

Student Satisfaction toward Academic Departments: A Case Study of Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin

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Abstract: *Providing excellent services is the main objective of higher learning institutions to achieve higher student satisfaction. Service quality generally emphasises the institutional services offered. However, studies pertaining to service quality and student satisfaction towards academic departments at Malaysia's Polytechnics are scarce. Therefore, this study investigates the influence of service quality on student satisfaction towards academic departments in the Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin context. More specifically, this study examines the influence of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy on student satisfaction. A quantitative, single cross-sectional, and survey research method was employed. The multiple regression analysis revealed that service quality influences student satisfaction. It shows that all academic departments need to enhance the quality of their services to improve student satisfaction. It also suggests that improving service quality elements, especially empathy, is critically important. This study helps the academic department of higher learning institutions to improve their services offered to the students.*

Keywords: academic departments, service quality, students satisfaction

1. Introduction

Student satisfaction is a focal point for higher learning institutions (Alsheyadi & Albalushi, 2020), determining the institutions' success in service quality and academic quality (Saleem et al., 2017). The academic quality will emphasise the learning outcome, acquiring knowledge and abilities in subject domains. Meanwhile, service quality generally emphasises the students' institutional services (Saleem et al., 2017). Due to ongoing student expectation, many higher learning institutions still struggle to meet or exceed student expectation (Prakash, 2018). These challenges have encouraged higher learning institutions to explore more ways to enhance service quality's effectiveness to achieve higher student satisfaction (Prakash, 2018; Chandra et al., 2019). Therefore, higher learning institutions need to analyse the quality of services they provided to function efficiently and effectively in highly competitive environments (Santos et al., 2020).

Generally, service quality refers to the elements of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy introduced by Parasuraman et al. (1988). Service quality can be defined as the overall assessment of the services depending on how much a service meets the consumer expectations (Amanulla et al., 2021). Chandra et al. (2019) stated that limited studies were conducted to investigate service quality and its correlation with student satisfaction in the higher learning institution sector. In Malaysia's Polytechnics context, limited studies have examined the quality of services provided on student satisfaction towards the academic

departments. Therefore, investigation of service quality and student satisfaction towards the academic department in the Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin (PTSS) context is essential to improve the quality of services provided to the students. Consequently, this study aims to investigate the influence of service quality on student satisfaction. Specifically, this study examines the influence of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy on student satisfaction towards the academic department in the PTSS students context.

In this light, Malaysia's Polytechnics is one of the hubs for the nation's human capital development (Omar et al., 2020). Their role has been expanded. Their establishment has been re-branded to accomplish the nation's mission to provide the human capital source to the industrial sectors to generate economic growth (Jabatan Pengajian Politeknik, 2009). Furthermore, Malaysia's Polytechnics focus on skill-based subjects, especially related to technical and vocational education and training (TVET). The subjects have been improvised and improved to be consistent with the national plan (Abdullah & Majid, 2013). Therefore, this study hopes to enlighten academic departments in providing better and excellent services to students to produce excellent students specifically and build a more significant image of Malaysia's polytechnics generally.

2. Literature Review

Service Quality

Studies on service quality were initiated by a study conducted by Parasuraman et al. (1988) (Chandra et al., 2019). Parasuraman et al. (1988) developed SERVQUAL to assess service quality consisting of tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, empathy, and assurance. In the educational research context, these five dimensions are frequently used to measure service quality (Chandra et al., 2019). According to Amanullah et al. (2021), reliability refers to accurate service delivery, and assurance is the staff's knowledge and courtesy, while tangibility is the appearance of the building, website, equipment, and the employees themselves. Amanullah et al. (2021) also defined empathy as the employee's caring attitude and individualised attention to the students, while responsiveness is the ability to provide quick and speedy services to the students.

Service quality is a critical success factor for service organisations because service quality can positively affect customers (Zumrah, 2015). In this study, the customers refer to the students. As described by Kim et al. (2012), the customers can also be students receiving services by the organisation. They also found that excellent service quality could subsequently increase the students' positive perception of the organisation (Kim et al., 2012). Therefore, providing excellent services to the students can increase excellent academic results (Saleem et al., 2017).

