

Students' Satisfaction towards Academic Advising Service

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Abstract: Effective academic advising service has been found to bring positive benefits to educational institutions to increase students' retention rates and graduation. This study sought to find the essential attributes in public university academic advising service in UiTM Pasir Gudang campus, Malaysia, which may be used to improve the service provided to the students. Quantitative research was conducted using a questionnaire adapted from Parasuraman's SERVQUAL model with a sample size of 221. The study aimed to examine the relationship between service quality dimensions and students' satisfaction. Descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression analysis were used to analyse the questionnaires. Multiple regression analyses results showed reliability and empathy were two dimensions that had significant relationship with students' satisfaction. The results also demonstrated a statistical difference in academic advising service satisfaction among the students according to their years of study and meeting frequency with advisors. The findings of this study may be valuable for the institution to understand the factors that are most significant to further improve the students' satisfaction level in academic advising service.

Keywords: Academic advising, Students' satisfaction, Higher education, Service quality

1. Introduction

The academic advisors provide support and encouragement to students throughout the education program. Students are prone to have regular interaction with the academic advisor over a long duration of time, including as they prepare to graduate. Student retention is very important in sustaining the image of the higher learning institution. The aspect of academics, such as quality of teaching, the role of the educators, was found to be the most significant influence on the students' satisfaction (Akareem & Hossain, 2016). By having a higher percentage of students to graduate on time and producing fewer dropouts, the institution can be the top choice among the students and offer a better position in terms of competitive advantage. The positive word of mouth from satisfied students would portray a positive image regarding the institution among the potential stakeholders.

Many researchers found that students' satisfaction is the predictor of retention (Hsu & Bailey, 2011; Saba'Ayon, 2015; Vianden & Barlow, 2015; Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, & Hawthorne, 2013). Hsu and Bailey (2011) stated that students' satisfaction with academic advising impacts on their

retention. The study showed the importance of advising and faculty advisor support on student persistence in which academic advisors play essential roles in advising students, particularly, the first year. Saba'Ayon (2015) investigated the perceptions of university students of academic advising, their attitudes, their awareness of the process and the role of the advisor, and the relationship between gender, major, or academic status on the participants' attitudes. She found the students in Lebanon private university had negative experiences with their academic advisors. Tyran and Ross (2007) assessed the service quality for a web-based academic advising service. They believed it is essential to have sufficient service to assist in students' academic development, especially in graduation rates and students' retention.

In the US, Vianden and Barlow (2015) in their study have explored the correlation between perceived academic advising quality and students' loyalty in undergraduate. It has shown that a positive relationship exists between satisfaction in academic advising and students' loyalty. Satisfaction among the students can lead towards the possibility of continuing to pursue the next level such as Bachelor's or Master's degree with the same university (Yaumiddin, 2011). From the development of self-efficacy to practical applications of study skills, academic advising does impact students' academic performance. Achievement of educational goals by the students and accomplishments of the educational mission by the institutions can be a win-win situation (Young- Jones et al., 2013). Academic advisors could play active roles in sensing alarming academic performance for early interventions and proactive measures to assist the students.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify the students' satisfaction level on academic advising service across service quality dimensions. This study would enable the institution to benchmark its services by identifying the strengths and weaknesses in the current service that the students experience. Moreover, this study was aimed to explore demographic variables that significantly differ towards students' satisfaction.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Service Quality in Higher Education

SERVQUAL is a multidimensional research model designed to measure service quality by capturing respondents' expectations and perceptions along its dimensions of service quality which include tangible, reliability, empathy, responsiveness, and assurance. Research on service quality in the context of higher education gained interest in Asia such as Yousapronpaiboon (2014) in Thailand; Khan, Ahmed, and Nawaz (2012) in Pakistan; Akhlaghi, Shahnaz, and Akhlag (2012) in Iran; Wong, Ong, and Kuek (2012); Abu Hasan, Ilias, Abd Rahman, & Abd Razak (2008); Chuah and Sri Ramalu (2011) and Sin, Yusof, and Sin (2018) in Malaysia.

Yousapronpaiboon (2014) investigated service quality in private higher education in Thailand using five dimensions of SERVQUAL. The study discovered that undergraduate students were not satisfied with the service quality in which their expectations exceeded their perceptions. In a public university in Pakistan, Khan, Ahmed, and Nawaz (2012) indicated that service quality, i.e., reliability, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy, does have a significant relationship with students' satisfaction level except for tangibles. In Iran, Akhlaghi, Shahnaz, and Akhlag (2012) used a 25-item SERVQUAL questionnaire to assess the quality of educational services offered in a technical college and found out that responsiveness and assurance led to students' dissatisfaction.

In Malaysia, Wong, Ong, & Kuek (2012) attempted to identify the determinants of service quality of lecturing staff from the students' perspectives. Abu Hasan et al. (2008) indicated that the service quality has a significant positive relationship with students' satisfaction in undergraduates from two private higher institutions in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia. From the SERVQUAL, the study dropped the tangible factor and added two more factors, which were knowledge and communication.

