

# Expectations and Perceptions of African Students on Service Quality of Higher Institutions in Malaysian Private Universities

Mahabub Musa Garba, and Assoc. Prof. Ilham Sentosa,, PhD

**Abstract**— This study was conducted to check the expectations and perceptions of African students on service quality in Malaysian private universities. 111 responses were collected from the African students from 2 private universities. The study found a significant relationship between the reliability, assurance and empathy with student satisfaction. Tangibility and responsiveness shows the insignificant relationship with student satisfaction. The future studies may be conducted with large sample of students. There is need to manage physical facilities by private institutions.

**Keywords**—Student satisfaction, Service quality, Higher institution

## I. INTRODUCTION

**M**ALAYSIA is ranked as an advanced country among developing world and currently it is facing the challenge of internationalization and globalization of education. The Malaysian government has encountered this challenge by allowing foreign students to get education in public sector institutes. Moreover, after realizing the significance of education for the country's economy, the Malaysian government is aiming to convert the country as a centre and hub for education. Moreover, it is expected from the model for engineering education, developed by the government, to achieve global acknowledgment and appreciation for its distinction in engineering education and preparing the leaders of future generations (Johari et al., 2002). Maximum numbers of public Malaysian colleges universities offer engineering programs attractively, furthermore authorization improved for the engineering syllabus from the international bodies (Rasli, Shekarchizadeh and Iqbal, 2012).

However, recently more international students reached to Malaysia from more afield, they were from the countries of the Middle-east, the Indian subcontinent or even few from African countries (Rasli, Shekarchizadeh and Iqbal, 2012).

In Malaysia, the numbers of foreign students are important for the Malaysian economy, particularly in the global market. On the other side, Malaysian higher education has possible to be a great revenue earner by providing the top class academic diploma and degree programs (Rasli, Shekarchizadeh and Iqbal, 2012).

The goal of the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education is to attract ninety five thousand international students for education in Malaysia since 2010 (Sirat, 2006). Malaysia has succeeded in increasing admissions to higher education and the next rational importance is an improvement of its standard and quality assurance for higher education mainly with regard of post-graduate studies (Rasli, Shekarchizadeh and Iqbal, 2012).

In Malaysia, there were about ninety three thousand students studying in 2011, but the aim of the country is to raise these numbers to 200,000. Despite higher tuition fees, about seventy two per cent of foreign students are studying in private colleges and universities. Malaysian Department of Malaysian Immigration stated that 79,000 Africans arrived the country in 2012. This Department issued about 25,000 visas for the students of Africa. None of my respondents was on scholarship from the government. Private universities in Malaysia cooperate to recruiting agents that are paid for recruitment new students. These recruiting agents are usually former students that returned to their country and alumni from further universities (Kandale, 2014).

In recent years, service quality has received more attention from marketing practitioners and academics. According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, (1988) research studies suggested that the five dimensions of quality of service (i.e., Responsiveness, tangibles, empathy, assurance, and reliability), that have been commonly used in later years in many industries for measuring the service quality. The managers of industry have made some attempts by utilizing above five dimensions, in usage of the SERVQUAL instruments for measuring perceptions of customer about service quality or identifying the perception gap between service recipients and service providers.

Some of the factors of consumer's expectations about quality of service are identified by the Berry, Parasuraman and Zeithaml (1993) which are consumer's personal needs, social, psychological and physical. These factors are greatly influenced through the culture and social of customers. So the perceptions and expectations of customers are greatly influenced by the culture in the quality of services (Ibrahim,

Mahabub Musa Garba is with Post graduate centre, Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, Cyberjaya, Malaysia.

Assoc. Prof. Ilham Sentosa,, PhD, is with School of Business, University of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Wang and Hassan, 2013). This study focuses on the student satisfaction through service quality of private universities.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Service quality of higher institutions

Seymour (1992) measured the quality of services of American education institutes, from the student perspective, by using the SERVQUAL model. Ruby (1996) measured the satisfaction of American students by using five dimensional SERVQUAL. Tomkovick et al., (1996) implemented this model to measure the perceived quality of American institutes by foreign students who studying in US business schools. Soutar, McNeil and Lim (1996) inspected the perceived service quality of foreign students about various Australian education institutes. The research carried out another research to gauge the quality of services from two distinct perspectives of administration and teaching staff in Australia. Suba (1997) carried out a research in elementary schools in order to examine expectations and satisfaction variables with education service quality. Suva (1997) revised the SERVQUAL model in order to add more dimensions, such as the significance of personal demand, physical attributes, learning outcomes and participation of the community. Kerlin (2000) also used a revised model to gauge the service process quality of education, support system in Everett Community College Washington (Ibrahim, Wang and Hassan, 2013).

