Quality of University Life (QUL): A Case Study of Malay Students (Kualiti Hidup Universiti: Satu Kajian Kes ke atas Pelajar Melayu)

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ABSTRACT

Quality of Life (QoL) has many definitions and is synonymously defined as an individual's perceived life satisfaction or general well-being. Quality of University Life (QUL) is a sub-domain of QoL and basically measures what university students expect, need and want focusing on many aspects of their university experiences. This study was carried out to investigate the QUL of Malay students at a public university. A sample of 368 undergraduates having at least six months experience of life at campus was randomly selected. QUL was assessed according to two domains namely affective and cognitive. The QUL instrument which was comprised of 116 items (Likert scale ranging from 1 to 10) had reliability index of 0.98. Overall, students were slightly satisfied with their lives at the university with a mean score of 6.75. The affective QUL scored 6.70 and cognitive QUL scored 6.80. Among the main components of cognitive (education, administration, facilities), education services scored the highest mean (7.48). Findings indicate that some aspects about the administration and facilities need attention and improvements. Comparison studies between gender, resident/non-resident and with/without own transport will be discussed in the paper. Correlation analysis done indicates no relationship among the four main components. Hopefully, this finding will assist the management of the university to make necessary improvements towards increasing student's happiness and life satisfaction at the campus.

Keywords: life satisfaction, Quality of University Life (QUL), general well-being, affective, cognitive

ABSTRAK

Wujud banyak takrifan mengenai istilah Kualiti Hidup seseorang dan secara amnya kualiti hidup didefinisikan sebagai persepsi individu terhadap tahap kepuasan atau darjah kesejahteraan individu tersebut terhadap kehidupannya. Kualiti Hidup Universiti adalah sub-domain Kualiti Hidup dan secara asasnya mengukur harapan, keperluan dan kehendak pelajar universiti mengenai pelbagai aspek tentang pengalaman hidup mereka di universiti. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meninjau kualiti hidup pelajar Melayu di sebuah universiti awam. Sampel terdiri daripada 368 pelajar peringkat ijazah sarjana muda yang telah menjalani kehidupan di kampus untuk tempoh sekurang-kurangnya enam bulan dan dipilih secara rawak. Kualiti hidup pelajar dinilai berdasarkan dua domain iaitu afektif dan kognitif. Instrumen kajian yang digunakan mempunyai indeks kebolehpercayaan 0.98 dengan 116 item (skala Likert 1 hingga 10). Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa secara keseluruhannya dengan min skor 6.75, kepuasan pelajar berada pada tahap sederhana.. Skor bagi domain afektif ialah 6.70 dan skor bagi domain kognitif ialah 6.80. Di kalangan komponen utama kognitif (pendidikan, pentadbiran, kemudahan asas), komponen pendidikan mendapat skor yang tertinggi (7.48). Hasil kajian mendapati beberapa aspek berkaitan pentadbiran dan kemudahan asas perlukan perhatian dan penambahbaikan.

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Analisis perbandingan antara jantina, residen/bukan residen serta tiada/mempunyai pengangkutan persendirian juga akan dibincangkan. Analisis korelasi menunjukkan tiada hubungan diantara empat komponen utama. Adalah diharapkan hasil kajian ini akan dapat membantu pihak pengurusan universiti mengenal pasti aspek penambahbaikan yang wajar dilaksanakan bagi meningkatkan tahap kepuasan hidup dan kesejahteraan pelajar di kampus.

Keywords: kepuasan hidup, Kualiti Hidup Universiti, kesejahteraan am, afektif, kognitif

INTRODUCTION

The termed Quality of Life (QoL) has a variety of definitions and is synonymously defined as an individual's perceived life satisfaction or general well-being. To be more precise, it refers to the degree of a person's judgement on the quality of one's overall life that stems from satisfaction and dissatisfaction with areas of life that are important to one self (Diener, 1985; Nausbaum *et al.*, 1993; Nordenfelt, 1999; Ren, 2009).

Researches on quality of life in the west are so well established and have reached an advanced level. QoL has been used in various contexts across many disciplines from health to social sciences. In the educational arena many researchers have developed QoL specifically for college (QCL) or university students (QUL). Sirgy *et al.* (2007) placed QUL as a subdomain of QoL and defined it as the overall life satisfaction that students feel at college/university and it essentially measures what university students expect, need and want. The measurement focuses on students' total experiences at the campus and is not confined to classroom environment only.

