ASESSMENT OF SERVICE USER'S EXPERIENCE ON THE FACILITIES PROVISION AT UTHM STUDENTS' RESIDENTIAL COLLEGES

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades international student enrolments have grown rapidly in Malaysia. This raises the demand for student accommodation. The establishment and development of students' residential colleges is a challenge for many higher institutions in Malaysia as a result of the continuing extension of higher education and the internationalization policy of Malaysia which led to rising number of international students. Malaysia has become a strong force in international education there is a need to examine and understand how these students fit-in and observe the services delivered in the residential colleges of higher institutions of learning. Therefore the aim of this study is to assess the service user's experience on the facilities provided at UTHM students' residential colleges. The study intends to explore the most important physical attributes that influence the service user's experience in the study area as well as measure the value students give to the physical attributes that influence service user's experience in the study area. This study intends to use mixed method, and a sample population of 189 international students will be involved. The implication of the study is that it will help to formulate guidelines in terms of designs, construction and maintenance for future developments of students' residential colleges. Conversely the study will also serve as a yardstick in measuring the key elements of facilities that are more users centred for UTHM students' residential colleges.

Keywords—service user experience; students' residential colleges; physical attributes; international students; service excellence.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive educational setting where students have many choices available, attributes that enable higher institutions of learning to attract and maintain more international students should be studied seriously. Higher institutions of learning, that aimed to gain competitive advantage in the future, may need to begin searching for creative and effective means to attract, maintain and foster stronger relationships with international students (Ilias, 2008). International students have been described as a special asset in today's higher learning arena, and some countries like Britain, United States and Australia has put in place some techniques to attract more students(Shekarchizadeh, Rasli, & Hon-Tat, 2011). However, in the East Asian region some countries like Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia have expressed their intention of becoming education hubs of higher learning in the

region, [2]. Most Higher learning Institutions in Malaysia do give a great deal of importance in meeting students' expectations which is related to business organization (Ilias, 2008). Generally, the enrolment of international students in Malaysia has increased gradually since 1996, when several higher educational transformations were introduced to enable the entry of international students into higher institutions of learning (Sirat, 2009). The National Mission and 9th -10th Malaysia Plans set out the country's dream of moving Malaysia into a high-income knowledge-based economy by 2020. The National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) was formulated with a vision to transform higher education within the context of establishing Malaysia as an international hub of excellence for higher education (Abdullah & Rahman, 2011). More so, the target of NHESP is to have the total number of 200,000 international students by the year 2020 (MOHE, 2012). It can be understood that there is a provision to accommodate this expansion from now to 2020 based on the internationalization policy for higher education in Malaysia which aimed at accelerating the inflow of international students to 150,000 by 2015 (Internationalization policy for Higher Education Malaysia, 2011).

The international students enrolment in private and public higher learning institutions have increased from 40,525 in the year 2005, to 80,750 students, in the year 2009 (MOHE 2013). Therefore, Malaysia has become a strong force in international education and they need to examine and understand how these students fit into and perceive the physical environment and the services delivered in their higher institutions of learning (Njie, Asimiran, & Baki, 2012). Moreover, as the number of international students increased, also their needs, in terms of adequate facilities such as accommodation, transportation, restaurants and other facilitating services increases. These facilities need to be aligned from time to time to ensure that international students' satisfaction is achieved.

User experience refers to different areas of relationship with user including experience with ongoing business relationship, experience with the quality of service or product, experience with the performance ratio of a service and experience because a service met users expectation (Gilburt et al., 2010). Understanding the entire structure of user needs and requirements are the most important part in problem solving. The needs of user must be examined independently(Vermeeren, Law, & Roto, 2010). In facilities management, full users' complaints or requests must be recorded accordingly into an integrated maintenance schedule which is transparent, dependable and reliable (Waheed & Fernie, 2009). Facilities management service providers should be proactive in finding out the users' needs and wants, here, communication is a very important aspect in achieving that goal(Drion, Melissen, & Wood, 2012). Bashir, (2012) Opined that users' needs should be fully incorporated into the design and development of products and services, especially in students' residential colleges.

