Students' Perception of Service Quality Dimensions in Islamic Higher Education

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Abstract:
This research is conducted to analysis the student's perceptions on services quality dimensions in Islamic Higher Education. This research adopts qualitative approach to gather the data and generate a theoritical model, using Focus Group Discussion (FGD). From this research found that there are six dimensions related to the service quality in Islamic Higher Eduacation: lecturer, curriculum, administration, facilities, libraries and Islamic environment. If university can fulfill those six dimensions of service quality, it will impact to student's satisfaction and grow the willingness to recommend and promote the university to others. In the end for the research, suggested model of research will be made to recommend the next researcher on measuring the student's perception on service quality in Islamic Higher Education.

Keyword: Service quality, student perception, higher education

1. Introduction

Services quality has been importance review of the services marketing literature. It is because of services quality is an elusive construct (LeBlanch and Nguyen, 1997), that have difficulties of defining quality. It is also because of spesific features of services such as intangible, heterogeneous, simultaneous production and consumption (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000), that make service quality different from goods. This difficulties defining and specific features services remains challeng for reseacher to develop applied concept and measurement of services quality in many sector.

Most of reseacher have concentrated their findings on the dimensionalities of service quality to develop scales to measure the quality. This dimensional approach has been result many model of measurement service quality, such as Gronroos model (Groonroos, 1984), SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, 1985) and SERVPERF (Cronin & Taylor, 1994). One of the most popular measurement scale widely used in many sector industries is SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et.al., 1985, 1988), with five dimensional construct consisting of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and emphaty, and 22 item instruments. This model is stems from earlier work of Gronroos that conceptualise service quality with developmet of the perceived service quality model. It is conseptualized on discorfirmation of expectation paradigm (Patterson, 1993), that used methodology of comparing the gap between expectation and perception. The used of this metodology has attracted critisism.

The popular result of SERVQUAL criticisms is SERVPERF model developed by Cronin and Taylor (1994) that based on customer evaluating perceived service performance-only. It is consist of 22 perception items and excludes any consideration of expectations. The excludes is based on premise that it is difficult to conceptualise expectations, so that expectarions can be disregard for service quality assesment. It is support by empirical results that SERVPERF offers better reliability than SERVQUAL (Cronin and Taylor,1992).

Gronroos Model, SERVQUAL and SERVPERF are the model that provides a convenient starting point for academics exploring dimensionalities of service quality. Study of dimensionality service quality still being hot topic because several reason: firstly: although SERVQUAL or SERVPERF claimed applicable for all service context, it is argued that the original five dimensions are not universal, need to be contextualized (Buttle, 1995). Secondly, because of service in any context have their own features, it is need to conceptualize service quality to be adapted to the study context. It means that dimensional approach will gives an understanding of the service feature and their relevant dimensions. As result, this reason provided the basis for exploratory study of dimensionalities of service quality in education setting.

In education setting, particularly in higher education context, many authors have developed service quality dimensions according to student's preferences as primary customer. This dimension developed based on service characteristic and features in higher education context.

Athiyaman (1997) used eight characteristics to examine university education services namely, teaching students well, availability of staff for student consultation, library services,

computing facilities, recreational facilities, class sizes, level and difficulty of subject content
and student workload. LeBlanc & Nguyen (1997) identifies seven factors which influence student evaluations of service quality, namely, reputation, administrative personel, faculty, curriculum, responsiveness, physical evidence and access to facilities. LeBlanc & Nguyen (1997) noted that this identification of the dimensions in business education for controlling quality and for achieving excellence in business education sector.

Another author develop dimensions of service quality based on the importance of new measurement scale in education sector. Abdullah (2006) develop HEdPERF (Higher Education PERFormance-only), a new measuring instrument of service quality in higher education sector. It is consist of 41 items instrument that grouped into six factors, namely, non-academic aspects, academic aspects, reputation, access, programme issues and understanding. Abdullah (2006) argues that tertiary institutions can use HEdPERF to improve service performance by confirm students' perception of service quality, particularly on service delicery process. Another same projects has did by Annamdevula & Bellamkonda (2012) in Indian context. Through qualitative and quantitative studies, it is explores five dimensions of service quality in higher education sector, namely: teaching and course content, administrative services, academic facilities, campus infrastructure and support services of service quality within the higher education sector.

