

Service Quality Provision in Higher Education: Case Study of Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation

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ABSTRACT

Managing the service sector in higher education has become a more significant issue, as a lot of competitors are emerging in these sectors. Managing quality in the education needs be separated from other service sectors, if best quality education must be accorded to its customers (students). This work basically involves a study of service quality provision in higher education, which particularly was conducted and carried out at the Asia Pacific University, Malaysia. Students' perceptions were sampled based on the perceived quality of services attained from this institution with almost reference to the learning instruments and their ability to be competitive in the relevant knowledge obtained in the learning process. Questionnaires were administered to thirty respondents to get the views of students concerning service quality in the higher education. Students turn up rate was high and responses were encouraging. The study gets the views of students and also pin point the relevant areas that need improvements.

KEYWORDS

Service Quality, Education Service, Education, Higher Education, University Service Quality, Service Sector

1 INTRODUCTION

The service sector has attracted a lot of attention and has been playing a crucial role in

the economy of nations. This sector has tremulously grown since 1970. Basically, quality has been attached to the service sector, as provision of services is not enough when the quality is not compatible with the needs of people [1].

Modern day education society happens to be very competitive, in the bid to attract more students; there is need for educational institutions to upgrade in their relevant service provision [2]. This is because this factor is crucial for student assessment into higher institution, since there are a lot of available options for students to choose from. Therefore, institutions that want to be competitive in future may be forced to develop strategic means of attracting students and also come up with ideas of retaining them and creating a stronger relationship between them [3]. Rasli, et al. [4] hold the view that to gain the two key achievements of student satisfaction as well as student loyalty, there must be good quality of service towards the students. According to Khan et al. [5], satisfied customers will generally improve the profitability of the institution. Furthermore, a satisfied customer will be more likely to re-use the service or recommend someone else for the service.

The provision of good quality services is highly associated with high profitability, customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, customer attention and attraction [6].

This research arises in need to address issues of service quality provided in Asia Pacific University of Technology & Innovation (APU), Malaysia, which is a well-established university attracting students from over one hundred countries [7]. The study involves collection of views among students studying in the university, with the administration of questionnaires to students.

University services and facilities signify a lot in the life of student. This is important because it can either help students to develop themselves or depreciate their study morale. Thus, this research is mainly directed to address issues of service quality in higher institution mostly on the way student feel towards their current services provided in the institution (APU).

This research is very vital, in that it will address issues of service quality in higher institutions which will help the APU administration to take better actions and appreciate the need for quality services provision. This will also try to suggest possible solutions that will remedy the problems that are association to service quality.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Good standards of educational institutions are the main principles for customers prior to considering taking up a service. This also plays significant role in measuring the institutional performance [8]. This is the reason why institutions around the world are gearing their efforts to deliver quality of educational and offer leading services to their customers to ensure their satisfaction. Research has been carried out mainly to investigate the service quality of educational institutions and most importantly the higher education with the aim of identifying the factor that determine the student satisfaction [9]. Further on this there is need to see more on service quality and satisfaction.

2.1 Service quality

The word service quality is used interchangeably

with the concept of satisfaction. Service quality is the perception of customer in regard to services provided by an organization [10]. It refers to the rating that customers give to a service provider. Services quality mainly focuses on how to meet the expectation of the customers. Importantly, customers need varies and changes from time to time. The essence of measuring services quality is to upgrade with the needs of customers, to keep them satisfied [10].

Quality revolves round the perception of people receiving it. The perceptions of students vary when it comes to service quality provision. However, service quality is based on perceived quality. Perceived quality is defined as the customers judgment about an entity overall experience [11]. Consumer perceptions of service quality are measured in most case by comparing expectations prior to receiving the services and their actual experience of the service.

Perceived service quality is the product of evaluation of a number of services encounter by the students, ranging from the office staffs, to tutors and head of department [12]. Each time student are not satisfied with the service quality provided by the school institution, this shows that their expectations are not meet. The students are the main customers in the school institution, and not meeting their demands of service quality can reduce the assimilation level of students in their study.

However, quality has been defined in various perspectives. It is the eye of the customer. It can be measured and seen. Still it is defined as fitness. Goetsch and Davis define quality as a dynamic state associated with products, services, people, process, and environments that's meet or exceed customers' expectations [13].

