ANALYZING SERVICE QUALITY IN A HIGHER EDUCATION:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi perspektif mahasiswa, mengenai kualitas pelayanan di International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah fenomenologis, fenomenologis adalah pendekatan naturalistik untuk memperoleh informasi mengenai pengalaman siswa tentang kualitas layanan yang mereka rasakan. Melalui kuesioner terbuka, wawancara dan observasi, hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kualitas pelayanan yang dirasakan mahasiswa bervariasi. Dalam perspekti mahasiswa, sarana fisik secara akademik dirasa cukup bagus, akan tetapi dalam hal tenaga administrasi atau staff dirasa belum sesuai harapan. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan kepada manajemen universitas untuk memberikan perhatian pada isu-isu terkait: peningkakan kualitas staf, peningkakan sistem keamanan di kampus dan untuk mereformasi atau memperbaiki kantor CPS dan Keuangan.

Kata-kata kunci : *Kualitas, Pelayanan, Perguruan Tinggi*

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore, from students' perspective, how students perceived the service quality in International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). A phenomenological method was used; it is a naturalistic approach to acquire information on students experience about the service quality that they are feeling through open-ended questioner, interviews and observations. The result reveals that students perceived the service quality in different ways. The study found that the university is performing fairly enough in term of physical facilities and academic staff, but in term of administration staffs less than students' expectation. The study recommends university's management to give attention to the following issues: to improve the quality of staffs, to improve the security guard in this campus and to reform or refine the office of CPS and Finance.

Keywords: *Quality, Service, Higher Education*

Introduction

The competition among the higher educations is increasing today, because not only the emerging new higher education institutions but also distance learning (e-learning) which is provided by foreign universities. This condition makes higher education institutions forced to improve quality and performance of their services based on the continuous evaluation toward service provided (Christensen et al., 2003). By doing evaluation, university will get valuable data and information which are very useful for the university administrators as well as the academic staffs to provide plans and solutions for the continuous improvement of the services and the programs which is offered by university.

Over the years, a number of researches have evaluated service quality in university (Hill, 1995, Ford et al., 1999; Abdullah, 2006; Jusoh et al. 2004). Interestingly however, experts in this area have yet to agree on a common measure for service quality. In the last decade alone, there were emerging instruments to measure service quality

included SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al, 1988), SERVPERF (Cronin and Taylor, 1992), Evaluated Performance (EP) (Teas, 1993), and HedPERF (Higher Education Performance) (Abdullah (2006). Clearly, these differing measures for service quality suggest that this concept is multi-dimensional and highly complex.

To evaluate the dimensions of service quality, most of researchers used quantitative analysis. However, since services relies on interaction between people during service delivery (Hill, 1995), the heavy reliance of quantitative techniques maybe not be enough to draw an understanding the complexity and dynamic the nature of behavior toward service quality. This interactive nature of services creates many varying and volatile situations and also time dimensions in relation to access the services, and the process and period of time taken for service delivery, may require a longitudinal, continuous study in a research project on services (OøNeill, 2003). As a result, qualitative research is most appropriate as a mode inquires in behavior toward service quality.

In the light of these, this study will employ qualitative method using phenomenology. Phenomenology is an interpretative research methodology which is used to gain an understanding of the nature and meaning of lived experience by one or more individuals (Van-Manen, 1997, Creswell, 1998). The purpose of this study is to analyze the studentsø perception toward service quality in International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). It is hope that findings from the study will lead to answer the following questions:

1. What is the perception of students toward service quality in IIUM such as physical facilities, administration staffs and academic staffs?
2. Is there any gap between studentsø expectations and perceptions of service quality in this university?
3. Which attribute of service quality need to improve in this university?

In the remaining parts of this article, we will discuss about the of service quality in higher education, research methodology, major findings of the research and finally discussion and conclusion derived from the study.

Service Quality In Higher Education

Today, the higher education institutions have proceeded from a niche service consumed by small elite, to a mass market service in which increasing number of students (O'Neill and Palmer, 2004). In order to attract, serve and retain students, higher education institutions need to understand the student expectations and perceptions of service quality, because the fulfilling student expectation toward service quality can lead the higher education institutions become excellence (LeBlanc and Nguyen, 1997).

Understanding service quality within the university context entails an understanding as to what should be evaluated. Douglass et al. (2006) suggested three elements of service-product bundle in university can be evaluated: first, the physical facilities such as lecture and tutorial rooms, lighting, layout and catering. Second, the explicit services including: the knowledge level of staff, staff teaching ability, quality of academic staff, and easy of making appointment. Third, implicit service includes the treatment student by staff such as friendliness, approachability, and concern shown if the students have a problem.