QUL is gaining more importance due to the role it plays in ensuring expectations of students on every possible aspect of their life as students at campus are realised. Many universities especially in the west are using QUL indicators to assess students' satisfaction. In fact, in some surveys of university rankings, QUL is taken as one of its categories. A measure of QUL is not only seen as a platform of providing baselines for students' satisfaction but can assist the management of institutions to identify policies as well as areas and aspects about the students' lives that need attention and require improvements. A good quality university will have the ability to meet students' expectations and definitely will attract more other students to enrol.

The objective of this study was to investigate the QUL of Malay students at a public university. QUL was assessed based on two domains: affective and cognitive. Affective refers to one's emotions or overall feelings of satisfaction experienced during the last several months while cognitive refers to satisfaction according to three components of university services: educational services, administrative services and facilities provided. The study also attempted to examine whether there exist significant differences in QUL of students between genders, residence/non residence and with/without transport. Relationships between the main components were also examined.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on quality of college or university life assess many dimensions that concern students. In determining life satisfaction of students researchers varies in their definitions of the term quality of student's university life. Several researchers measure quality of student's university life by assessing the affective domain and cognitive domain (Robert & Clifton, 1992; Yu & Lee, 2008). Affective refers to the pleasantness experience in feelings, emotions and moods and perceived satisfaction on social interactions or attitude (Robert & Clifton, 1992). Cognitive refers to satisfaction with basic human needs and are more judgemental (Sirgy *et al.* 2007; Cohen *et al.* 2001; Deiner, 1985). Other researchers for instance Low (2000), assessed students quality of university life based on what she termed as institutional performance and students' expectations.

Even though those studies varies in their definitions of quality, terminologies, dimensions, its compositions, as well as measurement standards, many agree that probing into students' perceptions on their university experiences is crucial in determining the students' quality of university life (Deiner, 1985; Roberts & Clifton, 1992; Low, 2000; Cohen *et al.*; Cha, 2003; Clifton *et al.*, 2004; Peng *et al.*, 2006; Michalos *et al.*, 2006; Sirgy *et al.*, 2007; Yu & Lee, 2008; Nek Kamal *et al.*, 2009). In this case quality is assessed based on the difference between expectation and service performance or in other words, perceived value versus perceived performance, from the standpoint of the students. Yu & Lee (2008) refer to it as the perceived discrepancy between aspiration and achievement.

Sirgy *et al.*(2007) conceptualized QUL as significantly and positively correlated to students' satisfaction with academic aspects and students' satisfaction with social aspects and in turn the two were characterised by satisfaction with university services and facilities. Yu & Lee (2008) extended Sirgy's model by conceptualizing QUL in terms of needs satisfaction and affect balance and confirmed Sirgy's finding that education services, administrative services and facilities positively influence QUL.

Roberts and Clifton (1992) who developed QoL measuring the affective domain of university students found that positive affect, negative affect, identity and professors have positive correlations with overall students' satisfaction. Cha (2003) found positive relationships between subjective well-being and personality constructs such as self-esteem, collective self-esteem, and optimism.

Numerous other findings have been reported from studies on quality of university life. Roberts and Clifton (1992) recounted from Levitz and Noel (1989) that students' perceptions of the quality of their university experiences have a significant impact on academic achievement. For instance Low (2000) and Chow (2005) found that the higher the CGPA the higher the level of student satisfaction. Chow also found strong relationship between QoL of students with relationships, friendships and living conditions. With respect to gender, Low (2000) and Ren (2009) found that females generally have higher level of satisfaction than males.

METHODOLOGY

The sample of this case study consisted of 368 undergraduate Malay students having at least six months experience of life at campus selected at random from a particular faculty.

In this study QUL is defined to be the overall feelings of satisfaction students experience with life at the university. Following that, QUL is characterised as a composite of the cognitive and affective components. The affective component refers to the overall feelings of satisfaction (Roberts and Clifton, 1992) and the cognitive component refers to satisfaction of basic human needs (Yu & Lee, 2008). Measures on the affective domain were adopted and adapted from Roberts & Clifton (1992) where as measures on the cognitive domain were taken and adapted from Yu & Lee (2008).

