the public sector was suggested to be *high importance*. The mean score ranged from 4.21 and above on a five point Likert scale.

The findings revealed a high mean value among public servant in Malaysian public sectors. Subsequently, judging from the score, which showed a strong mean concentration, probably it may be assumed that public servant in Malaysian public sectors have exhibited their perception of the service quality at the workplace [51-54]. All these practices have been well employed by the respondents of all genders, length of service, age groups, and different service schemes across the Malaysian public sectors.

Perhaps with continuous on the service quality applied at the organizations, public servant are more conscious of their obligations and know to act as it should independently [55-57]. Another possible reason is that public servant possessed a high educational level and therefore they not only aware the challenges encountered by the Malaysian public sector, but also understand how to act in executing their responsibilities at the workplace [55, 58-62].

## CONCLUSION

The results obtained show that the public servant in Malaysian public sector has shown rather high understanding of the service quality in the public sector. The findings may add to the literature on importance of the service quality, especially in the context of Malaysian public sector. Since the present study only emphasizes on the Malaysian public sectors, it would enhance the finding, if future research could also include employees from private sectors in Malaysia.

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