Moreover, Chelladurai and Chang (2000) also recommended evaluating three dimensions of quality in university: first, the core service related to the performance of the promised service such as qualified lecturer, good administrations etc. core service is described as similar to the conceptualization of the reliability dimension in the Servqual instrument (developed by Parasuraman, et al., 1998). Second, physical context dimension is described as the quality of the facilities, the location, the equipment and tools used in the service. Physical context is described as similar to the concept of tangible dimension in the Servqual instrument. Third, the interpersonal interaction, it refers to the helping orientation and behavior of employee, courtesy and care toward customers. This dimension is described as similar to the conceptualization of the responsiveness, assurance and empathy of Servqual dimension.

Adee (1997) suggests that several universities characteristic may be useful in explaining the perceived quality service among students. He found factors like competent teaching, available staff for consultation, library service, computer facilities, recreation activities, class size, level and difficult subject content and student work load.

Joseph et al. (2005) conducted series focus groups and followed by survey 439 students. They found important factors that influence studentsø satisfaction toward service quality in university are: university staff, recreation activities, physical facilities, campus environment, reputation, cost, family/friend and size/schedule.

Furthermore, Abdullah (2006) studied service quality in Malaysia, he found four important factors that influenced student satisfaction toward service quality, its can be described as follows:

1. Non-academic aspects. These factors refer to the variable that is needed by student to fulfill their study obligation and it relates to the responsibilities which carry out by non-academic staff.
2. Academic aspects. These aspects refer to responsibility of the academic staffs such as: having good attitude, good communication skill, sufficient consultation, and being able to provide regular feedback to students.
3. Reliability. These factors refer to the ability to provide the pledged service on time, accurately and dependably.
4. Empathy. It relates with the giving attention to the student individually and personalized with understanding their specific and growing needs while keeping their best interest at heart (Abdullah, 2006).

Based on the dimensions and the factors that influence on the service quality which some experts purposed, basically there are three important components in service quality in university: physical facilities, administration staffs and academic staffs. The next part we will discuss this components:

Physical facilities, Physical facilities have been proven to have big impact on learning process in university. A study conducted by Earthman (2002) found that poor facilities in university negatively impact on effectiveness and performance of students and teachers. Moreover, Price et al. (2003) found that the facilities are one of the main influences on the studentsø decision to enroll. Some studies found that physical facilities such as class room (Adee, 1997; Joseph et al, 2005; Douglass et al, 2006; Nasser et al., 2008), computer lab (Adee, 1997; Hill, 1999; Barness, 2005) library (Hill, 1999; Barness, 2005; Nasser et al., 2008) canteen or food service (Douglass et al, 2006; Joseph et al, 2005; Nasser et al., 2008), accommodation or mahallah (Joseph and Joseph, 1997 Hill, 1999; Nasser et al., 2008) and sport facility (Joseph and Joseph, 1997; Hill, 1999; Nasser et al.,

2008) have positive impact on student satisfaction toward service quality.

This study will evaluate six components of physical facilities which are provided by International Islamic University Malaysia such as class room, computer lab, library, canteen, accommodation or mahallah and sport facility which were used in the previous researches.

Administrative Staffs, services are delivered to people by people. Employees who deliver the service are the key important to customer. In university, the interaction between staffs and students lies at the heart of service delivery. In order to fulfill students' satisfaction, all staffs in university should adhere to the principles of customer service, especially front line contact staff in administration office. Research on service quality found that administration staff has impact on student satisfaction. Sohail and Shaikh (2004) found that personal contact was the most influencing factor in student's evaluation toward service quality. Moreover, Galloway (1998) studied the role of administrative staff in a UK university on the students' perception of service quality. He found that administration staffs have significant role on students' satisfaction toward service quality in whole university.

The previous researches proved that administrative staffs influenced student satisfaction toward service quality, the components administrative staff including appearance (Douglass et al, 2006), prompt service, keep promise, willingness to help, feeling comfortable and knowledge (Barness, 2005; Abdullah, 2006).

*Academic Staffs, a*ccording to Fuhrmann and Geyer (2003), good lectures should give explanations, answer questions, adapt their teaching methods, and be interested in and show concern for their students and their learning progress. Hill et al. (2003) investigated student perception of quality experience in higher education. They used focus group in collecting data; they found that the quality of the lecturer and the student support systems are the most influential factors in provision of quality education.

Furthermore, Barness (2005) conducted focus group found that student really have high expectation toward the staff including: willingness to help, provide punctual service, provide academic

guidance, and how appropriate knowledge to answer. Douglass et al. (2006) found the expertise of academic staff, teaching ability, and appreciable of academic staff are the most important factor influence student satisfaction toward service quality. Voss and Gluber (2006) explore the desire quality of the lecturers for studentsø point of view. The study results indicated that students want lecturers to be knowledgeable, enthusiastic, approachable and friendly.