There are fewer research conducted in the United Kingdom, to measure the quality of service in higher education institutes, as compare to USA. For instance, Hill (1997) conducted a longitudinal study by collecting the data from accounting students at a British university. He proposed that few service dimensions were important for successful completion of education for many students at the university. Aldridge and Rowley (1998) carried out a research at the University of Central England to measure the students' satisfaction about the quality of education. Focus group methodology was used to gauge the perception of the student. Expectations of students were not investigated in this research. Cuthbert (1996) proposed that different component of service quality must be reviewed by the director in order to formulate a specific hypothesis for higher education. An altered version of SERVQUAL was examined on students of Manchester Metropolitan University; findings indicated that mean of perceptions for every dimension exceeds the mean of expectations excluding tangibles (Ibrahim, Wang and Hassan, 2013).

Previous approaches to examine the service quality got the minute attention of the researchers in academic research. Dabholkar, Shepherd and Thorpe, (2000) perceived quality as a distinct concept rather than summed dimensions. They formulate the concept of service quality containing and proposed that service quality is influenced by all four dimensions, which are personal attention, reliability, features and comfort. The researchers consider these dimensions as precursors of service quality. This longitudinal research has used three measures; perception only; measured disconfirmation, such as explicit comparison after receiving the service; computed disconfirmation, which is obtained by deducting perception (post usage experience) from

expectations (image of the service before using it). The results suggest that measured disconfirmation and computed disconfirmation are less than perception measure. The research propose that if research aims to forecast the quality of service or to measure its causes, perception-only measure must be used instead of disconfirmation. If research aims to analyze gaps, then measured disconfirmation should be preferred rather than computed disconfirmation. The aforementioned research proposed that the precursor model offers a comprehensive understanding about the perceived quality of services and the way such evaluations are developed (Sultan and Wong, 2010).

Parasuraman et al. (1988), formulated SERVQUAL questionnaire that intended to be a global indicator about gap 5 in various organizations along with higher education institutes. These dimensions are given bellow;

- Tangibles: appearance of the staff, equipment and physical facilities.
- Reliability: competent enough to deliver promised services accurately and dependably.
- Responsiveness: desire to assist customers and quick services
- Assurance: employees with courtesy and knowledge who can build win the confidence and trust of customers
- Empathy: caring and attentive.

The SREVQUAL model has been used in various sectors, such as financial services, health care, tourism, utility firms, dry cleaning, pest control, professional services, fast foods, libraries and educational institutes.

Numerous psychometric and theoretical issues have been raised despite widespread application of SERVQUAL model. Robinson (1999) highlighted the main areas of consensus and disagreement to gauge service quality. According to Robinson (1999), the sole area of consensus is that service quality is considered as attitude, which is different from satisfaction, that performance related perception should be measured, service context influences the definition of dimensions and statement with negative must be avoided, except short survey (Clews, 2003).

There are various unsolved issues in SERVQUAL literature. These issues include proper definition and explanation of service quality, appropriate model for measuring service quality, expectation related issues, dimensions of service quality in different perspectives and format of measuring instruments. Gronroos model also lacks the longitudinal aspects

Churchill, Brown and Peter (1993) have challenged the rationality of SERVQUAL and proposed that the model is endorsed by little theoretical/empirical evidence and the scale is failed to obtain discriminant validity of its components. Moreover, Cronin and Taylor (1992), proposed that SERVPERF can provide more effective results, in order to measure service quality, in comparison to SERVQUAL. Despite the protracted discussion between advocates of SERVPERF and SERVQUAL, SREVQUAL is most practical and vastly used model to gauge the quality of services. Nevertheless, it is observed that the SERVQUAL model is

used measure single phenomenon: may be gauged student satisfaction or expectation, but cannot gauge both of them simultaneously (Ibrahim, Wang and Hassan, 2013).

### *B. Student Satisfaction*

The satisfaction of student expresses favourability about a student's subjective progress of the different experiences and outcomes related to education (Oliver and Desarbo, 1989). Student's satisfaction is being formed through repeated experiences during the life on campus. The environment on campus is nearly a web of interrelated experiences which influence and overlap overall satisfaction of students. In the classroom what happens to student is not free from all experiences related to the life on campus. Browne et al., (1998) stated that global satisfaction in a campus life was taken through the quality assessment of a student about the extra curriculum and the course-related factors related to that campus. The conclusion of this study is that the chances of a student mentioning the relative and friends were greatly influenced by the level of interaction between or among the university personnel and students (Elliott and Shin, 2002).

