

## **Development Of MBA Program-Service Quality Measurement Scale**

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*The dimensions of perceived service quality are an important issue since it permits researchers to explore the relationships between each dimension and construct. This study developed perceived MBA program-service quality measurement scale (MBA-SQ) in MBA program. The targeted population of this study was MBA students from graduate school in Northern region Malaysia. A total of 222 questionnaires were collected out of the 331 questionnaires distributed. After conducted several testing the measurement instrument included a) unidimensionality of the constructs, b) construct validity, c) convergent validity, d) discriminant validity, and e) nomological validity. The results found that the MBA-SQ has success met research objective The MBA-SQ measurement can be used as a strategic tool for the marketing of the school's programs. Perhaps then the graduate school of management would have the opportunity to fulfill needs and desires of students, giving the school a competitive advantage in the market.*

Key words: MBA Program, Graduate Student, Quality Dimensions, Service Quality

### **1.0 Introduction**

Today, higher education is more accessible to a wider clientele who have the choice of going to public universities or to private institutions. "It is a welcoming outcome that the private organizations are really competing well with and even well ahead of government organizations in delivering services and other related outputs. Privatization can be considered to be the right move globally and particularly in Malaysia." (Sivanand & Nagalingam, 2005, pp. 14) In response to this, public universities should be cautious and should have an appropriate quality control mechanism to keep standards up. There is no one right way to make quality visible and quantitative. Universities have to identify the qualities that their customers (i.e. students) recognize to be essential for high quality education. In an attempt to define quality and then promote its enhancement, as recipients of higher education, students' perception of quality were of interest. A measure of service quality previously may have analyzed the summed overall and not the scales of dimensions. Significant information is lost when summed responses were used, as researchers have no way of identifying which attributes of service contributed to the importance of the research.

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Satisfying students to retain them is important for any education universities. It might be argued that dissatisfied students may cut back on the number of courses or drop out of university completely. Statistics indicate that more than “40% of all college entrants leave higher education without earning a degree, 75% of these students drop out in the first two years of college, and a more recent statistics indicated that 46.2% of the freshmen do not graduate from college” (Kara & DeShields, 2004, pp. 1). Based on the numbers, we can see how important for universities administrator and researchers to focus their attentions on service qualities that give rise to student satisfaction for a better chance to compete. The objective of this study is to explore the dimensions perceived by students as quality dimension in assessing the MBA program. The following sections describe the literature review and related issues in the measurement scale. This is followed by the methodology and analysis. The last section highlights the discussions and recommendations for future research.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Quality In Higher Education**

The focus of quality in service in this research is narrowed down to one aspect particularly service in higher education. Being an important agent, higher education service providers are now looked at as having the edge in improving its services. Ever since higher education providers throughout the globe were urged to operate more commercially, quality has been identified as the core ingredient to success, and as the evolution of dynamic competition continues, students as clients must be satisfied. We have to face the fact that quality is no longer just for manufacturers. In recent years, providing quality higher education in developing countries has become a great challenge and extremely significant to society and government. As higher education providers like the universities face internationalization, they must now compete with the standards set by other educational institutions of the world. This exposure has stimulated a demand for better information and transparency about quality in order to attract and retain students, both national and international students.

Arguments that quality could not be measured but could be recognized by academics when and where it existed were common. There are many different understandings of the term “quality”, often reflecting the interests of different constituencies or stakeholders in higher education. Thus, we can say that quality is multidimensional and often a subjective concept. In order to provide quality, higher education providers must first understand what their students need. To do that, they must understand the quality attributes embraced by these students because quality is perceived differently. One might see quality education as in the teaching syllabus, the caliber of the lecturer and the facilities provided. Owlia and Aspinwall (1996) pointed out that in order to measure quality, characteristics of the quality need to be identified. Additionally, Cheng and Tam (1997) emphasized on the importance of defining characteristics of quality for the measurement of the education process.

### **2.2 Conceptual Service Quality Models In Higher Education**

## Merican, Zailani & Fernando

For decades, various service quality models were established and practiced, covering the aspects of conventional services to the latest web interacted services. Up to this date, at least 19 service models are in use and applied to the current services context. Several of these models have proved to be important measurement instrument in the service industry including the higher education industry. As the quality management of higher education was handled differently from that of manufacturing industries, popular service quality models practiced by business world have been adapted and applied through-out the years. For example, Total Quality Management (TQM) has been applied to schools and colleges in countries like UK, USA and Malaysia. And not forgetting the most popular SERVQUAL was also used to measure the quality in education (Chua, 2004). It is a known fact that service quality is influenced by attitude and behavior of a service customer and provider. Different stakeholders are likely to prioritize different importance of these dimensions of quality according to their interest and motivations. There are a number of service quality measurement instruments available and can be applied to services. One instrument that can be applied to number of service setting, including higher education is called SERVQUAL (Ivancevich et. al., 1997).

