

ANALYZING FACE-TO-FACE PRACTICUM AS A LEARNING SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS IN A DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract

Customer satisfaction is a main requirement for the success of an organization, including in higher education. Satisfaction of students and teachers or tutors become a benchmark for universities to be able to improve their performance in order to deliver competitive graduates, including for universities that implements distance education system. Universitas Terbuka (UT) is a higher education institution that implements distance education system, which provides a variety of learning support for students to facilitate students learn independently. A kind of learning support provided for students of accounting study program is face-to-face practicum (FFP) to improve their skills in the areas of accounting. This study aims to analyze the satisfaction and importance of implementation face-to-face practicum (FFP). The results showed that handles every complaint quickly and appropriate is the most important factors that need to be improved in face-to-face practicum implementation in order to achieve satisfaction of students and tutors.

Keywords: customer satisfaction, distance education, face-to-face practicum.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the era of competition such as this, customer satisfaction is a strategic issue for companies, both manufacturing and service companies. Customer satisfaction can affect consumer confidence and create consumer loyalty (Omar et al., 2009). Customer satisfaction will be formed from consumer perceptions of quality of service (Saha and Theingi, 2009). Experts and practitioners in the field of marketing is often explores the cognitive and affective response of consumers to the attributes of the service in order to provide the needs of consumers in a way that effective and efficient (Ravichandran *et al.*, 2010). Satisfying consumers for a product or service is not easy, especially the quality of services. Quality of service is more difficult to evaluate than the quality of the goods. Perceived satisfaction depends on their perceptions of the expectations and the quality of services provided by the company. Quality of service is a form of consumers' assessment of the level of perceived service with the level of expected service. If the customer expectations is greater than the level of service received, the customer is not satisfied. Vice versa, if the expectations are equal to or less than the level of services received, then the consumer will be satisfied.

The quality of service is also very important for educational institutions, including higher education. Bahroom (2009) stated "*service quality is important in Higher Education Institutions, and this is more so in an open and distance learning (ODL) environment*".

Quality of service is a fundamental and important aspect for the sustainability of an institution of higher education, especially in higher education distance (ODL). This is due to the drop-out rate at ODL student higher than conventional students.

Universitas Terbuka (UT) is an institution that implement ODL in the learning process and have the students spread to all over of Indonesia. To maintain and improve the quality of services, UT has quality assurance, both in academic and management. One study program offered by UT is accounting that has two practicum courses, i.e. Accounting Introduction Laboratory and Auditing Laboratory. Both of these courses have Face to Face Practicum (FFP) as a learning support for students. FFP is designed in the form of study case, problem solving, and group discussion. FFP held for 8 (eight) meetings/class attending within one semester at each of UT's Regional Office. The increasing of FFP services, will result in good administration, academic and infrastructure. On the other hand also found a variety of complaints on the service. Based on the monitoring results of FFP managed by UT, there is still lack of tutors/instructors and more student's complaints against the service of FFP. Based on the background described, this study is obtain to analyze the viewpoint/opinion of the students and tutors/instructor regarding of FFP services quality at Regional Offices, in order to achieve, increase, and explore aspects to be improved or corrected of an ideal FFP implementation. In addition, this study is expected to provide benefits for UT and also for researchers in applying the theory, particularly the theory of marketing field into the real world practices.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Higher education service quality issue has been widely discussed in the literature. Students are the main customers of a university or higher education institution (Hill, 1995 in Brochado, 2009), direct recipients of the services provided, the perception of service quality of students has turned into the issue is very important for the university and its administrators. If higher education is considered as a service, it must have the classic features of services, so that the measurement of the quality to be very complex (Hill, 1995 in Brochado, 2009). The literature shows the importance of service quality education agency monitors the quality of the services it offers with the goal of continuous improvement in the future. Nevertheless, universities are increasingly finding themselves in a component of an environment conducive to understand the role and importance of quality of service (Shank et al., 1995).