The differences service quality dimensions that developed and used by the above mentioned researcher summaries that dimension and item used to explain service quality varies according to research objective and customer group. As result, it is provides basic research gap to explore dimensions of service quality in Indonesian Higher Education context, particularly in Islamic Higher Education context. Despite the developing dimensionalities of service quality in the Islamic higher education domain, there is a further scope to reinvestigate the consequences of service quality in the context of Islamic higher education.

Several reseachers have their attention to concequences of service quality. The most widely known as consequence of service quality is satisfaction. Zeithaml & Bitner (2000) states that service quality is the most critical determinant of satisfaction. Another researcher focus on behavioral consequence of service quality, such as repurchase intentions (Cronin & Taylor, 1992), wilingness recomended (Boulding et al, 1993). Equiping all, in their research, Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996) found that improving service quality can increase favourable behavioral intention and decrease unfavorable intentions that stem from satisfaction or dissatisfaction. This behavioural intentions including loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, propensity to switch, willingness to pay more, external responses and internal responses. Empirically it is found that there is relationships between service quality and behavioural intentions (Zeithaml et al, 1996).

In the context of higher education, there is several empirical evidence that service quality have positif relationship with several behavioral consequence such as student satisfaction (see Tuan, 2012; Al-Alak & Alnaser, 2012) word of mouth (wright, 1996; palmer 2011), student loyalty (Hennig Thurau et al, 2001). It means that student who feel they have a high likelihood of success of having their dissatisfiying experience taken care of are also more likely repatronize the university in the future. thus, the university that has a reputation for taking the time to satisfy students will both encourage repratonage, and decrease negative word of mouth (Wright, 1996).

The review of literature provided the basic for an exploratory research of service quality in Islamic higher education setting. Islamic universities are higher learning institutions with especial emphasis and directions. As a faith school, islamic higher education have distinctiveness. This includes retaining the school's religious character, sometimes challenging secular values, and balancing the two priorities of educational attainment and moral and spiritual development (Scott & McNeish, 2012). On this differences, we suggest that there are will be new finding that enrich this study of service quality in education context.

2. Research Method

The approach adopted in this research was an exploratory qualitative method and employed Focus Group Discussion (FGD) technique, to study the perceptions of students with regard to dimensions, consequences and outcome of perceived service quality, and their relationships with an aim to develop a research model. Focus groups as a research technique have long been prominent in marketing studies (Krueger and Casey, 2009). It is used because of of quick, flexible and inexpensive method of gathering data from several respondents in a short period of time (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2010), and very useful for exploratory research when little is known about the phenomenon at hand (Stewart *et al*., 2007).

2.1. Participants of Discussion

The Participant for FGD was students studying at postgraduate UIN Maliki Malang, Indonesia. The participants were divided into two different groups male and female. This was done in order to give comfortable environment, due to Islamic value. Participants were students at least six month of studying experience with postgraduate UIN and were selected based on convenience and purposive sampling techniques. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that is used to obtain sample of convenient elements at the researcher's own discretion (Saunders *et al*., 2009). As Hair *et al.* (2008) recommend that focus groups should be as homogenous as possible, all participants is students of postgraduate UIN Maliki, master and doctoral degree. Homogenity intended for avoiding conflict and domination between participans. So entire partisipans can active in discussion comfortably. FGD conducted in two groups man and own woman. Each group consist of 8 paricipants, based on suggestion from Krueger & Casey (2009) , that group discussion should followed by 5-10 participant. Too small (e.g. less than 5 participants) or too large (e.g. more than 10 participant) can make the focus group ineffective as the participation of individuals can become too fragmented (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2010)