Service product is classified into core services and supplementary services. Core service is the basic reason for a firm to be in the market. It represents the competency of the firm to create value for its customers. It also represents a collection of benefits which may be difficult to

analyze due to some physical, psychological and other emotional factors. Core service is therefore the most basic purpose for providing the service. The core service in this study is the reason for using university services, which is to gain informational knowledge [14].

A supplementary service refers to auxiliary services. This includes logistics services, advices, installation and upgrades. They are enhancing services, this services help the core services to take place and add value for the customer [14].

Moreover, defining quality in higher education has proven to be controversial and challenging, especially in the education industry [15]. Lewis and Booms suggests that service quality is a measure of how well the service level delivered matches customers' expectations [16]. Research by Nimako & Bondinuba [15] shows the difference between technical quality and functional quality in service provision. Technical quality describes what the customers gets and it objectives in nature, While functionality quality describes how the customers gets the service and it is subjective, in nature [15].

The overriding value in measuring services quality in higher education lies in the identification of critical aspect of the service delivery. The customer is the major priority here that is the student. The customer is always seen as right. Therefore, the customer (student) must be fairly treated. This follows that if students cannot be seen as customers, the measurement of services quality, with the intention of improving service quality is wholly inappropriate [15].

Students' expectations are valuable source of information. When students are new to school, they have idealistic expectations, and if the higher institution knows about new students' expectations, they may be able to provide a more realistic responds to them. It is pertinent for universities to inform students of what is realistic to expect from the lectures [3]. The knowledge of student expectations gives the lecturers an avenue to design their programs to fit in students' expectations. The higher

institutions must therefore provision to improve in all round aspect of impacting knowledge to the students.

Students feel satisfied with teaching quality, when the lecturers are competent to deliver in respect to the subject matter of the courses. The quality of delivery must therefore help to develop the student's analytical skills, as well as making the students competitive. Students will feel more satisfied with the quality of the schools services when there is a better communication skills and proper functioning of teaching equipment. Most importantly, the higher institutions must be in place to make necessary tools and instruments that will enhance the research level of the students. Libraries must be well equipped with relevant knowledge information prior to students courses [2].

Telford & Masson [17] identified that student's perceived quality of education services depends on student's expectations and values. This clearly shows that the expectations and values of students must be well understood by the higher institution before making provision of certain services, and students viewpoint must be inquired [18]. Studies have shown that service quality in the higher education have relied high on the input from academic insiders while excluding the input from the students themselves [18, 19]. Universities administrators should therefore focus on understanding the needs of their students, who are the primary target and also ensure that the lecturers' inputs as well as the instruments of learning are sufficient to obtain high quality learning.

2.2 Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a value judgment based on the gap between actual experiences and expectation of the customer [20]. Customer satisfaction is interchangeably used with service quality. Meanwhile, satisfaction is broader than service quality. Models of satisfaction often focus on comparing customer expectations to the observed services delivered.

Customer satisfaction is a demonstration of cumulative effect that may occur each unique time a customer is exposed to service [20]. This concept shows that customers make comparative judgments each time they are faced with service purchase.

Studies have shown that customer's perception of service quality and customers' satisfaction directly affects their intentions to positively favor an organization [21]. Satisfaction is the resultant outcome of an institution administrative as well as its educational system coherent performers. Students are prone to do better in their studies if the universities provide a friendly learning environment for its students [10].

Rating the satisfaction level of student, the school administration must develop a feedback system, where students' needs and demands will be understood at all points in time.

According to Aldridge and Rowley [22], when students feel the institutions' quality and standardized learning environment facilitate intellectual progress and that appropriate facilities of learning are provided, their interest in the school will increase and may lead to retention of students that derive satisfaction.

Student satisfaction covers issues of students' perceptions and experiences all through in the university period [2]. Students measure the quality of organization on the basis of tangibility (teachers), reliability and responsiveness (methods of teaching), and management of the institutions and these factors have direct effects on the quality perception of students [23].

Palli & Mamilla [10], suggest that tangibility, empathy, assurance, reliability and responsiveness can increase customer satisfaction of services rendered by the higher education system. Satisfaction is very crucial to student retention. Still, satisfaction level is rated differently among students. It varies from student to student. The school management must develop strategic measures to understand how to satisfy the needs and demands of students.

