ASSESSMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCE ON
ATTRIBUTES OF PHYSICAL FACILITIES PROVISION AT UTHM
RESIDENTIAL COLLEGES

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ABSTRACT

Presently higher institutions of learning are trying to attract more number of international students in their own programs and employing various strategies to maintain their students. Malaysia has two (2) percent of the world’s international student population, as of 2013 and was ranked the world’s 11th most preferred study destination. The country has therefore become a strong force in international education and thus they need to examine and understand how these students fit into and perceive the services delivered in the residential colleges of their higher institutions of learning. The aim of the research is to assess service user’s experience on the facilities provided at UTHM students’ residential colleges. The research determines the existing level of physical attributes and analyzes the relationship between physical and demographic attributes on service user’s experience with the facilities provision at the study area. The study adopted mixed method approach and questionnaires were distributed to 210 respondents, in which 189 responses were collected. Moreover, thematic network analysis was used for analyzing the qualitative data while quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS (Version 20) in which multiple and logistic regression analysis was used. The research determines the existing level of physical attributes at UTHM students’ residential colleges which include the availability, comfortability and quality of the physical attributes. Moreover a data analysis shows that there is a significant relationship between the demographic attributes of service users with the availability, comfortability and quality of some physical attributes. The research proposed a set of user-centered indicators that helps UTHM residential colleges to achieve a positive service user experience on the facilities provisions at the study area. The finding of this study helps to formulate guidelines in terms of improvement, maintenance, design and construction for future developments of students’ residential colleges. While on the other hand serve as a yardstick in measuring the key element of facilities that are more user’s centered for the UTHM residential colleges.
ABSTRAK

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

% -Percentage
EFQM -European Foundation for Service Quality Management
FM -Facility/Facilities Management
G2G -Government to Government
HEIs -Higher Education Institutions
KPI -Key Performance Indicators
MOHE -Ministry of Higher Education
NHEAP -National Higher Education Action Plan
NHESP -National Higher Education Strategic Plan
PIHE -Public Higher Education
QFD -Quality Function Deployment
SERVQUAL -Service Quality
SERVPERF -Service Performance
SLA -Service Level Agreement
UTHM -University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia
SERVEXCELL -Service Excellence
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Presently higher institutions of learning are trying to attract more number of international students in their programs and employing various strategies to maintain them (Khozaei, Hassan & Khozaei 2010). The introduction and the delivery of customer value become important in establishing a sustainable advantage in the highly competitive education market (Palmer, 2012). In today’s higher learning arena, international students have been described as a special commodity. Some countries like Australia, the United States of America and Britain have put in place some methods aimed at attracting them (Panditt, 2007). At the same time, some Asian countries have expressed their intention of becoming education hubs of higher learning in the region. Leading the initiatives are countries in the East Asia region, namely Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia (Operational Framework for International Student Management 2013).

According to the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia has two (2) percent of the world’s international student population, as of 2009 and was ranked the world’s 11th most preferred study destination. The total enrolment of international students in public and private higher learning institutions have increased from 40,525 in the year 2005, to 80,750 students, in the year 2009 (MOHE 2013). Malaysia has therefore become a strong force in international education. Thus they need to examine and understand how these students fit into and perceive the physical environment of their institutions of higher learning (Njie, Asimiran & Baki 2012).
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. 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).

Malaysia has 20 public universities, 33 private universities and university colleges, 4 foreign university branch campuses, 22 polytechnics, 37 community colleges and about 500 private colleges (MOHE, 2013). However, most of these institutions of higher learning are adopting various measures in attracting more international students by providing adequate facilities in their campuses to meet the needs of their users’, such facilities includes healthy and safe residential colleges, transportation and other facilitating services to ensure comfort of their customers (Bashir, 2012). The higher education system is designed to ensure that the Public Institutions of Higher Education (PIHE) have the capacity to develop reputation which encompasses dynamism, competitiveness, ability to anticipate future challenges including acting effectively and keeping pace with globalization.

