

Quality Services as perceived by students of International and Public schools

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Abstract: In today's world of global competition, rendering quality service is a key for success. The aim of this study was to compare the quality of service delivery between Saudi and Malaysian public Schools operated in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In this research, there are five important factors the researcher used to examine the service delivery in both Malaysian and Saudi schools through student perception namely (1) physical evidence, (2) contact personnel, (3) reputation and assessment, (4) admission, and (5) teaching and teachers. Quantitative approach is used in this study. Responses from 250 students are analysed. The result shows that Malaysian students had lower satisfaction than Saudi ones on the service delivery in their schools in all six factors mentioned above. All the mean scores of Malaysian school are lower than the Saudi. There is also found significant difference of the satisfaction with the service delivery between Malaysian and Saudi students. It is suggested that public Malaysian schools consider the service delivery weakness and find the solutions for them even the schools are mostly supported by the government.

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Background of the study

Service industries are playing an increasingly important role in the economy of developing and emerging nations. In today's world of global competition, rendering quality service is a key for success, and many experts are of the view that the most powerful competitive trend currently shaping business and marketing strategy is service quality.

Education is one of the most important industries and playing a vital role in national development. In relation to the importance of education, Brunat (2006) has studied on the relationship between education and economic growth. Based on the findings from his study, he found that there is a correlation between education and economic growth but a correlation is not a cause-and-effect relationship. This is supported by the examples of countries like Germany, Japan and the Republic of Korea, in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries respectively, where they suggested that an educated population is a springboard for jumping to high economic performance.

There is a growing interest to use performance management and service quality improvement techniques in educational institutes in order to increase the competitiveness and quality of education in a globalized environment (Nejati et al., 2007).

The same need has been identified in educational industry, and specifically business schools are concerned about the *Quality of Education*. The

identification of the dimensions which signal quality and the achievement of excellence in business education have emerged this decade as key issues facing the academy (LeBlanc, 1997).

Historically it is the businesses schools in developing countries that are showing keen interest in improving the *Quality of Education* but unfortunately they remain unsuccessful due to limited, poor and ambiguous definition of quality in academia.

In fact, the competition in the private education has always been high and private schools previously obtained high returns for relatively little efforts, but now the time has changed and for the better satisfaction of students these private schools need to change their strategy. Private schools provide the services delivery to satisfy the student needs. Nowadays, service quality has emerged as a key strategic issue in management (Nejati and Nejati, 2008). As argued by Berry (1995) service is one of the important factors enhancing value, and can positively influence a college success. The students are customers for these schools, and schools play an important role help students to offload potential burdens. The student expectation is an essential component to enhance a school service delivery measures. This means that in order to gain the best satisfaction among the students, we must know the characteristics of the course participants, college environment, lecturer support and many other factors should be considered so that the most effective perceived education service delivery can be provided to them. So far there has been focus on

improving teaching methodologies and students learning outcome. Now it has been realized that it is not only the teaching or the students' learning process which needs to be improved, but a combination of multiple processes. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the quality of different services provided by schools. The following research objectives are made to guide the study.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

- i. To analyze the perception of the students of the selected schools on the quality of service delivery in both Malaysian and Saudi schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- ii. To compare the quality of the service delivery in both schools, Malaysian and Saudi.

Literature Review

Nowadays no organization can succeed unless it can attract and retain enough customers (Nejati et al., 2009). Similarly, colleges and educational institutes need to pay special attention to the students as their main customers and try to provide quality services that satisfy them. Service deliveries are drivers, which contributes to student's satisfaction.

Kasper et al. (1999) define service quality as "the extent to which the service, the service process and the service organization can satisfy the expectations of the user". On the other hand, Grossman (1999) suggests that service quality is made of two components--technical quality and functional quality. Technical quality refers to what the service provider delivers during the service provision while functional quality is how the service employee provides the service. Parasuraman et al. (1988) also defines service quality as "a function of the difference between service expected and customers' perceptions of the actual service delivered".

The new vision of service delivery is given by Yu and Dean (2001). It has already been argued by Cuthbert (1996) that SERVQUAL is an instrument to measure the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of educational experiences. Then the multi-itemed disconfirmation scale which is relatively similar to SERVQUAL is used to measure the component of satisfaction which is given by Yu and Dean (2001). This scale has been used to measure the cognitive component of satisfaction.

Yu and Dean (2001) have discussed the dimensions of service attributes which focuses on the teaching facilities offered by these private colleges to students in term of feedback and assessment of physical environment, interaction and support, administration, learning materials, course structure and content.

The evaluation of the service is not only based on the outcome of services. But also on the service cycle which provides that service and is very

important. Having a look at the top 100 rating of the Colleges and Universities in the world, it can be noticed that it keeps on changing from time to time. All these ratings depend on many parameters but one of the important parameter is service quality. As said by Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, (1990) the perception of service quality stress form how better provider delivers via a customer.

According to Zeithaml et al. (1990) and Grossman (1999), the term service is basically heterogeneous, inseparable and intangible offered by the service provider. Comparatively it is not easy for customers to judge good service quality. As discussed by Zeithaml (1987) that service market's service quality is determined by customer's judgment regarding the subject overall excellence or superiority.

