

CRITERIA OF INSTITUTIONAL SELECTION, SERVICE QUALITY,
ADJUSTMENT AND SATISFACTION AMONG INTERNATIONAL
POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

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To my beloved mother and father for their unflagging love and relentless support throughout my life

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ABSTRACT

Increasing trends of students going abroad for further studies in the last two decades has motivated higher education institutions to find the criteria of institutional selection of international students, improve the service quality of education and reduce the adjustment problems of these students to keep them satisfied. Malaysia is one of the countries which always try to achieve high academic standards in the education system to reach the global market. For this purpose, this study used two sets of quantitative questionnaire and distributed them among two groups of international postgraduate students in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). The first questionnaire is SERVQUAL, Adjustment and Satisfaction (SAS) questionnaire which was distributed among 353 respondents in UTM. Four dimensions of service quality namely tangible, consistency, assurance and compassion were obtained. Furthermore, high level of adjustment and low level of service quality and satisfaction from the respondents' perspective were observed. In addition, the study represented the relationship and differences in these based on demography. The second instrument is Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) Questionnaire which was distributed to 30 international postgraduate students in UTM. AHP findings indicated that "Academic Qualification" is the most satisfactory criterion of institutional selection while "Study Abroad" is the lowest. Additionally, this study was able to show that international postgraduate students in UTM have negative perceptions of education service quality in this university. In the case of UTM, international postgraduate students tend to compare UTM with the education in academic universities of US, UK, Australia and Europe as the standard and general class for higher education and they may also compare the fees with service quality in UTM.

ABSTRAK

Peningkatan trend pelajar yang pergi ke luar negara untuk melanjutkan pelajaran dalam dua dekad lepas telah mendorong institusi pengajian tinggi untuk mencari kriteria pemilihan institusi bagi pelajar antarabangsa, meningkatkan kualiti perkhidmatan pendidikan dan mengurangkan masalah penyesuaian pelajar-pelajar ini dari segi kepuasan. Malaysia adalah salah satu negara yang sentiasa cuba untuk mencapai taraf akademik yang tinggi dalam sistem pendidikan untuk mencapai pasaran global. Bagi tujuan ini, kajian ini menggunakan dua set soal selidik kuantitatif dan mengagihkannya kepada dua kumpulan pelajar pascasiswazah antarabangsa di Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). Soal selidik yang pertama adalah berbentuk *SERVQUAL*, *Adjustment and Satisfaction* (SAS) yang diedarkan kepada 353 responden di UTM. Empat dimensi kualiti perkhidmatan yang dikenali sebagai ketara, konsisten, jaminan dan ikhsan telah didedahkan. Tambahan pula, kajian ini menunjukkan hubungan di antara dimensi-dimensi berdasarkan demografi. Instrumen kedua adalah soal selidik Proses Analisis Hierarki atau AHP yang telah diedarkan kepada 30 orang pelajar pascasiswazah antarabangsa di UTM. Penemuan AHP menunjukkan bahawa "Taraf Pendidikan" adalah kriteria yang paling memuaskan dalam pemilihan institusi manakala "Belajar Luar Negara" adalah kriteria terendah. Selain itu, kajian ini juga menunjukkan bahawa pelajar pascasiswazah antarabangsa di UTM mempunyai persepsi negatif terhadap kualiti perkhidmatan pendidikan di universiti ini. Dalam kes UTM, pelajar pascasiswazah antarabangsa cenderung untuk membandingkan pendidikan UTM dengan pendidikan di universiti akademik di USA, UK, Australia dan Eropah sebagai kelas bertaraf tinggi dan umum untuk pengajian tinggi dan mereka turut membandingkan yuran universiti dengan tahap kualiti perkhidmatan yang diberikan oleh UTM.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	-	Analysis of Variance
AHP	-	Analytical Hierarchy Process
HEI	-	Higher Education Institutions
MCDM	-	Multi Criteria Decision Making
NCES	-	National Center for National Statistics
OECD	-	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
SAS	-	SERVQUAL, Adjustment and Satisfaction
SLA	-	Second Language Acquisition
SPSS	-	Statistical Package for Social Science
TL	-	Target Language
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UTM	-	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
ICT	-	Information and Communications Technology

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The interest of studying and educating abroad has been increasing in last two decades and becoming more common every day, especially at the postgraduate levels. Universities in all around the world have always attracted international students even in the mid-sixteenth century. According to Naidoo (2009) and UNESCO (2009), the numbers of international students in overseas have been growing from 150,000 to 2.8 million since 1955 to 2007.