Data of public HEIs as at 31st December 2011 shows that there is an increase in the enrolment of international students from 14,324 students in 2007 to 25,263 students in 2011 (MOHE, 2013a). Similarly, UTHM is among the higher institutions in Malaysia that have witnessed an increase in the number of international students. According to the UTHM International Office (2014), the statistical data has shown that the number of international students increased from 17 students, in 2007 to 493 students in 2014. To accommodate the increasing number of international students in Malaysian higher institutions of learning, the National Higher Education Action Plan (NHEAP) 2011-2015 has outlined objectives and targets to be achieved by providing quality improvements on teaching and learning, endeavor to develop first class human capital, and the curriculum need to be continuously improved in order to ensure that the curriculum is innovative, dynamic, up-to-date and relevant with market demands and current intellectual development (National Higher Education Action Plan, 2011).
1.2 Problem statement

The National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) was formulated with the aim of transforming Malaysia into an international hub of excellence for higher education. Moreover with the internationalization policy of higher education in Malaysia, the total enrolment of international students in public and private higher learning institutions has increased from merely 40,525 students, in the year 2005 to 86,916 students in the year 2010 (MOHE, 2013). The enrolment of international students in Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has increased from 14,324 in 2007 to 25,263 students in 2011 (MOHE, 2013). In the same vein, the statistical data at UTHM, has shown that the number of international students increased from 17 in 2007 to 493 students in 2014 (UTHM International Office, 2014). However, as the number of international students increased, also their needs in terms of facilities such as accommodation, transportation, restaurants and other facilitating services increases (Njie et al., 2012). Moreover, these facilities need to be improved from time to time to ensure that student needs are fulfilled (Njie et al., 2012).

Najib et al., (2011a) carried out a research on students’ residential experience at three Malaysian Research Universities, which showed that students have positive experience. However, the research did not cover the physical attributes which include bedroom size, density, building layout and floor level, as well as demographic attributes such as gender, age, economic status, race and religion which influence user’s experience with the facilities provision at the residential colleges. Therefore, further studies is recommended, to explore both physical and demographic factors which can influence student experience and can serve as a guide for residential college administrators towards achieving positive user’s experience (Najib et al., 2011a).

This research seeks to fill this gap. Similarly another research carried out by Najib et al., (2011b) to measure the student experience on the residential college facilities, at University Sains Malaysia, revealed that the experience level is low, compared to the previous studies. Moreover, Bashir (2012), wrote on students’ experience towards service quality in residential colleges of Kuala Lumpur Infrastructural University College (KLIUC), where data was collected based on Parasuraman et al., (1988) service quality framework. The study revealed that
students’ have positive experience but more effort is required in order to reach the level of excellence in service delivery. More so, students’ residential program being practice by the institutions of higher learning in Malaysia is described as good and does contribute to the social tolerance but the layout of the students’ residential facilities need to be improved so that relationship amongst students could be increased for social interrelation (Najib, Yusof & Sani, 2012). Moreover, students demographic attributes have a great influence on the students experience with the physical attributes of the residential colleges, more emphasis should be given to students economic status, ethnicity of roommates and sense of sharing (Najib et al., 2012).

According to Muslim et al., (2012) students’ enrolment has been increased in Malaysia and the demand for residential colleges also increased and many higher institutions of learning are facing the challenges and development of student’s residential colleges due to the increasing number of students. However, most residential colleges do not have the highly desired amenities and physical attributes that students’ and their parents perceive as essential to the higher institutions experience, such as wireless networking, kitchen, fitness and recreation centers, single bedroom with private toilet. They further maintain that some higher institutions have found themselves competing with private residential market as it provided students preferences (Muslim et al., 2012).

Despite the great importance of understanding student’s preferences with regards to physical attributes at students’ residential colleges, this area of study has been ignored (Khozaei, Ramayah, & Hassan, 2012). Khozaei, Hassan, Al kodamy & Aarab, (2014) affirmed this statement that, the new generation students, seek for single room with private bath, larger space, greater privacy and increase control over their privacy and personal space. However, more studies should be conducted on the role of demographic attributes on students’ preferences (Khozaei et al., 2012). According to Khozaei et al., (2014) there are several studies that have addressed students’ residential experience, but there is still lack of adequate knowledge on the real needs and requirements with regards to physical and demographic attributes. Existing literature suggests that residential experience is a function of a whole series of factors related to the users’ residence, services within the residential college, relationship with neighbors as well as the location of the residential college, also physical factors such as common areas, ventilation and lighting, windows orientation
within the residential colleges also contributes towards overall experience (Mohit & Azim, 2012). The physical and demographic attributes of students residential colleges need to be vigorously examined with a view to evolving a sound policy on students accommodation and the problems has provoked some researchers in developing countries to investigate the actual needs of the students (Lawrence, 2013). More so, it is evident nationwide that, the physical attributes of some students residential colleges are in major disrepair and are virtually obsolete when compared with the increasing demands of today’s University students. Student residential colleges built in the 1950s and 1960s are the most predominant residential option for students, which usually comprise of single rooms accommodating two students each in long corridors that do not provide privacy (Khozaei et al., 2014).