The survey questionnaire comprised of four parts. Part I was used to gather demographic information about the respondents. The core of the survey instrument (Part II & Part III) involved a total of 116 items using Likert scales of 1 to 10. Part II involved a formative measure of the affective QUL (1=strongly disagree to 10=strongly agree) which consisted of four dimensions namely positive affects, negative affects, interaction with students and interaction with professors. Part III captured the formative measure of cognitive QUL (1=strongly dissatisfied to 10=strongly satisfied) which in turn comprised of satisfaction with education services (lecturers, coursework), satisfaction with administrative services (admin office, academic office, library, healthcare, food, security/parking/transport, other campus services) and satisfaction with facilities (classroom, ICT, social, convenient, campus environment, housing). Part IV of the survey consisted of an open-ended questions used to gather additional area/matter worth attention.

Before further analysis was done, the reliability of the questionaires was tested. The overall index of reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) of the QUL questionnaire was 0.982 where by the items were constructed according to four different main components in the two domains in which the realiability for Affect (34 items) was 0.936, Education (9 items) was 0.926, Administration (40 items) was 0.977

and Facilities (33 items) was 0.973. Thus, the instrument was considered reliable for measuring students' satisfactions since alpha was greater than 0.65 and near to 1.

In analyzing the quantitative data, all the negative statements (negative affect) were rescaled in reversed order. The scales were regrouped into three categories: less than 5 (Disagree/Dissatisfied), 5 to less than 7 (slightly Agree/Satisfied), 7 – 10 (Agree/Satisfied). A few methods were employed to achieve the study objectives. Descriptive statistics of mean scores were used to assess student's satisfaction level. T-tests were used to investigate significant differences in the mean of satisfaction scores between males and females, and between residents and non-residents as well as between those students who possessed or did not possess own transportation. To verify whether the students were in the same direction of agreement on their life satisfaction with respect to the main components and to determine associations between the main components, Pearson's coefficient of correlation was used.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic Data

The samples involved in this study were 71% male and 29% female with an average age of 22 years old. Most of them were the university residents, contributing 72% of the samples and the rest were the non-residents (28%). Basically, 47% keep their own transport such that 36% possessed a car and 64% possessed a motorcycle. In terms of academic performance, the average student's CGPA was 3.14. The average weekly contact hour for learning activities (ATA) per week was 21 (with dispersion of 4 hour from the mean) as in Table 1.

Table 1: The mean and standard deviation for CGPA, ATA and age of students

Information	Sample size	Mean	S.D.
CGPA	293	3.14	0.361
ATA	308	21	3.947
Age	363	22	1.352

Analysis of Students' Satisfaction

Table 2 shows that generally students were *slightly satisfied* (Overall = 6.75) with their lives at the university. Among the attribute sub-components, mean of academician scored the highest (Education_lecturer = 7.68), suggesting that students were *satisfied* with their lecturers. The lowest score was satisfaction towards security, parking and transport (Admin_transport = 5.46).

For the affective QUL there were 34 items constructed to assess the students about their feelings and emotions pertaining to their lives at the university. Seven items were found exceeding the overall mean score of 6.70. "Mixing with other people helps me to understand myself" was the highest item with mean score of 7.91, followed by "the things I learn will help me in my life" with score of 7.84. The lowest in the rank was "I feel restless" with score of 4.42 and the next lower item was "I feel worried" with score of 4.22. Overall for the Affective domain, the students were *slightly agreeable* to the items. Out of the four sub-components in the affective domain, only negative-affect scored below 5 (4.94). The other three sub-components (positive-affect, interaction with lecturers, interactions with students) scored above 7. The finding implies that even though the students were fairly happy or satisfied, at the same time the students were worried and restless. Further investigation revealed that almost 25 percent of the students had a total of more than 25 contact hours weekly. This revealing fact may suggest that despite admitting what they learned were rewarding, on the other hand, there