Student residential college is a supervised living-learning accommodation consisting of shared residential amenities and facilities for the community of residents, which is constructed on-or off campus, and owned or rented by higher institution of learning. It provides low-cost chargeable rooms, and administered to accommodate the undergraduate or postgraduate students (Winston, 1993). According to Najib, Yusof & Osman, (2011) student residential colleges have been introduced to provide relatively low-cost, sanitary, safe and comfortable living

environment to promote the social, personality, intellectual, physical, carrier, educational and moral development of those who live there. Student residential colleges has been described for long as an essential component of the facilities provided by the higher institutions of learning in helping students to expand their intellectual competence (Hassanain, 2008). Physical attributes of students' residential college, such as architectural design, bedroom size, floor level and density can influence students' experience. However, demographic factors, such as gender, age, socio-economic status, religion and race can influence students' residential experience as well (Najib et al., 2011).

The main objective of this study is to explore the most important physical and demographic attributes that influence service users' experience on facilities provisions at the study area. The overall aim is to assess service user's experience on the facilities provided at five UTHM students' residential colleges which include Taman University, Perwira, Taman Kelisa, Malewar and Tun Syed-Naseer. The study intends to help in formulating guidelines in terms of design, construction and maintenance for future developments of students' residential colleges.

2. THE CONCEPT OF SERVICE

Service is an economic activity that creates value and provides benefits to customers at specific times and places by bringing about a desired change in, or on behalf of the recipients of the service (Jumat, 2012). According to Johnston & Clark, (2005) service is a combination of outcomes and experiences delivered to and received by a user, they further explained that users therefore judge the quality of the service on the experience as well as the outcome. As services and products are becoming more similar and as it becomes easier for organizations to copy others' they may choose to compete through something that exceeds their service offering. The service concept, relates with the characteristics of the service offered to the target market (Mascio, 2007). He further described the service concept as the bundle of goods and services sold to users. The dominant view is that, the service concept can be seen as a package made up of a set of intangible and tangible elements. In other words, service is defined in terms of its constituent parts and the most common way of classifying the service concept relates to the degree of customization of these elements (Johnston & Clark, 2005).

The evolution of service concepts involved two important dimensions; commoditization and customization as shown in Figure 1. Customization means producing in response to a particular user desires. Customization handles the individual user request. Organizations should tailor product and services to meet the exceptional needs of individual service users in such a way that nearly all can find exactly what they want at a reasonable price through a new mind-set, one of creating service user unique value, while commoditization on the other hand, refers to the regulation process, that is, it prescribes whether the service delivery has been executed to the needs of every individual user (Pine & Gilmore 2011). Moreover it refers to the description process of a service, where it describes the steps to be followed so that a particular service gets delivered. It also deals with the way in which the request of the individual user is packaged (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). There are five levels of service concepts within the service evolution. These stages shows

how the service concept has expand from service task to service excellence as shown in Fig 1:1