In a public university in Malaysia, Chuah and Sri Ramalu (2011) discovered that empathy, responsiveness, and assurance were the three dimensions of service quality that are significantly related to the students' satisfaction. Sin, Yusof, and Sin (2018) adopted Parasuraman's SERVQUAL model to investigate the international students' satisfaction level, which showed that responsiveness, assurance, and empathy were the three dimensions that had significant relationship with the students' satisfaction. Based on past studies several researchers have used SERVQUAL model instruments to

measure service quality perceptions that are well established in the higher education sector. Thus, it is evident that the SERVQUAL questionnaire is adapted for this study.

3. Methodology

A cross-sectional study was conducted between Oct to Nov 2019. Convenience sampling through an online questionnaire was used to evaluate the satisfaction of academic advising service perceived by students in a public higher institution in Pasir Gudang, Malaysia. The subjects of this study were students from the various semesters who have been assigned to an academic advisor as early in their first semester. Every student has been assigned an academic advisor throughout the program. The questionnaire was adopted from Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) SERVQUAL and consisted of three parts.

The first part aimed to collect demographic information from the respondents, mainly gender, current semester, frequency of meeting, and online discussion group availability. The second part was to solicit the students' experience in receiving academic advising service based on reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy by using a five-point Likert scale (Strongly disagree-1, disagree-2, neither-3, agree-4, and strongly agree-5). The third part was to measure the students' overall satisfaction level of academic advising service received.

As it concerns the quality of academic advising, the tangible factor may not be relevant (Khan, Ahmed, & Nawaz, 2012; Wong, Ong, & Kuek, 2012). Most of the discussions with an academic advisor are done online or on the phone, and no direct physical facilities, i.e., counters or offices, are involved. It also avoided the student to rate based on the physical appearance but on the grounds of quality academic advising. Therefore, items regarding tangibles were removed from the SERVQUAL questionnaire. Four dimensions of SERVQUAL in academic advising are characterized as in Table 1. Descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression analysis were used to analyse the questionnaires.

Table 1. SERVQUAL dimensions

Dimension	Frequency
Reliability	The ability to deliver services as promised, to perform the promised service dependably and accurately such as the capability of an academic advisor in advising regarding academics accurately.
Assurance	The knowledge to answer questions. The ability to show courtesy towards the students. The ability to inspire, to convey trust and confidence.
Empathy	The ability to provide caring, individualized attention to the students. The ability to promote a student-centered environment.
Responsiveness	The ability to assist and provide prompt service within a particular time, such as academic advisor willingness to help and to provide a response to emerging situations.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 2 shows the demographic information of the respondents. The total distribution of gender was leaning towards males (66.1%) as the majority population of mechanical engineering

students is male dominated. 78% of the respondents had been assigned to the same academic advisor for more than two years. More than 90% of the respondents had met their academic advisor at least once during the semester. Almost all respondents (97.7%) have had an online discussion group with the academic advisor via WhatsApp or Telegram application.

Table 2. Description of the Respondents (N=221)

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	146	66.1
Female	75	33.9
Current Semester		
1-2	47	21.3
3-4	63	28.5
5-6	111	50.2
Frequency of Meeting per Semester		
Never	12	5.4
1-2	90	40.7
3-4	60	27.1
More than 4	59	26.7
Online Group Discussion		
Yes	216	97.7
No	5	2.3

4.2 Reliability Analysis and Correlation Coefficient

Table 3 indicates the reliability coefficient of all variables. All alpha coefficients are above 0.75. Desirable Cronbach alpha well above the acceptable level of 0.70. Thus, it could be concluded that the internal reliability of the questionnaires was acceptable and satisfactory.

Table 3. Reliability Testing

Variables	# of items	Cronbach's alpha
Reliability	3	0.929
Responsiveness	3	0.933
Assurance	4	0.937
Empathy	4	0.934
Total	14	0.960

Based on the results in Table 4, the mean for students' satisfaction was 4.003, which agreed with the statements. This result indicated that most of the students were satisfied with the quality of academic advising service offered. The mean for reliability, responsiveness, and assurance was four and above. Meanwhile, for empathy, the respondents only 'slightly' agreed with the lowest mean of 3.936.

Table 4. Correlation Coefficient

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1 Students' Satisfaction	4.003	0.963	---				
2 Reliability	4.139	0.833	0.836**	---			
3 Responsiveness	4.038	0.926	0.814**	0.871**	---		
4 Assurance	4.068	0.895	0.810**	0.794**	0.811**	---	
5 Empathy	3.936	0.916	0.876**	0.807**	0.821**	0.835**	---

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 Level (2-tailed).

In Table 4, there are significant and positive relationships between reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The relationship between students' satisfaction is $r=0.876$, meaning that empathy shows a stronger relationship. The result indicates that all the dimensions are highly correlated and very significant with one another. Empathy demonstrates the highest positive Correlation related to students' satisfaction in academic advising.