Student Satisfaction

Due to the increased pressure of competition in the education service sector, student satisfaction has recently gained a greater focus in higher learning institutions (Chandra et al., 2019). According to Saleem et al. (2017), student satisfaction with the university has institutional, individual, and social welfare. Usually, contented students are much more probable to endure their studies and prosper academically. Exceptional service standards can easily achieve student satisfaction. Furthermore, satisfied students can persuade new students to join their program or university by engaging in affirmative word-of-mouth to inform their friends, which can, in turn, encourage other students to take programs or courses in the same university (Pheunpha, 2019).

According to Mulyono et al. (2020), student satisfaction plays a vital role in university success and acts as an essential tool in improving the service quality. Students are seen as customers of higher learning institutions services, as student satisfaction becomes crucial for learning institutions in recruiting new students (Thomas & Galambo, 2004). It is the responsibility of higher learning institutions to understand the process of creating student satisfaction and find reliable ways and methods to measure student satisfaction (Alves & Raposo, 2009). Therefore, student satisfaction is the most important key to determining the most appropriate strategic management to ensure that long-term performance for public and private institutions can be achieved (Yusof, Zaini, & Mansor, 2019).

The Relationship between Service Quality and Student Satisfaction

Previous studies have shown that service quality correlates to student satisfaction. In their study, Chandra et al. (2019) found that service quality positively and significantly influences student satisfaction. Saleem et al. (2017) also found a positive association between service quality and student satisfaction in the education sector. While Santos et al. (2020) also found that service quality influences student satisfaction. Besides, Amanulla et al. (2021) found that tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy are significant predictors to measure user satisfaction. Tangibility has the most significant impact on user satisfaction. Lastly, Alsheyadi and Albalushi (2020) also showed that the direct relationships between SERVQUAL dimensions (tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy) and student satisfaction are significant; the highest effect on satisfaction comes from the reliability and responsiveness dimensions. Therefore, based on the literature review, five hypotheses were developed:

- H1: There is a positive relationship between tangibility and student satisfaction.
- H2: There is a positive relationship between reliability and student satisfaction.
- H3: There is a positive relationship between responsiveness and student satisfaction.
- H4: There is a positive relationship between assurance and student satisfaction.
- H5: There is a positive relationship between empathy and student satisfaction.

Research Framework

This study's independent variable is service quality attributes, while the dependent variable is student satisfaction. Figure 1 shows the study's research framework.

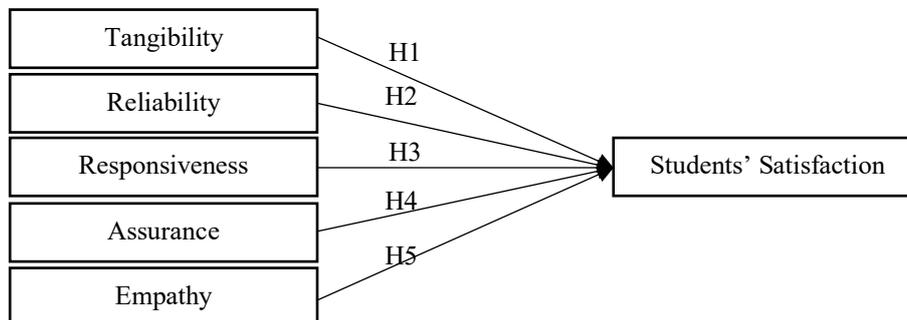


Figure 1: Research framework Adapted from: Parasuraman et al (1985)

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design with a single cross-sectional method. The target population was PTSS students from six departments: Department of Tourism and Hospitality (JPH), Department of Commerce (JP), Department of Electrical Engineering

(JKE), Department of Information Technology and Communication (JTMK), Department of Design and Visual Communication (JRKV), and Department of Mechanical Engineering (JKM). The total number of students in the June 2020 Session was 3195 students (PTSS Student Affairs, 2020). Based on the Raosoft software calculation, if the population is 3195, the minimum sample is 344 respondents. Since this study employed stratified random sampling, the minimum number of the questionnaires to be distributed was JPH = 76, JP = 64, JKE = 53, JTMK = 50, JRKV = 59, and JKM = 42, respectively.