2.2. Discussion's Topic
Discussion conducted in FGD should happen naturally, because the purpose is to explore themes that are relevant and looking for relationship inter theme talked. The focus group interviews were conducted by the principal researcher in a non–directive and unstructured Fashion. Use other moderator inneffective because can produce findings that bias, waste time and cost. Thereby, this discussion moderated by researcher with orientation vicariously and not structured, so that can flow what existence. Although discussion should conduct naturally, moderator must have guide question related with topic conversation. In discussion, there is some move undertaken. First, the respondents were explained about the research aims, and the tasks they would perform during focus group discussion. Second, open-ended questions were posed, such as: How do they evaluate service quality in UIN Maliki? What are the critical quality aspects of this university? Should there is different between general higher education and Islamic education in their services quality? What are the critical consequences in terms of service quality evaluation in the context of their university? Third, to facilitate the discussion and to keep it compact within the aim of this study, the researcher summarized the discussion when necessary during each of the interviews. This facilitated participants to focus on the content of discussions. The discussions were recorded using an electronic device. On an average, each discussion took one half hour duration.

2.3. Data analysis
According to Miles and Huberman (1984), there is three activities in qualitative research after data collected, namely: data reduction, data display, and conclusion/ induction verification. Data reduction is process analysis to choose, rivet, simplify, abstract as well as transform data that came out of notes field. Reduce meaningful data make summary, choose ground matter, focuses on important things, looking for theme and pattern, as well as remove that considered unnecessary. Thereby, data that direduksi will provide picture that is more specific and facilitate researcher make next data collections. With reduction, data will be clearer and systematic. After reduction, data will display in temporary sheet summary, until enabled to do next step namely encoding (Miles and Hubberman, 1984). Looking at displays help us to understand what is happening and to do something further analysis on that understanding. Coding means that data will be grouping in certain groups. By providing code, works units being governable. With the existence of code, data interconnected and grouped to found dimension and consequence, and outcome of service quality, so the new theoritical model and hypotheses can be developed.

3. Findings

3.1. Services Quality Dimensions in Islamic Higher Educations
To find out dimensionalities of service quality, focus groups were asked to discuss three point thing: How do they evaluate service quality in UIN Maliki? What are the critical quality aspects of this university? And Should there is different between general higher education and Islamic education in their services quality?
Based on coding result, found that there are six dimension related to service quality in Islamic Higher Education, namely: lecturer, curriculum, administration, facilities, libraries and Islamic environment.

3.1.1. Lecturer
This first dimension revealed from question about critical quality aspect of universities. Several participants quote attributes such as: lecturer competencies, motivation by teacher, the way lecturer teach and so on. This dimension is similar with Abdullah (2006) findings namely academic dimension. This includes entire thing related with teaching activity and ability such as: knowledge level of lecturer, staff teaching ability, the concistency of teaching quality, and easy to making appointments with lecturer. It is also supports Athiyaman (1997) theory that emphasis on teaching student well as one of service characteristic in universities. The specific quote of this dimension as follows:
"...sometimes, I feel that some lecturer has less role in class. We just follow another student's presentations with little conclusions, i hope getting new knowledge from lecturer beside what we already heard from our friend's presentation...." (male, master degree, 28).
"... the lecturer should have deep understanding on subject material...my experience with one of lecturer show that lecturer just telling theory without any further explanation, especially about how the implementation of that theory... (male, master degree, 25).
"....in the afternoon class, most lecturers absent without any explanation before...." (male, doctoral degree, 35).

3.1.2. Curriculum
This second dimension of service quality in Islamic Higher Education refers to atrributes that relevant with content of learning programs including content of program, sillabus structure, and material learning. This findings support Abdullah (2006) theory that issues program as one of dimension service quality in higher education. The specific quote of this dimension as follows:
"...university should have practical program like another campus do... " (female, master degree, 25).
"...most of subjet what i have been learning now is have i learned before in undergraduate degree, i think universities should improved its curriculum, especially in arabic program, there is should be continuous improvement between undergraduate, master and doctoral grade." (Female, master degree, 26)

