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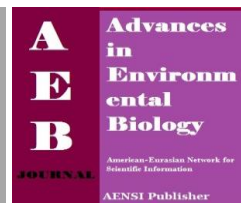
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Student Satisfaction Towards Service Quality of Front Office Staff: A Perspective of Public Higher Education Institution in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to assess student's expectation and perception level towards service quality of the front office staff in five dimensions; tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Total of 90 respondents selected from three of higher education in Malaysia. The findings of this study showed the level of students' expectation and perception is high in all dimensions. The finding showed that the SERVQUAL gap revealed negative gap that stated the front office staff unable to provide better service as expected by the students. Recommendations made below are important to enhance service quality of front office staff. All dimension should be enhance especially in tangibility dimension.

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INTRODUCTION

Clients' needs are always changing and vary according to passage of time and seasons. Sensitivity to the needs and consumers preference is one of dimension that should be priority in the process of providing a product or service [17]. Organization that providing service requires an understanding of customer expectations and its importance towards relationship with quality service. In the context of higher education, factor that can influence customer expectations includes verbal communication, student personal needs, past experience towards the quality of services and external relations from the provision of services [15]. Students expectations towards the quality of services provided is heavily influenced by their previous experience before register in Higher Education Institution (HEI).

Furthermore, student satisfaction in the quality of higher education is different from the quality of educational services obtained. Generally, the level of student satisfaction in HEI may give an impact towards the performance of staff and lecturers. Students perceived level of satisfaction towards the service offered based on internal and external factors. Therefore, HEI was responsible to provide better service in order to satisfy all stakeholders. It must be noted that the increase number of students' enrollment in Malaysia HEI will result in intense competition between HEIs to attract students to pursue their studies at their institutions. It is prime important that the level of service provided by HEI should be upgraded and improved.

2. Background of the study:

There are various reasons that should be given a priority in providing quality services in a university administrative unit, [2]. The first exposure of the student to the university is through the admission and registrar's services. Providing high quality service to students contributes to the positive image of the university. In fact, the administrative departments of the university, such as the registration office, financial office or library, is a replication of the bureaucratic units of governmental or public institutions [19].

Customer satisfaction is the key of a business success whereby the satisfaction will be evaluated by the customer. To be a premier HEI, quality education and effective administration must be excellent. In most cases, customer's assessment toward the quality is measured in all aspects Haque, and not confined to specific areas. Therefore, this study was undertaken with the aim to examine student's satisfaction towards service quality of front office staff in Malaysia HEI. The objective of the study are; (1) to assess student's expectation and perception level towards service quality of the front office staff in five dimensions which is tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, (2) to analyze the discrepancy gap between students'

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expectation and perception towards service quality of the front office staff and (3) to examine the relationship between dimension of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy in service quality of the front office staff toward student satisfaction.

3. Literature Review:

The review will outline the historical trend in studying service quality towards customer satisfaction, followed by an overview of service quality methods used in previous studies and service quality towards students' satisfaction.

3.1 Service quality towards customer satisfaction:

The result from the comparison those customer expectations about service and their perception on what that the service has been performed is call service quality, [15]. Parasuraman *et al.* [15] define service quality is the different between customer expectation and perceived of quality of service. Customer dissatisfaction will occur if the perceived quality is less than satisfactory and expectation is greater than service performance.

Parasuraman and Zeithaml [15] defined service quality as "the global evaluation or attitude of overall excellence of services". Therefore service quality can be interpreted as the difference between customers' perception and customers' expectation. This research is focusing on front office in HEI of Malaysia. Specifically, front office service quality can be defined as "the overall excellence of services that can fulfill what users' expectation".

3.2 Measuring service quality:

The SERVQUAL approach has been applied in service and retailing organizations. Service quality is a function of pre dealing customers, expectation, perceived process quality, and perceived output of quality. According to Parasuraman and Zeithaml [15] define service quality as the gap between customers expectation of service and their perception of the service experience. Based on Parasuraman and Zeithaml [15] there are 22 items instrument include in the original SERVQUAL and it has grouped into five dimensions; tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Most studies have applied the SERVQUAL on their research. This is because it has a practical approach and a generic service application to the specific area. This instrument has been measured service quality in a variety of services such as hospitals, hotels, travel and tourism, a telephone company, insurance companies and banks [22] and university. In this study, the researcher uses SERVQUAL approach as an instrument to explore customer's expectations and perceptions levels of service quality towards the front office staff at the Malaysia HEI.