3 Aim of the research

The main objective of this research is to identify the level of students' satisfaction of services quality provided in higher education with the aim of making the school administration understand those services which have to be improved on, in order to boost the learning ability of students. This study tends to reveal those services that need urgent improvement when it comes to student-teacher relationship, as well as the mode of lecturing and level of corporation that exist between and among co-students.

Achieving the goal of this research, information was gathered using a self-administered questionnaires to respondents. The questionnaires clearly explained the aim of the study.

4 METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative research; it invokes the use of both primary and secondary data. The aim was to sample the level of student satisfaction with services quality provided at APU.

4.2 Collected data

Data were collected through sampling of questionnaires to respondents to get the most relevant information, with the aim of saving time and cost. A total of fifteen questions were developed, which is divided into two segments, the demographic representation of respondents and perception of students on service quality in higher education. However, the questions were constructed to get vital information of the aim of the study, which is to determine the level of satisfaction of respondents with service quality provision in APU. The questions were well explained to respondents.

4.1 Sampling procedure

This research is a quantitative study; the idea of sampling method is to generate a representative sample from the targeted population so that the findings of the research can be generalized back to the whole population. The sampling technique is based on probability sampling strategy called simple random sampling. The questionnaires on this study randomly samples the service quality of higher education in APU, giving each student equal opportunity of been selected. The total sample size was thirty respondents, in this study.

Questionnaires were administered to thirty respondents on their acceptance. However, the questionnaires were randomly distributed, giving every student equal chance of being selected. The study comprises of both locals and international students.

5 FINDINGS and ANALYSIS

This section focuses on the findings and analysis of data, which was collected via questionnaire. The data for this study is analyzed using figures and diagrams presented in this section. Analysis focuses on the principal objective of the study, service quality in higher education.

4.1 Demographic distribution of respondents

Gender

Figure 1 shows the distribution of respondents in the study. It implies that in terms of their gender, respondents were constituted of 60% females and 40% males. Female participated more in this research compared to males. This however does not imply that the ratio of females to males is greater in the institution.

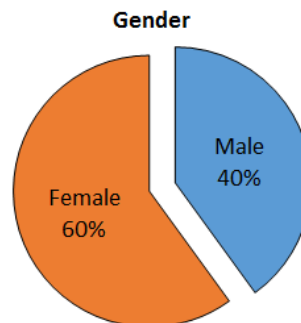


Figure 1. Gender of respondents

Age

Figure 2 shows the age distribution of respondents which was as follows; 15 respondents were aged between 23 to 25 years. This sample represented mostly the students who were in their final year of undergraduate studies and have been in the institution longest. 7 were respondents between 18 to 22 years. This group best represented students in their initial years of study. 5 respondents were between 27 to 30 years and 3 respondent were in the range of 30 and above, mainly representing students pursuing postgraduate studies.

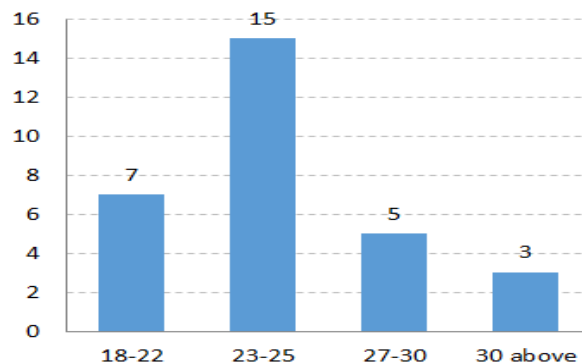


Figure 2. Age of respondents in the study

Nationality

The nationalities of the respondents are comprised of 80% of international students and 20% of the locals, which is illustrated in pie chart in figure 3.

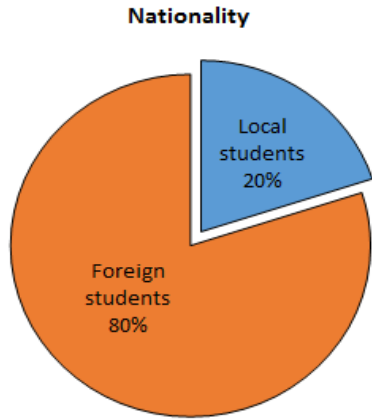


Figure 3. Nationality of respondents

Level of study

The level of study of respondents included the undergraduate and postgraduate students. As it is shown in figure 4, there was more participation from the postgraduate students with 63% of participation while the undergraduate only had 37% of the participants.

