

# Service Quality Attributes: Perspective of Newly Registered Postgraduate Students by Research

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**Abstract** — For service industry, it is rather difficult to measure quality of service since services are intangible in nature. Nevertheless, effort on measuring service quality will have to be done to form a basis of monitoring, control and planning. This study looks into the service quality attributes of postgraduate programme by research by having newly registered students to participate by answering the survey form. The findings confirm other research in this area in that lecturers play a major role in education. However, leisure seems to be the lower end of agreement if compared to academic, cost and industry link.

**Keywords** - Service Quality, Postgraduate, attributes, empirical

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## I. Introduction

Malaysia postgraduate intake by universities has seen an increment from 4,150 to 6,275 for PhD, and 18,886 to 22,170 for Masters from 2009 to 2013. Its enrollment has increased from 14,669 to 29,280 for PhD, and 44,880 to 63,463 for Masters (Malaysia Higher Education, 2014). According to Chiao-Ling and Chapman (2014), UNESCO Institute for Statistics had reported that the respondents viewed that government of Malaysia and Thailand investing in graduate education will contribute to the national economic development. The Malaysian respondents viewed that the substantial investment in education will build educated workforce that in turn will attract international investment and will boost national economic development. It further stated that the graduate enrolment has increased by 400% over the last decade. With the increment in intake and enrollment of postgraduate students and the significant role it plays in country's development, what are the service quality attributes for postgraduate programmes? Which of the service quality attributes are more important for postgraduate students?

## II. Service Quality Attributes

Service as defined by Oxford Dictionaries is the action of helping or doing work for someone. According to Heizer, Render and Munson (2017), services are presented by the fact that an organization do not produce product, thus the nature of service is intangible. It is produced and consumed simultaneously, unique, high customer interaction, inconsistent product definition, often knowledge based, its services are dispersed, and quality is hard to evaluate. Quality on the other hand is the ability of a product or service to meet customer needs. Thus service quality is ensuring customer needs are being provided in a business where product and customers expectation are intangible. Service quality is usually associated with Parasuraman, Zeithaml and

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Beny (1985) SERVQUAL's five dimensions that are tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. SERVQUAL measures the perception of respondents on the service that they received based on the five dimension. Few studies on higher education (Abili, Fatemeh, & Afarinandehbin, 2012) and postgraduate education (Dursun, Oskaybas, & Gokmen, 2013) used SERVQUAL to measure the quality of service. Angell, Troy and Phil (2008) conducted service quality in postgraduate education using Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA). Their service quality attributes are academic, leisure, industry links and cost/value for money. Their findings were that academic and industry links were most critical to postgraduates. This study had used Angell et al. (2016) service quality attributes since its attributes are directly related to university particularly postgraduate programmes.

### III. Methodology

The research was conducted in a non-contrived setting with minimal interference from the researcher. It was a cross-sectional study with individual as the unit of analysis. It is an empirical study in which survey forms were distributed to 240 newly registered students by research at a research seminar conducted by the university using convenient sampling method. According to Tabachnick & Fidell (2013), for a study with four (4) independent variables, the minimum required number of sample is 108. Programmes by research were chosen since the manner of studying is independent and subject to the arrangement between the student and the supervisor. Out of 190 returned survey forms only 148 were usable. Thus the response rate is 62%. The items for the survey form for service quality attributes are adapted from Angell et al. using Likert Scale of 1-5 in which 5 is strongly agree. The analysis used for the study includes descriptive statistics, factor analysis and reliability testing.

### IV. Findings

Seventy-six percent of the students are female and 89.2% of the total 148 are between the age of 21 to 35 years old. Twenty-four percent are pursuing their PhD while the rest are pursuing their masters. A factor analysis with varimax rotation was carried out to validate whether the four constructs are distinct. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was above 0.6, that is 0.884 while the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (Chi-Square: 1564.07). Three items were removed because of cross-loading. These items were location safe, variety modules, near mosque and opportunities for meeting fellow students. The remaining items are as shown in Table 1. The Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient are good for Academic, Leisure and Industry and acceptable for Cost.

Table 1: Factor Analysis for Service Attributes

Items	Component			
	Academic	Leisure	Industry Link	Cost
Regular access to lecturers	<b>0.793</b>	0.105	0.174	-0.048
Variety of library books and journals	<b>0.761</b>	0.204	-0.054	0.016
Practical skills are taught	<b>0.754</b>	0.087	0.038	0.194
Transferable skills take place	<b>0.727</b>	0.275	0.15	0.161
Lecturers skilled and engaging	<b>0.696</b>	0.065	0.087	0.168

Computing and web facilities	<b>0.654</b>	0.356	0.198	0.187
Postgraduate programmes are reputable	<b>0.623</b>	0.104	0.303	0.179
Near café and social meeting places	0.108	<b>0.781</b>	0.145	0.016
Sports and recreational facilities	0.209	<b>0.69</b>	0.249	0.091
Near mall	-0.115	<b>0.681</b>	-0.034	0.096
Attractive campus layout	0.38	<b>0.669</b>	0.19	0.122
Places on campus to relax during the day	0.302	<b>0.645</b>	0.084	0.19
Quiet study place	0.393	<b>0.599</b>	0.165	0.057
Industry contacts	0.217	0.159	0.854	0.12
Helpful career services	0.205	0.197	<b>0.815</b>	0.135
Tuition fees are charged at reasonable price	0.205	0.041	0.033	0.832
Accommodation reasonable priced	0.122	0.286	0.21	<b>0.768</b>
Cronbach Alpha	0.881	0.828	0.865	0.647

When comparing the mean score for items under the Academic construct, *lecturers skilled and engaging* has the highest mean score (4.43) followed by *variety of library books and journals* (4.34) and *regular access to lecturers* (4.30). It needs to be mentioned here that all items are above the mean score of 4.

When comparing the mean score for items under the Leisure construct, the highest mean score is *quiet study place* (3.96), followed by *attractive campus layout* (3.80), and *near café and social meeting places* (3.79). All items are above 3.5.

For Industry Link, higher of the two is *industry contact* (4.10) followed by *helpful career services* (4.05). For costs, higher of the two is *tuition fees are charged reasonable price* (4.43) followed by *accommodation reasonable priced* (4.03).

Overall, the mean score for Academic is the highest (4.25) followed by Cost (4.23), Industry Link (4.07) and lastly Leisure (3.75).

## V. Discussion

The survey was carried out on the perception of newly registered student by research. Since they have not had any experience of dealing with the supervisor, administrators, and friends, it can be concluded that the result could be used in attracting new students. Overall Academic construct scores the highest mean, reflecting the very essence of what a university stands for that is the quality of the lecturers and resources. However for the fees, the students have had paid the registration fees and they have given a good scoring with a mean score of 4.43 reflecting that the university fees is reasonable. They further would prefer industrial linkages but low scoring on agree for leisure.

With this result, the university is able to prioritize on the importance of enhancing and maintaining the service quality of postgraduate programmes. It would need to be reminded that the result of this survey cannot be used for Diploma and Bachelors since the expectations in the curriculum is different from that of the postgraduate students. It would be interesting to find out the perception of the Diploma and Bachelors' students on the service quality attributes. This study could be further enhanced by doing a multiple regression on students' satisfaction and adding in qualitative findings.

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