Students in different countries in all around the world wish for studying in higher education level in the top ranking universities with the high service quality and facilities. When a student has made a decision to study in another country, the afterwards decision is picked out an appropriate country to education. One of the countries which provides and offers such facilities for international students is Malaysia. It's well-known and high-ranking universities, the low cost of education and life comparing with other international universities in Europe and USA, and the similar educational methods which are comparable with other famous universities around the world are some reasons for international students to choose Malaysia as

their destination to continue their studying in higher education levels.

All the international students face to some issues as newcomers in Malaysia, so, finding and solving these issues are necessary for creating the satisfaction among international students and motivate them to continue their studying in this country and recommend this country to others. One of these issues is adjustment. To become a great player and enjoy the benefits of having international students, Malaysia basically needs to understand the adjustment issues faced by international students and provide the right kind of supports and academic standards.

One of the most important goals of Malaysian government is having the high academic standards in the education system; so to reach this aim; Drucker (1985) considered quality as a subjective concept and defined it as conformance to specifications of a customer. Babakus *et al.* (2003) described quality as a buzzword which specifies the strengths and weaknesses of a product or service distribution by an organization. Customers will only be satisfied when quality fits or exceed their expectations (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1990).

All service organizations to compete with their competitors in their market need to preserve their service quality in good level. According to Zeithmal and Bitner (1996), service quality is the major indicator or long-standing profit of an organization to reach the loyalty of their customers. The basic tool for an organization to be successful is supporting and improving the level of service quality (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1990). To reach this goal, a suitable quality control mechanism is necessary to keep the standard up in any organization and for upgrading the quality of service, the evaluation is used. It is a way to identify the level of delivery quality for customers to obtain recognition of the service.

For finding the standard quality in higher education systems such as universities in Malaysia, as the first step, it is so important to know and perceive the expectation of international students before their entrance to Malaysia and then their perception after their arrival. These expectations and perceptions of international students are related to the service quality of Malaysian universities, which are offered to students.

Students how are international give feedback to their family and friends in their home countries afterwards beginning their study in a foreign country. Previous researches such as Bodycott (2009); Maringe and Carter (2007); Gatfield and Chen (2006); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) noted that the viewpoints of international students are extremely affected with suggestions and recommendations they receive from the others who have the experience of educating abroad. So keeping students satisfied can have a great role to attract new students to Malaysia.

One of the Malaysian universities which has played a big role in attracting international students, is Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) with over 5000 students from different nationalities and different parts of the world such as China, South Korea, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Iran, Turkey, Yemen and many Arab countries, but there are some shortages, difficulties and problems, especially in such places where people from different cultures and minds gather and live together for a long time. The international postgraduate students of this university who are studying for Master and PhD degrees can be very good samples to distinguish the criteria of institutional selection, service quality, adjustment and satisfaction issues among all the international students in Malaysia.

The focus of this study is on the criteria of institutional selection, service quality, adjustment and satisfaction issues among international postgraduate students in UTM, consequently, is not on the original decisions of international students to come and study in Malaysia; but on the possible future decisions of these international students regarding further study and the future recommendations they

offer to their friends and family in their home countries to encourage them to come to this country. And it is a way of introducing and marketing Malaysian universities as a good option for higher educational opportunities to the world.

1.2 Background of the Study

Nowadays, studying in higher institutions has developed as one of the sectors that are significant to improve the business environment in Malaysia. Higher education sector alone gives a high income to the government every year. This profit was producing from the international students' enrolment in the higher institutions. In the perspective of Paige (1990), the international students are individuals who temporarily exist in a country other than their own country, in order to take part in international educational exchange as students.

Bohm *et al.*, (2002) estimated that in the year 2000, there were 1.8 million international students registered in institutions of higher education around the world, and they predicted that there would be a fourfold increase in this number by 2025. Therefore, the Malaysian government is motivated in encouraging the Malaysian education sectors to reach to this global level. Private and public institutions or organization of higher learning is compelled to present high level quality of higher education system with the undertaking to get the center of the powerful education system in the Asia (Tan, 2008).

Malaysian government has to attract more international students to its higher education sectors to achieve the global level in its learning sectors. Attracting the students who wants to continue their studying in higher educational sections in international universities and institutes needs the complete and comprehensive

information about their necessities, assumption of the quality service of the educational environments and criteria of institutional selection which are related to quality. The different aspects of service quality in higher education institutions is presented by many previous researchers, such as: (Kelsey and Bond, 2001), educational service quality (Abdullah, 2006), personal rationale, institution mage, programmed appraisal (Cubillio *et al.*, 2006), education stature (Baharun, 2004), prospects of occupation, infrastructure of universities (Veloutsou *et al.*, 2004), environment (Mazzarol and Souter, 2002) cost (Mazzarol and Souter, 2002), and also facilities (Mazzarol and Souter, 2002; Baharun, 2004).