This study will evaluate four important components of academic staff which used in study before including preparation for class (Hill et al., 1995; Banwet and Datta, 2003), consultation (Adee, 1997; Aldrige and Rowledge, 1998; Abdullah, 2006), willingness to help and serve students (Barness, 2005; Banwet and Datta, 2003), and knowledge (Banwet and Datta, 2003; Barness, 2005; Voss and Gluber, 2006; Douglass et al., 2006). This study will use this four components (preparation for class, willingness to help and serve students, consultation, and knowledge) to evaluate academic staffsø performance on service quality.

International Islamic University Malaysia

The International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) was set up in May 23, 1983 with its mission being to become the premier Islamic university in the world. It operates under the direction of a Board of Governors which includes representatives of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). This university has four campuses, the main campus in Kuala Lumpur in the District of Gombak.

There are thirteen Faculties, we called Kulliyah and twelve centre institution with 18,815 students, of which 2,762 are foreign students from about 98 countries a round the world. This university employed 3,000 members of staff, of which 1,633 are academic staffs and 1,489 are administrative staffs. There are some facilities which are provided by university such as library, computer lab, sport centre, medical centre, hostel, canteen etc.

This university also has a concerns regarding to the issue of service quality. To ensure an effective delivery of this service, IIUM implemented the Quality Management Systems ISO 9001:2000 for all

its major activities including Human Resources Management; Facilities, Food and Services (Student Affairs Division); Management of Pre-Seasonal Program and Public Courses; Management of ICT Resources and Application Systems; Management of Student Development Activities; and Mosque Management (IIUM web site). The certification of quality management system under the ISO 9001-2000 standards requires the meeting of a number of criteria, including monitoring of customer satisfaction. In the lightening for that goal, this study aims to investigate the perception of students toward the service quality in this university. Through undertaking the study, the university will get better understanding toward what are really needed by student regarding to the service quality in this campus.

Research Methodology

This study used the qualitative approach of phenomenology. Phenomenological research is a mode of inquiry that describes a phenomenon as experienced by one or more individuals. This inquiry mode is used to understand what individuals experience and how they experience and interpret their lives (Patton, 1990). Phenomenological method has been used to provide enlightening and interpretations of behavior by a growing number of customer researchers (Goulding, 1999). Holbrook and Hirschman (1993) argued that the study of customer behavior need to articulate using interpretative perspectives (in Goulding, 1999) because customers, as human, sometimes they have unpredictable behavior which is effected by experience and complex situation.

The phenomenological process measures the accuracy of the actual phenomenon by interpreting the aspects of the customersø lives rather than measuring their responses by scores or numbers. It places greater emphasis on individual feelings, expectations and interpretations. So, the researcher gets the information from the customers who have experienced the phenomenon under the study (Hansenmark and Albinsson, 2004).

In this study, phenomenological approach is observing the experience of the students regarding to the service quality in IIUM. It is a naturalistic approach to acquire information on students experience about the service quality that they are feeling through

open-ended questioner, interviews and observations. In sort, it will capture the phenomenon of studentsø satisfaction toward service quality in this university.

Student Interview

Seven students were participating in this study. Each student participant was asked their availability to participate in this mini project. Interviews were scheduled and conducted at mahallah, canteen, in campus and outside campus wherever possible. When the student agreed to play a part this study, researcher give him an open-ended questioner, that he should fill before conducted the interview. There are three item questions in this questioner:

1. What is your opinion about physical facilities at IIUM such as classroom, library, computer lab, canteen, sport facilities and other facilities?
2. What is your opinion about employees who serve you at the office of department, kulliyah, finance, admission and record division, postgraduate, rector and other offices in IIUM?
3. What is your opinion about your lecturers such as their ability in teaching, their preparation for your class, and their willing to help you?

The goal of giving this questioner is to give understanding to the respondents what the topics of interview will be going on. Interviews were using semi-structure questions and tape-recorded. The researcher also wrote notes to get recurring themes, back up the record and also to get additional information.

Observation

The value of observations is to add the understanding of what is happening for the participant and fill in the complexities of a situation (Patton, 1990). As a student in IIUM, researcher was a part of the setting. Researcher was second year student in this campus; the understanding of service quality in IIUM will help describing the participant opinion about the general opinion about their felt. As part of this research allowed the researcher to better understand what the

participants were talking about and note inconsistencies between what the researcher saw and felt and what the participants said.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of looking at the data for emerging categories, themes, and patterns in order to understand the experience of the student toward the service quality in IIUM. The researcher used qualitative data analysis method. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), data collection and analysis go hand-in-hand. During data collection the researcher observes more intense to the reality which happens in the ground. The researcher also makes some discussion to the other student beside respondents.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggest six phases of a typical analytic procedure. These include: First step is organizing the data. All interview transcriptions, note and answering questions were assembled in one pack. The transcripts and documents were read thoroughly. The next step is generating categories, themes and patterns. During reading the researcher developed a template to organize the emerging categories, themes and patterns. When this was completed, the information was reviewed again. Similar categories were merged together, themes, and patterns that appeared weak were deleted, and higher-level themes based on the organized data were developed in a table.