As a result of the difficulty of defining quality, measurement is also a controversial issue. In terms of measurement method, some authors demonstrated the concept of service quality is the ratio between the perceptions of performance expectations (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). While others say, the quality of services only from the perception of performance only (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). Because the expectations are irrelevant and lead to confusion in evaluating the perception of service quality. Therefore, it makes whether or not expectations as a determinant of quality has spawned two different paradigms, namely the paradigm of disconfirmation paradigm and the perception paradigm.

2.1 Measurement of Service Quality of Higher Education

Some services marketing literature reveals two main approaches measuring the quality of services, namely SERVQUAL (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988) and SERVPERF (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). SERVQUAL, as one of the most popular methods, based on a theoretical of the gap models and defines the quality of services as the difference between customer expectations with perceptions of the performance of the 22 items of questions namely physical evidence (tangibles), empathy, responsiveness, reliability, and a guarantee (assurance). In the context of higher education, the fifth dimensions include college physical facilities, equipment, employees, and communication (physical evidence), the ability of colleges provide services promised definitively and accurately (reliability), the willingness of universities to help students and provide appropriate fast- service (responsiveness), knowledge and manners lecturers and ability to convey trust and confidence (guarantees), and the attention and concern of the college to the student (empathy).

Stability expectations and perceptions of service quality during this time in the sphere of higher education through empirical evidence concluded that the perception of the service is less stable compared with expectations (Hill, 1995 in Brochado, 2009). Due to perceived flaws in the SERVQUAL approach, both at the conceptual and operational levels, performance-based approach to measure the quality of services called SERVPERF introduced. SERVPERF is a variant of SERVQUAL scale based on the perception of the components alone. Some researchers successfully implementing application paradigm SERVQUAL in measuring service quality higher education (Hill, 1995 in Brochado 2009; Cuthbert, 1996 in Brochado 2009; Stodnick and Rogers, 2008; Sahney *et al.*, 2008; Bayraktaroglu and Atrek, 2010; Lupo , 2013). SERVQUAL stated to have better alignment than SERVPERF to measure the dimensions of quality in higher education (Bayraktaroglu and Atrek, 2010).

As the scale SERVQUAL and SERVPERF that does not take into account the relative importance of students in the five dimensions of interest-weighted (importance-weighted score). Therefore, several studies discussing the relative importance of the five dimensions of the customer, the weighted score measuring the perceived quality of services each dimension and total service quality in accordance with the model gap (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1991). Questionnaires experience is a tool that is very popular in the sphere of higher education to evaluate students' perceptions about the performance of teaching and learning process (Ginns et al., 2007).

2.2 Customer Satisfaction

The concept of customer satisfaction can be interpreted in various fields, both services and manufacturing. Johnson and Clark (2008) defines the concept of services as the common understanding of the basic services provided and received. The concept of services should also provide information about the core of the service, the experience of the service, and the service results. The services provided will affect customer satisfaction. Satisfaction and customer perception of the quality of the labels we use to summarize a range of observed action associated with a product or service (Hayes, 2008). A more complete understanding of satisfaction expressed by Kotler and Keller (2006) which states that satisfaction is feeling happy or disappointed someone who is formed from comparing the performance or the outcome of a product based on the perceptions of those expectations. Perception is a belief related customer service received or sustained Customer satisfaction can be determined by the perception of the service received.

According to Oliver (1981) satisfaction is a judgment that the features of the product or service, or product / service itself, provide a level of compliance associated with the consumption of delightful included level under -fulfillment and over-fulfillment. Furthermore, Halstead et al. (1994) expressed satisfaction is an affective responses that are transaction-specific and is produced from the comparison made between the performance of consumer products with several standard purchase.

From the definition above have in common, that is concerning the customer's decision (expectations and perceived performance). Generally, customers' expectations are thoughts or beliefs about what customers received when he buys or consumes a product (goods or services). While the perceived performance is the customers' perception of what is acceptable after consuming the product purchased.