3.3 Previous study of service quality towards customer satisfaction:

Parasuraman and Zeithaml [15] suggested that service quality can be measure through functional quality dimension This model able to identifies several gaps of service quality of the service organization, during the service expectation till the actual service delivery. The first gap is the service providers able to know what the expectations of the customers about the service. Second gap is the service provider able to recognize the standard of service that customer expect. Specifications of the service and delivery of service is the third gap. Forth gap is related with delivery of the service. Last and final gap is the customer's expectation about the service and the perceived service.

In addition Zhu proposed one of service quality model for IT related to business. They stated that IT-based services have a direct impact on the three dimensions which is reliability, responsiveness and assurance and it has indirect impact on customer satisfaction and perceived service quality IT in order to achieve higher level of customer satisfaction. Santos introduces one important model to measure service quality of electronic business called Model of e-service quality. In this model the researcher propose determinants factors that have relationship with service quality measurement in e-business. To evaluate the service quality in organization, Gronroos, [9] proposed technical and functional quality model. In this model the author describes a few of elements to justify the service quality provided by a service's organization. The elements are technical quality, functional quality, and company image. Technical quality refers to the service consumer receives from service organization and functional quality refers how service organization provides that service to the consumers. In fact image creates favorable attitudes to the service providers. Based on the combinations of all three attributes it showed that there is a positive attitude towards a service organization.

Miao and Basham [13] have been studying the concept of customer service and proposed a three-dimensional approach to handle library services, namely (a) the best service strategies, (b) customer-driven system and (c) friendly staff. In implementing the strategy best service, staff library will provide services in achieving the mission and vision of customer service formed. Customer-driven system also shows that the service component must include library environment, procedures, finance and accessibility. On the other hand, the dimensions of customer friendly staff, such as reliability, assurance, and empathy and library facilities are important elements in service quality.

According to Ute Walter the researchers have proposed the dimensions of the drivers of customers' favorable and unfavorable experiences. It showed that interactions occur continuously between the customer and the drivers throughout the whole process of the customer service experience. Hayes was doing research on student's satisfaction towards quality provided by university and found that in most circumstances student satisfaction respond "What are the consequences of students who are dissatisfied?" When the environment is highly competitive, dissatisfied students tend to withdraw or transfer? According to Kitisuda new customer and loyalty customers were satisfied with the spa services and most of the customers agreed that the location of the spa was the most important factor for good services. They also suggested that the food and beverage facilities should be improved. Moreover, the study showed that gender, age, nationality, and income influence the service quality.

A study by Phenphun on international tourist satisfaction with the quality of service provided in Thailand. Based on his study various factors are related to satisfaction problems and customer preferences. The research showed that the international tourists satisfy with the quality of service. However, the most common problems occur were lack of employee's knowledge and language barriers. Therefore, the respondents suggested to improve the language and facility. Markovic [12] conducted a study on service quality provide better in the Croatian Hotel Industry. The finding showed that a SERVQUAL instrument is a reliable method to measure service quality of Croations hotels, and identify differences in terms of expectations and perceptions of customers.

Mostafa Nejati stated that the SERVQUAL model able to assess quality of educational services at Tehran University of Medical Science. The finding showed a negative SERVQUAL gap in all dimension of service quality and suggested that all dimension need to be improve, especially empathy dimension. In order to provide high service quality in classroom, dimension of reliability in service quality should be enhance.

4. Methods:

The approach was adapted from SERVQUAL where the original survey was being used in service and retailing organizations. The data on the 22 attributes were grouped into five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Numerous studies have attempted to apply the SERVQUAL because it has a generic service application and is a practical approach to the area. In this study, SERVQUAL approach used as an instrument and was modified to suit with student expectation and perceptions levels of service quality towards the front office staff. Changes and add items that were made from the original SERVQUAL instruments to meet the objective of this study.