The most common scale in the service quality model is SERVQUAL. It is based on the concept of a “service quality gap”. A gap that exists between customers expected level of service and their perception of the actual level of service delivery (Jabnoun & Al-Saad, 2004). SERVQUAL’s 5 dimensions include tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Faganel and Macur (2005) in their research on the Faculty of Management Koper, used 5 dimensions of service quality to challenge the SERVQUAL theory. The research was to establish the most important determinants of quality perceived by students and professor of that particular faculty. Their research showed that students and professors understood quality differently. Students in the faculty perceived quality of education as a whole and not only to just a few quality items. On the other hand, their professors recognized 5 quality dimensions (attention to students, regular and timely informing students, realization of planned services and students’ suggestions, study materials and service performance in time) which differed from the concept of Parasuraman et al (Faganel & Macur, 2005).

In addition to that, there are several other models used in the higher education industry for service quality assessment. To name a few, the “Performance Only model (SERVPERF) introduced by Cronin and Taylor in 1992, the Evaluated Performance and Normed Quality model proposed by Teas in 1993, and the latest, the service quality scale (DL-sQUAL) of online distance learning programs introduced in 2006 by Shaik, Lowe and Pinegar” (Zhiltsov, 2006, pp 4-34). DL-sQUAL was introduced as there was a need for an instrument to measure the quality of online education. Previous SERVQUAL and e-SQ models measured quality of traditional and eCommerce services and there are no instruments available to measure the quality of distance learning services. In their research, Shaik et al., (2006) found that the DL-eSQUAL scale demonstrated psychometric properties based on the validity and reliability analysis. Their findings from the exploratory research offered useful initial insights about the criteria and processes students use in evaluating distance learning services. These insights, in addition to serving as a starting point for developing a formal scale to measure perceived DL-sQUAL, constituted a conceptual blueprint that distance learning administrators can use to

qualitatively assess the potential strengths and weaknesses of their services (Shaik et al., 2006).

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Questionnaire Description**

The measurement in this paper was to interpret the quality of higher education in terms of the quality dimensions was derived from Parasuraman et al. (1988) model. Perceived College Quality Scale developed by Zailani et. al. (2006) was used as a proxy to the measurement in this research. The framework will be focusing on five service quality dimensions scale proposed below:

1. Perceived program quality
  - a. The School of Management offers the flexibility of program.
  - b. The MBA program has a variety of curriculum offered.
  - c. The MBA program has outlined and offered appropriate content to course.
2. Perceived quality of life
  - a. The students are exposed to favorable social/emotional support facilities within the school.
  - b. The students are given the opportunity for a positive interpersonal relationship among the MBA community.
3. Perceived quality of lecturing faculty.
  - a. Lecture in the school has well-versed knowledge.
  - b. Lecturers have all the experience needed in their subject matter.
  - c. Lecturers of the school have the ability to transmit enthusiasm for their subject.
  - d. Lecturers involved in the MBA program have stimulating and interesting teaching methodology.
4. Perceived quality of academic facilities.
  - a. The library facilities are readily available and accessible.
  - b. The computer facilities are readily available and accessible.
  - c. The laboratories are well equipped and accessible.
  - d. Student's lounge is available and accessible.
  - e. The sports facilities are readily available.
5. Perceived quality of outcome.
  - a. With the education and qualification received from the school, students have constructive placement opportunities.
  - b. Students are able to gain competencies with the education provided by the school.
  - c. The MBA program offers research/thesis quality that is competitive among other universities.

#### **3.2 Measures**

Informal interview was carried out with MBA students prior to distribution of questionnaires. The interview was to have a general insight of what the students perceived on the service they are getting from graduate school management in Northern region Malaysia. The questionnaires used were adopted from the

questionnaires developed by past researchers. Questionnaires were not identified to any particular respondents. In order to help to describe the sample characteristics in the data analysis report, demographic data such as age, gender, ethnicity, working experience and income was included in the questionnaire. These data were structured in a range of response option, rather than seeking exact figures. These demographic variables will be used to examine how different types of customers respond. These demographic variables will be selected without specific theoretical expectations; other than they represent important characteristics associated with different life-style patterns usually linked to different consumption behaviors.