After attracting the international students to the academic environments the next step is keeping the satisfaction of these students and this requires the good understanding of their needs and issues that they will face in the new environment where they will put in. There are lots of issues for international students one of them is the adjustment issue. Selltiz *et al.* (1963) remarked that foreign students face with many changes in their academic life and could adjust with them hard.

There are a variety of previous researches on international students experience change and adjustment difficulties when engaging in international education. Such as, noteworthy perception into international students' adjusting issues and successfulness in English speaking universities (Andrade, 2006) and academic stress, cultural differences, and language challenges as adjusting issues for international students (Zhai, 2004). Lin and Yi (1997) agreed which international students might have trouble to accommodate the different accents of the teacher and understanding class lectures, again and again need to more time to read their books and they are regularly incapable to persuasive their comprehension due to their limited vocabulary. Thomas and Althen (1989) have added that the international students can suffer from a variety of adjustment issues, which can include: depression/helplessness, hostility toward the host country, anxiety, and over-identification with the home country, withdrawal, homesickness, and loneliness.

Keeping students satisfied are so important and vital for all educational institutions because international students give feedback to their family and friends in their home countries by evaluating their academic life after beginning their study abroad. Many researches such as Bodycott (2009); Maringe and Carter (2007); Gatfield and Chen (2006); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) reported that choosing the academic destination of international students are seriously influenced by recommendations and suggestions of others who are students in abroad. So keeping students satisfied can have a great role to attract new international students.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

In the academic world the customers are students and they have some expectation of their new higher education environment before they start their studies and some perception after their entrance. Attracting the students who want to continue their studies in abroad, needs the complete and comprehensive information about their necessities and criteria of institutional selection, adjustment issues, expectations and perceptions of the service quality and satisfaction issues in educational environments.

International students confront many issues after they start their studies abroad; one of these issues is adjustment. The foreign students face with many changes in their academic life and could adjust with them hard (Selltiz *et al.*, 1963). The adjustment problems of international students can have variable reasons such as differences between cultures, food habits, language, and communication. According to Andrade (2006:147), “academic adjustment problems for international students tend to focus on language issues”. Zhai (2004:101) also described that “meeting academic demands was the most overwhelming difficulty for international students during their adjustment stage”. Finding the level of adjustment among students is so vital for the countries which want to attract more international students to their

higher education institutes because by solving the adjustment problems they can make a comfortable atmosphere for international students and accordingly increase the level of satisfaction among these students.

In the other hand, in the opinion of Gamage *et al.* (2008) to compete with other universities continue improvement on service quality in higher institutions is fundamental because service quality is vital for a university to continue their competition and existence. Increasing the service quality level of a university can help the students to solve their adjustment problems more easy and it has the direct effect on the students' satisfaction. Marzo-Navarro *et al.* (2005) considered that the service quality which has an effect on the students' satisfaction will consequently influence students' recommendation to others as support in future as well as the word of mouth marketing. So finding the service quality dimensions which are apparent among international students are very essential. The other important issue is finding the preferences of the criteria of quality in higher education (Tsinidou *et al.*, 2010).

Furthermore, detecting the relationship between service quality, adjustment issues and satisfaction of international students in higher education institutes and also, the effect of demography on the level of these factors are always noticeable point because different countries in all around the world try to reach the global level in their higher education institutes, to achieve this goal they have to attract more international students to their higher education institutes and universities and for this reason they are trying to increase their academic service quality and find the adjustment issues of these students to obtain this ability to keep the students satisfied.

Consequently, Malaysian higher education institutes and universities like the other competitors want to reach the global level, so they tries to improve to a sufficient level of educational quality to attract more international students. In addition, to follow the National Higher Education Strategic Plan in 2007 that was launch by Prime Minister of Malaysia, UTM is set to develop into an vital player in the global education environment in its target to attract at least 50% of its

postgraduate and 5% of its undergraduate students from abroad by the year 2013 (UTM, 2011b). To reach to this level, Malaysian higher education institutes have to understand and develop the service quality which can overcome the various kinds of adjustment problems that the international students will face and then make and keep the international students satisfied.