The available literature, shows that the level of excellence is yet to be achieved in students’ residential colleges, moreover physical and demographic attributes was not covered and to this effect, such research was an attempt to fill this gap which justified the need to carry out the assessment of users’ experience on the facilities provision with physical and demographic attributes at UTHM students’ residential colleges.

1.3 Research questions

1. What are the physical attributes that influence service user’s experience on the facilities provisions at the study area?
2. How does the physical and demographic attributes influence the service user’s experience on the facilities provisions at the study area?
3. Why do the physical and demographic attributes influence the service user’s experience on the facilities provisions at the study area?

1.4 Aim and objectives

The aim of the study is to assess the service user’s experience on the physical and demographic attributes of the facilities provided at the UTHM students’ residential colleges. To achieve the above mentioned aim, the following objectives were outlined.
1. To determine the existing level of physical attributes that influence service users’ experience on the facilities provisions at the study area.

2. To analyze the relationship between physical and demographic attributes on service users’ experience with the facilities provisions at the study area.

3. To propose a set of user-centered indicators in order to achieve a positive service user experience on the facilities provisions at the study area.

1.5 Scope of the research

The scope of the research is restricted to five UTHM students’ residential colleges, which include Kolej Kediaman Taman University, Kolej Kediaman Tun Syed Nasir, Kolej Kediaman Taman Kelisa, Kolej Kediaman Taman Melewar, and Kolej Kediaman Perwira. This research focus on the assessment of International students experience on the facilities provision with the physical and demographic attributes at the UTHM students’ residential colleges. The physical attributes examined in this research, include; study–bedrooms, building layout, toilet/bathrooms, laundry rooms, pantry, leisure rooms i.e., study areas, computer centers, television lounges, meeting rooms, mosque and other support services such as parking lots, cafeterias, mini markets, ATM machines, closed circuit television (CCTV) surveillance systems and security guards, as well as demographic attributes, which include gender, age, socio-economic status, religion and race. Similarly, the study’s targeted respondents are the international students, living in the five (5), of the above mentioned UTHM residential colleges.

1.6 Significance of study

The research contributes to understanding and interpreting the experience of service users at UTHM students’ residential colleges. The result offers valuable feedback to architects, facility/property managers and university housing administrators in terms of the present standards or the need for further improvement of the student residential facilities through effective designs and management. The findings also help to formulate guidelines in terms of designs, construction and maintenance for future developments of student residential colleges, ensuring that the universities are able to
provide adequate and contemporary student residential colleges. Finally the research findings serve as a yardstick in measuring the key element of facilities that are more users’ centered for the UTHM students’ residential colleges.

1.7 Research Plan

The research plan of the study from stage 1 to stage 6 is illustrated in Figure 1.1.
1.7.1 Stage 1

The procedure of the research includes gathering of relevant literature, the feedback from deductive reasoning and interview. This step includes the literature review in order to contribute the understanding on service user experience with the facilities provision at UTHM students’ residential colleges. The step comprises the following aspects: the concept of service, service definition, characteristics, elements, evolution, measuring tools and different interpretation and implementation of service excellence. However, the step consist of the issues on the Malaysian Higher Educations, the aim, target and strategies, statistics /increasing number of international students studying in Malaysia and the issues related to the facilities provided to complement the aim to be the educational hub.

1.7.2 Stage 2

The second stage in the procedure of the research is the development of the research framework. The research framework provides an in depth into the nature of the research, in case of whether an inductive or deductive approach is to be selected. The research framework developed to achieve the Research Objectives established in this study.