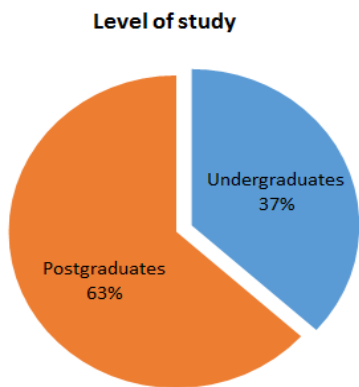


Figure 4. Level of education of respondents

Duration of Study at APU

As it can be seen in figure 5, majority of the students participated as respondents in this research have studied in APU for one semester (10 respondents), 9 respondents have studied for two semesters, and 6 students of the respondents have studied for 3 semesters, while the rest 5 have studied for a longer period of four semesters.

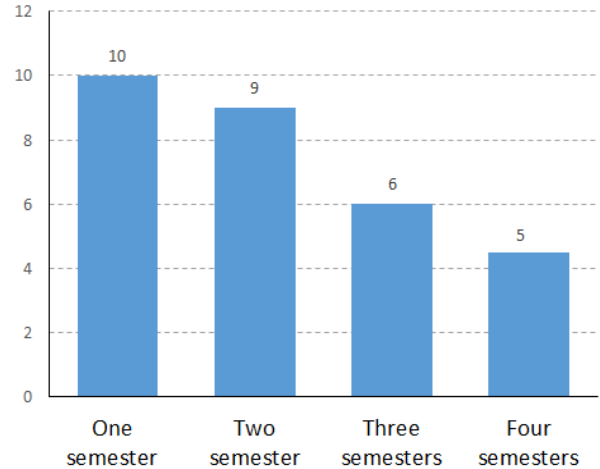


Figure 5. Duration of Study of respondents

4.2 Respondent perception of service quality in higher education APU

This section discusses the perception of respondent on service quality in APU. The questions were formed using a five Likert scale, which includes *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neutral*, *disagree* and *strongly disagree*. Each of these responses has a number assigned to it.

The quality of teaching services

The role of the teacher is very important to the learning process. Good quality of teaching is key to proper learning

Figure 6 shows the responses of whether the students were satisfied with the quality of teaching services or not. 5 respondents were strongly satisfied and 10 satisfied. This shows a positive response with half of the students sampled comfortable with the quality. 10 of the respondents were not sure whether they were satisfied or not. This could mean that the lecturers are not able to deliver or the students have difficulties grasping what is being taught. On the other hand, 5 respondents cited the quality unsatisfactory as 3 of them disagreed and 2 strongly disagreed meaning their expectations on quality were not met.

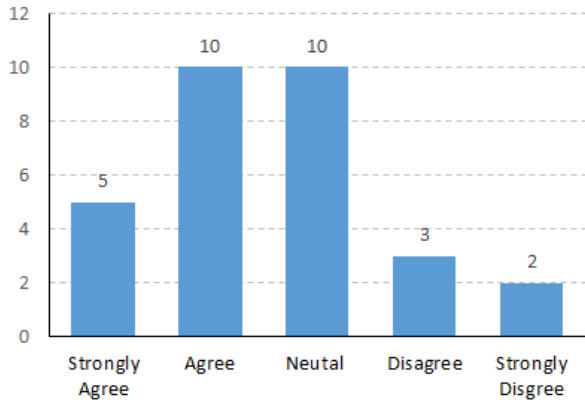


Figure 6. Quality of teaching

The usefulness of module components offered in the career development

Every student has a vision or a goal which one would love to achieve one of which is to develop a great career. The university should therefore be keen to having modules that are concrete enough to develop different careers as the students’ needs are different. Of the various opinions that the respondents had about their career development, 13 respondents had a positive response with 3 strongly satisfied and 10 satisfied. 10 respondents were not sure would mean that either the content was not good enough for some students or they were not sure of what they would love to achieve. There were however 3 respondents that were of a different opinions for they disagreed to the usefulness of the modules components offered in their career development. None strongly disagreed as shown in figure 7.

Assessment criteria is clear

Every performance has a way to measure to determine how well a student has grasped the content. APU has various ways of assessing performance which include written exams, individual research papers/ reports, group assignments among others. The views on the clarity of the assessment criteria were dissimilar to different students as represented in figure 8. A sample of 15 respondents were impartial on the clarity of assessments. This rings a bell and the institution should find out the reason.