2.3 Previous Research

Development of instruments measuring the quality of services of the institution of Open Distance Learning (ODL) has done Bahroom et al. (2009) at the Open University Malaysia (OUM). Instruments called ODLPERF generated from item 29 survey questions Importance-Performance OUM involving 2,491 students in 2008. This study resulted in four factors of service quality, the real evidence, reliability, assurance, and empathy. These four dimensions are formed of 14 items. Abdullah (2006) describes the methodology of development of Higher Education Performance (HEdPERF), as an instrument measuring the quality of services of the higher education sector. Forty-one (41) items tested empirically through a unidimensional, validity and reliability of the exploratory and confirmatory analysis. A valid measurement scale reliably used as a means of tertiary institutions in enhancing the performance of services amid the global education market competition. The results of this study yielded six dimensions of quality of different services and conceptually clear, namely the aspect of non-academic, academic aspects, reputation, access, issues program, and understanding. Rashid and Harun (2004), tested the students' perception of service quality institutions ODL in Malaysia. Focus group sessions and structured questionnaire was used to collect relevant information from respondents. The study shows the quality characteristics of ODL services differ from traditional higher education institutions. As a new perspective of service quality, this instrument was tested at ODL institutions in Malaysia. Lagrosen et al., (2004) tested the key dimensions of higher education in Austria, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. They found 11 key dimensions of quality, of the collaboration of corporate, information and responsiveness, programs offered, campus facilities, teaching practices, internal evaluation, external evaluation, computer facilities, collaboration and comparison, factors post-study, and other sources of literature.

From a review of some earlier research had shown there are many approaches to measure the quality of services in the field of education. Dimensions of service quality also varies depending on the focus of researchers. However, given the universality of the model instrument of service quality ODL proposed Rashid and Harun (2004) and Bahroom et al. (2009), it will be used to define and redefine the key dimensions of service quality in this study.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to analyze the differences in perceptions and expectations of students and tutors for the implementation of FFP at Regional Offices. Research conducted in several Regional Offices. Based on basic theories, this study used some dimensions of satisfaction and importance, measured by:

- 1) Operational Services of FFP
- 2) Non-operational of FFP
- 3) Infrastructure of FFP

Data used in this study are primary data obtained from students and tutors/instructors of FFP which were selected randomly to represent the condition of FFP implementation from some Regional Offices. Data obtained by distributing a questionnaire to students and tutors/instructors. The study used a sample of 326 students and 31 tutors/instructors from Accounting Study Program of Economics Faculty at Regional Offices UT. Respondents were asked to state their level of perception of FFP services and their expectations for the implementation of FFP using a five-point Likert Scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”.

The method used in this study is explanatory survey method. The analytical method used is statistical analysis and measurement model description testing. Meanwhile, Validity and Reliability of all instruments were measured by T-value test, Standard Loading Factors (SLF), Contract Reliability, and Variance Extract.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Results

The objectives of this study were to analyze the viewpoint of the students and tutor towards the services quality of FFP implementation at Regional Offices UT and to find out the dominant influential factor to the satisfaction of the students and tutors. This study also find some aspects that need to be improved in the implementation of FFP. The respondents of this study are students and tutors, there are 326 students and 31 tutors/instructors. The majority gender of tutor is female (71%) and 29% is male. Most of the tutors in this survey in the age group between 31-40 years old (65%), with most duration as a tutor between 1 – 5 years (74%).