This study adapted the questionnaire from Alsheyadi and Albalushi (2020), with 34 items divided into seven sections. Section A focused on tangibility with six items and Section B on reliability with eight items. Section C was about responsiveness, and Section D was about assurance, with eight and six items, respectively. Meanwhile, Section E dealt with empathy with six items, and Section F with student satisfaction with ten items. Finally, Section G focused on the respondents' demographic profile with five items. All items were measured using a five-point Likert type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

This study employed three content experts to verify all the items to measure validity and ensure the instruments' validity. Then, since the questionnaire was initially in English, the back-translation method introduced by Brislin (1970) was implemented. Two translators translated the English version into the Malay language. Another two translators retranslated it into the English version to ensure no variations between them and reassure the questionnaire's accuracy. Then, to measure the questionnaire's reliability, the study used Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cronbach's alpha coefficient showed that all variables were reliable, ranging from $\alpha = 0.908$ to $\alpha = 0.980$. More specifically, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient value of tangibility $\alpha = 0.908$, reliability $\alpha = 0.954$, responsiveness $\alpha = 0.969$, assurance $\alpha = 0.969$, empathy $\alpha = 0.960$, and student satisfaction $\alpha = 0.980$.

This study employed a survey method to collect the raw data, and the researchers used pen and paper to distribute the questionnaires. Attached with the questionnaires was a cover letter informing the survey was voluntary, and all information gathered would be treated as confidential. This study also utilised the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 to analyse the data. The multiple regression analysis was used to answer the research objectives.

Data Analysis and Results

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Based on the result obtained, females were the highest respondents (68.7%), followed by males (31.3%). In terms of age, 20 – 21 years old (67.7%) was the highest respondents, followed by 22 - 23 years old (16.1%), 18 – 19 years old (12.9%), and 24 years old and above (3.2%). Malay (86.4%) was the majority in this study, followed by Indian (9.7%) and Others (1.8%). The lowest was Chinese and Siamese, with 1.1%, respectively. In terms of Semester, Semester 2 and Semester 3 (23.7%) were the highest responded to the survey, followed by Semester 5 (17.9%), Semester 6 (13.6%), and Semester 4 (11.5%). The lowest was Semester 1 (9.7%). Lastly, in terms of departments, JRKV students (24.4%) were the majority answering the questionnaire, followed by students from JP (24.0%), JPH (23.7%), and JKM (14.7%). The lowest was JKE students (1.4%). Table 1 shows the respondents' demographic profile.

Table 1: The Respondents' Demographic Profile

Particular		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	87	31.2
	Female	192	68.8
Age	18 – 19 Years Old	36	12.9
	20 – 21 Years Old	189	67.7
	22 - 23 Years Old	45	16.1
	24 Years Old and above	9	3.2
Race	Malay	241	86.4
	Chinese	3	1.1
	Indian	27	9.7
	Siamese	3	1.1
	Other	5	1.8
Semester	Semester 1	27	9.7
	Semester 2	66	23.7
	Semester 3	66	23.7
	Semester 4	32	11.5
	Semester 5	50	17.9
	Semester 6	38	13.6
Department	JPH	66	23.7
	JP	67	24.0
	JKE	4	1.4
	JKM	41	14.7
	JTMK	33	11.8
	JRKV	68	24.4
Total		279	100%

Pearson Correlation Analysis

Based on Table 2, the Pearson correlation analysis result shows that tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy are correlated with student satisfaction. More specifically, tangibility $r = 0.801$, reliability $r = 0.864$, responsiveness $r = 0.830$, assurance $r = 0.630$, and empathy $r = 0.886$ with student satisfaction, respectively. The result also indicates that tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy are positively related to student satisfaction. Empathy is the strongest correlated with student satisfaction followed by reliability, responsiveness, tangibility, and assurance.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Analysis of Study

Variables	Mean	Std. dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Tangibility	4.292	.557						
2 Reliability	4.299	.552	.853**					
3 Responsiveness	4.264	.596	.793**	.870**				
4 Assurance	4.257	.712	.641**	.686**	.672**			
5 Empathy	4.292	.576	.777**	.859**	.831**	.702**		
6 Students satisfaction	4.288	.598	.801**	.864**	.830**	.630**	.886**	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

Multiple Regression Analysis

Based on Table 3, multiple regression analysis was used to analyse the tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy influence on student satisfaction. The results indicated that $R^2 = 0.838$, meaning all factors explained 83.8% of the variance in student satisfaction with $F = 258.084$, $p = 0.000$. The other factors explained the remaining 16.2%. In light of this, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy contributed significantly and positively towards the prediction of student satisfaction, with the beta values of $\beta = 0.139$, $\beta = 0.234$, $\beta = 0.139$, $\beta = 0.074$, and $\beta = 0.514$, respectively. Hence, Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2, Hypothesis 3, Hypothesis 4, and Hypothesis 5 were supported. It implied that tangibility,

reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy influence student satisfaction in the PTSS context.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis of the Study