According to the research on classroom education that satisfaction of students might be related to how well matches the environment of classrooms to the preferences of the student. A high relation between classroom environments preferred by students and real classroom environment should improve positive students' outcomes, as satisfaction. Classroom with higher levels of teacher-student interaction is preferred by students. High level of satisfaction is a personalization in the classroom, which provides personalization that no one other (Elliott and Shin, 2002).

According to the Sevier (1996), that product of a university is more than about the university's academic program. Rather than the university product is the sum of students' social, spiritual, physical and academic experiences. Typically, universities focus on academic dimensions of a student's educational experience, which steering such thing like students to faculty credentials, faculty ratio and faculty program. However, it is essential to realize that student may value differently to educational dimensions. A university may emphasize spiritual and academic experiences; whereas a student may increase their evolutions to social experience which available on university. Fox and Kotler (1995) suggested that a great number of students with their academic programs are satisfied. However, they are less happy with the services of support like career counselling and academics advising (Elliott and Shin, 2002).

It is realized by the successful universities that it is good to invest now (keep students) in spite of investing later (attract new students). Patters et al., (1997) demonstrated that experimentally a strong relation between repurchase intentions and customer satisfaction. Griffin and Babin (1998) suggested that the satisfactions of customers to be greatly connected with the future patronage intentions of the customer. Logically, it is assumed that students which are not satisfied with their educational experience, those who do not return to their college. Satisfaction of students in many universities is like a path, which a competitive benefit can gain (Elliott and Shin, 2002).

The research on customer management has neglected the methodologies that demonstrate the life cycle of a customer. Recently a research work of Bolton (1998) has expressed the relation between consumer's intentions, satisfaction and retention. The work of Bolton also explores that change in the satisfaction of consumer has important economic effects of the association. As the lifetime revenue from a customer based on the relationship duration of her/his, or the amount of dollar spent across the budget cycle. Seymour argues (1993) that developing a lot of happy, satisfied consumers, regardless they are alumni, parents of students, students or government employers and company, must be the main goal of higher education. So, focusing on improving satisfaction of customer at universities and college is important in the development of consumer value (Elliott and Shin, 2002).

Many library researches tell about satisfaction of customer, sometimes in relation to general context and sometimes in specific services. Generally the question of customer satisfaction allows for scaled response. Also, Surveys of customer's are actually intended such as report cards of library. Actually, very limited surveys ask participant to assign the grade of library from A to F. Usually there is no determination to take any educative actions which based on answers to these questions, but the responses used for negotiation in the sponsoring institutional administrators (Hernon and Altman, 2010).

### III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of the study is to find out the expectations and perception of African students about the service quality of higher institutions in Malaysian private universities.

### IV. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H1: Service quality has a significant relationship student satisfaction.

H1a: Tangibility has a significant relationship with student satisfaction.

H1b: Reliability has a significant relationship with student satisfaction.

H1c: Responsiveness have a significant relationship with student satisfaction,

H1d: Assurance has a significant relationship with Student satisfaction.

H1e: Empathy has a significant relationship with Student satisfaction.

### V. METHODOLOGY

Quantitative approach was used in this study. The responses are collected under the quantitative study. The responses were collected from students which were analysed with the help of statistical methods referred to as quantitative research approach (Zikmund et al., 2012). The study is used to check the relationship of student satisfaction and service quality in private universities. The structure and self-administered questionnaire was used in order to collect the responses of 111 students. The questionnaire consists of two parts. One is consisting on demographics and other part consists of variables. The item of student satisfaction were

taken from Jr, Kara and Kaynak, (2005). The service quality consists of five antecedents which include tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. The questionnaire of services was adopted for the study of Ibrahim, Wang and Hassan (2013). Pilot test used to check the reliability of the questionnaire before data analysis. Multiple regressions are used to check impact of service quality on student satisfaction.

VI. ANALYSIS

The questionnaire reliability was check with the help of Cronbach's Alpha. The reliability is used to check the appropriateness of each item which is engaged with each variable. The variable is a good sign of reliability of data if its value is greater than or equals to 0.50. It shows the reliability of data (Nunnally, 1967). The below table showed that all variables have greater than 0.50 values which represent the reliability of the data.

TABLE I  
RELIABILITY

Variables	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Student Satisfaction	4	.720
Tangibility	4	.788
Reliability	5	.856
Responsiveness	4	.871
Assurance	4	.560
Empathy	5	.555

Normality Tests

To check the normality of the data Kolmogorov Simirnov and Shapir-Wilk test were used. The Kolmogorov Simirnov test represents that 0.2 is the sig. value. It is greater than a value of 0.05 which represents the normality of the data. Similarly, the significant value of the Shapiro - Wilk is 0.495. It is greater than value of  $\alpha=0.05$ . It is insignificant. It means that the data is normal.