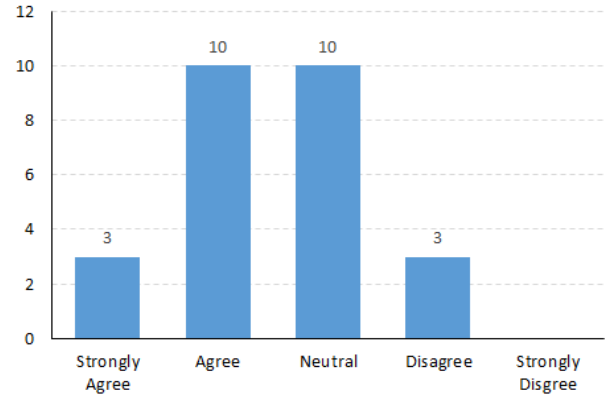


Figure 7. Usefulness of module components offered in the career development

In this question, 5 respondents agreed that the assessment criteria was clear and 4 respondents strongly agreed to this item. On the other hand there were students who were of a different opinion with a sample of 4 respondents disagreeing and 2 strongly disagreeing to the clarity of criteria of assessment, a response that calls for the institution to look into.

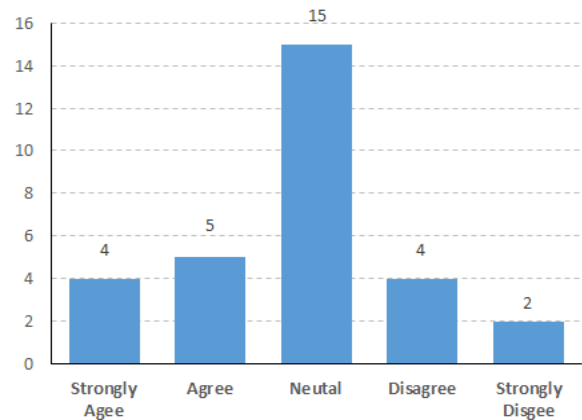


Figure 8. Clarity of assessment criteria

The course have develop your subject knowledge

Each course offered should be able add knowledge that will help the students to grow more so towards the area of interest. For this service, figure 9 demonstrates a positive feedback in that 10 respondents agreed and 5 respondents strongly agreed that the courses offered by university helped develop

their subject knowledge. 8 respondents were not sure at all if there was any development from the courses. An area of concern that needed to be looked into was the sample that opposed the idea. 5 respondents disagreed and 2 respondents strongly disagreed meaning that there was little or no development towards their subject knowledge.

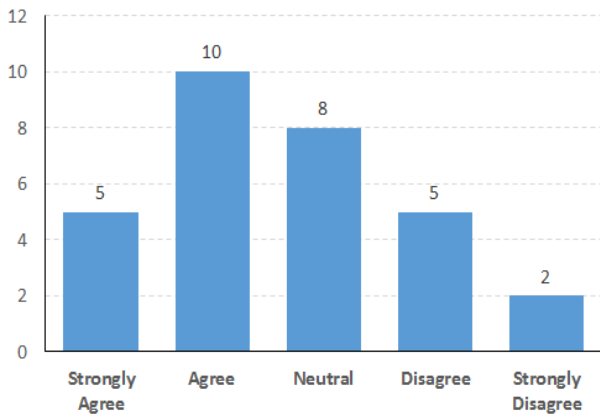


Figure 9. Knowledge improvement in the subject

You are learning what you hoped to learn, thus satisfied with the decision to enroll in this university

Many students especially the international students make applications to the school based on the information given on brochures or published on the website. To find out if the expectations are met then, this section tries to find out if for sure students are learning what they hoped to learn when they enrolled

Figure 10 shows that 15 respondents agreed and 3 respondents strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their decision to enroll in the university because they were surely learning what they expected to. A sample of 10 respondents were unaligned meaning that their expectations have not been met by the school or they have not yet discovered the advantage. 2 respondents were not satisfied with their decision to enroll in the university with one disagreeing and another sample respondent strongly disagreeing

