

## **Motivation, Empowerment, Service Quality and Polytechnic Students' Level of Satisfaction in Malaysia**

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### **Abstract**

*This study aims to uncover the relationship between lecturers' motivation, empowerment and service quality with students' level of satisfaction in Malaysian polytechnics. This study is based on previous studies which had looked into the relationship between the quality of teaching and learning with students' satisfaction level. About 200 questionnaires had been distributed to students in four polytechnics but only 98 questionnaires were analysed. The data collected was analysed using the SPSS software version 17.0. The analysis showed that there is a significant relationship between the dimensions of motivation, empowerment and service quality with students' level of satisfaction. These three dimensions contributed 35.5% towards students' level of satisfaction. Future research into related areas would be discussed in the final part of the study.*

**Keywords:** Motivation, empowerment, students' satisfaction, service quality

### **Introduction**

Students could be considered as the main customers in higher institutions of education as their needs would have to be fulfilled by the relevant parties, such as the need to acquire a valuable educational experience and good service quality. According to Tang Swee Mei and Lim Kong Teong (2002), students have the right to acquire quality education; in fact it is the responsibility of the educational institution to guarantee the quality of a particular course or degree programme. As stated by Yosuke, Gregg and James (2007), a client or customer would be satisfied if the service quality offered is much better than their expectations. Conversely, the customer would not be satisfied if the service quality received is much lower than his/her expectation. Halimah (2006) also stated that teacher attitude, interest and motivation are important aspects in the teaching and learning process to achieve the targeted objectives.

A few studies which had been conducted focused on the relationship between education quality and student satisfaction; for example, the study completed by Ainon Jauhariah Abu Samah and Poh Ju Peng (2006). As such, there is a need for a study which focuses on the relationship between lecturers' motivation, empowerment, service quality and Polytechnic students' satisfaction.

The objectives of this study are: 1) to evaluate the students' perception of the lecturers' motivation, empowerment and service quality during the students' study at the polytechnic, 2) to investigate the relationship between lecturers' motivation, empowerment and service quality with the Polytechnic students' satisfaction level, 3) to determine the extent of the contribution of lecturers' motivation, empowerment and service quality as related to the Polytechnic students' satisfaction level.

## Students' Satisfaction

Helen Khoo Chooi Sim and Rozhan Idrus (2003) conducted a study which measured students' satisfaction level with the customer-based student support system in a distance learning programme. The researchers discovered that 16 of the students' support system dimensions, which included Intensive Courses, Printed Teaching Material, Academic Planner and Teletutorial helped the students to learn effectively. Additionally, continuous quality improvement should be done for the Teletutorial which was in the 'try-to-improve' zone.

According to Fornell (1992), Boulding (1993) and Tan Swee Mei and Lim Kong Teong (2002), customer satisfaction could be measured after the first utilisation of service or after the subsequent utilisation of service or product. As stated by Tan Swee Mei and Lim Kong Teong (2002), teachers or lecturers would be able to measure the students' satisfaction the first time using the survey method after the end of the teaching period. The teachers and lecturers could also measure the students' cumulative satisfaction level using the same method after the completion of the classes or at the end of the semester.

Oliver, (1997) in Tan Swee Mei and Lim Kong Teong (2002) stated that there is a difference between the quality factor and the students' satisfaction, as quality could be attributed to the product specification whereas satisfaction would be based on the quality factor and external factors which may be out of the management's control. On the other hand, as stated by Rowley, (1996) in Tan Swee Mei and Lim Kong Teong (2002), students' satisfaction with the academic programmes could also be influenced by other aspects such as the study environment, the facilities provided, opportunities for students' self-improvement, services and other aspects.

## Service Quality

According to Tan Swee Mei and Lim Kong Teong, (2002), the quality of teaching and learning could be divided into four main dimensions which are teaching, assessment, guidance and courses. As stated by Moore (2003) and Ramlee Ismail and Marinah Awang (2004), teaching requires the teaching staff to behave in a specific way in order to help another person to achieve his full potential in all aspects. As such, Tan Swee Mei & Lim Kong Teong (2002) share the opinion that students' assessment of lecturers' teaching would be the most suitable approach for measuring the quality of teaching and learning. According to Yosuke, Gregg and James (2007), service quality could be divided into two main aspects: core service and additional service. These two services play important roles in influencing customer satisfaction. Therefore, this may indicate that in addition to providing effective teaching, lecturers should also pay attention to the students' comfort and facilities as these would also contribute to students' level of satisfaction.

Ainon Jauhariah Abu Samah and Poh Ju Peng (2006) conducted a study about students' satisfaction with the quality of education in UNITAR. The factors studied were facilities, course content, teaching style, teaching medium, assessment, social activities and others. The study findings showed that the students were most satisfied with the teaching medium, which was conducted in English. The analysis also uncovered four factors which influenced students' satisfaction (shown here according to rank of importance): course content, medium of instruction, facilities and lastly the lecturers and the faculty.

