Abstract:

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to assess the service quality perceptions and expectations of international postgraduate students studying in selected Malaysian universities.

Design/methodology/approach: A gap analysis based on a modified SERVQUAL instrument was used on 522 international postgraduate students who were selected based on stratified sampling of the top five public universities. The analysis started with descriptive analysis followed by factor and reliability analyses. Single mean t-tests were conducted to assess the significance of the gap analysis based on three methods: item-by-item analysis; construct-by-construct analysis; and computation of a single measure of service quality. Findings: Five factors in the form of professionalism, reliability, hospitality, tangibles, and commitment were uncovered. The single mean t-tests for the three methods of gap analysis indicated that all the items of perception were perceived as significantly negative as compared to expectations. Practical implications: The university senior management would benefit by knowing which gaps should receive the greatest attention in order to gain competitive and comparative advantages. Also, the findings from the study will assist in designing a quality system that involves not just the employees, but also the students. Originality/value: Ironically, most studies on service quality at institutions of higher education tend to concentrate on the undergraduate students and/or the education providers. As the international postgraduate segment is more lucrative, this research is timely and is expected to present significantly different results from those found in most literature.