5. Result:

5.1 Overall student expectation and students perception towards service quality:

Table 1: Overall mean score of student expectation and students perception towards service quality.

Five Dimensions	Students expectation Mean s.d Level			Students perception Mean s d Level		
Tangibility	4.13	0.72	High	3.64	0.66	High
Reliability	3.99	0.78	High	3.29	0.81	Moderate
Responsiveness	4.08	0.82	High	3.32	0.86	Moderate
Assurance	4.09	0.77	High	3.30	0.81	Moderate
Empathy	4.03	0.77	High	3.22	0.88	Moderate
Overall mean score	4.07	0.68	High	3.34	0.67	Moderate

Table 1 showed that the overall student's expectation towards the five dimensions was high (4.07). The student's expectation on tangibility recorded a high level which is (4.13), followed by assurance (4.09), responsiveness (4.08), empathy (4.03) and reliability (3.99). Overall student's perception towards the five dimensions was at the moderate level which is 3.34. Most of students perceive tangibility was the high dimension with the level of 3.64, followed by responsiveness (3.32), assurance (3.30), reliability (3.29) and empathy (3.22).

5.2 SERVQUAL gap between students expectation and perception level towards service quality of front office staff at UniMAP:

The SERVQUAL gap is calculated between the mean score of expectation and perception. The findings of the study showed the difference between student's expectation and student's perception as shown in the table below.

Table 2 illustrated the gap between students expectation and students perception. The study shows that the overall level of expectation of all dimensions was higher than level of perceptions. The negative gap indicates that students were not satisfied with the services. Besides, SERVQUAL gap also showed that the greater the negative gap the higher the level of dissatisfaction of students. Moreover standard deviation showed that tangibility was lower than other dimension. This is because, all of students agreed that front office have lack of

facilities. Based on Bross IDJ[4] points out that $P < 0.05$ as a practical value and feasible level. The value 0.05 mean the there is 5% chance of being false and 95% change of something being true. Overall dimension of students expectation and perception is relevant and significant means there is significant relationship between student's expectation and perception towards service quality.

Table 2: SERVQUAL discrepancy gap of student's expectation and student's perception towards the service quality of front office staff at UniMAP.

		Paired Samples Test					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Tangibility percept - Tangibility expect	- .49118	.67198	.07289	-63612	-.34623	-6.739	84	.000
Pair 2	Reliability percept - Reliability expect	- .70294	.92702	.10055	-.90289	-.50299	-6.991	84	.000
Pair 3	Responsive percept - Responsive expect	- .76667	.91605	.09936	-1.06425	-.66908	-8.722	84	.000
Pair 4	Assurance percept - Assurance expect	- .79294	.85214	.09243	-.97674	-.60914	-8.579	84	.000
Pair 5	Empathy percept - Empathy expect	- .80588	1.02598	.11128	-1.02718	-.58458	-7.242	84	.000

5.3 Relationship between students satisfaction with service quality of the front office staff:

To achieve the research objective, the relationship between service quality and student satisfaction was assessed using the Pearson correlation. Result showed there is relationship between dimension of service qualities and student satisfaction.

Table 3: Relationship between student's satisfaction with dimension of service quality of front office staff.

Service quality Dimension	Students satisfaction (r)
Tangibility	0.255
Reliability	0.287
Responsiveness	0.404
Assurance	0.465
Empathy	0.495

Based on the output, $r=0.255$ it show weak positive correlation between tangibility dimension and student satisfaction. The significance level show $p < 0.05$ and it will reject the null hypothesis, accept the alternative hypothesis. In this study, the null hypothesis of there is no significant relationship between student's satisfactions with front office staff service quality in tangibility dimension was rejected because the significant value shows $p=0.018$. The correlation is weak because based on the student's opinion, the appearance and personality is not really important in their process of service delivery.