Third step is coding the data. The table was filled with categories, themes and pattern that emerge from the data. Fourth step is testing emergent understandings. It is needed to evaluate the data were support the emerging understanding and consistency from any data sources which data that opposed the theme and pattern. Fifth step is searching for alternative explanations. Some finding may similar to the existing research and literature, some finding not support. It needs to alternative explanation and interpretation. Sixth step is writing the report. The result was written to explain the opinion of students toward physical facilities, administration and academics staffs. The gap between the expectation and perception and the part need improve. By following these procedures, the researcher performed the following analytical tasks in order to develop findings of this study.

Findings

The findings provided information that confirmed many of the research studies on service quality in universities. It also provided an understanding of the studentsø thinking about the service quality which they were received that affect to their satisfaction toward university in general. This study also provides a view of the certain aspects of university service which need to improve and develop. Thus, it will improve university competitive advantage in global competition. The findings clustered around five themes, as shown in table below:

Table

Themes and Findings

Themes	Findings
The Physical Facilities	1. Class room 2. computer lab 3. Canteen 4. Sport facilities 5. Mahallah 6. Library
The Administration Staff	1. Appearance 2. Prompt Service 3. Keep Promise 4. Willingness to Help 5. Feeling Comfortable 6. Knowledge
The Academic Staff	1. Preparation for Class 2. Consultation 3. Serve and help 4. Knowledge
The Service Gap	The gap between studentø expectation and perception.
The need improvement	The parts of service quality need to improve

The Physical Facilities

University need to provide physical facilities which support teaching-learning process. The main aspect of these facilities which are necessary for students, according to Ashworth and Harvey (1994), should fulfill these criteria: (1) The amount and range of facilities are appropriate. (2) The facilities is effectively deployed, maintained and when necessary replaced by more appropriate equipment. (3) Students have proper access to the facilities which is effective utilized. This study pointed to the fact that students have very diverse backgrounds and from different countries. They have different experiences and perception toward the facilities which they were received. In this study, we used some important components of physical facilities such as classroom, computer lab, canteen, sport facilities, mahallah and library. We will discuss the finding of the physical facilities below:

Classroom, the finding suggested that classroom is comfortable for teaching purposes. Six respondents indicated positive feelings about classroom in IIUM. Students referred to several reasons in which class room is good, including availability of air condition, LCD, light, ideal size and layout are emerging in the study. A PhD student from Law said:

> õí the class design in ideal formí the availability of air condition in each room that very helpful to make study process more comfortableö.

Another respondent stated:

> õyes, very good, the air condition is nice. LCD is also providedí ö

However, there some negative notes regarding to this facility such as the broken windows, lamps and air condition, air condition too cool. For example that mention by participant from Political Science:

> õ í when we survey, we found some building already damages, I have a class which air condition not working, so we

should open the window when we have classí .and lamp canøt work properlyö.

Computer lab, three student participants indicated that computer lab in IIUM was good and has enough programs and facilities inside. Three other students said that computer lab is good but the numbers of computers are not enough. Like a student noted:

õComputer lab is ok, but if we compare the number of computer and student is not enoughö.

Another student said:

õ...when we go to ITD lab, most of the time there are crowdedí so the numbers of student are getting increase every semester, but the computer stills same...ö

The study also found some negative comments from respondents regarding to computer lab such as internet very slow, only one printer in a lab, not update antivirus, some computers not working, and some computers too old. Only a PhD student from Political Science thought that his department does not provide computer lab, he should joint with other students in university level.

Canteen, five respondents felt that this facility is well provided in IIUM. The reason why this food facility is good because canteens provide variety of food such as Malay food, Arabic food, Thai food, African food etc. and also the place is nice, clean and the price is rational. Such opinion can be referred from Law student, he said:

õThe place quit nice and the variety of food provided by canteens quit interestingö.

Another student noted:

õí the price is cheap; the cleanliness is ok, quite clean. I think well serve.ö

However, the respondents also give some complaints regarding to the canteen such as the price is not standard among canteens, not enough seats, some boots provide not fresh food, food not suitable with some studentsø taste. A respondent suggested for separating between brother and sister, such he said:

> õthey must separate between brother and sister. If you seeí most of them mixed and togetherí I think there is image for university and also religioní ö

Sport facility, part of the physical facilities in IIUM is sport facility. This facility is not only for exercising but also for studentsø recreation. In IIUM we have two separate sport complex, namely male sport complex and female sport complex. The study found that all of respondents agreed that sport facilities in IIUM are good. Because sport complex provide complete facilities such as swimming pool, gym, football stadium, tennis court, badminton court etc. One respondent explained:

> õfor sport facilities I think very good and well provided. There are some varieties of sport facilities. Even students can not use all because not enough time to try allí ö

Nevertheless, there are also dissatisfying from some respondents, they give negative comments for particular sport facilities such as swimming pool and gym. Three respondents said that gym for male student is not good because the room is too small, limited and old equipments, limited opening hour (four hours a day), and very crowded. For the swimming pool facility, two respondents have complaint about the limited opening hour and the regulation of dress. But in generally respondents are satisfying with this facility.