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of QUL components

DOMAIN	Sub-component	Sample size	Sub-component mean	Sub-component S.D.	Agreement/ Satisfaction	Main component mean
AFFECTIVE 6.70	Affect_positive	348	7.45	1.169	agree	6.70 Slightly agree
	Affect_negative	357	4.94	1.671	disagree	
	Affect_interaction_lecturer	351	7.18	1.259	agree	
	Affect_interaction_students	345	7.16	1.224	agree	
COGNITIVE 6.80	Education_lecturer	364	7.68	1.319	satisfied	7.48 Satisfied
	Education_coursework	367	7.28	1.594	satisfied	
	Admin_office	366	6.59	1.685	slightly	6.57 Slightly satisfied
	Admin _academic	368	6.71	1.639	slightly	
	Admin _library	366	7.21	1.481	satisfied	
	Admin _healthcare	367	7.24	1.824	satisfied	
	Admin _food	362	6.31	1.628	slightly	
	Admin _transport	363	5.46	2.084	slightly	
	Admin _other services	363	6.43	1.614	slightly	
	Facility_classroom	364	6.74	1.779	slightly	6.40 Slightly satisfied
	Facility _technology	357	6.30	1.744	slightly	
	Facility_social activities	366	6.36	1.876	slightly	
	Facility _convenient	362	6.01	1.882	slightly	
	Facility _environment	366	6.44	1.822	slightly	
	Facility _housing	363	6.38	1.864	slightly	
	Overall_mean	282	6.75	0.91	slightly satisfied	

were things which bothered the students. The heavy workload could most likely have contributed to an unwarranted psychological effect and the students were worried about their academic achievement as proposed by Selye (1974) that there is a correlation between stress and CGPA. Or, there might also be other elements from the cognitive components which could have interfered with the students' emotions.

For the cognitive QUL (Education, Administration, Facilities), Education scored the highest with an overall mean score of 7.48, indicating that generally students were *satisfied* with the education services. Education services refer to satisfaction towards lecturers and satisfaction in regards to the courses they were taking. The students were satisfied with the quality of teaching (including lecturer's communication skills, interactions in class and the use of technology) as well as satisfied with the value of courses (syllabus, overall course workload and level of difficulty).

Mean for the overall Administration was 6.57 indicating that students were *slightly satisfied*. Administration services include administrative and academic offices, library, healthcare, food, security, parking, transportation and on-campus activities. Students were satisfied with healthcare (7.24) and library services (7.20). However, security, parking and transportation (5.46) were the *least satisfied* in the administration items after food services (6.31). From the result it is obvious that transportation and parking are areas that should be looked into. Besides, as far as food is concerned, there are rooms for improvement.

Most students were *slightly satisfied* with overall Facilities with a mean score of 6.40. Facilities being provided were classroom, the use of technology, services for social activities, prayer room, surrounding environment and housing (or in house residential services). Further analysis with respect to facilities indicates that students' satisfaction towards the classrooms was the highest (6.70) and for all the sub-components in Facilities, the students were *slightly satisfied* as depicted in Table 2. In-depth analysis unveiled that students were unhappy with the prayer's room (6.01). Through the

open ended questions of the questionnaire, result suggests that many students were not happy with the prayer's room due to its size. This finding may suggest that the prayer's room is an aspect in facilities that needs immediate attention.

Comparison Analysis

As depicted in Table 3, the results of the t-test provide evidence that there is no significant difference in the QUL mean scores between genders with respect to all the four main components of QUL. However, in-depth analysis illustrates a *significant difference* in the overall QUL mean scores between male and female with respect to their *academic performance or CGPA* (p=0.000) with female having a higher CGPA mean score of 3.20.

Further inspection on each individual item in the Affective component disclosed that the female scored significantly higher mean than male in two items with the following statements: "Lecturers treat me fairly" (p=0.004) and "Other students accept me as I am" (p=0.035). As for the statement "Lecturers are fair and just", female scored marginal higher than male (p=0.058). The finding appears to suggest that female students were generally more satisfied with their lecturers than their male counterpart.

Besides, as shown in Table 3, the results of the t-test also provide evidence that there exists no significant difference in the QUL mean scores between residents and non-residents with respect to all the four main components of QUL. However, there exists a *significant difference* in the overall QUL mean scores between residents and non-residents, again in regards to their *CGPA* (p=0.008) with residents possessing a higher CGPA of 3.23. On top of that, further analysis also showed that residents scored significantly higher (p=0.014) in social activities facilities (sport centre and study lounge). Such result seems to propose that non-resident students perhaps expect the institution to provide them with facilities for social activities or recreational spots that can enable them to participate or be included.

However, as reflected in Table 3, in regards to Facilities, the results of the t-test provide support that there exists a *significant difference* in the QUL mean scores between students with own transport and those without one **(**p=0.020**)** with students without own transport scored significantly higher (6.80). This finding probably suggests that students with own transport appear to be less satisfied. Such discovery implies that parking is a factor deem problematic to students with own transport and hence need urgent attention and improvement.