4.3 Multiple Regression Analysis

As shown in Table 5, 82% of the variation in the extent of the students' satisfaction can be predicted from the independent variables. Furthermore, two independent variables, namely reliability, and empathy, have a statistically significant relationship with the extent of the students' satisfaction. This finding indicated that reliability and empathy could be used to predict students' satisfaction reliably. Consistent with Abu Hasan et al. (2008), they found that the most critical factors in explaining students' satisfaction were empathy. Sin, Yusof, and Sin (2018) also discovered empathy as one of the significant factors in the international students' satisfaction level. Helgesen and Nettet (2007) suggested that academic advisors should give more attention to ensure the students' satisfaction level is at best. An academic advisor can engage students through effective interaction, primarily Face-to-Face, to boost students' confidence.

Table 5. Multiple Regression Analysis

Independent variables	β	t-value	p-value
Reliability	0.319	4.647	0.000
Responsiveness	0.061	0.887	0.376
Assurance	0.128	2.049	0.042
Empathy	0.518	8.224	0.000
R ²		0.820	
Adjusted R ²		0.817	
F value		246.585	

4.4 Significant Difference in Students' Satisfaction across the Various Demographic Variables

Table 6 shows no significant difference in students' satisfaction in gender. This finding was consistent with the result of Hsu and Bailey (2011). In contrast, Young-Jones et al. (2013) and Banat (2015) found that gender demonstrated a difference, statistically, in academic advising service students' satisfaction. Female students indicate a higher mean value of 4.053 compared to male students, even if the number of male students is higher than female students.

Table 6. Independent Sample t-test Result in Students' Satisfaction and Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Male	146	3.977	0.939	-0.543	219	0.588
Female	75	4.053	1.012			

Table 7 shows that the mean score for students' satisfaction in the second semester (M=4.342, SD=0.681) was the highest, whereas the mean score for students' satisfaction in the fifth semester (M=3.545, SD=1.129) was the lowest.

Table 7. Mean Scores of Students' Satisfaction according to the Current Semester

Semester	N	Mean	SD	SE
1	7	3.762	0.854	0.323
2	40	4.342	0.681	0.108
3	15	4.112	0.897	0.232
4	48	3.847	1.006	0.145
5	22	3.545	1.129	0.241
6	89	4.049	0.982	0.104

In Table 8, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted to determine whether the mean score for students' satisfaction is significantly different amongst various semesters. It was revealed that there was a significant difference in the mean score for students' satisfaction amongst various semesters. The reason for this is due to the demands and needs of students being different for each semester. Students faced different situations, issues, and problems each semester. Thus, the academic advisor needs to provide the information related to the advisees' problems.

Table 8. ANOVA Results for Students' Satisfaction and the Current Semester

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	11.126	5	2.225	2.481	0.033
Within Groups	192.87	215	0.897		
Total	203.99	220			

Table 9 shows that the mean score for students' satisfaction with meeting frequency more than four times per semester (M=4.271, SD=0.820) was the highest, whereas the mean score for students' satisfaction without a single meeting per semester (M=3.333, SD=1.146) was the lowest. It shows that students have the interest to spend more time and meet their academic advisor frequently to share their problems and obtain guidance throughout the semester.

Table 9. Mean Scores of Students' Satisfaction according to the Frequency of Meeting

Frequency of meeting	N	Mean	SD	SE
Never	12	3.333	1.146	0.331
1-2	90	3.748	0.941	0.099
3-4	60	4.256	0.820	0.106
More than 4	59	4.271	0.8935	0.123

In Table 10, it showed that there was a significant difference in the mean score for students' satisfaction between the frequency of meetings with the academic advisors. Young-Jones et al. (2013)

found that the frequency of meeting his/her academic advisor leads to students' satisfaction, which in turn contributes to their retention and success. Muola, Maithya, and Mwinzi (2011) suggested that academic advising should actively involve more physical interaction such as a discussion or meeting.

Saba'Ayon (2015) suggested that academic advisors should receive intensive training on advising for more positive advising experiences, and hence to improve students' perceptions of academic advising. For constructive example, effective communication training can be offered to the academic advisors for providing a more attentive and caring way of communication with the students.

Table 10. ANOVA Results for Students' Satisfaction and Frequency of Meeting

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	19.297	3	6.432	7.557	0.000
Within Groups	184.70	217	0.851		
Total	203.99	220			

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this study show that the academic advising service students' satisfaction is at a slightly high level. The study confirmed reliability and empathy play essential roles in the success of academic advising service, in which both had a significant relationship with students' satisfaction. In other words, it can be assumed that students regard reliability and empathy as the critical service factor in which academic advisors should focus more on. Thus, academic advisors should revamp their ability to provide service dependably, accurately, and consistently through effective communication. All these can be achieved through proper training by the institution.

Nevertheless, the sample study was limited to students of diploma in Mechanical Engineering in Pasir Gudang campus from September 2019 to January 2020 academic year. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to campuses that offer the same program. The survey must be done regularly to capture the level of satisfaction in academic advising from time to time. Valuing the feedback given by the students in higher education for service quality can go a long way. It helps the institution to improve its service level and take proactive measures for identifying the strengths and weaknesses in the current services offered to the students. Despite the limitation, the results of this study provided some empirical data that could support both academic advisors and institutions to explore continuous improvement initiatives in enhancing the academic advising satisfaction among the students.

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