Mahallah, student's residential college in IIUM is called Mahallah. The word Mahallah refers to a place where it is supposed to be a self-contained not only with services but also activities (IIUM web site). This university has 15 Mahallah complexes that accommodate about 13,000 students. There are 6 Mahallah for male

students and 9 Mahallah complexes for female students and staffs. These accommodations are inside campus so it is easy for students to access this facility.

This study found that four out of seven respondents indicated disappointed with the Mahallah facility. They said some reasons such no maintenance, not well manage, and broken facilities. A student from Thailand noted:

> *"There are so many problems, for example bath room, all the doors can't be lock, but some students take the nail, you know any room can't lock, and also lamp, we go to complaint that lamp is not work but until now they are not repair."*

Two respondents felt satisfy with the Mahallah, they only complaint dirty of the bathroom and unfriendly staff in Mahallah. Such a description from English department student:

> *"the mahallah is ok, but the only problem with toilet and rest room, especially in faruq and siddiq. The students are very dirty. Other that are still ok"*

The biggest problem in Mahallah according to most respondents is security, there some cases in stealing studentsø properties for example: laptop, money, shoes, computer etc. in Mahallah especially during Jumøah Prayer. This following student gives example of his perception toward Mahallah:

> *"...the objection is why they not provide security when we are praying Jum'ah ...that why there are some cases of thieves in Mahallah. My suggestion is beside the change the key of room to be the best one; they need to maximize the function of security guard during Jum'ah prayer."*

Library, as centre of knowledge, library has an important role to support student in getting their degree. The qualified library will be assessed on size and quality of accommodation, amount of current book stock, periodical provision, amounts spent on new book stock

etc. (Ashworth and Harvey, 1994). The University library in IIUM consists of four libraries at each of the University's four campuses. Its total collection of approximately 557,076 volumes of monographs, 1,674 serial titles on subscription, 24,066 volumes of bound serials, 60,091 units of audio-visuals and 29,148 microforms. It also provides access to the internet, the library also subscribes to a number of online databases and electronic journals and e-books and others (IIUM web site).

This study found that all respondents are satisfied to the library service in this university. However they have suggestion to improve the quality of this library such as enrich book and journal collection, add the working hour, and also add number of computer and carrel room for postgraduate students. One student suggested:

> *" I think the facilities in library are excellent in term of collection. My suggestion for library is only in working hour. Because too many holidays we have ...they should open in public holiday. Because based on my experience in England, any day library always opens…"*

Another student also suggested about the availability of the wireless, this student feel that most of the time wireless is off and also some times staff is not friendly, as mention by student from Myanmar:

> *"...I think library ok. But the staff in library is not very friendly, they are rude. Some time we go to information, we want to borrow some book, event the staff who work quite some time but they are not friendly, we are not very happy dealing with that staff…".*

The Administration Staff

The administration staffs at IIUM included those who serve students in administration matters such as registration, changing the program, financial assistant, certification letter etc. These staffs are on duty in every office in IIUM. Staff is consists of employees who work on full-time basis and part-time basis. The university has 1,489 non academic staffs consist of administrative and support staffs.

Administration staffs are very important factors that influence studentsø satisfaction toward service quality, because they have a direct contact and deliver the service to the customers. This study used some important components that should be performed by staff such as staff appearance; provide prompt service, willingness to help, feeling comfortable and staff knowledge. We will discuss each component that influence studentsø satisfaction toward service below:

Staff Appearance, staff appearance is part of a tangible factor in gap analysis SERVQUAL by Parasuraman et al. (1998). Most of staffs in IIUM used traditional dress õMalayö for female staffs and official dress for male staffs. The findings of this study indicated that most of participants agree that the dress and cloth which is used by staff is good or no problem, as noted by a student:

õI think they are ok. They used traditional dress, Malaysian dress, I think is okí ö

Only two respondents who suggested university to provide uniform for staff because for getting easy differentiated between staff and students.

Prompt Service, this factor related with the ability of staffs to deliver their service on time. By giving fast response, staff administration are supporting the learning process in university, hence it will increase student satisfaction toward service which is provided by university. All respondents agree that the administrative staffs especially who serve in some offices in IIUM is not responsive and slow. A PhD student from political science said:

õí they are sometimes quite slowly, they should responsible their job, not always postponeö. An economics student also noted: õí .sometimes they ask me to waití they always delayö.