TABLE II  
KOLMOGOROV-SMIRNOV AND SHAPIRO-WILK

Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
.064	111	.200	.989	111	.495

Multicollinearity

The problem of multicollinearity was checked with the help of collinearity statistics. The value of tolerance was ranging from 0 to 1. if the value of tolerance is less than 0 or greater than 1 then it said to be the problem of multicollinearity exists in the data (Rugutt and Chemosit, 2009). The problem of multicollinearity was checked with the help of tolerance. The table shows that tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy are 0.638, 0.520, 0.479, 0.505 and 0.951 respectively.

TABLE III  
MULTICOLLINEARITY

Variables	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Tangibility	.638	1.568
Reliability	.520	1.922
Responsiveness	.479	2.090
Assurance	.505	1.981
Empathy	.951	1.052

Autocorrelation

Durbin-Watson identified the value of 1.463 which is a bit beyond the acceptable limit of 1.6-2.4 or 1.8 -2.2. However, we have done the remedial in the following way:

DW=1.463  
 For example DW=d, then  
 D=1.463  
 P (Average effect of each row)=1-d/2  
 P= 1-1.463/2  
 P= -0.2685

TABLE IV  
AUTOCORRELATION

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Durbin-Watson
1	.711	.505	.482	1.463

Now we have developed the lag of variables from transform-create time series-function-lag and check on change. After creating the lag variables we were further transformed the new variables. Now the value of Durbin-Watson is acceptable limit.

TABLE V  
AUTOCORRELATION

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Durbin-Watson
1	.607	.369	.338	1.916

The histogram curve represents the normality of the data.

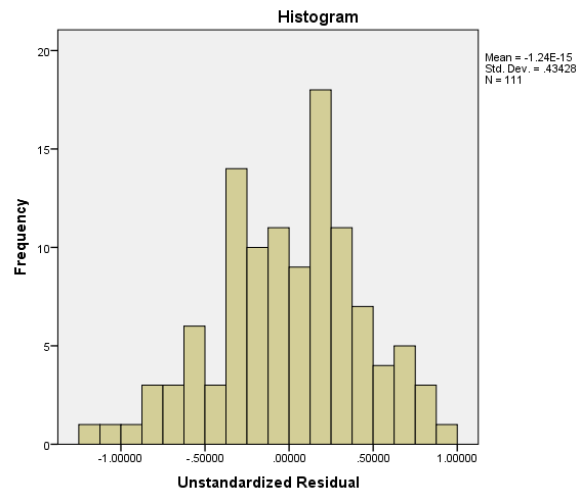


Fig. 1 Histogram showing the normality of the data

Multiple regression

The model fit provides the information about the value of R, R square and adjusted R square. The table represents the value of R is 0.607 which is the best level of prediction. The value of R Square is 0.369. It is the coefficient of determination. The value of R square represents that the 36.90% variation of services quality in student satisfaction.

TABLE VI  
MODEL FIT

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	.607	.369	.338

The analysis of variable table is showing the model fit of the study. The table represents the significant value is 0.00 which is greater than the value of  $\alpha=0.05$ . It means the model is significant.

TABLE VII  
ANOVA

Model	Df	F	Sig.
Regression	5	12.147	.000
Residual	104		
Total	109		

The coefficient table represents the unstandardized coefficient value of the service quality antecedent and significant values. The unstandardized value of tangibility is 0.130. It shows the positive relationship with the student satisfaction. It means that one unit of tangibility increase there will be an increase of 0.130 units of student satisfaction. The reliability represents its standardized value as 0.189. It also depicts the positive relationship between the reliability and student satisfaction. It means that when one unit in reliability, increased there will be an increase of 0.189 units in student satisfaction. The responsiveness depicts the value of  $\beta$  is -.126. There is a negative relation between the responsiveness and student satisfaction. It means that when one unit increase in responsiveness there will be decrease of .126 units of student satisfaction. The assurance is showing the value of assurance is .391. There is a positive relationship between assurance and student satisfaction. One unit increase of assurance there will be increase of .391 units in student satisfaction. The unstandardized value of empathy is .293. There is a positive relationship between the empathy and student satisfaction. When one unit of assurance will increase there will be increased of .391 units in assurance.