The next section, themes presented by Hill, Lomas and MacGregor were used as a guideline in developing the proper structure for the questionnaire. In addition to that, dimensions similar to those in the service quality measure developed by Zailani et al. were also adapted. The dimensions of the questionnaire were all measurable based on 5-point Likert-type scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The items included to measure a particular service quality dimensions. 35 questions were adapted from the University of Queensland Student Experience Survey, University of North Texas Student Survey and a research questionnaire by Greiner (2000).

This research was also inspired based on the Hill, Lomas, and MacGregor, (2003) research. Program quality looks at the students' comparative perception with regards to the quality of the program provided by the school. This dimension is defined by the variety of programs, curriculum and content of the course. Meanwhile the quality of life consists of support facilities, social activities and interpersonal relationship. Their social life in the school is important in determining perceived service quality as students spend a significant amount of time on the campus. Subsequently, this research looked at lecturing faculty. It has been argued that many of the factors contributing to high quality education are related to 'instructor factors' (Hill, Lomas & MacGregor, 2003). Lecturing faculty dimension is defined as lecturers enthusiasm, expertise, and teaching style. Next, this research explored the dimension of academic facilities that included resources such as lecture rooms, library, laboratories, student's lounge and computer facilities. And last but not least, outcome quality referred to placement opportunities, proficiency gained and research quality. Here, the result (knowledge, technical skills, analytical skills and soft skills) of receiving the school's service is questioned. Outcome also represents what the students gain from the service given by the school.

### **3.3 Research Design**

This study was done by narrowing the facts obtained from the review of literature. It was concluded that to give greater meaning to quality of education as perceived by university students, this study was to be carried out by examining the various factors in a generalized and common factor. This study is interested in describing the characteristics of a population or phenomenon, thus the study is a descriptive study. Since representativeness of a sample is not critical for this study, a random sampling of the non-probability design was used to distribute questionnaire. The targeted population of this study would be MBA students from graduate school in Northern region Malaysia. Samples were then identified and selected during a one week period of MBA classes. Samples were given questionnaires by hand.

In this study, only samples aged 20 to 60 were considered as they represent the typical or core students. This particular age group was chosen to gain more meaningful insights when conducting the study. Using the purposive sampling, about 331 students were targeted to be the sample for this research. A total of 222 questionnaires were collected out of the 331 questionnaires distributed. The response rate was 67%. According to Nunnally (1978) a sample of 300 respondents is sufficient to test measurement scales. The unit of analysis was focused on individual students. They consist of first year MBA students, second year MBA students, third year MBA students, final year MBA student and graduated MBA students. By surveying enrolled students, this study investigated the current operation of graduate programs and provided results that could be used to guide reform efforts.

#### **4.0 Result And Analysis**

The descriptive statistic for respondent profile shows more female students than male students sampled. The percentage of female respondents was 54.1 percent while the percentage of male respondents was 45.9 percent. In terms of race, the majority of respondents were Chinese (39.6%), followed by the Malays (30.6%), others (Sikh, Arabs, Persian, etc) (16.2%) and Indians (13.5%). The research involved 78.4% local students and 21.6% international students. A total of 136 (61.3%) part-time students and 86 (38.7%) full-time students were recorded as respondents. A majority of respondents (47.7%) for this research came from the 25-30 age groups. In addition to that, a total of 65.3% respondents have more than 4 years working experience. A bulk of 67.1% is working in the private sector while 6.3% work with the government. Finally, 44.1% of respondents were recorded to be earning above RM3000, 23.4% earning between RM2001 to RM3000, 11.7% earning less than RM1000 and 9% earning between RM1001 to RM2000. Income in this research reflected either salary or study loans or scholarships.

#### **4.1 Testing The Measurement Instrument**

The measurement instrument presented was adopted from Desmidt et al. (2007). They suggest testing for a) unidimensionality of the constructs, b) construct validity, c) convergent validity, d) discriminant validity, and e) nomological validity. The degree of unidimensionality of the constructs was measured using an exploratory factor analysis (Table 1). The conducted exploratory factor analysis confirmed the proposed factor structure and indicates that five factors (i.e., program quality, life quality, lecturing quality, facilities quality and outcome quality) exist with an eigenvalue of at least one, extracting 76.60% of the variance. The exploratory factor analysis also provided evidence for the unidimensionality of the measures as all indicators loaded high on their respective factor. Consequently, the proposed constructs are unidimensional, and no need exists to redefine them.