1.7.3 Stage 3

This stage highlighted the research design and methodological aspects of the research. This is necessary because it assist in determine research approach as well as techniques for data collection and analysis. The use of semi-structured interview and questionnaires aimed to increase the empirical understanding of the aforementioned issues in the context of service user experience.
1.7.4 Stage 4

In this stage, the various feedbacks from the respondents would finally be screened and analyzed. The researcher compiled data using close ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview from the international students, studying and living at UTHM students’ residential colleges. The quantitative data analysis was processed using SPSS software, while the semi-structured interview was analyzed by thematic network analysis. The outcome of this study was discussed with the aim of answering the research questions and achieved the objectives of the study.

1.7.5 Stage 5

At this stage data was collected by administering questionnaires and interview from the UTHM students’ residential colleges. The valid feedback was used to analyze the information obtained from UTHM students’ residential colleges. Data was obtained from the international students, studying and living at five UTHM students’ residential colleges.

1.7.6 Stage 6

This is the final stage in the research plan, it provides a summary of research findings, recommendations for future research and it provides the overall conclusion

1.8 Thesis organization

The writing of this thesis was organized into six chapters. Each chapter discusses details and more specific to every section as per below:
Chapter 1: Introduction

Introducing the subject to be discussed. The chapter includes background of the research which consists of the research problem, research questions, research objectives, scope of the research and research significance. Moreover, it lays the basis for the rest of discussion that follows.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review provides an overview and justification to the necessary and makes this subject as basic research in finding answers to questions that arise. The chapter defines the related terms about the research such as, service, the concept of service, service characteristics, service elements and evolution of service concept, service measuring tools and different interpretation and implementation of service excellence. The last part discusses the issues on the Malaysian Higher Educations, the aim, target and strategies, statistics /increasing number of international students studying in Malaysia and the issues related to the facilities provided to complement the aim to be the educational hub. The next chapter presents research design and methodology.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

The third chapter discusses the research framework and methodology. Discussions focus on the conceptual framework and research methodology used in this study. It covers the research design, research strategies, and the scope of the study, sampling, research instruments, data collection and data analysis methods. In reality consideration was given to the research populations. The targeted respondents were the international students, studying and living at UTHM students’ residential colleges.
Chapter 4: Data analysis and findings on the existing level of physical attributes that influence service users’ experience on the facilities provision at the study area

Chapter four presents data analysis and discussion of results from the questionnaire survey. Data analysis on the existing level of physical attributes that influence service users’ experience with the facilities provision at the study area was presented and the SPSS (Version 20) was used to assess the service users’ experience.

Chapter 5: Data analysis and findings on the relationship between physical and demographic attributes on service users’ experience with the facilities provisions at the study area

This chapter five also presents data analysis and discussion of results from both the questionnaire survey and the interview. Data on the service user’s experience was presented and the SPSS (Version 20) and thematic network analysis was used to analyzed the relationship between physical and demographic attributes that influenced service users’ experience on with the facilities provisions at the study area.

Chapter 6: Summary of findings, recommendations and conclusion

This chapter summarizes the findings of data analysis and corresponds against the Research Objectives. This chapter also highlights the main conclusion and recommends the future areas of research.
1.9 Summary

This chapter has introduced the topic and research questions that have brought about the undertaking of this research. It has shown how these reasons have led to a research questions and onto the aim and objectives of the research. The next chapter presents the reviewed related literature of this research work, with the aim of having a clear focus on the research.
2.1 Introduction

The quality of higher education has been described as one of the major determinants of national competitiveness. The quality comes from the combination of service excellent and the user experience on the service delivered. Assessment of user experience is important in determining quality of service in higher institutions of learning. To remain competitive, it requires Higher Institutions of Learning to continuously acquire, maintain and create stronger relationships with users. This chapter examines service, service definition, characteristics, elements, evolution, and different interpretation and implementation of service excellence.

2.2 Service

The way services are created and delivered to users’ is often hard to understand since many inputs and outputs are intangible (Johnston & Clark, 2005). Most people have encountered little difficulty in defining manufacturing or agriculture, but they can be disappointed in defining service (Gumnessson & Gronroos, 2012). They further defined service as a performance offered by one party to another, although the process may be tied to a physical product, the performance is essentially intangible and does not normally result in ownership of any factors of production. Zeithaml &
Bitner (2009), defined service as deeds, processes, and performances provided by one person for another. They further emphasized that services entails that intangibility is a key determinant of whether an offering is a service, although very few products are purely intangible or totally tangible, as an alternative, services tend to be more tangible than manufactured products, and manufactured products tend to be more tangible than services. Service is an economic activity that creates value and provides benefits to users at specific times and places by bringing about a desired change 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. Njie et al., (2012) opined that service has been identified as an effective tool for a competitive advantage that is why it attracts much attention.