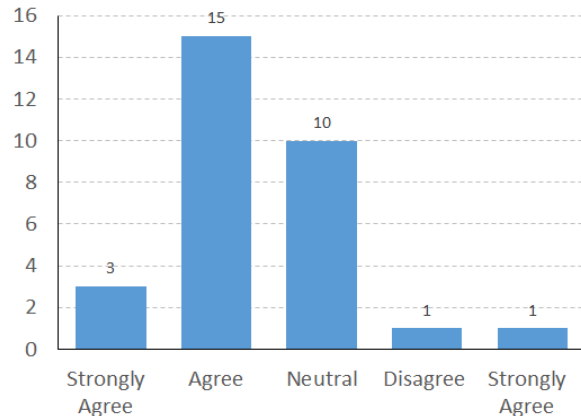


Figure 10. Satisfied with the decision to enrol in this university

Chance to explore important ideas from fellow students

Diversity comes with better exploration of new ideas. APU has students from over 100 nationalities thus well diverse.

Figure 11 shows the chances to explore important ideas from fellow students, with 67% neutral, 17% agree, 13% strongly agree, 3% disagree and 0% strongly disagree. The management should be keen as to the reasons as to why the response is not as pleasant.

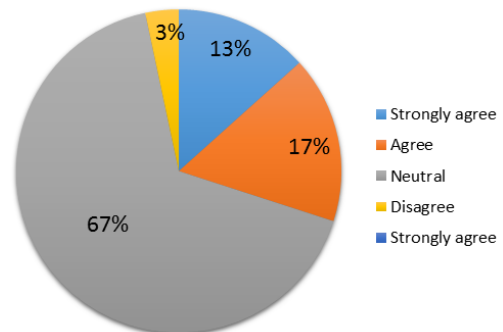


Figure 11. Chance percentage to explore important ideas from fellow students

According to figure 12, a sample of 20 respondents were unsure of the chance to explore from fellow students. Although only a sample of one respondent disagreed to this and none that strongly disagreed, the level of acceptance was not satisfactory with a sample of 5 respondents agreeing and 4 respondents strongly agreeing.

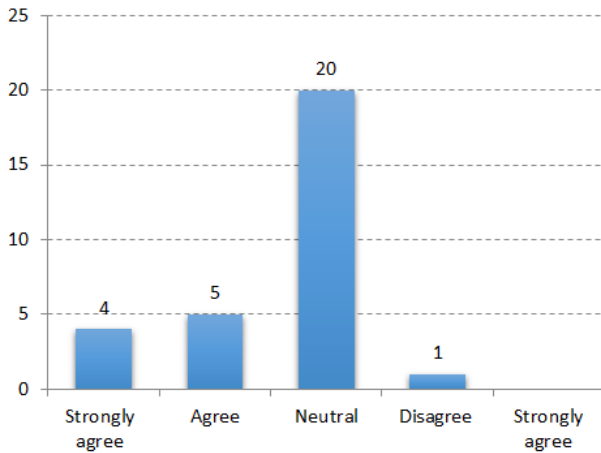


Figure 12. Chance to explore important ideas from fellow students

Development of team-working skill

A key part of learning is being able to work together with others. Developing team work skills is very important in the learning process. APU encourages students to work in groups to develop team-working skills. The response itself on this item shows that 11 respondents agreed and 9 respondents strongly agree to development of team-working skill in APU. Still at it, a sample of 7 respondents were impartial. There was a sample of 3 respondents who disagree, and none of the respondents strongly disagree to this item. The feedback from students is shown by the chart in figure 13.

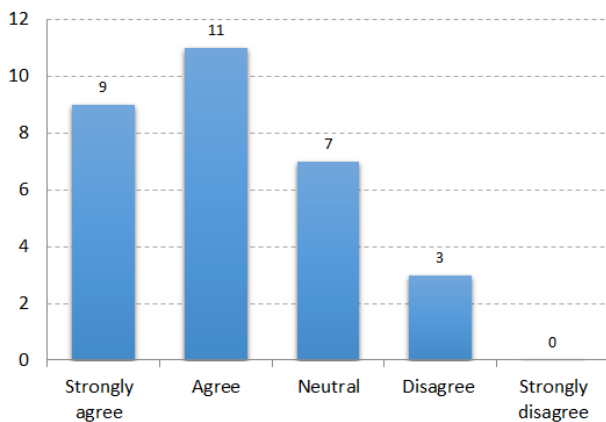


Figure 13. Development of team-working skill

Development of communication skills

As simple as communication is the act of passing information, being able to do it effectively is very important. An institution should be able to develop great communication skills to its students

The response to the development of communication skills was very positive as it showed a high level of satisfaction as reflected on figure 14. In this question, 10 respondents strongly agreed, followed by another 10 respondents that agreed to this. 8 respondents were not sure about it, while only 2 other respondents disagree to this. No respondent strongly disagreed.