Table 1 *Exploratory factor analysis: total variance extracted*

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	<b>14.065</b>	40.186	40.186
2	<b>4.836</b>	13.816	54.002
3	<b>4.452</b>	12.720	66.722
4	<b>3.149</b>	8.997	75.719
5	<b>2.335</b>	6.673	82.392
6	.878	2.510	84.901
7	.785	2.244	87.145
8	.656	1.874	89.019
9	.586	1.674	90.694
10	.428	1.222	91.915
11	.391	1.118	93.034
12	.303	.867	93.900
13	.235	.670	94.571
14	.206	.589	95.160
15	.194	.553	95.713
16	.190	.544	96.257
17	.169	.484	96.741
18	.159	.454	97.195
19	.149	.426	97.620
20	.117	.335	97.956
21	.116	.332	98.287
22	.108	.307	98.595
23	.079	.226	98.820
24	.068	.194	99.014
25	.058	.167	99.181
26	.051	.145	99.326
27	.046	.131	99.458
28	.042	.121	99.579
29	.034	.096	99.675
30	.030	.086	99.761
31	.028	.079	99.840
32	.023	.067	99.907
33	.018	.052	99.959
34	.015	.041	100.000
35	8.879E-18	2.537E-17	100.000

Evidence of construct validity was derived from the fact that all with the exception of three items had a loading of 0.70. Furthermore, all of the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the proposed constructs fall in the interval (0.90, 0.95). Thus, all constructs are reliable. Convergent validity was determined by the significant size of the factor loadings, which ranged from 0.54 to 0.91. All constructs demonstrate discriminant validity as all items load high on their respective factor. Additionally, discriminant validity was assessed by means of the confidence interval test (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). For each pair of constructs, a confidence interval of plus or minus two standard errors

## Merican, Zailani & Fernando

around the correlation between the constructs was calculated. None of these confidence intervals, computed using Fisher's z, included |1.0|, thereby giving further evidence of discriminant validity. Nomological validity was obtained because the correlations among the constructs are all positive as expected by theory (Desmidt et al., 2007).

*Table 2 Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations and Cronbach's alpha coefficients (in Underline italic)*

	Mean	Std. Dev	PQ	LQ	LcQ	FQ	OQ
PQ	3.41	.822	<u>.958</u>				
LQ	3.49	.800	.292**	<u>.940</u>			
LcQ	3.48	.759	.343**	.241**	<u>.943</u>		
FQ	3.15	1.07	.384**	.180**	.380**	<u>.957</u>	
OQ	3.74	.713	.455**	.276**	.507**	.327**	<u>.900</u>

*Note the code are refers to PQ: Program Quality; LQ: Life Quality; LcQ: Lecturing Quality; FQ: Facilities Quality; OQ: Outcome Quality*

n = 222; \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

## 5.0 Discussion

The focus of quality in service in this research is narrowed down to one aspect particularly service in higher education. Being an important agent, higher education service providers are now looked at as having the edge in improving its services. Ever since higher education providers throughout the globe were urged to operate more commercially, quality has been identified as the core ingredient to success, and as the evolution of dynamic competition continues, students as clients must be satisfied. We have to face the fact that quality is no longer just for manufacturers. In recent years, providing quality higher education in developing countries has become a great challenge and extremely significant to society and government. As higher education providers like the universities face internationalization, they must now compete with the standards set by other educational institutions of the world. This exposure has stimulated a demand for better information and transparency about quality in order to attract and retain students, both national and international students. Arguments that quality could not be measured but could be recognized by academics when and where it existed were common. There are many different understandings of the term "quality", often reflecting the interests of different constituencies or stakeholders in higher education. Thus, we can say that quality is multidimensional and often a subjective concept.

In order to provide quality, higher education providers must first understand what their students need. To do that, they must understand the quality attributes embraced by these students because quality is perceived differently. One might see quality education as in the teaching syllabus, the caliber of the lecturer and the facilities provided. Owlia and Aspinwall (1996) pointed out that in order to measure quality, characteristics of the quality need to be identified. Additionally, Cheng and Tam (1997) emphasized on the importance of defining characteristics of quality for the measurement of the education process. This objective of this study is to explore the dimensions perceived by students as quality in MBA program.