The first ever-developed model to measure the service quality and to conceptualize as the gap between customer's perception and expectations of the services was given by Parasuraman et al. (1985) to measure the service quality. In the beginning, the model has ten determinants, including:

- a) Reliability: the ability to deliver the pledged service on time, accurately and dependably.
- b) Responsiveness: the ability to deal effectively with complaints and promptness of the service.
- c) Credibility: the extent to which the service is believed and trusted.
- d) Competence: the necessary skills, knowledge and information to perform the service effectively.
- e) Access: the ease of approachability and contact.
- f) Courtesy: the politeness, respect, consideration and friendliness shown to the customers by the contact personnel.
- g) Security: the freedom from danger, risk and doubt, which involves physical safety, financial security and confidentiality.
- h) Communication: keeping customers informed about the service in a language that they can understand and listening to the customers.
- i) Tangibles: the state of facilitating good, physical condition of the buildings and the environment, appearance of personnel and equipment.
- j) Understanding the customer: this involves trying to understand the customer's needs and specific requirements, providing individualized attention and recognizing regular customer.

In this research, the above ten attributes were condensed into five. The reason to this was to exclude overlap between variables and to refine the original model and improve reliability and validity. The model of SERVQUAL has changed into five dimensions which are as follows:

1. Physical Evidence: This dimension includes physical facilities equipments and appearance of personnel. Any Thing that customers can see,

- hear, touch, test or smell will affect their perception of this dimension.
2. Contact Personnel: This dimension refers to the staff's willingness to help customer and provide prompt service. Also included is the competence of the staff. It also refers to the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence in customer.
 3. Reputation and Assessment: This dimension refers to the fame of the schools and the criteria and reliable judgment of the teachers in grading.
 4. Admission: This dimension includes the process of getting admission information, process of application, and tuition fee payment.
 5. Teachers and Teaching: This dimension refers to the quality of teachers in both teaching and personality and teaching methods and materials.

Service problems, and for pure understanding to refine and improve service quality can be used as a tool by this model. As argued by Parasuraman, Zeithmal, and Berry (1994) measurement of service quality that takes into observation and evaluation the customer expectations, provide stronger and comprehensive information as compared to focusing only on perception. They have provided a measuring instrument for service quality in a broader range of service.

Student satisfaction is the term which can be explained and evaluated in many ways. Kaldenberg, Browne and Brown (1998) discussed and found that in the college, student satisfaction was driven by evaluating the quality of coursework and other curriculum activities and other factors related to the college. The lecturers should treat students with sensitivity and sympathy, and assistance should be provided when necessary. Even simple listening is appreciated. For example, the lecturers or tutors who fail to turn up in class or arrive late will project a bad image in the students' minds. Also, preparation of lecture or tutorial material could be devalued by such behaviors. Grossman (1999) discussed that student

could be treated like a customer or a client within the college and in that case, the college serve the students on a better priority to fulfill their expectations and needs. According to Oliver (1980) "disconfirmation of expectation" model of satisfaction explaining that consumer satisfaction is the result of comparison between company performance and customer expectation. The performance is very important to evaluate the student satisfaction.

Patterson, Johnson and Spreng (1997) argued statistically that there is a strong bond between customer satisfactions and repurchase intentions. The repurchase in term of students recommending the college to friends and relatives was heavily influenced by the extent of interactions between the student and college. It is a complex phenomenon to measure the student satisfaction, considering their level of education and their various expectations. However, as argued by Babin and Griffin (1998) there are a number of satisfaction measurement scales lacking face validity due to contamination of other related constructs. As discussed by Athiyaman (1997), student satisfaction is type of attitude, which is not durable and varies form time to time and it is for short period measuring the student's educational experience. Messer and Mires (2001) discussed that a well-designed performance management should be the cornerstone of a firm's employee development efforts. They further argued that the traditional view of employee development as what takes place in a classroom is much too narrow. The more effective, broader view requires that firms understand the meaning of performance management. These collages do need to focus on the student development and give them more effective trainings and skills that can guide the students. The student satisfaction is best tested when the performance results are realized when lecturers gives feedback.

Relating to the theories above, the researcher conceptualized the research as shown in Figure-1 below.

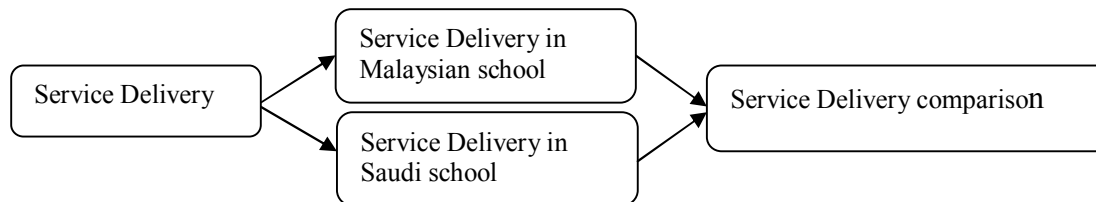


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

A pilot study was undertaken using 5 students from one of private schools in Kuala Lumpur. The time taken to complete the questionnaire ranged from 5-10 minutes. Feedback on clarity of words and instructions were good, with no assistance needed.