3.1.3. Administration
The third dimension is administration, refers to entire aspect related with services conducted by administrative staff. Universities should have administrative and supporting staff that has relevant skills and abilities of the in order to provide smooth functioning of academic activities at a university, especially for their relationshops with students. These are critical service attributes for providing the support services to smooth running the programs/courses. This findings support Abdullah (2006) studies that non academic aspect is one of service quality dimension in higher education sector. The specific quote of this dimension as follows:
"...administratif staff, sometimes make us confused, without any clear explanation. When I ask about document of my final test, they showed me to ask lecturer... and then when I ask to my lecturer... my lecturer said to ask to administrative sfaff. I think it is very bad services, administratif staff should understand their job and already have coordination with lecturer about the final exam.." (male, master degree, 25).
".. we need more time for administration services. Learning start at 7.00 a clock, but administrative departement open at 8.00 a clock. And sometimes administrative staff not stand by in his desk when we need them.. " (male, master degree, 27).
"..sometimes administrative staff not responsive and not problem solving..." (male, doctoral degree, 30).

3.1.4. Facilities
The fourth dimension is facilities. It is refers to any kind physical attributes that supporting students in follow learning activities. In some theory, physical facility become one of inside dimensions service quality, such as those which stated by Parasuraman , that mention tangible dimension as service quality a part of. Followings some findings from FGD result related by dimension facilities:
"..i'm not satisfied with class facilities. Broke Air conditioner, LCD not working properly.. very disturbing... " (female, master degree, 25).
".i'm really like the building... good looking, and modern architecture.." (male, master degree, 26).

3.1.5. Libraries
The fifth dimension is libraries, refers to fullfillment of library facility and human resource, such as: availability of various books, longer open hours library, quality of library staff and so on. This findings support theory that stated by Athiyaman (1977) that one of service quality characteristic in campus is library facilities. Followings some quotes from FGD participants:
".. we need longer open hours library, rest timing too long.." (male, master degree, 28).
" ...library need to improve its service by adding sources of learning and improve staff skill... " (female, doctoral degree, 29).
"...very importantance library to adding books quantity due to class programs existing" (female, master degree, 24).

3.1.6. Islamic Environtment
It is last service quality dimension of Islamic higher education. This findings is surprising, that participants hoping the distinctive between Islamic Higher education and general higher education. Participants hoping existence of integrated Islamic value in universities daily activities. Followings is some FGD participant quotes:
"all members of universities should more professional and take responsibility accordance Islamic values" (male, doctoral degree, 31).
"universities should applied Islamic values in education..." (female, master degree, 25).
"..say no to time corruption. Islam taught us discipline and good performance, Isn' t it?" (male, master degree, 25).
Thus, this study finds six dimensions of service quality, namely, lecturer, curriculum, administration, facilities, libraries and Islamic environment. , in the context of UIN Maliki. These categories are related to specific attributes of higher educational services that students encounter during their study.

3.2. Consequences of Services Quality in Islamic Higher Education
when the focus groups were asked to discuss the effects of service quality evaluation in the context of their university, appear feelings such as satisfied and dissatisfied. It means that satisfaction is the critical consequences of service quality in a higher education. Followings is specific quote from participants:
"...I am less satisfied service in class...",
"...I am dissatisfied with the library..."
Satisfied and dissatisfied is consequences over service quality performance that given by campus to student. This finding support Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) theory, as well as research conducted by Al Alak and Alnaser (2012) , that service quality have positive influence to customer satisfaction. Result of analysing the focus group data, also find that satisfaction have other impact behavior like willingness to recommendation, and word of mouth communications. The spesific quotes are:
"... I will not recommend my universities, because I feel disappointed with the services.."
"...I would recommend UIN on people who looking for faith universities"
"sometime, i tell to my friend my experience in this universities.."
This findings show that satisfaction have outcome behaviouR: student willingness to recommend and word of mouth communication. This findings support theory that stated by Zeithaml, et.al.(1996), and Shirsavar(2012).
Thus, the above discussions has three result findings:
1. There is six dimensions of service quality, namely, lecturer, curriculum, administration, facilities, libraries and Islamic environment. , in the context of UIN Maliki.