Based on our finding to develop perceived MBA program-service quality measurement scale (MBA-SQ) has met the research objective. This research serves as a tool in giving students an equal opportunity to provide general feedback on their perception of quality in their learning experience. Student feedback will be able to provide the graduate school of management with comparative information that can be used to assist them in the identification of strengths and weaknesses of the service quality provided, as perceived by the students. Student's overall perception and evaluation of quality service help to describe a variety of educational activities such as teaching methodology, lecturer-student interaction, staff-student interaction, educational facilities, and contacts with administration. Moreover, the graduate school of management will also be able to identify gaps between students' perceptions of education and that of educators. This is significant to the educators since they often have a misconception of students' attitudes because of the subjective manner in which students' comments are received.

### **5.1 Limitations Of The Study**

This research exclusively examined responses by MBA students in a Malaysia Northern Region location, making the sample size small and limited. Also, the ability to draw similar conclusions to other students in other schools is restricted. In addition, evaluations of educational quality by other important stakeholders such as lecturers and administration staff are not assessed.

### **5.2 Recommendations for Future Research**

The study was limited to a single master's program. First, we identified the quality dimensions according to the perspective of graduate school of management students. We found that the findings of this research rhyme well with some of the earlier publications regarding quality in higher education. Thus, further research in this area should be valuable. As mentioned, it would be useful to complement this research with studies from other perspectives than the students'. Single stakeholder view can only give limited perspective.

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## Merican, Zailani & Fernando

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## 7.0 Appendix

The aim of this section is to assess the level of agreement or disagreement on the following statements. The questions below are related to your perception towards the MBA program provided by graduate school of management. Please **tick** (✓) your best response.

<b>Perceived program quality</b>	
1	Flexibility of the program took into account the students experience and needs.
2	I can see how course contents fitted together to make a logical MBA program.
3	The workload is too heavy and there is a lot of pressure on me as a student in this program.
4	The variety of curriculum is well integrated.
5	Interesting variety of curriculum has stimulated my enthusiasm for further learning
6	Curriculum variation allows students to adapt with 'real world' practices.
7	The content of the program is appropriately outlined.
8	This course content provides for a wholesome education
9	The program class time and office hours are convenient to all students.
<b>Perceived quality of life</b>	
1	When you have a problem, The School of Management MBA staff shows a sincere interest in solving it.
2	The School of Management MBA staff cares about the interests of the students concerning social aspects like residence, scholarship etc
3	The MBA students are informed promptly of the important dates for examinations, registration, seminars, etc.
4	I feel like part of a group of students and staff committed to learning
5	I often work together with others in my classes
6	I have no problem working with students of different backgrounds (age, race, profession, social status, etc)
<b>Perceived quality of lecturing faculty</b>	
1	The MBA lecturers of the School of Management establish clear objectives for their classes.
2	The School of Management MBA lecturers have abilities to explain and answer questions clearly and comprehensively.
3	The MBA lecturers have proven record in research productivity (publish books, magazine articles, doctoral thesis).
4	The School of Management MBA lecturers have interesting lecturing techniques.
5	The lecturers seem more interested in testing what I have memorized than what I have understood.
6	The lecturer's knowledge of the subject is broad and accurate.
7	The lessons are prepared thoroughly, and presented in a clear manner.

## Merican, Zailani & Fernando

8	The lecturers are enthusiastic about the subjects taught, thus motivating me to do my best.
9	The lecturers work hard to make their subjects interesting.
<b>Perceived quality of academic facilities</b>	
1	The physical facilities (lecture rooms, library, lounge, etc) of the School of Management are appropriate for the MBA program.
2	The materials handed out during the MBA program of The School of Management (handouts, support materials, programs, website) are visually appealing.
3	In the School of Management, the services supplied by sub-contracted companies (security, cleanness) have good quality.
4	Where it was used, information technology helped me to learn
5	The standard of learning resources (library and computers) and access to them, meet my MBA study needs.
<b>Perceived quality of outcome</b>	
1	Your employers (if applicable) have trust in the quality of MBA education of the School of Management.
2	The reputation of MBA by the School of Management influences the choice of potential employers.
3	The MBA program has sharpened my analytical and problem-solving skills
4	The MBA program has improved my skills in written communication
5	The MBA program has helped me develop my ability to work as a team member
6	I am confident that I am able to produce quality research materials once I graduate.