Differentiated

Service Excellence

Service Quality

Service Performance

Service Delivery

Service Task

Customization

Commoditization

Service Excellence

Meeting Expectations & Perception

Measuring Service User Satisfaction

Adhering to Specification & Procedure

Doing the Job

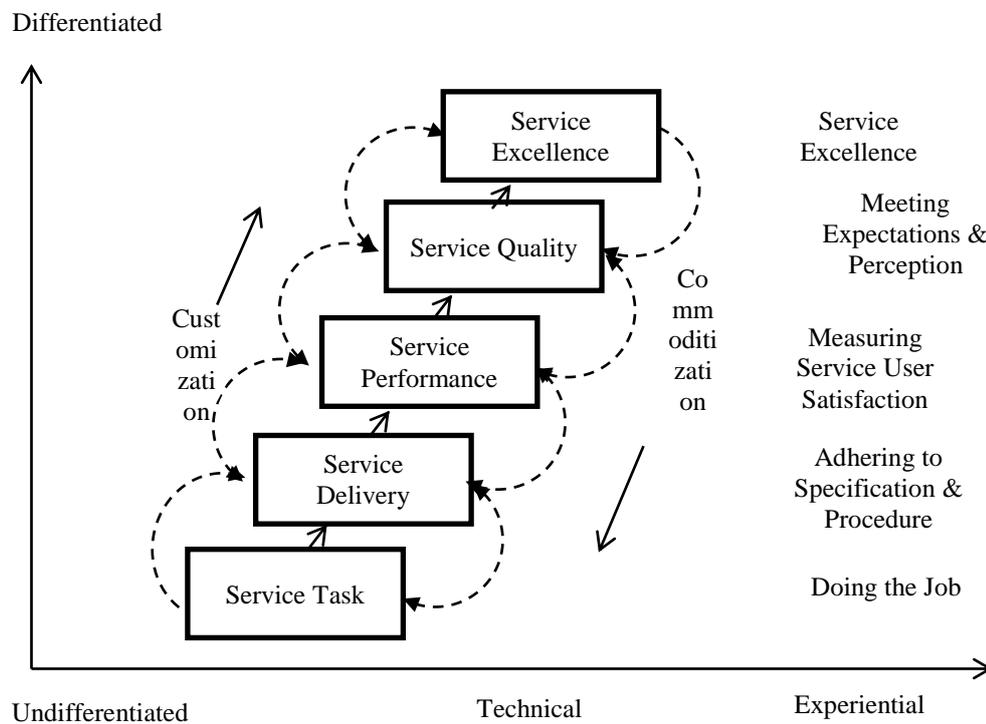Undifferentiated   Technical   Experiential

Figure 2.1: The Evolution of Service Concept (Adapted from Pine & Gilmore, 1999)

As shown in Figure 1.1 the higher the service concept moves up, the more customized the service becomes. Each level of the service concept is explained below.

- Service Task Level: this is the initial stage in the service concept evolution, and it is the most technical stage of all. This is where the routine tasks get completed based on directives from the supervisor. For example cleaning the toilet twice in a day.
- Service Delivery Level: in this level the service get delivered according to set procedures and specifications. This includes the input –based tasks to monitor the job sequence and its outcome. For example setting a cleaning specification and the method of delivery are input tasks of this level.
- Service Performance Level: service performance level has specific focus on the evaluation of service performance. In addition to service specification, service level agreement (SLA) and key performance indicators (KPI) are developed in this level.
- Service Quality Level: represent robust tools for performance management and service quality measurement that demonstrate tangible results. Introducing tools like SERVQUAL, and measuring the quality of service by analysing the service user expectation gap is a prominent feature of this level.
- Service Excellence Stage covers the final economic offering of this diagram with the least technical aspects. Service users enter this level knowing that they will experience the service in a very pleasant manner. At the service

excellence level, the organization's economic offering is not the materials, product, processes, nor the encounters, but the individual user (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Furthermore, the service concept conveys the benefits and value provided to users. Many researchers have raised some observation with regard to service quality, for instance, from the observations of Parasuraman et al., (1985) cited that, service quality is a difference between users' expectation and perceived service. They further explained that, if performed service is less than the expectations of a user, then the user might get dissatisfied with the service quality. The dimension of service quality has been identified through the pioneering research of (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Their research identified five specific dimensions of service quality that apply across a variety of service contexts. The dimensions are reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles.

2.1 SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSIONS

In order to determine the service provider's level of success, it is imperative to evaluate the user's perception level of service quality first. The question arises: how to evaluate user's perception level on the service quality (Bashir, 2012). According to Zeithaml & Bitner, (2009) service quality cannot be perceived by a user in a one-dimensional way only, instead, it will judge quality based on multiple factors relevant to the context. They further emphasized that the dimension of service quality have been identified through the pioneering research of Parasuraman, Valarie Zeithaml and Leonard Berry. Their research identified five specific dimensions of service quality that apply across a variety of service contexts as follows:
 i) Reliability; ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
 ii) Responsiveness; willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
iii) Assurance; employees' knowledge and courtesy and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.
iv) Empathy; caring, individualize attention given to customers.
v) Tangibles: appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and written materials.