## Empowerment

Bogler and Somech (2004) conducted a study about the effects of teacher empowerment on three dependent variables which were organizational *commitment*, *professional commitment*, and *organizational citizenship behaviour*. The study was conducted on the three variables based on the six components in teacher empowerment as stated by Short and Rinehart (1992) like decision making, professional development, status, self-efficacy, efficacy and impact. The study had been conducted on 983 teachers in Israel and the findings were positive. An increase in *self-efficacy*, *status* and *professional development* helped to increase the dependent variables *organizational commitment* and *professional commitment*.

Conversely, an increase in the dependent variable *organizational citizenship behaviour* was recorded when the three variables above and the decision-making component were increased. Overall, the study showed that teacher empowerment shared a positive relationship with the three dependent variables studied.

As such, it was hoped that this research would also be able to achieve the same results as regards to the relationship between lecturer empowerment and students' satisfaction. According to Dee *et al.*, (2003), empowerment in the field of education would refer to teachers who show a high level of commitment in their work and organisation and this commitment level could be seen from their confidence and the effect from their confidence. It was found that empowerment provided a positive effect on teachers' commitment at school.

### **Motivation**

Nurul Atikah *et al.*, (2006) had conducted a study about English language teachers' motivation in using computers for teaching and learning purposes. The study respondents were 62 teachers who had completed the questionnaires. Additionally, six English language teachers were interviewed. The findings of the study indicated the existence of a positive relationship between the teachers' internal and external motivation with their perception of computer usage in the teaching and learning of English. In fact, the researchers reported that the teachers fully supported the use of computers in English language teaching. The teachers realised the importance of using computers in the classes as the technology helped to improve the students' motivation to study. The teachers also agreed that the computers provided a pedagogical tool as they were able to present the teaching content to the students via an interesting and stimulating medium.

A study conducted by Teresa Hurley and Stephen Weibelzahl (2007) looked into the use of the Mozart method to support teachers in providing motivation to students who were studying on-line. The Mozart method had been invented based on the Social Cognitive Theory and it focused on the motivational aspect. Another study by Ruhizan Mohd Yassin *et al.*, (2001) investigated the cognitive processes of excellent students and mediocre students. They looked into the relationship between the students' learning strategies based on analysis of four factors: achievement motivation, operational learning, memorisation and global approach towards student achievement.

### **Methodology**

This quantitative study had utilised questionnaires to acquire data. The study respondents comprised polytechnic students all over Malaysia, but the sample had been randomly selected according to four regions which were the northern, central, southern and eastern region. A total of 200 questionnaires had been distributed to the students in four polytechnics in the mentioned areas. However, only 98 sets of the questionnaires were returned and analysed which meant that response given by the respondents was 49%.

### **Data Collection**

A total of 200 students had been selected using systematic random sampling to answer the questionnaires. The students were selected from different courses, ethnic and religious backgrounds, gender and age groups. They were required to answer the questionnaires based on their study experiences.

### **Research Instruments**

In constructing the questionnaire for this study, the researchers referred to the questionnaire constructed by Tang Swee Mei and Lim Kong Teong (2002). There were three sections for this study's questionnaire which were Section A – the sub-area for lecturer motivation (M1-M5), empowerment (E1-E5), and service quality (SQ1-SQ5) as shown in Table 1.

Insert table (1) about here

Section B in the questionnaire focused on students' satisfaction regarding motivation, empowerment and quality of service as shown in Table 2.

Insert table (2) about here

The students were required to provide their answers using a scale of 1 ( absolutely disagree) to 5 ( absolutely agree) for every statement. This scale would facilitate the researchers in implementing the data collection and analysis.

The reliability test was conducted on the test instruments. The reliability test results for the questionnaire's internal consistency can be seen in Table 3. The Cronbach Alpha value for the students' satisfaction dimension was recorded at 0.844. The Cronbach Alpha value for the motivation dimension had been recorded at 0.822, empowerment at 0.717 for and quality of service at 0.765. According to Uma Sekaran (2006), a Cronbach Alpha value in the region of 0.70 and above is acceptable. As such, all the questions in the dimension could be considered high reliability items due to the Cronbach Alpha value which exceeded 0.70.