Based on the Pearson correlation, $r=0.287$ it show fair positive correlation between reliability and student satisfaction. The significance level show the $p < 0.05$ will reject the null hypothesis, accept the alternative hypothesis. So that the hypothesis of there is no significant relationship between student's satisfactions with front office staff service quality in reliability dimension is rejected because the significant shows $p=0.008$. The student state that the factor of dependably and accurately are important in the service quality.

Based on the output, $r=0.404$ it show fair positive correlation between responsiveness and student satisfaction. The significance level show $p < 0.05$ and it will reject the null hypothesis, accept alternative hypothesis. The hypothesis of there is no significant relationship between students satisfaction with front office staff service quality in responsiveness dimension was rejected because the significant showed $p=0.000$. Students are agreed that the factor of quick service, professionalism and ability of staff in recovering mistake was the factor that will influence their satisfaction in service quality.

Based on the output, $r=0.465$ it show fair positive correlation between assurance and student satisfaction. The significance level test show $p < 0.05$ and it will reject the null hypothesis or accepted the alternative hypothesis. Based on the null hypothesis there is no significant relationship between students satisfaction with front office staff service quality in assurance dimension, it was rejected because there is positive correlation between the independent variable and independent variable and the correlation of significant is $p=0.000$. In order to satisfy students the factor of competence, courtesy, credibility and security are important in the service quality.

Based on the output, $r=0.495$ it show fair positive correlation between empathy and student satisfaction. The significance level show $p < 0.05$ and it will reject the null hypothesis, accept alternative hypothesis. In this study, the hypothesis of there is no significant relationship between students satisfaction with front office staff

service quality in empathy dimension was rejected because the significant showed $p=0.000$. Empathy dimension showed the highest correlation between students satisfaction with service quality. Student stated that the factor of accessible, communication and understanding the student was the most important factor in service quality.

6. Discussion:

This study was examined by using SERVQUAL instruments, developed by Parasuraman. The result revealed that, overall student's expectation was high (mean=4.07) and student's perception was moderate (mean= 3.34). However, this result was supported similar as study by Mostafa Nejati, that all dimension of students' expectation was higher than towards student's perception towards quality of educational service. This is because, as the customer, students were expecting to get good service quality to fulfill their need at university. Besides, front office also plays an important role that showed the image of the university and as a technique of competitive edge.

The second objective is to analyze the discrepancy gap between student expectation and students perception towards service quality of the front office staff. The result shows that overall mean score of expectation was higher than perception in all dimensions, which produce, negative SERVQUAL gap. Hence, this result shows that students were not satisfied with all dimensions of service quality provided by front office staff. This result was similar with the research by Mostafa Nejati, which revealed the result of negative gap quality in all dimension of service quality provided by Tehran University. This is because, students do not satisfy with the service provided by front office staff. Based on the factor that influence satisfaction; gender, race, verbal communication, past experience towards quality of service, students were expect more than what they have been perceived before this.

The third objective is to analyze the relationship between students satisfaction with the service quality of the front office staff. Based on the result, four dimension of service quality which is reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy showed positive correlation towards the student's satisfaction, while tangibility showed the weak positive correlation towards student's satisfaction. This result was opposite finding from the Cyril revealed reliability dimension as the weakest correlation between service quality and students satisfaction. Besides, this result also does not support research by Phenphun and Zhu. Based on the result, it can be conclude, the Malaysia HEI need to improve the service provided by front office staff this is because, all the dimension in service quality does not have strong correlation with student satisfaction. In tangibility dimension maybe because of lack of facilities, while in responsiveness dimension it maybe because of the bad attitude and commitment from the staff.

7. Conclusion:

The overall result showed student's expectation was high and student's perception was moderate. It is suggested that HEI should encourage lecturer to frequently used SERVQUAL gap approach to examine and improve the service quality of front office. It is recommended that in order to reduce the gap and improve the quality of educational services, attention should be paid to all aspects of service quality and emphasized on the entire dimension particularly the tangible dimension. It is suggested that future research could be broadened and include other service provided in the university such as residential college services, library services, student affairs services, cafeteria service and other services provided by HEI. It is also suggested that future research should adapted to qualitative method to supported more meaningful result. This study focus on Malaysia HEI public university and should also focused future research in college and private university and also a comparative study on public and private universities.

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