There are also some negative perceptions toward staffs, such some noted from respondents including always delay, not serving well, not working properly, not satisfy customer, not professional, and rude. The dissatisfy comments usually regarding the service in finance

office and Centre for Postgraduate Study (CPS). In generally, most respondent disappointed with the prompt service from administration staffs in this campus.

Keeping Promise, the respondents asked regarding to the administration staffsø keeping promise. This study found that six respondents are dissatisfy dealing with the administrative staffs especially in the keeping promise. They felt that staffs in IIUM offices are not working properly and very slow with their job. A student from Economics noted:

> õno, I think they are not keeping the promise, when they said come tomorrow, tomorrow I come but ready yetö.

Another student from English Literature Department express his disappointed:

> õ...if you have problem you go there, they said next week, then if you go next week, the staff is not there, some time they on leave, some time go to canteen, I donøt knowí so it very common in IIUMí they take too much timeö.

The offices in IIUM which is most respondentsø dissatisfaction are Centre Postgraduate Study (CPS) and Finance office. As a Law student noted:

> õí in case of CPS, a lot of problems there. Event before I when here I already disappointed with CPSí so I suggest the front office in CPS should be replace, I heard also some cases from my friendí they should cut the procedures, make simpleö.

Regarding to this prompt service a student from Thailand said:

> õthis is the big problem in our university, you to every place you got same problem. For example if you go to finance, there is only one sister who responsible to postgraduate students, if the sister not around, we should wait for one weekí ö

Willingness to help, this study found that three respondents indicated that the administration staffs have intention to help them, such a student when he asked about this willingness of administration staffs to help, he replied:

> õI think quit helpful, when I have problem they help me. Although they are not solving the problem very quickly, but they still helpfulí ö

One respondent feel that staffs have willing to help but in limited things, he noted:

> õof course they will help me but only limited on their job onlyö.

As contrast, two respondents indicated that most of staffs no intention to help students, only small numbers who have intention to help student, like a student from Political Science described:

> õsome of them very õikhlasö serve us,í they good and willing to help us but the majority of them didnøt want to help, they think that it is your business or responsible, not my businessí ö

Feeling comfortable, when respondents asked about their feeling during having contact with the administration staffs, three of students indicated that they feel comfortable. A respondent from Indonesia noted:

> õyes, I know most of them, I have good communication with them.ö

Two respondents said that they are not really comfortable and some time yes and some time no comfort with the staffs. The rest of

respondents felt that they are not comfort with administration staff, as a student described:

> õI am not really comfortable with their service, because they are not showing the willingness to really help student. Sometime they always said that there is the rule.ö

Knowledge, the study found that four respondents indicated that the administration staffs have not enough knowledge to answer the student questions and handle their job. A respondent from Myanmar noted:

> õí they canøt answer, even though they already work for two and three years.ö

The other respondents mentioned that few of staffs are enough knowledge, but others not enough especially new staffs or part-time staffs, one respondent described:

> õI think senior employees yes, but I find some young person or young employees they donøt know well about their jobí ö

Two students feel that administration staffs have enough knowledge, such a student noted:

> õI think so, based on my experience they can answer my questions, for kulliyah and department are also ok.ö

The Academic Staffs

Undoubtedly, the academic staffs have a great influence to the service quality. High quality lecturers, those most capable of helping their students learn, have deep mastery of both their subject matter and Pedagogy (Darling-Hammond, 1997). This study used four components that influence student satisfaction toward lecturers such as preparation for class, availability for consultation, willingness to

help and serve, and lecturersø knowledge. Following part we will discuss about those components.

Preparation for class, lecturerøs preparations for the lectures are very important to satisfy student. This factor includes sufficient teaching-learning materials, continuance, organization of material, use of teaching aids (Ashworth and Harvey, 1994). Lectures have prominence role to support the success of learning process in class. Preparation for class has big impact on the lecturer performance during the class. This study found that the preparation of lecturer for class were fairly enough. From seven students who interviewed, three of them thought that lecturers have good preparation for the class. A student from Accounting noted:

> õí so far I recognize that lecturer well prepare. I recognize from the way they teach, they prepare hand out and they show the references. They explain very well.í ö

Two of respondents thought that some lecturers have good preparation but some others not enough preparation, like cited from a studentøs statement:

> õonly few of lecturer who have good preparation, other lecture I donøt think they are really prepare. Sometimes they just using old notes, last year notesí .ö

Only one student from Political Science argued that his lecturer not enough preparation for his class, like his commented:

> õ in generally, they are not ready to teach PhD students, they are too busy teaching undergraduate and master studentsö.