Most often, service involves interactions with the service provider. However, there are situations where the user as an individual does not interact with the service organization. On the other hand, many circumstances where interactions do not seem to be present however do involve interactions (Sharabi & Davidow, 2010). Services are usually described as intangible and their output is considered as an activity, rather than a tangible thing, this discrepancy is not a clear one because much service output has a solid tangible element (Johns, 1999). According to Pine & Gilmore (1996), services are intangible activities customized to the individual request of unknown users, also service providers use goods to perform operations on a particular users or on his property or possession.

Users generally value the benefits of services more highly than the goods provided to them. According to Gronroos (1990), service are series of activities of more or less intangible nature that normally, but not necessarily take place in interactions between the user and service employees, physical resources or goods, which are provided as solutions to user problems. As a result of these interactions, the user will make assessments based on his emotional judgments and decisions of the service performance received in his service encounter as compared to his initial expectations on how the service will be delivered.
2.2.1 Characteristic of service

Intangibility raises issues for both the user and the provider of services. The user cannot assess the intangible aspect of service before the event and hence users’ often must use the reputation of a service firm and its representatives to judge quality. Zeithaml & Bitner (2009), observed that services cannot be evaluated in advance of use; unlike goods they do not have many of what is called search properties. The user must rely on the experience of the service itself, experience properties, or due to lack of specialist knowledge they are not capable of making objective judgments during, or after the delivery process (Kumar & Kumar, 2004).

Intangibility also requires that service producers take account of user psychology, and make plans to cope with the difficulties of demonstrating their offerings, while designing a new service package. They also have to acknowledge the probability of imitating successful services, since patents cannot be applied to the intangible aspects of service package (Gruber et al., 2011). Gronroos (1990), opined that services are compared with physical goods. He summarized the characteristics of physical goods and services as shown in table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Differences between services and physical goods (Gronroos, 1990)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical goods</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. Tangible</td>
<td>i. Intangible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Homogeneous</td>
<td>ii. Heterogeneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Production and distribution separated from consumption</td>
<td>iii. Production and distribution and consumption simultaneous processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. A thing</td>
<td>iv. An activity or process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. Core value produced in factory</td>
<td>v. Core value produced in buyer-seller interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi. Customers do not (normally) participate in the production process</td>
<td>vi. Customers participate in production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii. Can be kept in stock</td>
<td>viii. Cannot be kept in stock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viii. Transfer of ownership</td>
<td>viii. No transfer of ownership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four basic characteristics can be identified for most services, even though not all services have all these characteristics (Dabholkar & Overby, 2005).

(i) Services are more or less intangible — Intangibility

(ii) Services are activities or a series of activities rather than things — Variability
Services are at least to some extent produced and consumed simultaneously — Perishability

The customer participates in the production process at least to some extent. — Inseparability. The inefficiency of service providers to deliver a standardized output is primarily due to the various amounts of individual user needs and experiences. Input from service user to service user may differ, thus satisfying specific service users requires a degree of flexibility on behalf of the service producer (Bebko, 2000).

2.2.2 Concept of service

As products and services are becoming more similar and as it becomes easier for organizations to copy others’ services and products organizations may decide to compete through something that exceed their service offering (Johnston & Jones, 2004). The service concept, relates with the characteristics of the service offered to the target market (Ponsignon, Smart & Maull, 2011), they 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 (Karwan & Markland, 2006). 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).

Furthermore, the service concept delivers the value and benefits provided to users (Bashir, 2012). From this point of view, it can be regarded as the company’s value proposition. Therefore, it follows that different service concepts, representative of different degrees of customization, require different composition of the service delivery system (Ponsignon et al., 2011). However, Solnet & Kandampully, (2008) have considered the organizational perspective in defining service quality, which means establishment of requirements and specifications for a company, once it is done, users satisfaction becomes primary objectives for the establishment of quality goals. In other words, it then asks for consideration of the users perspective as well, while Robledo, (2001) suggested that for a user perspective, service quality means tendency of service to meet or exceed users expectations.
According to Bashir (2012), researchers have generally used two perspectives in defining service concept, organizational perspective and user’s perspective as shown in Figure 2.1. From organizational perspective the service concept is described as the process by which organization wishes to have its services perceived by its stakeholders which include shareholders, lenders, suppliers and service users. On the users perspective it is the way in which the service user perceived the delivery of service by the organization.