These dimensions represent how users organize information about service quality in their minds. For more clarification of this model, each dimension is shown in Figure 2.2
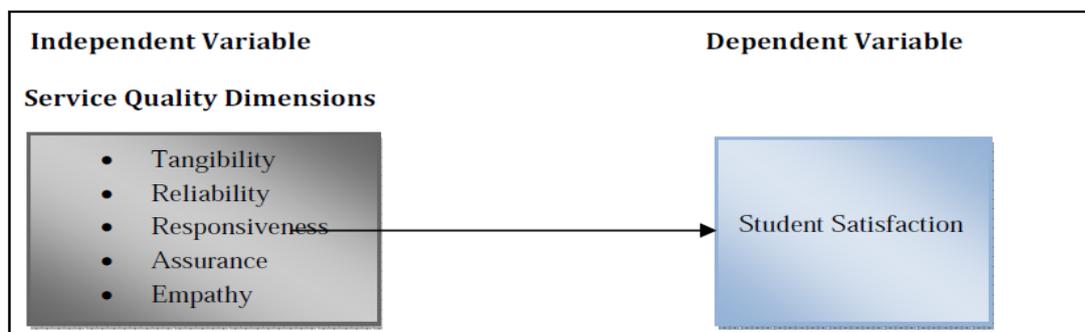

Figure 2.5: Service Quality Dimensions. (Hanaysha, Abdullah & Warokka, 2011)

Conceptual models are required for empowering the management to determine "quality" shortfalls and arrange the launch of a "strategic quality improvement" programme. Service quality models have tried to show the relationships that exist between salient variables; it is a simplified description of the actuality (Zeithaml & Bitner). The main aims of the models are to help the management to improve the "quality" of the organization and its offering in a logical way. Six conceptual service quality models were identified. Each of them is representative of a different point of view. The models are constructed to emphasize the particular bias; they are Nordic Model, Parasuraman's model, Lovelock model, multilevel model and Hierarchical model.

2.2 MEASURING SERVICE QUALITY IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING

The objectives of the evaluation of quality should be completely for the purpose of process improvement and not evaluating individuals involved against targets, goals. The latter approach only support short-term performance, opposes long-term planning, build fear, destroy teamwork, cherish rivalry and politics (Chen et al., 2011). However what is wrong is that performance evaluation focuses on the end product and not on leadership to help people in carrying out the process. Hanaysha, Abdullah & Warokka, (2011) opined that, to ensure user experience; the quality of service need to be measured at three levels, process, output and outcome. The emphasis of this is that instead of focusing on the process and its boundaries for which output is delivered, there is a need to take a further step to understand what the user makes with the service provider's output. Moreover, it should be realized that user satisfaction or dissatisfaction depends on achieving, or not achieving, three different levels of expectation. These three levels of expectation are implicit, explicit and latent (Clark & Baker, 2004). Methods of measuring quality should be able to recognize these levels and evaluate the service accordingly, meeting level 1 (implicit) customer expectations and level 2 (explicit) user expectations does not create satisfaction. It merely creates a neutral user but never a delighted user (Chen et al., 2011).

The SERVQUAL instrument is one measure of perceived service quality derived from how the service user perceptions of actual service performed matched expectations. According to Parasuraman et al., (1985) the service users, use similar standards in evaluating service quality regardless of service type. He further concluded that SERVQUAL could be used as a comprehensive tool for a range of services. Higher institutions of learning are under certain pressure to outperform their competitors in determining the previous, determinants, and consequences of service quality. The importance of service quality makes its evaluation and its consequent management of extreme importance (Shekarchizadeh et al., 2011). They further stated that academics have responded by providing evaluation tools such as SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988) and SERVPERF (Cronin & Taylor, 1992) which have provoke many consequent studies. Higher institutions of learning

struggle to deliver high-quality service throughout their administrative processes and educational curriculums. In order to do so, these institutions must consider students as their primary clients and seek to maximize their satisfaction based on educational services rendered (Katircioglu, 2012). There is a substantial body of evidence in higher education literature suggesting that the SERVQUAL tool is effective in measuring service quality in the higher learning environment and is useful in offering guidance for changing weaknesses to strengths (Ahmed, 2011).

