Quality Assurance Practice Impact on Customers' Satisfaction: A Case Study in IIUM

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ABSTRACT

Quality assurance practice impact on customers' satisfaction as a case study in International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) was studied. The aim was to ensure that IIUM's is able to achieve and maintain quality assurance standards. It was accomplished by monitoring and evaluating various aspects of representative projects, services, and facilities to ensure application of quality standards. Majority of respondents were satisfied with information regarding their studies, staff assistance, and effective communication. In general, quality satisfaction was evident which caused work life balance to be evident in collected data. Therefore, a positive quality assurance impact is present at IIUM.

Keywords
Quality assurance, Practice, Customer, Satisfaction, IIUM.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The quality assurance practice on customers' satisfaction has undergone significance changes in Malaysia due to the implementation of the ISO 9001 standards within its management system. This study is designed to analyse the quality assurance practices within the development, and implementation effect on IIUM customers' satisfaction. It prescribes systematic control activities to ensure that needs and expectations of customers are met in equivalent to the standards of the proper quality assurance. This will be according to the needs for quality and demand for assurance of applying standards to guide staff members in implementing proper practices and adopting customer satisfaction by defining staff's key roles and responsibilities.

2.0   RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The prime aim for every institution is customers' satisfaction quality assurance maintenance and enhancement. Therefore, the need of a proper satisfaction towards the institution is part of quality assurance. To attain that, there is a great need to spread quality culture to meet students and employers need, which will lead to full benefit increase, and competition gain. One of the main objectives is to ensure that methods and measures of quality can be implemented at IIUM. This is by introducing quality assurance initiative which enhances factors leading to proper qualities of customer care. Hence, this study hopes to answer some questions related to quality assurance impact and what is required for quality assurance adaptation for customer satisfaction.

3.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper briefly discusses quality assurance practices impact on customer satisfaction, a case study in IIUM. The first section of this paper gives an overview of quality assurance in general. Main discussion will be focusing on quality assurance practice effect as perceived by customers. It also provides brief account of how IIUM can achieve and maintain quality assurance standards. By accomplishing the proper assurance standards as intended, it will provide a reference of ISO 9001 in order to establish quality objectives and to fit in to customers' satisfaction operation which will lead to improved efficiency.

3.1 Quality Assurance

The response to the diverse and ever-growing systems of Higher Education worldwide, the issue of quality, quality assessment, quality assurance and accreditation, and recognition of qualifications have become the key themes of higher education in Malaysia, lately. This study discusses quality effect on customers' satisfaction. The questions of 'quality' are inevitably, it has been the principal theme in Higher Institutions policy debate in the past and will be in the future years. 'Quality', which means the inherent or distinguishing characteristics, has been used for having a high degree of excellence. However, 'quality assurance' refers to all policies and processes directed to ensuring quality maintenance and enhancement (Lim, 2001: 13).

The term 'assurance' has been used as a statement or indication that inspires guarantee or a pledge. It can also means freedom from doubt as certainty or self confidence. Therefore, the impact of quality

assurance in excessive self-confidence, or presumption in a perform habitually or customarily is a practice.

Quality concept and the concern for assuring and enhancing it was developed in the western business sector before it was adopted by educational sectors. The commercial success depends on quality for the implementation of proper standards in the business sectors. Lim (2001: 13) argues that "the need to maximise profit in a competitive environment requires that costs are reduced and sales increased. An important way to increase sales is to have a product or service that is in demand and of high increase at an affordable price".

The elaboration and arguments of Lim clearly explains quality concept of assurance in both education and business sectors. Other definition of quality is "the total feature and characteristics of a product or service that bears on its ability to satisfy implied needs" (Abd. Aziz and Nasir, n.d.: 4)

Therefore, different sectors could envisage different levels at which development must occur and which must share, at least, some common unifying goal to quality enhancement.

3.2 The Impact of Quality Assurance and Practices

The term 'impact' in this study stands for the effect or impression of one thing on another or the power of making a strong, immediate impression. An impression is normally made by an idea or cultural movement in a social group. While the term 'practice' refers to repeated performance of an activity in order to learn or perfect a skill. It can also mean as performance habitually or customarily repeated in order to acquire or polish a skill.

The concern about quality assurance impact in higher institutions and its practices through a suitable external mechanism is evident from the fact that more than 130 national quality assurance agencies in about 100 countries have been established in the past decade or so. These national Quality Assurance agencies (NQAA) were originally conceived to serve the national interest. The main objective of these agencies are outcomes, which are designed either to promote quality enhancement or to ensure higher institutions' providers satisfaction, in this case their respective governments.