### 2.2.3 Elements of service concept

According to Johnston & Clark (2005), there are four major elements of service concept as follows:

- The service experience refers to the service users’ direct experience of service process that places much importance on the way the service provider treat the service beneficiary.
- The service outcome refers to the outcome for the service beneficiary.
- The service operation refers to the way in which the provision of service is carried out.
The value of service refers to the tangible benefit that a service beneficiary perceives to gain in return for the contribution either indirectly as in public service provision or directly as in commercial relationship.

As shown in Figure 2.2 the service concept is a communication mechanism where experience, outcome, operations together with the feeling of recognition to the service beneficiaries are put together to display the potential value of the service. However, in the institutions where service organizations aimed at gaining competitive advantage through service quality, the quality of interaction between staff and service users is believe to be major determinant of service user perception of service quality. For institutions to provide good service quality, it has to handle the service process as well as all essential resources for the process (Baumann, Elliott & Burton, 2012).

Figure 2.2: Elements of service concept (Johnston & Clark, 2005)

### 2.3 Service concept evolution

The evolution of service concepts involved two important dimensions; commoditization and customization. Customization means producing in response to a particular user desires. So often business overcome users with so much product proliferation that they throw up their hands and walk away, rather than go through length of decision making process with little or no support. Fundamentally users do not want choice; they just want exactly what they want. 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 (Pine & Gilmore, 1996). They further defined customization as delivering a service in response to particular service users’ needs in a very cost effective method. They conclude that low cost, high quality, customized goods and services can be achieved through flexibility and quick responsiveness in ever changing environment, people processes, units and technology reshape to provide service users with what they want. To shift up the progression of economic value, whether from goods to service or service to experience, organization must use such interactions to find out exactly what their users want.

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. 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, 1998). According to Baumann et al., (2012) commoditization when taken to its rational wrapping up results in little if any discrimination between similar classis of products and consequently offers no technological or market advantage for organizations. Such a situation would mean that all value-add would then necessarily have come from services or supplementary products related to commodity. Moreover, manufacturers and service providers will increasingly see their contribution commoditized as more organizations charge openly for the unforgettable encounters they provide (Pine & Gilmore, 2000). As shown in Figure 2.3 the higher the service concept moves up, the more customized the service becomes.

Therefore A fit between what the service users precisely requires at students’ residential colleges and what is being offered must be maintained in order for the individual needs to be accurately prescribed and solutions are described accordingly. There are five levels of service concepts within the service evolution. Moreover, these stages shows how the service concept has expand from service task to service excellence level.
The five level of the service concept are explained below.

- **Service task level**: this is the initial stage in the service concept evolution and it is the most technical stage of the whole process. The routine tasks get completed in this level based on directives from the administrator. For example cleaning the toilet twice in a day. However, if service operation needs to increase transactions with users, it should simplify its offering, therefore reducing the variety of service offerings provided. Moreover, employees should be knowledgeable and have freedom to make decisions in case organization has a complex product offering (Bowen & Ford, 2004).

- **Service delivery level**: in this level the service get delivered to users according to usual procedures and specifications. This includes the input–based tasks to observe the job sequence and its result. For example setting a cleaning standard and the delivery method 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 requirement, key
performance indicators and service level agreement are developed in this level. Failure to identify appropriate specifications that would meet customers’ expectations in terms of content, delivery and application will lead to service performance inconsistencies. Learning experience and orientation cannot be assessed by grades alone; service performance should go beyond tangible forms (Ponsignon et al., 2011).

- **Service quality level**: this level represents strong tools for management of performance and service quality evaluation that reveal tangible results. Moreover, SERVQUAL introduction and measuring the service quality by examining the service user perception gap and expectation is a prominent feature of this level. Customers’ perceptions of service quality are influenced by factors such as communications between employees, various types of information collected and the credibility users develop towards a service organization (Karami & Olfati, 2012).

- **Service excellence level**: covers the final stage of the service concept evolution 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 product, materials, processes, neither the encounters, but the individual user. Service excellence should comprise the outer performance of an internal quest to satisfy a broader experience (Yeo, 2008).