3. SERVICE USER EXPERIENCE

In the marketing literature, experiences are regularly used to refer to a definite group of services including travel, music, theater, restaurants, hotels and culture. The basis of these services has to do with hedonic consumption (Sundbo & Darmer, 2008). Meyer & Schwager, (2007) define service user experience as the internal and subjective response, users encounter to any contact, direct or indirect with organization. User experience is a holistic concept that encompasses every aspect of organization's offering (Teixeira, Patricio, Fisk & Constantine, 2012). Service user experience is defined as the service process that creates the user's cognitive, emotional and behavioral responses which result in a mental mark, a memory (Johnston & Clark, 2001).

The concept of experience is also used to add value to user services, for example in telecommunications services, educational services, residential college services and airline services. Ritz Carlton and Singapore Airlines, for example, focus not only on traditional service quality issues and factors such as reliability and assurance, but also on creating favorable user experiences (Pariag, 2009). Some of the service user experiences are favorable and some are not both tend to stay in the user's memory. These experiences will have a strong impact on user's perceptions.

3.1 FACTORS AFFECTING SERVICE USER EXPERIENCE

Factors affecting service user experience may include age, choice, convenience, value adding and life, speed of service delivery, quality and technology. However some of these factors may not necessarily apply to all higher institutions, even though some common factors can be shared (Chin Wei & Sri Ramalu, 2011). Physical aspects of the residential settings, such as, lighting and ventilation, common areas and orientation of windows within the residential college also contribute towards overall housing satisfaction (Mohit & Azim, 2012). There are various factors that influence students experience with their residential colleges, which include physical and, demographic attributes (Foubert, 1999).

I.   Physical Attributes

Physical factors of residential college, such as architectural design, bedroom size, floor level and density can influence students experience in residential colleges (Najib, et al, 2011). According to Foubert, (1998) Physical factors in residential college, such as architectural design, support services; space and location on

campus also have influence on students' experience with their residential college. He further added that light, temperature, noise and air quality also has powerful influence over experience with residential college. Moreover excessive noise has been rated as a significant detractor from student experience. Prolonged exposure to noise and very high noise level during sleep may cause hearing loss, mental stress and irritation (Preiser & Vischer, 2005). Quite is the most important requirement in any residential college (Hassanain, 2008). According to Najib et al., (2011) Residential experience among students' emanate from high-quality facilities, good roommate relationship, strong floor communities and quite study environments in their residential colleges. Amole, (2008) opined that students assess their residential experience according to the privacy and level of crowding in their rooms. However, Hassanain, (2008) observed that student experience depends on some physical attributes which include brighter and wider rooms with less noise and stress in the residential colleges. Proper residential colleges will arouse a silent study environment, provide security and privacy, encourage good friendship among users and help the residential college administrators to satisfy students' needs and aspiration for betterment of residential college life (Najib et al., 2012). They further added that physical attributes of students residential colleges, encompassed study-bedrooms, pantries, washrooms, common and recreation rooms and support services properly and well equipped with complete house like amenities in each room. Moreover to create a house like environment, higher institutions have included study facilities with bedrooms, reading room and meeting places known as common and recreation and common rooms for academic discussion and social gatherings within the residential colleges (Khozaei, Hassan, & Razak, 2011).

More so, Khozaei et al., (2010) opined that distance from the higher institution facilities, rental fare, satisfaction with transport services, external condition of the building, population, security, room size and safety has been described as the most important factors that influence students experience in the residential colleges. If students can acquire a lot of benefits by staying in the residential college furnished with required facilities, they can experience their study life same as home experience, or even better. However with positive experience in quality services and facilities, students can perform best in their studies (Najib et al., 2010).