TABLE VIII  
PROPERTIES OF VARIABLES

Variables	B	Sig.
Constant	.282	.542
Tangibility	.130	.122
Reliability	.189	.037
Responsiveness	-.126	.144
Assurance	.391	.000
Empathy	.293	.029

## VII. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

According to Kotler and Keller, (2012) when expectations are increased than the actual performance is called satisfaction. The expectation and perception of African students on higher education in Malaysian universities are high. When the actual the performanc of the private institions meets the expectation of private instituions than it said to be satisfied. The private instituions which are providing the higher studies in Malaysia focuses on the services quality.

A total of 124 African student who were studying in Malaysian private instituions participated in the survey. There is about 2% of repondents are failed to compete the major

portion of the questionnaire. There were 76% of respondents are male and 24% of respondents are female.

TABLE IX  
SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Demographics	Classification	N	% of Respondents
Gender	Male	82	74%
	Female	29	26%
Course Undertaken	Master	84	76%
	Doctorate	25	23%
	Post Doctorate	2	2%
Age	20-25 years	29	26%
	25.01-30 years	55	50%
	30.01-35 years	13	12%
	35.01-40 years	11	10%
	40.01-45 years	3	3%

The significant column shows that the values of service quality factors. The significant value of tangibility is .122. The sig. value is greater than the value of  $\alpha$  (i.e.  $\alpha=.05$ ). The H1a hypothesis is rejected. It shows that there is an insignificant relation between the tangible and student satisfaction. According to the study of Ismail et al., (2013) has also supported the hypothesis.

The significant value of reliability is .037 which is less than the value of 0.05. It proves the significant relationship between the reliability and student satisfaction of African students who are studying the higher education in Malaysian private institutions. This study also accepts the H1b hypothesis. The study of Hassan et al., (2013) confirms the relationship of reliability and satisfaction. But the study of Ismail et al., (2013) not supports the H1b hypothesis.

The H1c hypothesis represents that there is a significant relationship with student satisfaction. The significant value of responsiveness is 0.144. It is greater than 0.05. It does not support the hypothesis and it rejects the H1c hypothesis. This hypothesis does not prove the relationship of responsiveness to student satisfaction. The study of Hassan et al., (2013) also supports the H1c hypothesis. But the study of Ismail et al., (2013) does not support the study.

The H1d hypothesis represents the significant relationship between the assurance and student satisfaction. The significant value of assurance is 0.00. This value is less than the value of 0.05. It shows the significant relationship between the assurance and student relationship. Hypothesis H1d is accepted. H1d hypothesis is also supported by the study of Hassan et al., (2013). But the study of Ismail et al., (2013) represents the insignificant relationship.

The hypothesis H1e represents that there is a significant relationship between the empathy and student satisfaction. The significant value of empathy is .029 which is less than 0.05. It confirms the significant relationship between the empathy and student satisfaction. There is a significant relationship between the empathy and satisfaction (Hassan et al., 2013). The study also confirms the relationship between the empathy and satisfaction (Ismail et al., 2013).

TABLE X  
SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Hypothesis	Sig.	Accepted / Rejected
H1a: Tangibility has a significant relationship with student satisfaction.	.122	Rejected
H1b: Reliability has a significant relationship with student satisfaction.	.037	Accepted
H1c: Responsiveness have a significant relationship with student satisfaction.	.144	Rejected
H1d: Assurance has a significant relationship with Student satisfaction.	.000	Accepted
H1e: Empathy has a significant relationship with Student satisfaction.	.029	Accepted

The study also is depicted that showing that African student are studying at the top ranked Malaysian private universities. They have negative perceptions about the quality of the universities. It also observed the appearance of the staff, equipment and physical facilities in the higher education do not meet fulfil the expectation of the African students. This is against the perception of the African students. This kind of service quality will leads to dissatisfaction of the students. Faculty members are competent enough that they will deliver the agreed services accurately to their student. It is the good sign of satisfaction of the students. The private institutions have competent faculty staff for their students. The management and faculty members of the private institutions are not student oriented. They are not providing quick services or facilities to their students. The faculty member of the private institutions has courteous behaviour and they have enough knowledge that they can build the confidence and trust among the students. The faculty is airing and attentive to students.

The future study may also conduct the pre and post student focus about the image of the higher education private institutions. The sample size may also be enhanced to check the responses of the students.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

The discoveries revealed that there is a gap between African students' expectations and perceptions of educational services in Malaysian private universities. Private universities should focus on the quality of the study rather than the quantity of the students. The researcher believe that the sustainability of the growth of overseas students and African students in particular in attending Malaysian universities necessitates improvement in educational service quality and understanding of cultural differences for better accommodation of such difference. This study examined only African students' expectations and perceptions. Future research is needed to look other nationalities of foreign students to get a comprehensive understanding of overseas students 'concerns.

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