The study is conducted in the selected schools in Kuala Lumpur. The list of these schools was taken from Malaysian education websites and popular search engines such as Google and Yahoo. The respondents were students from selected schools. The students were randomly selected.

As mentioned above, the population for this research consisted of students of selected schools in Kuala Lumpur. Altogether 170 students were selected randomly from Malaysian schools and other 130 were selected from Saudi School. To achieve the objectives of the research, convenient sampling method was used among these schools. However, due to the semester break, the response rate was low, however, a total 300 self administered questionnaires were distributed among respondents in both schools.

The dependent variable (student satisfaction) was an ordinal variable with the 1-5 scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree which investigated the factors influencing the improvement of the students satisfaction in the selected schools. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed to the students in the both schools. From the total number of 300 questionnaires distributed, 250 were returned; therefore, the response rate was about 83%.

To analyze the data for this research, SPSS was used to analyze means, standard deviation, and T-test. In order to determine the reliability of the research method and the questionnaire, the Cronbach Alpha has been used. The result show that $\alpha = .764$ (Table 1). Through this method, it has been ensured that the items comprising factors produced a reliable scale. According to Sekaran (2003) the level of reliabilities less than 0.60 are considered to be poor and questionable. As discussed by Nunnally (1967), the reliability of 0.50 to 0.60 is acceptable for the beginning levels of research, but Sekaran (2003) said that reliability over 0.80 is considered good; where as in the range of 0.70 is considered acceptable.

Table 1 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.764	30

Findings

The first objective of this paper is to analyze the perception of the students of the selected schools on the quality of service delivery in both Malaysian and Saudi schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

In this research, there are five important factors the researcher used to examine the service delivery in both Malaysian and Saudi schools through student perception namely as (1) physical evidence, (2) contact personnel, (3) reputation and assessment, (4) admission, and (5) teaching and teachers.

Table 2 Mean Score of factors of service delivery in Malaysian and Saudi schools

School	Mean & Std	PE	CP	RA	A	TT
Malaysian	Mean	3.24	3.38	3.43	3.42	3.47
	Std. Deviation	.44	.51	1.13	.69	.52
Saudi	Mean	3.88	4.18	4.42	4.19	4.16
	Std. Deviation	.51	.47	1.79	.45	.35

PE=Physical Evidence, CP=Contact Personnel, RA=Reputation and Assessment, A=Admission, TT=Teachers and Teaching

According to Table 2, the result shows that Malaysian students had lower satisfaction than Saudi ones on the service delivery in their schools in all six factors mentioned above. All the mean scores of Malaysian school are lower than the Saudi.

Regarding second objective question, the researcher used T-test to analyze the data if there is significant difference of the satisfaction with the service delivery between Malaysian and Saudi students. Table 3 below shows the result of this question.

Table 3 T-test

School	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	T value	Significance
Malaysian	150	3.39	.35	-9.95	0.00
Saudi	100	4.16	.42		

Concerning Table 3, Malaysian student had lower mean score (3.39) than Saudi school (4.16). The mean value depicted a clear difference between these two schools. In addition, the significant is .000, which meant that there is significant different between these two schools. Therefore, both Tables 2 and 3 shows that service delivery in Saudi school is better and satisfied by students than in Malaysian schools.

Discussion

The student satisfaction has been identified as a behavior that distinguishes between satisfaction levels between the students in Malaysian and Saudi schools. Therefore, students' behavior could possibly be controlled and managed with regard to perceived service attributes in term of satisfaction of students to meet their expectations and needs. In regards with this, factors such as physical environment, contact personnel, reputation and assessment, admission, and teachers and teaching were measured. The study findings show that the Saudi school provided more satisfying service delivery to the students than Malaysian schools. It is not strange that students satisfied with the service in Saudi than Malaysian schools because Saudi school chosen to study was a private school. This finding is in line with the study of Cheng and Tam (1997) which proved that private schools tried to be more competitive than the public ones in term of service delivery in order that they could survive (24). As it is observed by many researchers, the service delivery can be maintained and it has long-term attitude implications, where as consumer satisfaction is a transitory judgment and keeps on changing according to the delivery of service, and it cannot be maintained.

Conclusions

Both of the research questions have been proved and can be observed from the statistical data that there is limited awareness of the quality indicators in public Malaysian schools. It means that those schools are not performing up to the required standards.

Therefore, it is suggested that public Malaysian schools consider the service delivery weakness and find the solutions for them even the schools are mostly supported by the government.

The indicators identified are merely indicative of some of ground realities but may not necessarily depict or reflect the actual ground situation. For that matter, a thorough investigation would be required which may entail the cultural aspect of teaching requirements as well. However, researcher has not discussed the cultural aspects affecting the quality of education and service as well as the management and leadership styles. This impact of cultural competencies can be measured in further phases of the research.

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