Majority of the Asia-Pacific countries have already established their National Assurance Agencies, while others are in different stages of establishing such bodies. In Malaysia, where this study is conducted, significant changes throughout the recent years were undergone. Many Universities

had made effort and struggle to put into practice a quality management system through the implementation of the ISO 9001:2000 standards within its management system (Abd.Aziz and Nasir, n.d.). This attitude leads to reflection and coverage to all necessary performance indicators that could result into a quality culture.

3.3 The Approach in Customer Satisfaction

The term 'customer' in this study has been used as an individual with whom one must deal with, where it reflects quality assurance impact of practices of individual in certain areas. 'Satisfaction' refers to the fulfilment or gratification of desire, need, or appetite. It also means the pleasure or contentment derived from such gratification. Therefore, source or means of gratification reflects the impact of quality assurance practices on customer pleasure or contentment. The person in satisfaction is a person's feelings of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance or an outcome in relation to his or her expectations.

Musa and Salleh (2005: 137) argue that "the greatest performance gap in customer satisfaction will be achieved by closing the largest 'performance gaps' but some gaps will be costlier than others.". Thus, makes clear satisfaction as a function of perceived performance and expectations. If the performance falls short of expectations and that is due to customer services received, then the customer is satisfied. But if it exceeds expectations, by proper adopting of high quality assurance practices and satisfaction, then the customer is highly satisfied or delighted.

3.4 Quality Service and Customer satisfaction

The term 'service' means the performance of work or duties. The service organisations also depend on the quality of their services. Quality service definition depends on customers help, because every customer may have a different perception of quality. It is therefore essential to involve customer in the development of quality services. Although it is difficult to involve customers in developing of quality services as stated by Han and Leong (1996: 72) that:

> Product quality alone is insufficient to satisfy modern customers. Customers are usually not engineers or production managers and know nothing about statistical process control, degrees of tolerance, or any other quality measurement techniques.

There are number of criteria used by customers in evaluating service quality, which were identified as follows: Reliability, responsiveness, competence, courtesy, credibility, security access,

communication, and understanding consumer tangibility. These criteria represent the views of service quality.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The study is based on quantitative analysis, where it systematically uses a predefined set of procedures to answer the question. This study focused on quality assurance practice impact on customers' satisfaction as a case study on IIUM. The evidence was collected through a questionnaire closed to postgraduate students only. It emphasis seeking conformity of customers satisfaction at IIUM.

4.1 Participants and Data Collection

The study analyze the quantify variation of the case study of IIUM by conducting a closed ended question format based on numerical values to responses. The scale questionnaire survey was used with 150 postgraduate students of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Out of a total of 150 respondents, however, 124 responded to the questionnaires.

4.2 Instrument

The questionnaire used in this survey is an adaptation of different books and articles on conducting surveys in social sciences and education. The adapted questionnaire comprises five 29 dimensions with 124 items. Since the study used a number of 29 dimensions in different categories, it will only demonstrate the survey results through tables and analysis of these results.

4.3 Data Analysis
Participants'/Subjects' responses to the questionnaire were analysed based on statistical analysis using the computer application SPSS using Windows, Linux / UNIX and Mac. The results are presented below.

5.0 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Frequency Table

In table 1 of general quality, 73.8% of respondents agreeing that the general quality of service is good. While 6.6% disagreed and 19.7% were on average. Therefore, it is concluded that the majority agreed that general quality is good.

Table 2 shows 49.2% of respondents agreeing that services provided by the administration are good. While, 21.3% disagreed and 29.5% were on average. Therefore, administration service is quite pleasing.

Table 1:General quality

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	90	72.6	**73.8**	73.8
	No	8	6.5	6.6	80.3
	Sometimes	24	19.4	19.7	100.0
	Total	122	98.4	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.6		
Total		124	100.0		

Table 2: Administration pleasing

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	60	48.4	**49.2**	49.2
	No	26	21.0	21.3	70.5
	sometimes	36	29.0	29.5	100.0
	Total	122	98.4	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.6		
Total		124	100.0		

Table 3 shows 41.8% of respondents agreeing that quality standards are impressive. While 19.7% disagree and others 38.5% were on average.