II.   Demographic Attributes

Demographic attributes of an individual for example, duration of staying, ethnicity, sense of sharing, gender, economic status, relationship with students, and individual's home experience are also essential, therefore could not be ignored and will obviously influence students experience with the residential college (Najib et al., 2011). Some of the demographic attributes that influence service users' experience are discussed as follows:

Gender: females talks more than males, they like making friends and entertaining visitors in their rooms, while male students use their rooms as sleeping place and relaxation. Satisfaction with student residential college experiences is higher among female compared to male (Amole, 2008). Socio-economic status: personal income level of students plays a significant role in determining student residential experience. With good economic back ground, student may aspire to live enjoyable lives (Najib, Yusof, & Sani, 2012). However duration of staying due to

temporary nature of occupancy at universities' students' residential colleges, residential experience can be determined through the duration of stay (Foubert, 1998). David Jiboye, (2012) affirmed that satisfied students' would stay again in that residential college for the next semester.

Sense of sharing: female students were most likely to stay in shared facilities, while male students usually preferred to stay in more private spaces (Hassanain, 2008). Moreover, some researchers predicted that ethnicity has positive and negative effect on student residential experience (Ilias, 2008). Discrimination of different races will cause residential dissatisfaction among students.

4. THE CONCEPT OF SERVICE EXCELLENCE

The continuous globalization of services has prompted organizations in various service industries to concentrate on achieving user delight through service excellence, which will enable them to secure their competitive position and establish long-term user relationship (Gouthier, 2012). They also added that service excellence occurs when users perceive that a service exceeds their previous expectations. Service excellence could be described as that which the user perceives as providing the services they require quickly, conveniently without any error and delivered courteously by knowledgeable staff at an acceptable cost (Jones, 2004). The provision of excellent services is central to the competitive strategies of most, if not all service organizations. Particularly, issues related to service quality in higher institutions have led to an increased awareness of the significance of internal user satisfaction (Solnet & Kandampully, 2008).

The challenges and benefits of service excellence are highlighted as previous research has shown that student' and other stakeholders' expectations are growing and that the demand in better returns for their investment in higher institutions of learning are increasing (Khan & Matlay, 2009). As a result, service excellence is becoming a major component of higher education institutes' (HEIs') which they strive to achieve and maintain sustainable competitive advantage. Service excellence is an integral part in higher education delivery; various employees came into contact with a range of internal and external stakeholders and are directly responsible for the provision of quality services provided to their students (Khan & Matlay, 2009). They further stated that, in order to deliver the best service and to gain competitive advantage, HEIs should recruit, train and develop highly motivated and committed employees.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In order for the Facilities management Service providers to sustain surviving in the ever-turbulent condition, they need to act more like an integrated business, by paying close attention to all constructs in a holistic method. Service providers must realize that good and services are no longer sufficient, people seek experience. This will accelerate the move in to a new era where the service is designed around the service user, rather than the needs of the service user being forced to fit around the service already provided. If the intent is to deliver and sustain service excellence within organizations around the need of service users, obtaining feedback from them

and taking account of their views and priorities is necessary for bringing about improvements in the quality of service delivery which will help the organizations or higher institutions of learning to move from service quality level to service excellence level. The need to deliver service excellence in students' residential colleges from organizational perspective has been identified; this paper has recognized the need for service providers to support and add value to the delivery of facility management services by engaging all stakeholders to better respond to the service user's demand.

In conclusion, this study explore the most important physical and demographic attributes that influence service user's experience on the facilities provision at the students' residential colleges. This will benefit the university management, residential college administrators, facility and service managers in improving the method of service delivery and service quality on students' residential facilities as they advanced to improve from service quality level to service excellence level. Further study should explore the major functional and technical elements of performance on student students' residential colleges, which will help in continually improving the design, construction, performance, and maintenance.

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