Consultation, the part of learning process in university is the availability of lecture to give consultation to their students. All of the lecturers in IIUM have special schedules for consultation. During that time students can ask, discuss and consult the academics on issues based on their interest. The findings of this study indicated that most

student satisfy with the consultation hours which is provide by their lecture, as mentioned by a student from economics:

õ I think very well because they have specific time to do that, so far no problemö

Two students thought that they find difficulty to meet their lecturers even during consultation hours. They argued that their lecturers were often busy with so many activities such as teaching, family, projects, external meetings and so on. This indication was noted by a student:

õí they are not there during consultation hour. But I think they are very busy, they have their family, some of them they have their projects. During consultation hour you go there you are not find them thereö.

Willingness to help and serve student, the personal relation and interaction between academic staffs and students are also crucial in regard to perceived service quality performance (Hill, 1995). During their study, students always have a lot of problems such as assignments, choice of subject or program, examination or personal problems. Their satisfaction toward university may affected by the availability academic staffs to help students solve their problem. This study found that most of respondents agree that their lecturers in IIUM are helpful and serve them well. A PhD student noted:

õI think so, lecturers are helpful, they are happy to discuss about their subjects, what their teachingí .they are serving me very wellö. Only a student from English department who dissatisfied with small part of his lecturers, like a master student said:öí .unfortunately few of them, in very few, they are not very friendlyí ö

Knowledge, the academic staffs must be qualified and experienced individual with academic and professional qualification matched to their program (Ashworth and Harvey, 1994). The findings of these study explained that almost respondents satisfy with their

lecture knowledge. Lecturers in IIUM have a qualification to teach in their area, because they already fulfilled the requirement for teaching such a student describe:

> õtheir knowledge average is ok, most of them graduated from abroad, so they suppose to have western knowledge. In term of knowledge they are meet the requirementö.

However, a student show in term of the way teaching need to be improve, as a PhD student suggested in this comment:

> öin term of teaching way, I think, I still feel that most of them are not apply what we called ÷art of teachingø or ÷art of lecturerø that make they attract the students and involve all students. Most of them still in veryí very usual or conventional wayí ö

Gap Analysis

Berry et al (1990) noted that customers as being the sole judge of service quality. The customers actually assess service quality based on their perceptions of service quality which is result from comparing expectations prior to receiving the service and their actual experience of the service (Hill, 2005). According to Zeithaml et al (1990) there are some factors which can influence the customerøs expectations, these are: (1) word of mouth communications, which refers to the customers heard from other customers, (2) personal needs, as determined by individual characteristics and circumstances, (3) past experience of the service or related service, (4) external communications from the service provider such as from advertising, TV commercial, brochures and so on and (5) price.

In this part, students asked to compare between what they receive and they expect on service quality in this university. Three respondents indicated that service quality in IIUM generally fulfill their expectation. A PhD economics student noted:

> õI think UIA meet what I expect, fulfill my expectation. To be hones I didnøt expect too much when I apply UIA. When I

start coming here, start look at facilities, in the way they are teaching quite ok...ö

Another student stated:

õin general, service quality in UIA is satisfying, fulfill what I expect, mostly has been fulfilling by provision provided by UIA.ö

Furthermore, one respondent said that service quality in IIUM fulfill 80% his expectation, one student said 70% and another said 50% fulfill his expectation. Such a student from Master of English literature noted:

õUIA is good, but not the best place. Overall, if you consider the kulliyah, the lecturers, and some other things, you are thinking that UIA is good, at lest ok here. May be fifty percent fulfill my expectation.ö

One respondent from Jordan said that he expect service quality in this campus is better than he receive now, when he asked about fulfilling his expectation, he replied:

õno, not fulfill. The reality and expectation are different. My expectation Malaysia and UIA are better than what happen.ö

As a result, he feels dissatisfy with the service quality in this university.

The Improving Area

Students are now being viewed as the primary customers of the higher education (Hill, 2005). The perceptions and suggestions from students should be primary resources for university to improve the quality of service which is provided. When respondents asked the part

of service quality in IIUM needs improvement, a variety of answers were given. Some respondents suggested to improve the quality of staffs, especially who in front office or serve students. Some respondents also suggested improving the safety in this campus, since theft in hostel, mosque, and library occurs on a regular basis. Researcher also found some lecturers who complaints lost their laptops in their offices. Two of respondents suggested improving the research opportunity and funding for students.

Additionally, two respondents suggested improving the number of academic staffs in some area such as in Accounting and English department. Other suggestions come in this interview such as: improving quality of staffs, law enforcement in dress code, coupling and õ*akhlak*ö, improve in finance office, add number of computers and lab for listening and pronunciation.

Discussion

This evaluation is important for the university to look at what the students want and what students consider to be good service and not only from the management perspective (Oldfield et al. 2000). The results described here allow us to better understanding the perception of students toward service quality which is provided by IIUM. There are three important factors of service quality in higher education which is used in this study, namely physical facilities, administration staff and academic staffs.