Table 3 : Standard impressive

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	51	41.1	**41.8**	41.8
	No	24	19.4	19.7	61.5
	Sometimes	47	37.9	38.5	100.0
	Total	122	98.4	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.6		
Total		124	100.0		

Table 4 shows 41.3% of respondents agreeing that communication with staff is effective. The 20.7% disagree, while 38% were on average. Therefore we conclude that communication with staff is fair.

Table 4 :Communication

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	50	40.3	**41.3**	41.3
	no	25	20.2	20.7	62.0
	sometimes	46	37.1	38.0	100.0
	Total	121	97.6	100.0	
Missing	System	3	2.4		
Total		124	100.0		

Table 5 shows 41.8% were satisfied with the general customer service 20.5% were not satisfied and 31.7% were average.

Table 5 : Customer service

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	51	41.1	**41.8**	41.8
	No	25	20.2	20.5	62.3
	Sometimes	46	37.1	37.7	100.0
	Total	122	98.4	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.6		
Total		124	100.0		

Table 6 shows 73.6% of respondents agreeing that IIUM have good work-life balance, hence the University will be more effective and successful. While, 9.1% disagreed and 17.4% were average.

Table 6 : Work life balance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	89	71.8	**73.6**	73.6
	No	11	8.9	9.1	82.6
	Sometimes	21	16.9	17.4	100.0
	Total	121	97.6	100.0	
Missing	System	3	2.4		
Total		124	100.0		

Table 7 shows 51.2% of respondents agreeing that special customary services are good. While, 8.1% disagreed and 40.7% were average. Therefore, the majority are satisfied with special customary service.

Table 7 : Special customary service

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	63	50.8	**51.2**	51.2
	No	10	8.1	8.1	59.3
	Sometimes	50	40.3	40.7	100.0
	Total	123	99.2	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.8		
Total		124	100.0		

Table 8 shows 55.7% of respondents agreeing that when they have problems, it is dealt with efficiently. The 33.6%, disagreed while 10.7 were average.

Table 8 : Complaints procedure

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	68	54.8	**55.7**	55.7
	No	41	33.1	33.6	89.3
	sometimes	13	10.5	10.7	100.0
	Total	122	98.4	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.6		
Total		124	100.0		

Table 9 shows 72.7% of respondents agreeing that the staff assistance were adequate. While 21.5% disagreed and 5% were average. Therefore, the majority receives assistance when required.

Table 9: Staff assistance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	88	71.0	**72.7**	72.7
	No	26	21.0	21.5	94.2
	Sometimes	6	4.8	5.0	99.2
	22	1	.8	.8	100.0
	Total	121	97.6	100.0	
Missing	System	3	2.4		
Total		124	100.0		

Table 10 shows 71.7% of respondents agreeing that staff communicated effectively in regard to responded needs. However, 25% disagreed and 3.3% were average. Therefore, there is a clear evidence that high effective communication is present.

The research findings of the present study were analyzed according to the results obtained of the customers' satisfaction quality assurance impact practiced at IIUM. Results showed that general quality of service were good, which stand as conformity to specific requirements and standards of quality. According to the adoption by the Fourth General Conference of the FUIW [10] of the draft Guide (Kuwait, State of Kuwait: 4-5 April 2007), states that the American National Standards Institute defines quality as "the totality of features and characteristics of a product or a service that bears on its ability to satisfy the given need" (FUIW, 2007: 19). In this case, the given need is the service which is needed by the customer to be satisfied.

Table 10 : Effective communication

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	86	69.4	**71.7**	71.7
	No	30	24.2	25.0	96.7
	sometimes	4	3.2	3.3	100.0
	Total	120	96.8	100.0	
Missing	System	4	3.2		
Total		124	100.0		

Table 11 shows 79% of respondents agreeing that they are informed of important matters regarding their studies. While, 18.5 disagreed and 2.5% averages. Therefore, the majority are satisfied with getting information regarding their studies.

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[10] FUIW: Federation of the Universities of Islamic World.

Table 11 : Information

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	94	75.8	**79.0**	79.0
	No	22	17.7	18.5	97.5
	sometimes	3	2.4	2.5	100.0
	Total	119	96.0	100.0	
Missing	System	5	4.0		
Total		124	100.0		

The present study did not emphasize Total Quality Management (TQM), although it is being analyzed by the works provided by Arcaro (1995), who argued that Total Quality Management is a methodology that can assist education professionals to cope with contemporary challenging environment, provided that it is implemented properly. This is as far as TQM is concerned, but when discussing Total Quality in education, it refers to a set of characteristics and features which reflect accurately the real situation of education in all its different dimensions: including input, process, output, and feedback; as well as the continuous interactions realization of the required objectives recognized by all.