Model	B	SE B	β	t	Sig.
(Constant)	.062	.125		.496	.620
Tangibility	.149	.054	.139	2.754	.006
Reliability	.254	.073	.234	3.479	.001
Responsiveness	.139	.056	.139	2.495	.013
Assurance	.062	.031	.074	1.988	.048
Empathy	.534	.057	.514	9.389	.000

Note: $R^2 = 0.838$, $p < 0.000$.

Discussion

This study examines the service quality (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) influence on student satisfaction. The results showed that service quality significantly and positively influences student satisfaction in the PTSS context. The results were consistent with Chandra et al. (2019), finding that service quality significantly and positively influences student satisfaction. This study's result was also consistent with Alsheyadi and Albalushi (2020), finding and supporting that service quality is related to student satisfaction. Saleem et al. (2017) also found that service quality significantly and positively influences student satisfaction. Tahir et al. (2010) mentioned that prospective students are likely to enrol in schools, offering them excellent service quality and better student satisfaction.

Besides that, the findings showed that tangibility influences student satisfaction. It was consistent with Alsheyadi and Albalushi (2020), showing a significant direct relationship between tangibility and student satisfaction. Amanulla et al. (2021) also showed that tangibility is a significant predictor of student satisfaction. It might be because most of the students agreed that the academic department has the modern and latest equipment to deal with student affairs, besides the department is located at a convenient location. The students also agreed that most of the academic department staff are always well dressed and appear neat. The physical environment of the academic department is also clean. Hence, all the elements lead to student satisfaction with the PTSS academic department.

This study found that reliability significantly and positively influence student satisfaction towards the academic department. It was consistent with Alsheyadi and Albalushi (2020) and Chandra et al. (2019), finding that reliability is a significant predictor of student satisfaction. Most of the students felt that the academic department provides services when they promise to do so. Besides that, the academic department shows sincere interest in solving students' problems and providing adequate working hours according to students' needs. The academic department staff are also highly knowledgeable and dealing with students matters professionally besides providing relevant and practical services to students. Hence, this was probably making the students felt satisfied with the academic department.

Next is responsiveness. This study also found that responsiveness significantly and positively influences student satisfaction. It was consistent with Amanulla et al. (2021)'s study, finding that responsiveness is a significant predictor of student satisfaction. The study also found that the students agreed that the academic department handled and resolved all their enquiries and requests promptly. Besides that, the academic department willingness, availability, and easily approached to help the students also contributed to this study's student satisfaction. On top of

that, the academic department always makes information easily accessible by students, contributing to student satisfaction.

Assurance also showed a significant and positive influence on student satisfaction in this study. It was consistent with Amanulla et al. (2021) and Santos et al. (2020), observing a similar finding in which assurance significantly and positively influences student satisfaction. It is probably because most of the students agreed that the academic department staff are friendly and polite in dealing with them. Moreover, the students also agreed that the academic department staff are very professional in answering students enquiries. Besides that, the students also felt that academic staff behaviours are encouraging and confident in dealing with students. Hence, these elements contributed to student satisfaction in this study.

The final element is empathy. This study discovered that empathy also contributed to a significant and positive influence on student satisfaction. It was consistent with Alsheyadi and Albalushi (2020) and Amanulla et al. (2021) that empathy is a significant predictor of student satisfaction. Most academic department staff treat students equally and with respect, show positive attitudes towards students, understand the students' specific needs, give students individual attention, and have the students' interest at heart.

5. Conclusion

This study showed that service quality comprising tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy significantly influences student satisfaction towards the academic department at Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin. It indicates that improving these five elements will enhance student satisfaction and, consequently, the academic department gains a positive image in the students' eye.

This study has a few limitations. Firstly, this study focused on service quality attributes only. Perhaps future studies can include other elements. Secondly, this study focused on PTSS only and could not be generalised to other polytechnics in Malaysia. Lastly, this study employed a quantitative method. Perhaps future studies can employ a qualitative method to obtain more related information.

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