### 2.4 Service quality definition

Many researchers have raised some observation with regard to service quality, for instance, from the observations of Parasuraman et al., (1985) service quality is a difference between users’ expectation and perceived service. They further explain that, if performed service is less than the expectations of a user, then the user might get dissatisfied with the service quality. The service quality in higher learning institutions particularly is not only essential and important, but it served as an important framework of educational excellence. It is discovered that positive perceptions of service quality has important influence on student satisfaction and therefore satisfied student would attract more students through word-of-mouth
communications (Alves & Raposo, 2010). Kotler (2012), confirmed this view by highlighting that possible chances can occur for a user to either re-use the service-provided or recommend to others, if he perceives previous service received above his expectations. The students can be inspired from both academic performance as well as the administrative efficiency of their institution. Ahmed (2011), mentioned that service quality is a key performance measurement in educational excellence and its important variable for universities to create a strong perception in users mind.

Most of the well-established higher learning institutions focus highly on strategic issues like providing excellent services to their users. It is important because by doing so they would be able to create good relationship with users which are actually very significant in determining their future as institution (Malik & Usman, 2010). Moreover, higher learning institutions are like other service organizations that depends on users’ experience and one of the powerful marketing strategy is through positive word of mouth (Katircioglu, 2012). However, performance measurement of service quality at higher learning institutions is strongly enclosed with the matching between students’ expectation and their experience of a particular service (Talha, 2004).

More so, students evaluate and judge the service quality to be satisfactory by comparing what they expect against what they really got. Gruber et al., (2011) believe that human interaction element is important to determine whether students consider service delivered satisfactory or not. Apart from that, higher learning institutions need to have appropriate infrastructures too, such as administrative and academic buildings, residential colleges, catering facilities, sports facilities and recreations center (Sapri, Kaka & Finch, 2009).

According to Gronroos (1984), in his service quality model stated that service users compared their expectations to their experience of service quality in taking their decisions. He proposed that service users’ evaluations of service quality were as a result of their assessment of functional, technical and the impact of an organization’s image. The outcomes of technical and functional quality may not be adequate to identify what is perceived by the service user in using Gronroos service quality model because technical and functional quality, together, contain the construct of image. Image might be a quality dimension that might not only influence expectations, but also might affect the perceived service quality, depending on the level of technical or functional quality present (Talha, 2004). Gronroos, (1984)
opined that both expectations and perceptions would be influenced by the image of the service organization, which was formed by the functional and technical quality. Similarly Brandy & Cronin, (2001) opined that the image of service organizations result from a comparison of perceived with expected performance.

Moreover, Gronroos, (1984) used the terms technical and functional quality in the sense of internal quality and he further added that functional quality would be more important to the perceived service than technical quality, provided that functional quality was satisfactory. Parasuraman et al., (1985) provided the most widely accepted set of service quality in which they defined perceive service quality model based on the difference between service user’s expectation and perception. Therefore factors affecting expected service include previous experience, perceive needs, word of mouth and communication.

2.5 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 et al., (1991). Their research identified five specific dimensions of service quality that apply across a variety of service contexts.

i). Tangibles: appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and written materials

ii). Reliability; ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately

iii). Responsiveness; willingness to help customers and provide prompt service

iv). Assurance; employees’ knowledge and courtesy and their ability to inspire trust and confidence

v). Empathy; caring, individualize attention given to customers
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 2.4.

![Service quality dimensions diagram](image)

Figure 2.4: Service quality dimensions. (Hanaysha et al., 2011)

### 2.5.1 Reliability

Reliability has been consistently shown to be the most important determinant of perceptions of service quality, among the five quality dimensions (Mohammad, Gambo, & Omirin, 2012). They emphasized that, according to Parasuraman et al., (1988) reliability is service provider’s ability to perform certain service dependably and accurately. This is beneficial in terms of retaining users. As defined by Zeithaml & Bitner (2009), reliability means the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. They further emphasized that users might expect to re-do the business with such an institution or organizations, who has reputable image for keeping their promise. Consequently, the user’s reliability expectations must be learned properly by all service providers.

### 2.5.2 Responsiveness

This dimension focuses on attentiveness and promptness in dealing with user’s problems, complaint’s, questions and requests (Abili & Thani, 2012). Responsiveness is the willingness to help users and to provide prompt service. This
REFERENCES