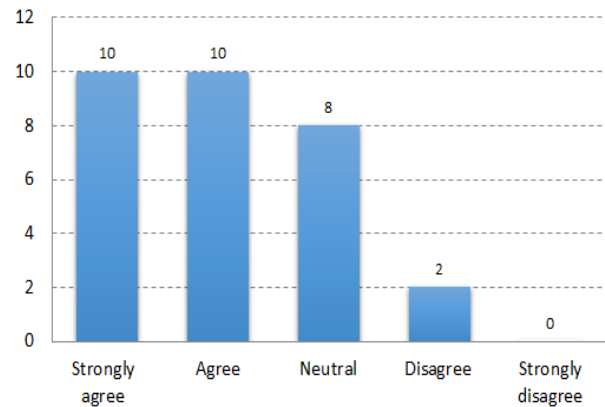


Figure 14. Development of communication skill

Development of practical skill

Figure 15 shows 34% *disagree* with this, which means they believe there is no practical skill development in their area of studies. Six respondents (20%) were *neutral*, while another 6 respondents (20%) *strongly disagree*, and in total 8 respondents agreed (13%) and strongly agreed (13%) on this item.

This result is shown in figure 16 by a bar chart. It indicates that there is a bit of concern for majority of the respondents who are not satisfied. There was a poor response of 16 respondents dissatisfied with 10 respondents disagreeing and 6 strongly disagreeing on the development of practical skills.

Practical skills are very crucial for they give the hands on experience and create perfection as “practice makes perfect”. In this question, 6 respondents were not sure. Only 4 respondents strongly agreed and 4 agreed.

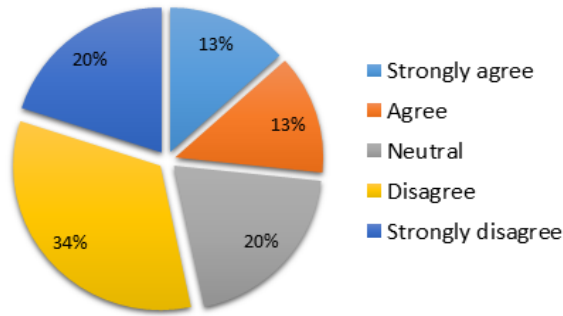


Figure 15. Development of practical skill (percentage)

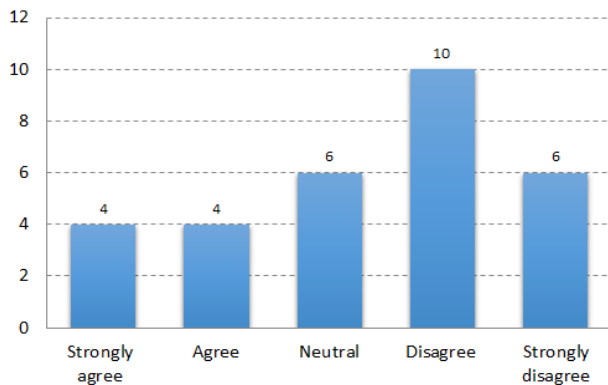


Figure 16. Development of practical skill

Development of analytical ability

Reading between the lines is one of the best ability of solving a problem. It is important to know how to make the best decision based on the available information. When questioned if the school enabled the students to have these analytical skills, figure 17 shows that 7 of the respondents strongly agreed and 11 agreed that there is development of analytical skills. On the other hand we have 4 respondents who disagreed and 3 strongly disagreed. A sample of 5 respondents were unsure.

This result is illustrated in figure 18 by a pie chart which is based on the percentage of the

results. It shows that 37% of the respondents agreed that there is development of analytical skills, and 23% strongly agree to this item. 17% remains neutral, while 13% of the respondents disagree and 10% strongly disagree.