Table 3: Comparison of satisfaction between gender, residency and transport.

	FEMALE			MALE			
	Sample size	Mean	S.D.	Sample size	Mean	S.D.	t-test p-value
CGPA	205	3.20	0.347	88	3.00	0.359	0.000
Affective	227	6.73	0.869	88	6.64	0.823	0.389
Education	259	7.46	1.314	104	7.53	1.301	0.639
Administration	247	6.62	1.298	101	6.46	1.566	0.378
Facilities	249	6.40	1.521	97	6.44	1.676	0.834
	RESIDENT			Non-RESIDENT			
	Sample size	Mean	S.D.	Sample size	Mean	S.D.	t-test p-value
CGPA	89	3.23	0.367	209	3.11	0.354	0.008
Affective	91	6.79	0.827	223	6.67	0.868	0.241
Education	104	7.49	1.311	259	7.47	1.308	0.903
Administration	99	6.70	1.328	258	6.70	1.402	0.273
Facilities	100	6.51	1.545	253	6.37	1.574	0.448
	TRANSPORT			No-TRANSPORT			
	Sample size	Mean	S.D.	Sample size	Mean	S.D.	t-test p-value
CGPA	144	3.11	0.368	148	3.17	0.348	0.094
Affective	169	7.48	1.239	193	7.50	1.342	0.216
Education	161	6.56	1.441	186	6.59	1.322	0.834
Administration	164	6.41	1.613	181	6.41	1.525	0.983
Facilities	140	6.58	0.747	175	6.80	0.924	0.020*

Correlation Analysis

To investigate the relationship between the main components that had been considered with respect to students QUL, the following results of Pearson Coefficient of correlation is shown as in Table 4. The relationship between Education, Administration and Facilities was found to be significant with Affective at 10% level. The positive value of the coefficient indicates that the relationship was in line and did not contradict with each other. The strongest agreement in the QUL of students was between Facilities and Administration (0.827). On the contrary, relationships between Education and Administration as well as between Education and Facilities were rather weak (about 0.5). The result also indicates that there was almost no relationship between CGPA and all the main components. In fact, there was a negative correlation between CGPA and Education. This finding seems to suggest that high achiever students appear to have higher expectations and thus might give lower ratings as compared to the low achievers.

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Table 4: The Pearson Correlation Coefficient

	CGPA	AFFECTIVE	EDU	ADMIN	FACILITIES
CGPA	1				
Affective	0.065	1			
Education	-0.22	0.402 (**)	1		
Administration	0.014	0.46 (**)	0.586 (**)	1	
Facilities	-0.070	0.362 (**)	0.523 (**)	0.827 (**)	1

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

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the QUL of Malay students. In general, students at this particular faculty were quite satisfied with their well-being and emotionally they were slightly happy with their lives.

With respect to education aspects, most students were relatively satisfied with the quality of academicians. In fact rating of lecturers was the highest. Student's satisfaction with academicians and instruction is a strength that the faculty or institution may wish to promote in an effort to attract more potential students.

In view of the administration services the results suggest that students were satisfied with healthcare and library management. Students were especially not satisfied with transportation and parking. Students who possessed own transport complained of insufficient parking and students who used public transport criticised on having to wait long period for buses. In this regards, perhaps the institution may implement in-house bus services which are more frequent and schedules be made available at many places for students to refer to.

As far as facilities are concerned, the findings illustrate that overall and for each individual facility mentioned, students were slightly satisfied. Apparently, the prayer's room was really not up to the students' expectations. It is a known fact at the faculty that the prayer's room is too small to accommodate the vast majority of students and this finding ascertain students' dissatisfaction on the matter.

The increase uproar in higher education marketplace has encouraged educational institutions to utilise a more customer oriented philosophy in delivering services. As mentioned by Low (2000), successful institution share three basic attributes: focus on the needs of the students, continually improve the quality of educational experience and use student satisfaction data to shape future directions. Hence, it is only imperative that educational institutions continually apply student-oriented principles to have better chance of satisfying the needs, wants and expectations of students effectively. This is a preliminary attempt of assessing QUL for the institution. This study was confined to a particular faculty and thus, future studies may want to include students from other faculties as well.

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