The results of validity test demonstrate that the entire instrument is valid with the T-value ≥ 1.96 and Standardized Loading Factors ≥ 0.5 (Igbaria et al., 1998). The results of reliability test demonstrate that the entire instrument reliably with contract Reliability ≥ 0.70 and Variance Extracted ≥ 0.5 (Hair et al., 2011)

4.2 Discussions

4.2.1 Operational Services of FFP

The operational services of FFP viewpoint of student measured by smooth communication (L1), practicum schedule information on time (L2), delivering information of practicum to students clearly (L3), quick and accurate of services (L4), easy to contact the UT staff (L5), easy to contact the practicum tutors/instructors (L6), quick feedback of complaint (L7), and the hospitality of UT staff in serving (L8). Furthermore, the operational services of FFP viewpoint of tutor measured by information from Regional Offices given openly (E2), UT staff is able to fulfill the needs of tutors (E4), UT staff delivered quick and accurate of services (E5), easy to contact of UT Staff (E6), UT staff get the feedback and handle complaints quickly (E7), and also delivering information about rights and obligations of tutor clearly (E8).

The results of this research shows that from viewpoint of students there are 56.44% of the students stated the communication between students and the person in charge in FFP at Regional Office smoothly and 82.52% of the students stated smooth communication is important. 65.03% of the students stated provision of practicum schedule information on time and 87.12% of the students stated they were important. 59.82% UT staff in delivering information of practicum to students clearly and 84.97% of the students stated they were important. 57.98% of students feel the service of UT staff given quickly and accurately and 82.52% of the students stated that quick and accurate of services is important. 55.52% of students feel easy to contact the UT staff and 79.75% said it was important. 63.50% of students feel easy to contact the practicum instructors and 82.21% stated that it was important. 42.02% of the students stated that quick feedback of complaint and 77.91% stated that quick feedback of complaint is essential. 73.62% of students feel the hospitality of UT staff in serving and 85.89% said this was important. Overall through testing of the measurement model, that quick and accurate services of UT staff and quick respond of handling complaints is two determinants of service quality UT.

The next results is the quality service of FFM as a learning support viewpoint of tutors are 77.42% tutors stated information from Regional Offices given openly to all tutors and

96.77% tutors stated this factors are important. 80.65% tutors stated UT staff is able to fulfill the needs of tutors and 93.55% tutors said it was important. 87.10% tutors stated the services of UT staff delivered quickly and accurately and 90.32 stated this is important. 80.65% tutors stated that easily to contact UT Staff and 96.77% said it's important. 70.97% tutors stated UT staff can quick feedback and handle complaints and 93.55% said it's important. 77.42% tutors receive information about their rights and obligations clearly and 93.55% said it is important. Overall through testing of measurement model that the clarity of information about rights and obligations of tutors and the easily of contact theUT staff are two determinants of service quality UT.

4.2.2 Non-operational of FFP

The non-operational services of FFP viewpoint of student measured bymaterials of practicum controlled by tutor (LP1), tutors assist students to understanding the material of practicum (LP2), tutors provide feedback on assignments (LP3), case of assignments given by tutor is up to-date (LP4), and completeness of equipment's practicum (LP5). Whereas the non-operational services of FFP viewpoint of tutor measured by the competent of UT staff is supporting of FFP implementation (A3), availability of Tutorial Activity Design (RAT), Tutorial Activity Unit (SAT) and notes of tutorial (A4), availability of the procedures of FFP implementation (A5), UT staff handles every complaint by appropriately and quickly (A6), UT always provide solutions in any problems of tutors (A7).

From the viewpoints of the students, there are 73.31% of the students stated the materials of practicum controlled by tutor and 85.58 stated this important factor. 74.23% of the students stated that tutors assist students to understanding the material of practicum and 88.04% said it's important. 72.70% of the students stated tutors provide feedback on assignments and 86.20% said it's important. 64.72% of students stated that the case given a tutor is up to-date and 85.52% said it's important.62.27% of students stated that all equipment's practicum is complete and 82.21% said it's important. Overall through testing of measurement model, the role of tutors in assisting the students to understanding the material of practicumand provide feedback on assignments are two determinants of service quality UT.