Based on mentioned issues the reason for conducting this study is to assess international postgraduate students' criteria of institutional selection and service quality factors in higher education and find the adjustment and satisfaction issues among these students in UTM to upgrade an overall service quality in this university and also, attract more international students in future to compete with the other international higher institutions around the world.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The present study seeks to look into the expectation and perception of international postgraduate students from the service quality of their university and find the adjustment issues of these students, which is led to satisfaction of these students. The objectives of this study are as follow:

- To investigate what service quality dimensions are among the international postgraduate students.
- To determine the level of service quality, adjustment and satisfaction of international postgraduate students in higher education levels.
- To assess the relationship between service quality, adjustment and satisfaction of international postgraduate students.
- To develop the differences in the level of service quality, adjustment and satisfaction based on demography.

- To evaluate the international postgraduate students' assessments of the criteria of institutional selection in higher education.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the objectives and the requirements, this study attempts to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What service quality dimensions are apparent among international postgraduate students?
2. What are the level of service quality, adjustment and satisfaction of international postgraduate students?
3. What is the relationship between service quality, adjustment and satisfaction?
4. Are there differences in the level of service quality, adjustment and satisfaction based on demography?
5. What are the international postgraduate students' assessments of the criteria of institutional selection in higher education?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is determining the service quality, adjustment and satisfaction issues among international postgraduate students in UTM. The results of this study benefit numerous groups of people in UTM such as the management of the university, the staffs of the university, and the international students to produce the better marketing for the UTM.

In UTM, the people who are working in management sections are responsible for improving the service quality of university in different parts to be able to attract more students and compete with other universities in Malaysia and world. To increase the ranking of UTM University, it must develop its quality and facilities in various parts of university and make the students satisfied. This study will be beneficial for UTM management to achieve these goals; it can be useful to recognize the adjustment problem of students when they enter to and their point of view about service quality of UTM and their demands to keep them satisfied.

In UTM, staff of the university are the people responsible for giving the service to students so it is so important for them to know which services are necessary for students and which level of quality can be satisfied them. This study will help the staffs of UTM to know the adjustment problems of international students and give them new ideas to know how to treat with these students.

This study will also be significant for the international students because it provides an obvious perspective of their needs from service quality of UTM University and better understanding of their adjustment problems; thus giving them this opportunity to express their needs from university and the ways that they will be satisfied from the situation of their studying.

The present research relates to the inspiring factors to get better on the service quality and adjustment issues to please the students, particularly the international students. In addition, the results will also supply to the advertising policy devised to magnetize more international students in prospect since the factors resolute for the option of study purpose usually are affected by the satisfaction of students. It is significant for UTM to intend good-looking instruction advertising plans in future.

In addition, the results of this revise can also be a positioned for other Malaysian higher institutions, such as confidential institutions and public institutions which the issue of service quality and adjustment issues are significant things to draw international students' option of purpose as well as to get better the excellence of the education served. The evaluation of students' awareness and understanding of students' requirements are vital supplies for a higher institution to please customer in order to vie with other higher institutions around the world (Wright and O'Neill, 2002).

This study attempts to achieve the following expectations at the end for making it possible to be beneficial for the above groups.

1. It is expected to find out several service quality dimensions among international postgraduate students at the end of the research.
2. It is expected to investigate whether or not, there is relationship between service quality, adjustment and satisfaction at the end of the study.
3. It is expected to investigate the preferences of international post graduate students through the quality factors in higher education at the end of the study.
4. It is expected to find out if there is difference between the level of service quality, adjustment and satisfaction based on the demography at the end of the study.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The aim of this study is to find the preference of criteria of institutional selection, service quality, adjustment and satisfaction issues among international students in Malaysian Universities. The scope of this project is Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and the respondents are limited to the international postgraduate

students from different faculties of two campus of this university in Skudai, Johor Bahru and Kula Lumpur.

1.8 Purpose of the Study

One of the important strategies of Malaysian government is to strategically develop their higher education markets. For expanding these markets attracting more international students to this country is so important and for achieving this goal finding the factors that leads to satisfaction of international students is very significant. The international students have some expectations before they come to Malaysia and these expectations will change to their perception after their entrance.

The service quality of Malaysian universities will effect on the expectation of international students. The quality of academic services and facilities that any Malaysian universities can offer to their students can have a great influence on students' academic life. Finding the preferences of criteria of institutional selection can help to improve the level of service quality in higher education institutions. In the other hand, international students will face many issues when they experience the new country, one of the fundamental one is the adjustment issue. They always compare the new country to their own country from the different aspects and sometimes they decide to return their own countries.

The study has sensible significance for advertising practitioners as well as researchers. Market research should be demeanor to recognize the requirements, wants and prospects of international students and then make sure that those requirements, wants and prospects are gotten together. It is significant that criticism is required from students so that the student knowledge is enhanced.