According to this concept of Total Quality in education, the meaning of quality has been used in the present study in large to encompass the quality of the product. The same meaning also applies to the concept as it is in the former works on Quality Assurance, in general. Therefore, the quality is a large concept, as it encompasses the quality of the product, the service, the performance, information, the working environment, the management, the quality of individuals, and all principles that increases efficiency to meet the objectives pursued by a given educational institution. All these meanings of quality are demonstrated in the present study, especially when responses were analyzed on the quality assurance practice impact findings on customers' satisfaction at IIUM. In this respect Al-Habshi and Nik Hassan (2000: 81) argues that "Quality assurance evolution saw a shift in focus from the production process to the whole production chain-from design to delivery of the product to the customer". This definition encompasses the productivity aspects of quality assurance, however, these aspects had a small impact in the present study.

The present study, also, surveyed the service and customers expectation on quality which is part of the quality planning in this study. Al-Habshi and Nik Hassan referred to quality planning as "A process that identifies the customers', their requirements, the product and service features the customers expect, and the process that will be deliver, those products and services with the correct attributes and then facilitates the transfer of this knowledge to the producing arm of the organization". While also defining quality control as "a process in which the product is actually examined and evaluated against the original requirements expressed by customer. Problems detected are then corrected" (Al-Habshi and Nik Hassan, 2000: 86). This is a total quality process implementation which occurs after a total examination and evaluation which is not covered in this current research, however, a future expanded study is intended to do so. Although there are some requirements expressed by the customers in relation to different aspects pertaining to the service and quality in general and in specific, no corrections were attempted; as this study only analyzes the current state through responses given by customers who are students and staff members at IIUM.

The quality improvement occurs in a process of assessing quality projects by establishing permanent structure to pursue quality and maintain the gains secured. This can be done by allocating resources and assigning people to pursue quality projects based on quality assurance. In order for quality improvements to take place, a process of sustainable mechanisms should be put in place so that quality can be achieved on a continuous basis.

Satisfying customers is an essential element to staying in business or services in this modern world of global competition. However, to gain customer loyalty and good reputation services, a continuously maintained satisfaction and quality services is required.

Therefore, customer satisfaction is a primary goal of an improvement program process as seen in results of this study, where customers' satisfaction means a lot in providing quality standard of the system. The work of Arcaro represents the implementation of education in such a way that arguing on quality being neither magic nor complex as it is a structured process for improving the output shape (Arcaro, 1995). Arcaro understands quality as " … to create an environment where educators, parents, government officials, community representatives, and business leaders work together as a team to provide students with the amenities and resources they need to meet current future academic, business, and societal challenges" (Arcaro, 1995: 2 report).

The present study shows a general quality assurance effect on customers' satisfaction, where the effect of general quality standards application were positively shown in the satisfaction of most respondents.

Musa and Mohd Salleh showed in their edited book of articles related to quality standard that quality standard in an Islamic perspective dealing with

management principles in organizations should subscribe to and implement these standards. It also explores those principles, which are relevant to the present study, and shows their relevance to continued quality practice in the future. Some of these quality standard mentioned by them were: seeking knowledge, sharing and caring, smart working, strategic mindset, sincerity, integrity, social justice, and equality.

Other work which differs with the present study is the Management of quality in Islamic perspective, which covers principles and practices. The discussion on managing quality excellence is covered widely in the works by Ahmad (2008). Ahmad, defines quality management as "the degree of excellence" while when regarding an organization refers to "the quality of services rendered or products offered to fellow humans: customers' and final users" (Ahmad, 2008: 334).

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The overall finding of this data analysis has a positive impact on general quality assurance and customers' satisfaction at the IIUM. The overall performance as seen above in response to different items in service delivery is good. However, the following areas needs to be improved as their percentage of agreement was below 45%. These include the standard to impress, communication, customer service, welcome, social activity and dealing with students' needs. It also concludes that no matter how effective an organisation meets the needs of its customers, it must remain constantly alert and responsive to the dynamic competitive environment and continuously changing needs and expectations of customers. This could be done by adopting quality assurance services and proper standards in order to be effective in demonstrating customers satisfaction to clients.

7.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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