The quality service of FFM as a learning support viewpoint of tutors are 83.9% tutors stated the competent of UT staff is supporting of FFP implementation and 90.4% stated that these factors are important. 80.6% tutors stated Tutorial Activity Design (RAT), Tutorial Activity Unit (SAT)and notes of tutorial areavailable and 96.7% stated that it is important. 77.4% tutor stated that the procedures of FFP implementation are greatly assist tutors that

provided by Regional Offices and 93.6% stated that it is important. 67.8% tutors stated UT staff handle every complaint by appropriately and quickly and 93.6% stated that it is important. 77.4% tutors stated UT has a commitment in the FFP implementation and 93.6% stated that it is important. 77.5% stated UT always provide solutions in any problems of tutors and 87.1% stated that it is important. Overall through testing of measurement model is known that provide solutions in any problems of tutors in the FFM implementation and commitment of UT in the FFP implementation are two determinants of service quality UT.

4.2.3 Infrastructure of FFP

The infrastructure of FFP dimension in viewpoint of students measured by the conducive of FFP environment (SP1), availability of the facilities of FFP such as blackboards, desks, chairs etc. (SP2), and sufficiency of the infrastructure such as classrooms, mosque, toilets, and canteen (SP3), the sanitation (SP4), the security (SP5) and easy to access of FFM locations (SP6). Furthermore, the infrastructure of FFP viewpoint of tutor measured by infrastructure such as classrooms, prayer room and toilet provided with adequate and (T3), the infrastructure such as classrooms, prayer and toilet are comfortable (T4), availability of major facilities such as materials such as text and workbook cases, Tutorial Activity Design, Tutorial Activity Unit and notes of tutorial (T5) and access or transportation to FFM easily (T8).

This research also shows that 68.10% of students find the environment of FFP is conducive and 83.13% stated that this factor is important. 75.46% of students stated that the facilities of FFP such as blackboards, desks, chairs, the case, and the paper work of FFP is available and 86.81% tutors said it's important. 62.27% of students find the infrastructure such as classrooms, mosque, toilets, and canteen are sufficient and 80.67% tutors stated this is important. 67.79% tutor finds the sanitation in FFM locations and 84.36% stated that this factor is important. 76.69% tutors finds the security in FFP locations and 86.81 stated this is important. 76.38% tutors' stated the location of FFP is easy to access and 88.34% tutors said it's important. Overall through testing of measurement model that sanitation in FFP location and the conducive of FFP environment are two determinants of UT service quality

The viewpoint of tutors are 71% tutors stated infrastructure such as classrooms, prayer room and toilet provided with adequate and 71% stated that it is important. 70.9% feel the infrastructure such as classrooms, prayer and toilet are comfortable and 70.9% stated that it is important. 74.2% tutor feel availability of major facilities such as materials (text and workbook cases), Tutorial Activity Design, Tutorial Activity Unit and notes of tutorial and

74.2% stated that it is important. 83.9% tutors stated access or transportation to FFM easily and 83.9% stated this is important.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Universitas Terbuka (UT) is a higher education institution that implements distance education system, which provides a variety of learning support for students to facilitate students learn independently. A kind of learning support provided for students of accounting study program is face-to-face practicum (FFP) to improve their skills in the areas of accounting. Satisfaction of students and teachers or tutors become a benchmark for universities to be able to improve their performance. The results showed service quality from students' perspective is quick and accurate services of UT staff and fast respond in handling complaints from students. Moreover, the role of tutors in assisting the students to understanding the material of practicum and provide feedback on assignments are determined the service quality of FFM. The tutors' perspective is the clarity of information about rights and obligations of tutors, the easily of contact the UT staff, provide solutions in any problems of tutors, and commitment of UT in FFM implementation. Form infrastructure dimension, sanitation in FFP location and the conducive of FFP environment are two determinants of UT service quality. UT staff handles every complaint quickly and appropriate is the most important factors that need to be improved in face-to-face practicum implementation in order to achieve satisfaction of students and tutors.

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