In fact, the purpose of this study is to discover the preferences of criteria of institutional selection which are related to quality, various service quality factors which are required by any international students in higher education environment, adjustment and satisfaction issues faced by these students in Malaysia and then find the effect of different demography on service quality, adjustment and satisfaction of international postgraduate students. In the end, this study wants to make some recommendations to improve the service quality of higher education levels and solve the adjustment issues to make the international students satisfied and lead them to the marketing of the Malaysian universities.

1.9 Assumptions and Limitations of study

There are three assumptions in this study as follow:

1. The truth of the response given by the participants.
2. The ability of the respondents to fully understanding of the questions which were posed in the research instruments.
3. The unbiased response would be solicited from the participants.

This study is not without limitations. Data and information for the study is based on the responses from the international postgraduate students of different faculties in UTM and the study will be carried in two campus of this university in Johor Bahru and Kula Lumpur. The comparatively small model gained via the expediency sampling approach at a single university means that the consequences are not making simpler to all international students in the Malaysia. In addition, the sample had some prejudice toward international postgraduate students and so was not fully envoy of the student inhabitants at the university where the study was mannered. Generalization of the study's results is also incomplete by the

information that the learning was demeanor at extremely grade and well-respected research-intensive university in Malaysian states.

There are some limitation in finance, geography and time for this study that they are leaded to choose the probabilistic sampling method. It means that this study has some limitation in finance because we don't have enough budgets to travel to different universities of Malaysia and get the information from all the international postgraduate students in this country and this fact create the limitation in geography because it will limit the study to specific university in Malaysia that it is UTM in its two campus in Skudai, Johor Bahru and Kula Lumpu.

Gathering the data and information is the time consuming occasion but this research has time limitation and it must be written in the Specified time. The other limitation of this research is in instrument and it assumes that the respondents will answer truthfully the items which presented in the both survey and AHP questionnaires.

It is obvious that there is scope for both advertising practitioners and researchers to do more research into the decision-making procedure of international students, particularly with look upon to their approaches, attitudes and estimations on international division campuses, which have so far been mainly unnoticed in the literature. So, the consequence of this study will be limited just to the international postgraduate students in UTM but it may widespread to wrap all the universities in Malaysia.

1.10 Definition of Key Terms

There are a few terminologies that play the role of key words and frequently be used in this study.

International students:

International students who are Non-citizens of the country in which they study and they are not permanent residents of their country of study, or those who received their prior education in another country (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2010).

Service quality:

Zeithaml (1988); Parasuraman et al. (1988) identified quality of service as an attitude form– a long time comprehensive evaluation. Moreover, Lewis and Booms (1983) indicate quality of service as a tool of how well a delivered service matches the expectations of the customers.

Adjustment:

Halonen & Santrok (1997) stated the meaning of adjustment as “a psychological procedure of adapting to cope with, problems managing, challenging, activities and needs of daily life”. Adjustment is the level of a human psychological consolation with a variety of point of view of a fresh setting (Black and Gregersen, 1991).

Satisfaction:

The definition of satisfaction in the perception of Oliver (1981) is as “the emotion react of a disconfirmation experience which play the role as the base approach level and is consumption specific”. Kotler and Clarke (1987) also identified satisfaction as “affirm touched with an individual who has live through of execution or an effect

which gratify his or her expectation. In the view of Palacio et al. (2002), the expectation may go considerably in the preceding time that students even join to the higher education system; recommendation is consequential to the Prober to decide first then trying to enter to the university.

1.11 Plan of the Study

The first chapter of this thesis presents the background of the research and an historical review of Service quality, Adjustment and Satisfaction issues among international students in higher education levels. It also outlines the statement of research problem, objectives, research questions, significance of the study, statement of the purpose, scope and limitation of this research. In addition, it provides important definitions of the key terms of the study. The second chapter will be devoted to the literature review of this study. The review of literature will start by discussing issues related to globalization and the Higher Education Institution (HEI) and it will continue by some issues about international students, service quality, students' adjustment and satisfaction, the demographic factors for this research and criteria of institutional selection. Subsequently, the theoretical framework of this study will be elaborated. The third chapter will discuss the research design of this study. It will also provide an overview of the methods and instruments as well as sampling frame for the study. The chapter will end with a discussion on the research framework and research methodology. Rationales for using two set of quantitative questionnaires (SAS and AHP Questionnaire) and using advanced statistical methods will be provided throughout the chapter. The fourth chapter will illustrate the analyses of this research and finally the fifth chapter will explain the conclusion and recommendations of this research.

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