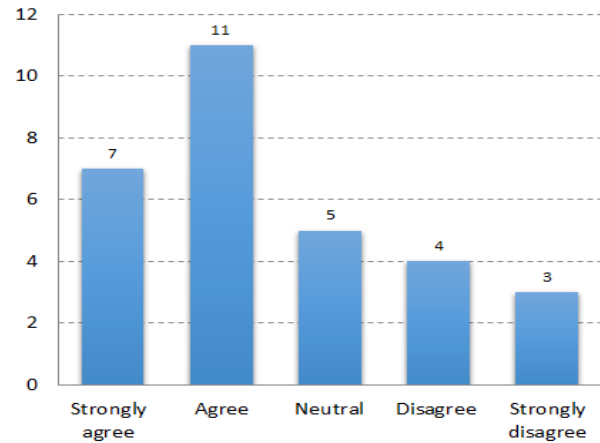


Figure 17. Development of analytical ability

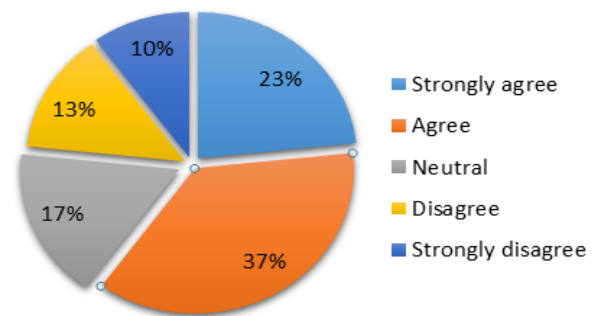


Figure 18. Development of analytical ability (percentage)

5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned before, the main objective of this study is to identify satisfaction of service quality in higher education and also the level in which these services have impact to the students in questions. The questionnaires distributed were able to get vital information on the view of student concerning the service quality derived from the institution. It also explains the pattern of communication skill

coupled with lecturing instrument and its impacts to students' education. Above all, the data also gives information regarding the level of cooperation among students, which is level of team work and understanding of materials used to impact knowledge.

The data shows that female represents 60% of the study population while male represent 40% of the study. The study consists of more foreign students with 80% respondents and local students represent 20% of the study. The study recorded positive results from majority of its items. Most of the respondents were satisfied with the quality of most services provided in the higher education in APU.

With emphasis on the quality of teaching materials, majority of the respondent were satisfied with this service provision in the university with regards to teaching materials that are made available to impact knowledge to the students. This implies that the university has to continuously maintain the standard in order to constantly improve the study level of students.

Although the study shows that the assessment criteria used in the university is not too concise, as most students were neutral about this whilst only few students are clear with the assessment pattern (9 respondents out of 30). Majority of the respondents agreed that the courses studied in the university have really helped them in understanding the subject knowledge. This shows that students are satisfied with the courses in the school and the content of the course as it give them better understanding of their study area. The data also shows that students have no regret enrolling in the institution as they were satisfied with their studies and stay in the university as it impact the due knowledge which they want.

Respondents displayed their satisfaction level of communication skill they enjoy from lecturers and also from colleagues as very high. Acceding to the data there is high rate of team work and corporation between students and lecturers, and also among students since they experience positive outcome from team work.

Still, the quality of knowledge and satisfaction which the student gain on analytical ability was highly satisfactory, as this has helped broaden their horizon and create a better sense of analyzing issues when they arises. A sample number of 11 respondents strongly agree on the high impact of analytical ability which they have gained. In support, still there were 7 respondents who agreed on this. This therefore shows that there is high satisfaction of service quality in this regard.

The study findings show that most of the respondents were not satisfied with development of practical skills, as the services provision does not give them much opportunity to be practical, hence they were dissatisfied with their level of practicality.

Generally this study has gained a high response rate of satisfaction from majority of the items. This implies that respondents were satisfied with the service quality provision in higher education in APU.

6 CONCLUSION

This research has been conduct to determine the level of student satisfaction with the service quality provision in higher education and also to proffer some relevant information on how service quality can be improved on. At the end, the research was able to reach its objectives and successfully answered the research questions. Hence this research will serve as a bench mark for upcoming researchers on this field.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has shown high satisfaction in most of the items in the questionnaires, yet there are aspects where students were not satisfied with. It is recommended that from time to time the school management should carry a study to collect information on services quality to determine the level of student acceptance of service quality provision in the university, as the view of the students changes from time to time. Understanding the perception of students

through this will help the university management to know such services quality that needs improvement.

The university management should also look keenly to the issues that lead to poor acceptance and try to solve the issues that the students mention for improvement.

This improvement of the services will thus help the university attract more students and more so have a happy alumni who will recommend the institution to others.

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