Insert table (3) about here

## **Research Findings**

### **Respondents' profile**

The study sample comprised of students from four polytechnics in Malaysia with different religious and ethnic backgrounds, age groups, programme of study, academic departments and other aspects. The findings indicated that the majority of respondents were males with a percentage of 70.4% and the rest were females with a percentage of 29.6%. The highest number of respondents came from the 21-24 years old age group, comprising a percentage of 65.3%. The lowest number of respondents came from the 29 years and above age group, recording a percentage of only 1.0%. This could be attributed to the majority of polytechnic students who were mainly school-leavers. Additionally, the Semester 6 students were also recorded as the highest number of respondents at 55.1% and the lowest number of respondents came from Semester 3 students at a percentage of 1.0%. Majority of the students came from the Electrical Engineering Department (23.5%) while the minority came from the Food Technology Department (2.0%). About 92.9% of the respondents are Muslims while 3.1% belong to the other faiths like Christianity. Respondents from the Buddhist faith were the lowest at 3.1%. In terms of ethnic groups, the highest numbers of respondents are Malays at 92.9% while the lowest numbers are Chinese at 3.1%.

It was also observed that most respondents were diploma level students at 84.7%, whereas there were only 15 certificate level students and the percentage was 15.5%. The students' demographic details are shown in Table 3.

Insert table (4) about here

### **Correlation between Motivation, Empowerment and Quality of service**

Table 4 shows the results from the Pearson's correlation of the average value of variables like motivation, empowerment and quality of service. The Pearson's correlation had been used to fulfil the study's second objective: to investigate the relationship between lecturers' motivation, empowerment and service quality with the Polytechnic students' satisfaction level. As such, the Pearson's correlation value in table 5 would indicate that all the variable mean values like motivation, empowerment and service quality shared a significant relationship at a level of significance of 0.01.

Insert table (5) about here

### **Pearson's correlation between motivation, empowerment, lecturers' quality of service and students' satisfaction.**

Table 5 shows the findings of the analysis of the Pearson's correlation between the motivation, empowerment and quality of service dimensions with students' satisfaction. The findings would indicate that all the variables share a significant relationship with students' satisfaction at 0.01 level of significance. Additionally, it was also found that the quality of service variable had the highest correlation level with students' satisfaction at 0.513, followed by the motivation variable at 0.496 and empowerment at 0.438.

Insert table (6) about here

### **Regression model**

A linear regression analysis was conducted to identify the relationship between dependent variable *i.e.* students' satisfaction with independent variable *i.e.* motivation, empowerment and service quality.

It was found that the regression model formed had an R square value ( $R^2$ ) of 0.372 which was significant at a level of 0.000. Table 6 below further explains the details of the multiple regression analysis.

Insert table (7) about here

The study findings would indicate that the students' perception of lecturers' motivation, empowerment quality of service had a positive relationship with students' satisfaction. The results also showed that the three variables like motivation, empowerment and quality of service contributed 37.2% towards the polytechnic students' satisfaction. Indeed, there are other aspects which the lecturers could pay attention to in order to improve the students' satisfaction.

Insert table (8) about here

Table 8 showed the value for the independent variables *i.e.* motivation, empowerment and quality of service which could be used to predict the value for dependent variable *i.e.* students' satisfaction using the linear equation below:

$$Y = a + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + b_3x_3 + e$$

where

Y = students' satisfaction

X1 = motivation

X2 = empowerment

X3 = quality of service

a = constant

e = std. Error

Therefore, the linear equation for this study could be described as:

$$\text{Students' satisfaction} = 0.88 + .260(\text{motivation}) + .210(\text{empowerment}) + .325(\text{Quality}) + .431$$

### **Discussion**

According to Tan Swee Mei and Lim Kong Teong (2002), the teaching staff are not only responsible for disseminating the lecture content but they should also focus on the course assessment, content and providing guidance. This is because teaching which is solely based on the lecturers' whim and fancies may produce a result which is less than optimal.

Furthermore, based on the results of the students' perception of lecturers' motivation, empowerment and quality of service, suitable corrective measure could be applied for further improvement. From the findings we could observe that the students gave the lowest rating to the statement regarding the quality of service, especially the statement which described the lecturers as always available and accessible to give guidance out of lecture hours. This would mean that lecturers should be able to provide their guidance after the classes have ended. As such, perhaps the lecturers could provide the students with clear consultation hours or by asking the students to contact them by e-mail or mobile number if they had any problems.

To improve the lecturers' attitude so that they could be more motivated to help the students, perhaps the lecturers could approach the weaker students and provide the required guidance. A warm relationship would help to create a positive environment for the students to study as they feel that they have been properly guided by the lecturers. There is a need for lecturers to become aware of the students' background like the family economic status, academic achievement and other aspects and the lecturers themselves have to be open-minded as all these contribute to a positive effect in the students' academic process in terms of the guidance and advice given by the lecturers.

The polytechnic management needs to provide more opportunities for the empowerment of the lecturers as regards to the courses that are taught. On the other hand, the lecturers too need to use the power given wisely. It is easy to talk about the implementation of empowerment; however, to actually make the plan a reality is another challenge. The lecturers themselves need to have an awareness about the need for them to change. They also need to be given the opportunity so that they could realise that they could make changes if they wanted to and be given the freedom to make such changes.