2. Student Satisfaction is consequence of perceived service quality in Islamic Higher education
3. Satisfaction bring behavioral implication such as willingness to recommendn and word of mouth communication.
4. From this findings, we can develop model as in figure 1, and hypothesis as followings:
   - H1: perception of positively affect student satisfaction in the context Islamic higher education
   - H2: student satisfaction positively affect student recommendation to another
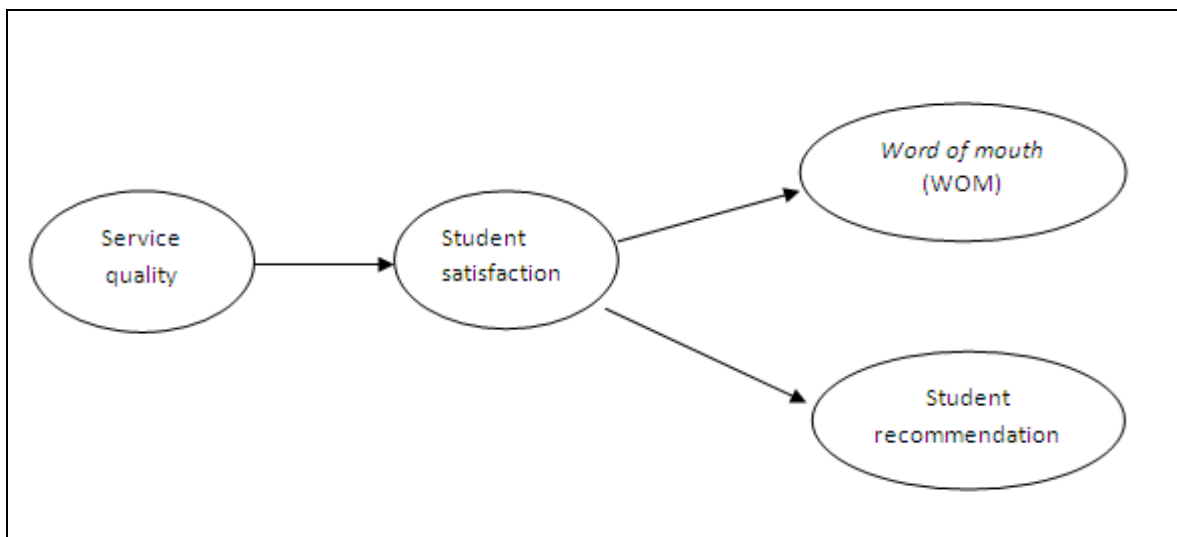   - H3: student satisfaction positively affect student word of mouth communication to another.

Figure 1: The Research model

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to explore perception student with regard to the dimensions and consequences of services quality in the context of Islamic Higher education in Indonesia. Researcher use qualitative method to produce a theoretical model, by using Focus Group Discussion (FGD). From this research found six dimensions of service quality, namely, lecturer, curriculum, administration, facilities, libraries and Islamic environment. While consequence from evaluation of service quality is student satisfaction, that have behavioral impact, student recomendations and word of mouth communications.

This research also intended to provide suggestion to Islamic higher education in Indonesia, especially to UIN Maliki. From analysis data FGD found that there are some complaint in administration department, service library and quality teaching. This finding makes implications for manager of UIN Maliki. First, universities should listen and respons every complaint immidiately. Good habbit or culture built should start from universities until student follow. When student feel dissatisfied with university services, will provide impact on student quality of education and also overall performance university. Second, universities should do continuous improvement in services quality due to finding the outcome of good service quality will impact on student willingness to recommend university and positive word of mouth.

This research has some limitations. First, this research conducted in Singgle University. For further reserch can conduct in larger scale. Second, service quality purposed in this research only based on student perceptions, whereas there is also other party like employes lecturer and other stakeholder that also have owns hope due to service quality service quality in Islamic higher education. Third, this research only produces model or theory taken from FGD, sure still needed further research that involved larger respondent to test the model.

6. References

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