The first factor is physical facilities; the findings indicated that the current respondents in general satisfied with the physical facilities provided by the university, although some respondents were dissatisfied with their mahallah. Furthermore, some respondent suggested adding some additional facilities such as the number of computers in lab, listening and pronunciation lab for English department, books and journals for library, equipments for gym, and wireless in hostel. Moreover, for the student who lived in hostel, they need better security to safeguard their belongings, especially during Jumøah prayer.

This finding is almost same with the researcher experience regarding to the physical facilities in IIUM. Based on the researcher

felt and understood, the physical facilities in IIUM were enough to support studentsø activities, only some problems in maintenances of facilities. This also matched with Joseph et al (2005) study, they found that facilities such as library, computer lab and classroom affected studentsø satisfaction toward service quality in university.

The personal interaction between staffs and students are also crucial in regard to perceive service performance (Hill, 1995). This study found that student sample was dissatisfied with the administration staffs in IIUM. Basically most of the respondents satisfied with the first component, appearance of administration staffs, but for the rest of components in general not meet what the respondentsø expectations. The findings also found that there are two offices which are most respondentsø complaint: Centre for Postgraduate Study (CPS) and finance office. As a student, the researcher also feels that the services in some offices in IIUM are not serving well, especially in CPS and finance. The researcher also found some students which is complaint toward the behavior of some staffs such as unfriendly/ rude, easy get angry with students, work slowly, always postpone their job, absent or on leave etc. Nevertheless, there are also some administration staffs with good attitude toward students and their works. In conclusion, the service of administration staffs in IIUM is not enough fulfilling the studentsø expectation.

For academic staffs, in general there was an agreement here to suggest that the academic staffs are performing fairly enough. Nevertheless, more yet still could be done to improve the contribution of the academic staffs. For instance, the respondents in the study complained about staff shortages in some critical areas such as accounting and English, lack of diversity in the teaching methods and limited attention students received from extremely õbusyö academic staffs. Moreover, there is also From four components evaluation of academic staffs such preparation for class, willingness to help, consultation and knowledge, is only preparation for class which get negative opinion from respondents. These findings are supported by Barness (2005) study. He found that Chinese Postgraduate students agreed that lecturersø knowledge, willing to help, personal attention toward students, are fairly satisfy students but not fully fulfill what studentsø expected. In addition, it also in the line with Voss and Gluber (2006), they found that students want lecturers to be knowledgeable, enthusiastic, approachable and friendly.

Regarding to gap analysis, this study found the half of respondents indicated that they almost satisfied with the service quality in this campus, it means their expectation toward the service quality almost fulfilled by this institution. For the rest respondents they felt that this campus fulfilled 70% and 50% their expectation. Only one student totally dissatisfies and disconfirms between his expectation and his perception toward service quality in this campus. To fill the gap between customer expectation and service performance, university must measure the satisfaction and fill the components of service regularly to response to the change of the environment where the expectation from customer is becoming higher.

Conclusion, Recommendation, and Limitation

The purpose of this paper is to explore, from studentsø perspective, how students perceived the service quality in IIUM. A phenomenological method was used, to get better understanding a service quality phenomenon in this university.

The results reveal that students perceived the service quality in different ways. This is in line with the findings of Barness (2005), every student has different understanding toward the services. The respondents felt toward service quality which is provided by university in as many as three ways in every factor in this study: satisfaction, fairly satisfaction and dissatisfaction. In general there is an agreement here that the university is performing fairly enough in term of physical facilities and academic staff, but in term of administration staffs less than studentsø expectation.

Thus, the study recommends universityøs management to give attention to the following issues:

- University needs to improve the quality of staffs, especially the administration staffs regarding to their service toward the customers. Because the perception of this service can influence to whole customersø satisfaction toward university.
- The university requests to improve the security guard in this campus. This study found that there are abundant thieving cases in

this campus such as in mosque, library, mahallah, lecturersø room especially on electronic properties such as laptops and cell phones.

- University has to give attention to the maintenance of the physical facilities in this campus. Even though university have some divisions that responsible for these activities, but in fact they are not work properly.
- University also needs to reform or refine the office of CPS and Finance to be more responsive toward the customers needs.
- University should always reevaluate the service quality based on the research or information which depicts the changing the customersø expect.

This study has some limitations; the primary limitation of this study is the scope and size of its sample, because the study only involved seven male students, all of students are international students in IIUM. So the next study should increase the number of sample, across gender and *Kulliyah* in this university. Secondly, research is not specific in certain department or office. It is better for the next research to analyst service quality in level department, *Kulliyah* or office so it will give better findings and contributions. Thus the respondents will more focus on the specific; the results will be more valuable for improving the service in certain office. Thirdly, in term of methodology, the next research need to consider using surveys also to verify the findings, by using mixed method the result will be more reliable. In summary, further research needs to address these limitations, and researcher advocates that the more research should be undertaken to evaluate the service quality performance in university. This initial research will be inspire more academics researching in this area and become source of information toward improving quality of the service in university.

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