As the motivation, empowerment and quality of service aspects had only contributed to 35.5% of the students' satisfaction, perhaps the next suggestion for future researchers is to investigate the relationship between students' satisfaction with other aspects. As stated by Rowley, 1996 (Tan Swee Mei & Lim Kong Teong, 2002), students' satisfaction could also be influenced by aspects such as the environment, facilities provided, opportunities for students' self-development, educational services and others.

### **Conclusion**

A nation's strength and development would depend greatly on its education system and this would no doubt depend on the quality and effectiveness of the teachers. As such, this study finding may help in providing useful suggestions and information to relevant parties such as academicians, university faculties, university management and the government itself to further improve the quality of education and also the students' academic achievement.

Furthermore, following the government's plan to upgrade the Polytechnic as a competitive educational institution, it is imperative that students' satisfaction as customers are taken into account. A study which focuses on the relationship between lecturers' motivation, empowerment and quality of service with students' satisfaction such as this one should be viewed by the responsible parties as relevant for further improvement. This study may prove to be a handy tool in helping to achieve the nation's educational objectives.

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**Table 1:** Dimension of independent variable

Item	Dimension of independent variable
<b>Motivation</b>	
M1	The lecturer used various strategies, methods and techniques to teach.
M2	The lecturer was able to stimulate and attract the students' attention towards the subject matter
M3	The lecturer took an interest in the students' achievement
M4	The lecturer was willing to help the student in academic matters as well as non-academic matters.
M5	The lecturer provided encouragement and advice to the students.
<b>Empowerment</b>	
E1	The course assessment had been fully completed by the lecturer.
E2	The scope and format of exam depended on the lecturer.
E3	The format of assignment was determined by the lecturer.
E4	The lecturer had every right to penalise the student like barring the students from taking the exam.
E5	The consultation time was determined by the lecturer.
<b>Service quality</b>	
SQ1	The lecturer was available and accessible to give guidance out of lecture hours.
SQ2	The lecturer provided quality academic guidance.
SQ3	The course content was organised and well-planned.
SQ4	The assessment method was suitable for the students.
SQ5	The lecturer's teaching material was well-planned and of good quality

Table 2: Dimensions of dependent variable

Item	Students' satisfaction
S1	I am satisfied with the education I received at the polytechnic.
S2	I feel happy studying at the polytechnic.
S3	The teaching and learning process provided motivation for me.
S4	If given another chance, I would still choose an academic programme in this polytechnic.
S5	Overall, I am satisfied with my experience of studying in the programme at the polytechnic

Table 3: Results of the Instrument Reliability Test

Results of the Reliability Test for Motivation, Empowerment and Quality of Service with Students' satisfaction.

Dimension	No of items	Cronbach Alpha Value
Motivation	5	0.822
Empowerment	5	0.717
Quality of service	5	0.765
Students' satisfaction	5	0.844

Table 4: Respondents' demographic details

Item		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	69	70.4
	Female	29	29.6
Age	17-20	32	32.6
	21-24	66	67.4
Semester of study	1-2	27	27.6
	3-4	4	4.1
	5-6	67	68.3
Course	Engineering	83	84.6
	Commerce	15	15.3
Religion	Islam	91	92.8
	Christianity	3	3.1
	Buddha	4	4.1
Ethnic group	Malay	91	92.8
	Chinese	3	3.1
	Indian	4	4.1
Academic Level	Diploma	83	84.7
	Certificate	15	15.3

Table 5: Pearson's correlation between mean for motivation, empowerment and lecturers' quality of service.

Dimension	Motivation	Empowerment	Quality of service
Motivation	1.000	0.500**	0.541**
Empowerment	0.500**	1.000	0.447**
Quality of service	0.541**	0.447**	1.000

\*\* Significant at a significance level of 0.01 (2 tailed)

Table 6: Pearson's correlation between motivation, empowerment, lecturers' quality of service and students' satisfaction

Dimension	Satisfaction
Motivation	0.496**
Empowerment	0.438**
Quality of service	0.513**

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level of significance (2 tailed)

Table 7: Results of the multiple regression analysis

Model	Change statistics				
	R square	R sq change	F change	Df2	Sig f Change
1	.372	.355	17.216	94	.000

Table 8: Linear regression between students' perception of motivation, empowerment and quality of service with students' satisfaction

Variable	Beta	Std. Error	T value	Significance
Constant	0.880	0.431	2.044	0.044
Motivation	0.260	0.112	2.309	0.023
Empowerment	0.210	0.113	1.854	0.067
Quality of service	0.325	0.110	2.960	0.004